

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE ROOM
418 EAST SECOND STREET
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2026
5:30 PM**



To attend the meeting via Zoom and **provide live comment** attendees should go to the web link below. **Due to occasional technical difficulties, the most reliable way to participate is through in-person attendance. Electronic means are not guaranteed.**

Meeting Link: [Zoom Link](#) Meeting Number: **849 2808 8413** Password: **59937**

Raise your virtual hand to indicate you want to provide comment.

- We encourage individuals to provide written public comment; to the City Clerk, Michelle Howke at mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov or deliver by **4:00 p.m. Monday, February 9, 2026**, to City Hall. Written comments should include name, address, should be short and concise, courteous, and polite. All written comments received by 4:00 p.m. will be provided to the City Council and appended to the packet following the meeting.
- Public comment by those attending the meeting "live" via Zoom or in-person will be limited to three minutes per individual.

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Vision Whitefish 2045 review of Housing and Transportation Plan Elements– Alan Tiefenbach
- 3) Public Comment
- 4) Direction to City Manager
- 5) Adjourn



The following Principles for Civil Dialogue are adopted on 2/20/2007 for use by the City Council and by all boards, committees and personnel of the City of Whitefish:

- We provide a safe environment where individual perspectives are respected, heard, and acknowledged.
- We are responsible for respectful and courteous dialogue and participation.
- We respect diverse opinions as a means to find solutions based on common ground.
- We encourage and value broad community participation.
- We encourage creative approaches to engage public participation.
- We value informed decision-making and take personal responsibility to educate and be educated.
- We believe that respectful public dialogue fosters healthy community relationships, understanding, and problem-solving.
- We acknowledge, consider and respect the natural tensions created by collaboration, change and transition.
- We follow the rules and guidelines established for each meeting.

Adopted by Resolution 07-09
February 20, 2007

MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: Alan Tiefenbach, Long Range Planner

Date: February 2, 2026



RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 Work Session on Housing and Transportation Plan Elements

Honorable Mayor and members of the City Council,

On January 20, 2026, a work session was held to introduce you to three plan elements – economic development, environment, natural resources and hazards (ENRH) and public facilities – as well as a wealth of background information. The next sections staff is introducing to the Council are the Housing Element and the Transportation Element.

The Housing Element was prepared in consultation with five housing needs assessments, two housing specific studies, the previous two growth policies and community and agency input. The Whitefish Community Housing Committee was given an early draft of this plan element and made revisions based on their recommendations during three two-hour work sessions. The Planning Commission reviewed and made their revisions during two work sessions. All of the Housing Committee and Planning Commission’s red-marked revisions have been accepted into the draft.

There are seven transportation related plans for the City of Whitefish, two trails plans, and several plans (such as the 2018 Climate Action Plan) which contain transportation planning-related strategies. During visioning sessions, seventy-five percent of map comments regarding what could be improved directly related to transportation. As such, the transportation element is not intended to duplicate the information, work programs or policies already established. The plan element presents a snapshot of the existing transportation system and discusses existing issues and the transportation-related comments received during visioning sessions. Existing plans are analyzed and summarized, and consideration was given to how these plans integrate with each other. The plan element intends to present an overview of all the transportation studies in one location.

Two work sessions were held by the Planning Commission on the transportation element. The majority of red-marked revisions have been incorporated into the document with two exceptions: The first is language regarding how wide Wisconsin needs to be in order to made Wisconsin a three-lane highway, and whether this

should be mentioned in the plan without the actual design. The second exception is that all references to mixed use development have been deleted by the Planning Commission. These exceptions have been retained as red-marked text.

As mentioned in the January 20, 2026 staff memorandum, Planning Commission public hearings on the final draft are being scheduled for mid to late February. The version that goes to the Planning Commission for these hearings will be comprised of ALL red marked changes as made by the Planning Commission with any subsequent red-marks as recommended by staff identified. As there could be additional changes made by the Planning Commission during these hearings, the final version that goes to the City Council for adoption in early March will be red-marked accordingly along with staff's recommendations regarding the changes.

HOUSING ELEMENT SNAPSHOT PLACEHOLDER

ENCOURAGING A DIVERSITY OF HOUSING

“We encourage a diversity of housing types integrated throughout all areas of the city. We will provide for all demographic segments of our population, particularly our local workforce, to allow residents to move in, move up or age in place, ensuring everyone can remain here across multiple generations. New housing will be complementary to and respectful of existing neighborhoods.”

INTRODUCTION

Housing is a critical part of and one of the distinctive physical aspects of a thriving community. Housing combines to form neighborhoods, and neighborhoods combine with other uses to form the community. Housing is more than just shelter; it is our living environment. Ensuring a range of housing options at a variety of sizes, with prices affordable to all segments of the population, is imperative. While shelter is one of the most basic human needs, the high cost of housing in the Whitefish area puts it out of reach for many working families. Like many high-amenity mountain towns across the United States, Whitefish is facing challenges in providing housing affordable and attainable to individuals who wish to live and work in one of Montana’s most beautiful locales.

The City of Whitefish is experiencing a community housing³ crisis. The desirability to live (and retire) or invest in Whitefish, in combination with a range of other factors including escalating mortgage rates, high demand coupled with low supply of attainable housing, increased construction costs, neighborhood opposition to housing projects, greater interest from out-of-state buyers, the proliferation of short term rentals, the need to update outdated development standards, recent state legislation and job growth has brought the crisis to the forefront of the community. Many of these factors were compounded by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This brought a migration of well-paid remote workers from larger metropolitan regions with a spending power which could not be matched by local residents or employers. The 2007 adopted growth policy reported the median selling price of a single family home was \$319,000. In 2020 the median selling price was \$440,000 and in 2025 the median selling price now exceeds one million dollars⁴.

³ The 2025 Housing Needs Assessment defines Community Housing as “Housing that is affordable for community members that live and work in the Whitefish Area that is not being provided by the housing market. This refers to a range of household income levels for which market priced housing is unattainable, including both the traditionally low-income housing, as well as middle income, and, in Whitefish, upper middle income.”

⁴ Source: Montana Regional MLS

This Housing Element promotes a diverse housing supply and preserves the existing housing stock by encouraging a mixture of housing types, maintaining residential neighborhood quality, and providing opportunities to assist in the development of housing available to more economically diverse segments of the population. It will provide a comprehensive analysis of recent statutory requirements and how the city will meet (or is meeting) those requirements.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

1. With the most recently adopted Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment as a guide, achieve an adequate supply of housing equitably distributed throughout the city for all income levels to meet the needs of Whitefish's existing and projected populations with a priority on permanent affordability.

Whitefish is facing an escalating housing crisis driven by high demand, limited supply, rising costs, and regulatory restrictions. This has contributed to local workers and families being priced out of the community. To address the supply side of the community housing deficit, the city should proactively work toward encouraging an adequate supply of community housing at higher densities, and the housing should be distributed throughout the city to minimize social and economic segregation. Strategies include continuing to focus on implementing existing housing strategies, exploring zoning and development standards revisions, and supporting compatible infill development in areas with existing and adequate infrastructure (through such means as elements of a form based code⁵). Clear benchmarks should be set to measure success. As much as 14% of the total housing units in the City of Whitefish are comprised of short term rentals (STRs), which take housing off the market that could otherwise be used for full-time housing. Accordingly, the city should continue proactive enforcement and additional restrictions to limit their impact on housing availability.

Objectives

- a. Continue to implement the most current Housing Roadmap.
- b. Continue to review and revise regulations and development standards to reduce barriers to the development of needed housing. Regulatory updates could include:

- i. Revising zoning districts to allow a larger diversity in housing types and densities throughout the city.
 - ii. Reducing minimum lot sizes and setbacks in all residential zones with lot coverage, setbacks, height, massing and floor area ratio requirements to ensure neighborhood compatibility.
 - iii. Exploring the reduction of open space requirements as part of the Legacy Homes program or when proposed housing developments are designed for targeted income levels.
 - iv. Providing pre-approved building plans for smaller homes that meet requirements for compatibility with different neighborhoods.
- c. Mitigate the impact of the short-term rental market on the long-term housing supply through interventions such as:
 - i. Expanded enforcement of existing regulations on short-term rentals.
 - ii. Exploring a limit on the total numbers of permitted short-term rentals.
- d. Support residential infill development with gentle density that complements existing neighborhoods.
 - i. Adopt form-based zoning code elements.
 - ii. Review and regularly update the land use plan to ensure an adequate future supply of land designated to housing.
 - iii. Encourage innovative site planning techniques such as common open spaces, shared driveways, and strategically placed windows and landscaping to mitigate potential impacts on privacy and light.
 - iv. Explore more flexible design standards associated with zoning and public works requirements for smaller infill projects.
- e. Track new housing towards meeting the 10-year housing needs, reporting regularly to City Council, Planning Commission and Community Housing Committee.

Goal

2. Support a range of housing types and prices to fit the needs of a diverse community.

A diverse range of housing options - including small single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, apartments, and accessory dwelling units - ensures that people of all income levels, life stages, and household sizes can find suitable and affordable places to live. This variety encourages mixed-income neighborhoods and allows residents to age in place or relocate within the community as their needs evolve. By reviewing current zoning and development standards, the city can accommodate more innovative or non-traditional housing types such as boarding houses or dormitories, which can help with workforce retention. Additionally, the city should consider existing requirements and relationships with homeowner's associations, which sometimes have strict architectural guidelines that may limit housing styles, sizes, or materials. When existing housing developments are proposed for redevelopment, the city should encourage developers to mitigate the displacement of residents.

Objectives

- a. Promote a variety of needed housing types that can provide housing options to increase density in both new and existing neighborhoods, such as small single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, multiplexes, apartments, townhomes, and accessory dwelling units, while respecting existing neighborhood form and function.
- b. Promote distribution of various housing types evenly across different areas and developments, ensuring diverse housing options throughout the city while minimizing social and economic segregation.
- c. Encourage developers to address and account for the housing needs of displaced residents whenever new projects are developed in place of existing housing.
- d. Encourage a diversity of housing types and lots to promote mixed income neighborhoods.
 - i. Support the development of workforce housing serving residents at or below 150 percent area median income.
 - ii. Explore requirements for and the role of Home Owner's Associations and their relationship to private roads as well as covenants and restrictions that might affect affordability.

- iii. Support and encourage employee housing, including revising definitions or standards to encourage and allow alternative housing options in various districts for local workers such as single-room occupancy developments, boarding houses, dormitories, converted motels or other types of lodging into extended stay housing uses.

Goal

- 3. Support existing property owners in maintaining and preserving housing stock.

The average lifespan of a house is between 50 and 63 years before significant improvements and upkeep is often required. Many Whitefish homes are reaching or have reached this threshold. Without intervention these units may be at risk of falling into disrepair or being lost to redevelopment that may not serve local needs. Supporting existing property owners in maintaining and preserving housing stock is vital for sustaining community stability, affordability, and character. By offering technical assistance, education, and financial resources such as grants or low-interest loans, the city can provide help to homeowners to make critical repairs and accessibility upgrades, ensuring older housing remains safe, livable, and affordable.

Objectives

- a. Encourage ongoing property maintenance and promote reinvestment and improvements in established neighborhoods by bringing substandard housing and unmaintained properties into compliance with city codes.
- b. Seek and sponsor federal grants such as community development block grants to offer funding opportunities to property owners seeking to improve deficient properties to be used for long term rentals.
- c. Create a technical assistance program to help homeowners navigate repair and accessibility projects and understand available funding and regulatory requirements.
- d. Provide education and resources for –grants or low-interest loans for low-to-moderate-income homeowners to make critical repairs and accessibility modifications.
- e. Preserve existing affordable rental housing by providing resources for owners to refinance, maintain units and offer long-term affordability. Explore allowing current multi-family and naturally affordable rentals to qualify for the Whitefish Legacy Homes Program.

Goal

4. Pursue sustainable financing mechanisms and programs to support the development of Community Housing.

In 2025, the cost of housing in Whitefish is beyond the reach of even the upper middle class. Although providing sufficient housing supply is part of the equation, a successful housing strategy to provide housing more attainable to the community cannot be achieved without bridging the gap between market demand, land costs, development costs and what residents can afford. Various financial tools and innovative funding strategies exist to ensure housing remains accessible to a broader range of the population.

Objectives

- a. Analyze ways to streamline application processes.
- b. Ensure funding mechanisms remain relevant and create usable tools to increase Community Housing over time.
- c. Explore alternative ways to increase city revenue allocated to Community Housing such as:
 - i. Reallocation of resort tax revenues (such as reducing or eliminating reimbursement of resort tax for housing used for second homes or short term rentals) to increase city funding for needed housing.
 - ii. Reducing or reimbursing impact fees for new deed-restricted workforce housing.
 - iii. Exploring funding mechanisms to assist with the purchase or construction of workforce homes such as down-payment assistance programs or construction loans.
 - iv. Explore increasing resort tax by one percent for Community Housing.
- d. Explore opportunities to allow for expedited zoning and / or subdivision variances for developments of 100% deed-restricted affordable housing units.

Goal

5. Work to establish and strengthen relationships with the development industry and local, state and national organizations to help meet future Community Housing needs.

Partnering with private developers alongside local, state, and national organizations enables a city to combine public oversight with private-sector innovation and investment. Private developers bring expertise in construction, market trends, and project delivery. Public and nonprofit partners can provide regulatory support, funding opportunities (such as grants and tax credits) and programs that reduce costs and ensure affordability and equity. Land banking in partnership with non-profit organizations can reduce future development costs. Local organizations contribute community knowledge and grassroots support to align projects with neighborhood priorities. Together, these partnerships leverage shared resources to deliver sustainable, inclusive housing solutions that meet long-term demand.

Objectives

- a. Partner with developers to support the development of Community Housing in the private sector.
- b. Leverage community partners such as Housing Whitefish, Northwest Community Land Trust (“NWCLT”), Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley (“HHFV”), and other developers of affordable housing toward reaching needs. Utilize requests for proposals to find the most effective partners for Community Housing projects who are able to achieve success.
- c. Continue valley-wide communication with other jurisdictions on Community Housing progress, programs and collaborative opportunities.
- d. Utilize state-led housing programs which aim to increase Community Housing opportunities.

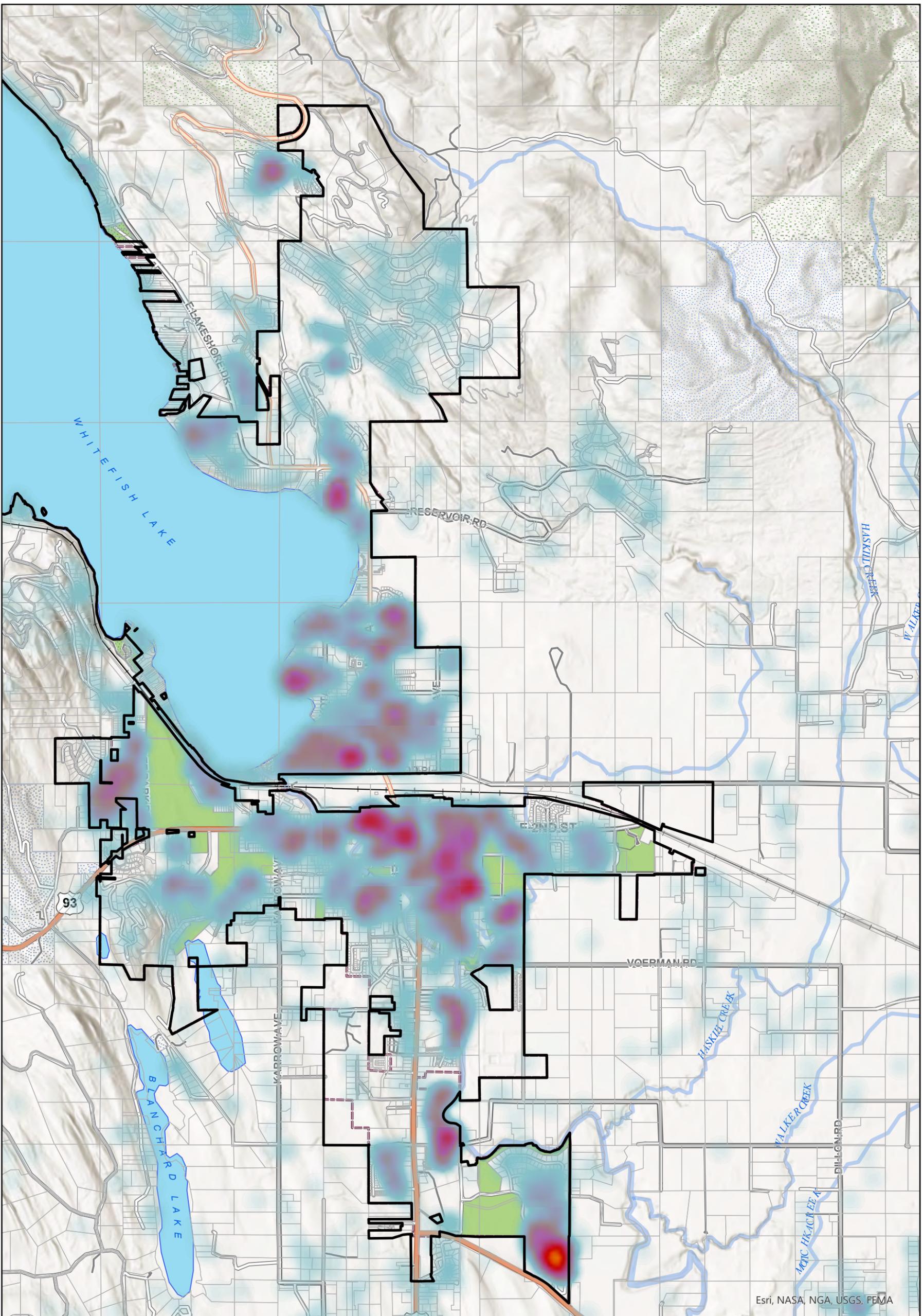
Goal

6. Encourage new housing development to align with all goals outlined in Vision Whitefish 2045.

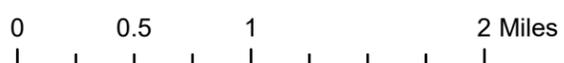
The housing goals outlined in this plan element go beyond the need to achieve an adequate supply and types of needed housing. Housing development should also be sensitive to environmental stewardship and efficient land use, reducing sprawl and supporting walkable, transit-oriented neighborhoods. Throughout this community plan in the associated plan elements there are broader sustainability principles such as reducing car dependence, reducing the carbon footprint, addressing climate change, and better economizing resources by prioritizing infill and compact development within existing city limits where infrastructure is already in place. Efforts to address housing affordability and supply should minimize impacts on the environment and the quality of life that Whitefish residents value.

Objectives

- a. Promote density in areas near transit and active transportation routes.
- b. Reduce car trips and improve quality of life by promoting walkable neighborhoods.
- c. Prioritize infill and compact development within existing city limits where water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure are already in place or can be efficiently upgraded or expanded.

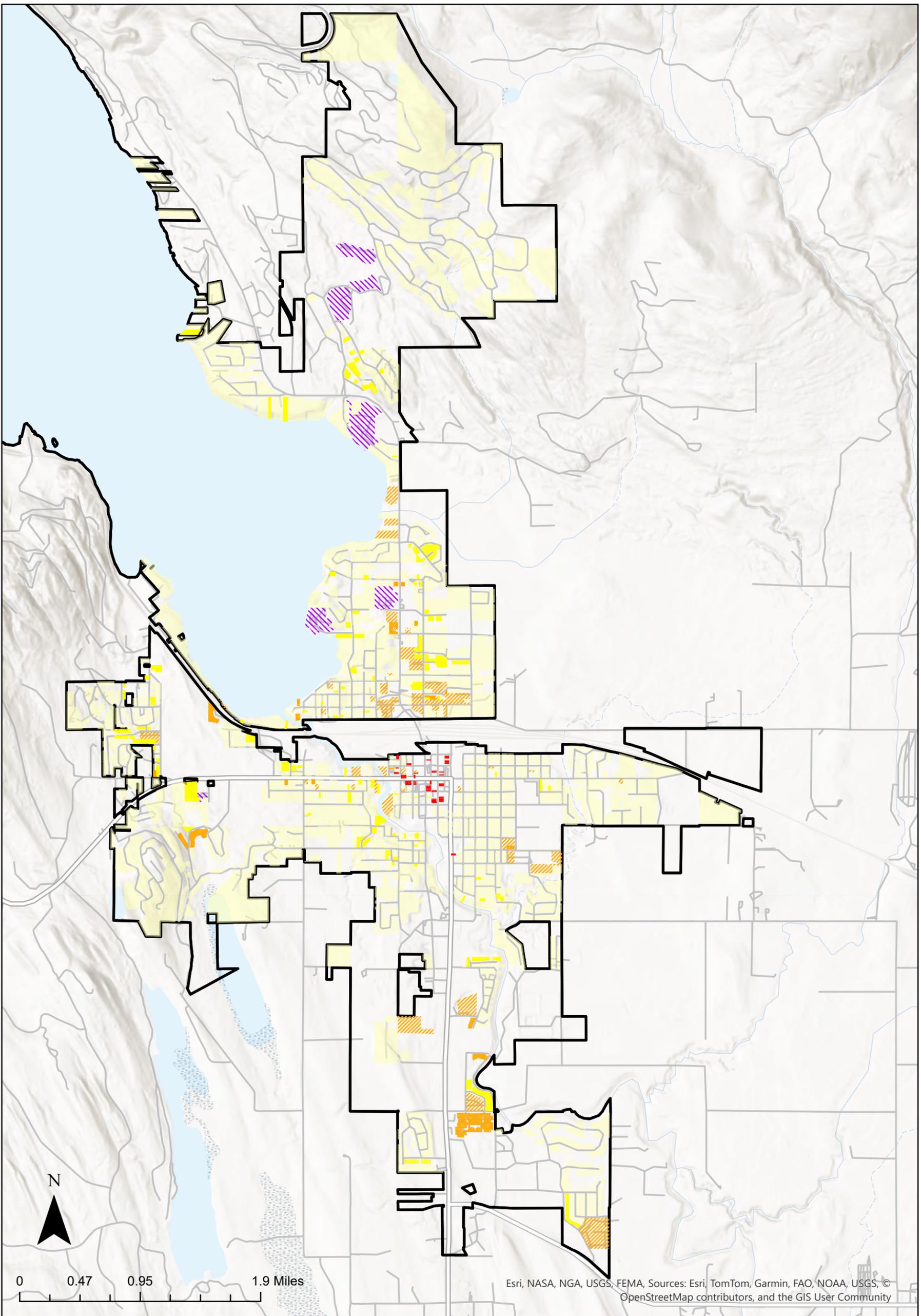


Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA



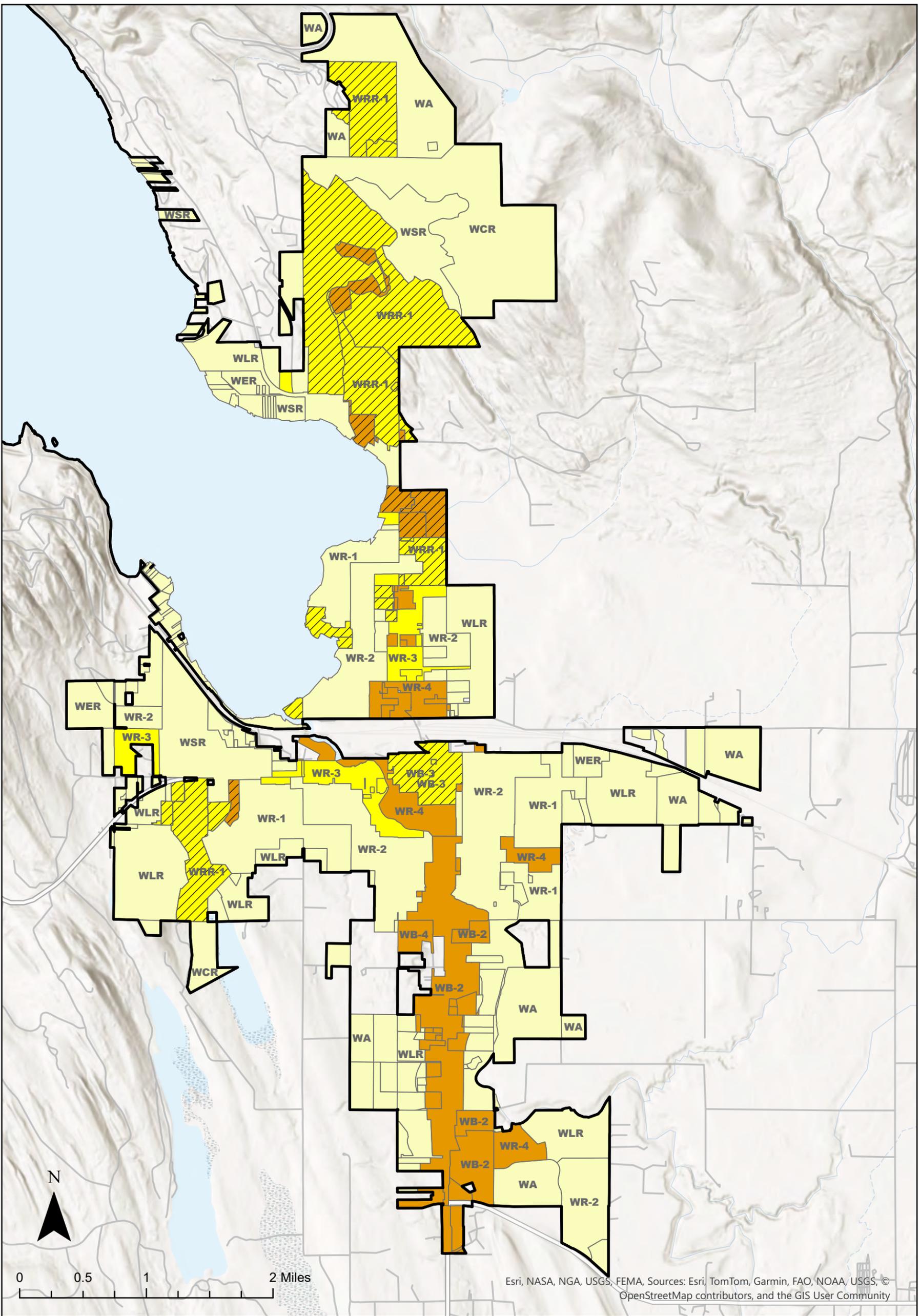
City of Whitefish Density Map

- Low Density
- High Density
- City Limits



City of Whitefish Location of Existing Housing Types

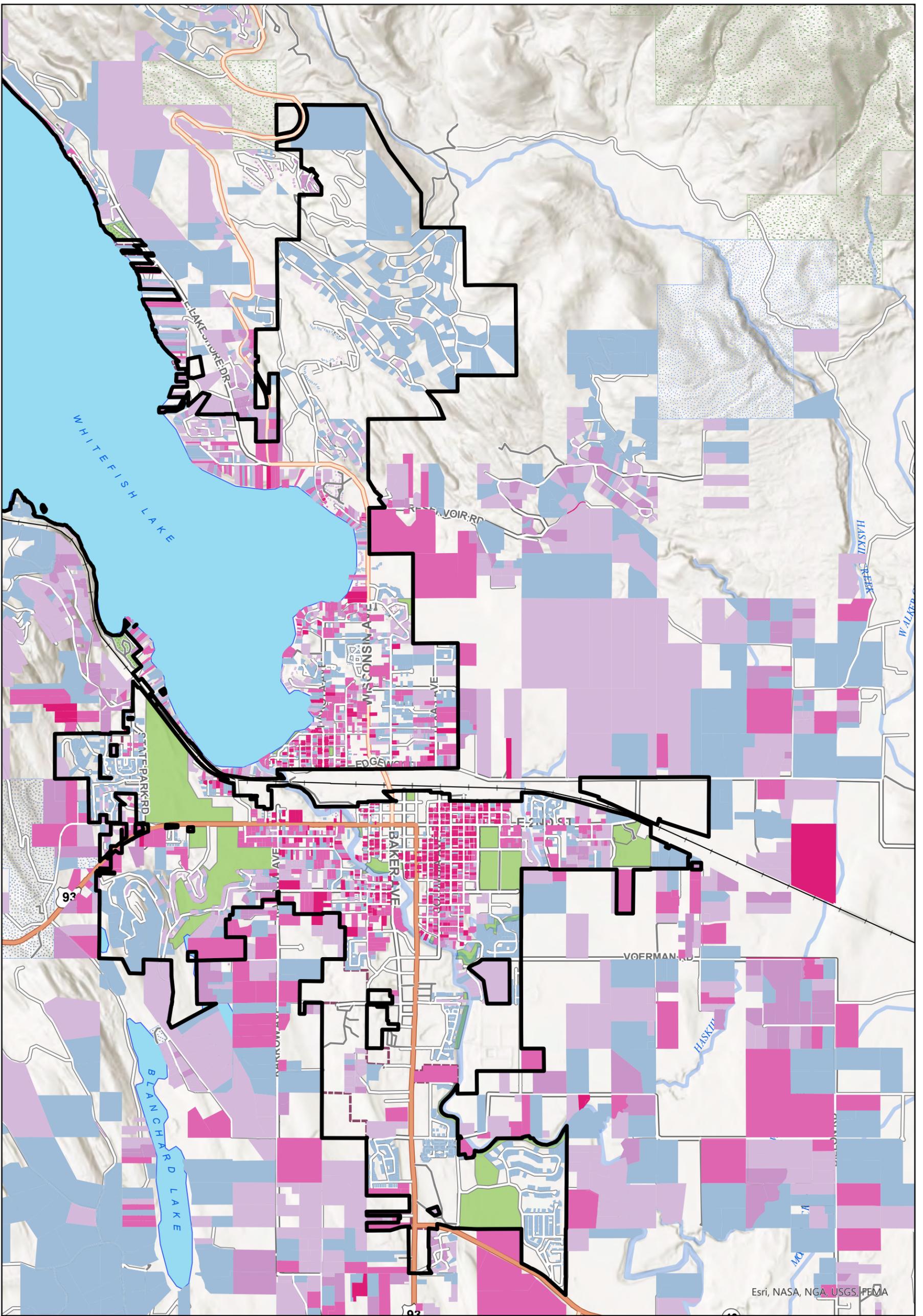
- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Family Detached Two Family Dwelling / Duplex Single Family Attached | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multifamily Resort Residential Mixed Use |
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City of Whitefish Types of Housing Allowed by Right

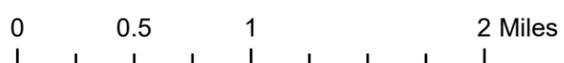
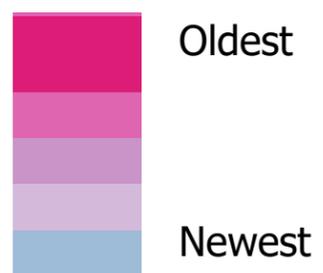
- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Family Detached, Duplex and Two Family Single Family Detached to Fourplexes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multifamily Zone Districts Allowing Short Term Rentals |
|---|--|

*WR-4 allows up to 18 multifamily units by right



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA

City of Whitefish Ages of Residences



TRANSPORTATION

During visioning sessions for Vision Whitefish 2045, the top response regarding how citizens saw Whitefish in twenty years was that Whitefish should be a multimodal community. This means placing equal emphasis on all modes of transport including walking, biking, transit, and rail as well as automobiles.

Many of Whitefish’s traditional neighborhoods are **compact and walkable**, as they were laid out before the widespread distribution of the automobile.

The Whitefish Transportation Network is an integrated multimodal system comprised of five components:

The Road Network
The Active Transportation Network
Public Transit
Air Transportation
Rail Network

The most frequently recommended city improvement during visioning sessions was **the need for a second grade-separated railroad crossing.**



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION refers to any form of human-powered travel - such as walking, biking, or using a wheelchair. To be most effective, active transportation routes should connect to key places such as schools, parks, neighborhoods, and shopping areas.

A **land use plan should steer the transportation plan** and associated infrastructure and not the other way around so that growth occurs in a concurrent manner. When the land use - transportation connection is not managed properly and new road infrastructure makes undeveloped land more accessible, development often follows.

COMPLETE STREETS are a transportation policy that ensures streets are designed, built, and operated to accommodate safe access for users of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists.



US Highway 93 produces the highest traffic speeds and volumes, the most conflict points, the majority of the most congested intersections, and seven of the ten most dangerous intersections in Whitefish.

As the city continues to grow, much of the new development has occurred along US Highway 93 South and other extents of the city limits - further away from schools, the downtown, and amenities. This has led to **more road infrastructure, less walkability and increased automobile usage.**

BEING A MULTIMODAL COMMUNITY

“We champion alternatives to private automobile use. We will be a connected, walkable community and will prioritize a safe, efficient, and convenient transportation system for all modes of travel. We place equal emphasis on non-motorized and motorized forms of transportation while considering associated impacts on land use and existing transportation infrastructure”.

INTRODUCTION

A well-designed transportation system is the backbone of a thriving community. It shapes how people move, interact, and access essential services and community amenities. By integrating various modes of mobility, a cohesive transportation network can reduce congestion, lower environmental impact, promote healthier lifestyles and improve accessibility for all communities. A well-designed transportation system also enhances safety, ensuring accessible routes for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Of all the impacts growth can have on a community, the one most often cited is traffic. Increases in traffic volumes, traffic congestion, speed, noise, air pollution and difficulty finding parking spaces are issues many people raise when talking about growth in their communities. Children’s safety walking or cycling is a big concern, and increased traffic overtaking neighborhood streets and intersections can frustrate residents.

Many of Whitefish’s traditional neighborhoods are compact and walkable, as they were laid out before the widespread distribution of the automobile. As the city continues to grow, much of the new development has occurred along US Highway 93 South and other extents of the city limits - further away from schools, the downtown, and amenities. This has led to more road infrastructure, less walkability and increased automobile usage. Connected compact infill development should be prioritized, positioning residential, institutional and commercial areas closer together to reverse this trend. This will reduce dependence on single-occupancy vehicles, promote transit ridership, and encourage active transportation modes like walking and biking. By integrating diverse uses into compact areas and providing better pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between these uses, a more efficient alternative transportation network will result, reducing traffic congestion and supporting environmentally sustainable growth.

While many residents still choose to drive for most daily trips, demand for infrastructure supporting non-motorized modes of travel is growing. In addition, a growing percentage of the Whitefish population is aging. Mobility is an issue for older or disabled residents who are no longer able to drive but still need to access services around the city.

Automobiles will likely remain an integral part of the community over the next twenty years, but thoughtful planning should prioritize diverse and sustainable alternative transportation and mobility options as well.

<u>TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES</u>
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Goal

1. Continue to develop a safe, balanced, and well-integrated multimodal transportation system for all ages and abilities that provides easy access to priority community locations including stores, banks, schools, neighborhoods, pathways, trails, and river access and gives equal preference to and enhances mobility for all modes of transportation.

<p><i>During visioning sessions for Vision Whitefish 2045, the top response regarding how citizens saw Whitefish in twenty years was that Whitefish should be a multimodal community. This means placing equal emphasis on all modes of transport including walking, biking, accessibility for those with mobility-challenges, transit, rail for goods or passengers as well as automobiles. However, safety and convenience for pedestrians and bicyclists is compromised in certain areas by lack of sidewalks and pathways, with safe routes to schools being voiced as a particularly high priority. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan incorporates the multimodal recommendations of previous plans (including the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan) into its transportation projects. The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan builds on this plan with additional recommended improvements for enhanced bicycle and pedestrian safety. Frequent reviews and updates of these plans should occur to continue to improve all forms of mobility and guide future transportation infrastructure.</i></p>
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Objectives

- a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to support active transportation through planning and capital improvements. This policy will promote mobility and accessibility for people of all ages and abilities.
- b. Continue to implement the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan (or future revisions adopted hereafter) when reviewing future transportation improvements or projects.
- c. At least every five years, review road network and active transportation network project priorities of the 2022 Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan and amend if necessary.

- d. Conduct periodic resident transportation surveys to identify travel trends over time and track progress toward meeting goals for all modes of transportation.
- e. Vehicular speeds should be reduced as appropriate throughout the community. Reducing speeds improves safety, mobility and comfort.
- f. Adopt a traffic-calming program as recommended in the 2025 Safe Streets for all Plan.
- g. Develop prioritization criteria to continue the construction of missing sidewalk and trail links throughout the City, with those providing safe routes to school, connectivity to other city trail systems, downtown access and along arterial and major collector streets being the highest priority.
- h. Whenever feasible, traffic-separated multi-use pathways are the preferred active transportation option.
- i. Prioritize connection of fragmented sections of the Whitefish River Trail and trails linking to it.
- j. The city should work with Flathead County to improve active transportation options and provide connections to existing paths and sidewalks along East Edgewood Drive outside of city limits east to its intersection with East Second Street.
- k. Adopt an official complete streets policy which considers and balances the needs of all transportation users, rather than prioritizing a specific mode. Commit to developing transportation projects that address the needs of all transportation users in all seasons.
- l. Continue to support federal funding that will keep Amtrak passenger service operating in Montana.
- m. Promote safety for pedestrians where electric transportation use is allowed.

Goal

2. Develop and maintain a transportation network that provides multiple reliable route options between key destinations to improve connectivity.

“Connectivity” refers to how effectively different routes, streets, or modes of transportation are linked together to allow smooth, direct, and efficient movement of people and goods. High connectivity means there are multiple accessible routes between destinations, which aids in dispersing traffic, providing multiple options to key destinations, increasing evacuation routes, reducing travel times, and easing congestion. Secondary access to and from areas with limited connectivity has been one of the most commonly mentioned transportation challenges in Whitefish, with additional grade-separated railroad crossings and emergency egresses mentioned as critical. During planning for enhanced connectivity, it is imperative to be cognizant of how new routes or transportation infrastructure impact existing neighborhoods.

Objectives

- a. Vehicular speeds should be reduced as appropriate throughout the community, and complete street strategies should be incorporated.
- b. Combine and consolidate driveway accesses along US Highway 93 South to improve traffic safety and flow.
- c. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for a second grade-separated railroad crossing.
- d. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for alternative access to Birch Point Drive and across the railroad yard separating north and south Whitefish.
- e. Pursue and prioritize options for reliable alternate arterial and collector access and egress and alternative north-south connectivity from the Big Mountain area to Edgewood Drive.
- f. Discourage new significant subdivision development on Big Mountain which relies on unimproved secondary emergency access which does not meet city or county road standards.
- g. Continue to prioritize additional east-west arterial and/or collector street connectivity throughout the city road network, especially extending 7th Street to Spokane Avenue and between major parallel north-south arterials such as Monegan Road, Whitefish Avenue, Baker Avenue, and Karrow Avenue. Incorporate complete streets and reduce vehicular speeds.
- h. Plan for through, continuous streets to the greatest extent possible. When cul-de-sacs are necessary due to ownership, topography, or other constraints,

- ensure a future street extension can be made via a right-of-way dedication, public access easements, or at the very least, a pedestrian connection.
- i. Continue to explore options for future road extensions to better disperse vehicular traffic across the transportation network, providing different route options to key locations and reducing congestion.
 - j. Continue to prioritize and develop frontage roads and major arterials parallel to Highway 93 south, including south of Highway 40, that connect to controlled intersections.
 - k. Protect residential neighborhoods by designing the road network to minimize the incursion of commercial and transient traffic into residential neighborhoods.
 - l. Explore opportunities to improve connectivity in existing neighborhoods without widening existing streets or materially reducing on-street parking spaces on any streets in our downtown neighborhoods.
 - m. Coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions, Flathead County, and MDT toward construction of multi-use pathways to Columbia Falls and Kalispell.
 - n. Continue to encourage MDT to replace the Whitefish River culverts under Highway 93 South with a bridge or tunnel designed to accommodate watercraft as well as a bicycle and pedestrian path crossing under the highway.
 - o. Work with MDT to recalculate the annual growth rate for traffic on Wisconsin Avenue and the level of service for all intersections along Wisconsin Avenue through 2045.

Goal

3. Recognize the transportation - land use relationship and associated impacts and encourage infill and mixed-usecompact development patterns over development which results in inefficient or excessive transportation infrastructure requirements. Consider City investment in transportation infrastructure to stimulate infill development where it is most appropriate to meet the community's stated preferences.

Transportation decisions can have significant impacts on land use by encouraging expansion and providing accessibility to previously inaccessible places. Likewise, land use decisions directly impact transportation needs, influencing traffic patterns, affecting environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife corridors, creating parking issues and necessitating additional infrastructure. The city should prioritize compact, ~~mixed-use~~ and infill development in appropriate areas already served by adequate infrastructure by placing residential, commercial, schools and job creating uses within close proximity ~~and encouraging the integration of residential and commercial uses~~. This reduces driving and associated emissions, economizes existing infrastructure, and promotes alternative forms of mobility. Existing and future land uses should steer infrastructure planning and investment in transportation infrastructure to stimulate desired development patterns. Transportation related impacts on surrounding land uses should be identified and/or mitigated where feasible. Future development should be built in concurrence with infrastructure.

Objectives

- a. Revise City of Whitefish Engineering Standards to improve transportation impact evaluation criteria for land use projects, specifically related to collector roadways and any project north of the viaduct.
- b. The community should encourage sustainability in all aspects of the transportation system so that the needs of the present are met while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities.
- c. Consider City investment in transportation infrastructure to stimulate compact infill development where appropriate.
- d. Ensure future development is served by appropriate street classifications, particularly in residential neighborhoods.
- e. Evaluate existing street classifications to determine if updates are necessary to accommodate or be more compatible with existing or future land use.
- f. Ensure road design templates are consistent with street type and place type standards.
- g. ~~Prioritize mixed-use land use patterns~~. Encourage and enable the development of housing, jobs, and services in close proximity to one another to prevent sprawl and encourage infill development.

- h. Encourage infill development in order to avoid costly extensions of transportation facilities and to minimize travel distances.
- i. Transportation infrastructure should be prioritized in areas that are ideally located for higher density housing.
- j. Determine appropriate design treatments to reduce traffic noise in residential neighborhoods and mixed-use residential areas before a major road capacity improvement project is initiated.
- k. Adopt a traffic-calming program as recommended in the 2025 Safe Streets for all Plan.
- l. Road design and construction should consider environmental impacts to sensitive areas, including using recycled materials and encouraging eco-friendly surface treatments, and by adopting erosion control measures, stormwater control practices, and vegetation management.
- m. Consider impacts to wildlife habitat in road design and adopt measures to reduce collisions.
- n. Review roadway improvement plans to ensure the desired design character of the area, as defined by zoning designations, is not adversely impacted.
- o. Consider a study in the area surrounding the Whitefish Airport to determine future needs and potential restrictions on future development in its proximity.
- p. Encourage the State of Montana to facilitate a study of potential local impacts related to future airport expansion and a full range of mitigation options.
- q. Continue to pursue a BNSF quiet crossing at Birch Point Drive.
- r. Continue evaluating parking management programs for downtown Whitefish to increase availability of customer parking, provide more available employee parking in designated areas, reduce impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods, and to potentially generate revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking structures and lots, and/or public transit.
- s. It will be the policy of the City of Whitefish to require concurrency of all urban services, including but not limited to: water and sewer, drainage, streets, public safety and emergency services, pedestrian, bikeways and trails.

Goal

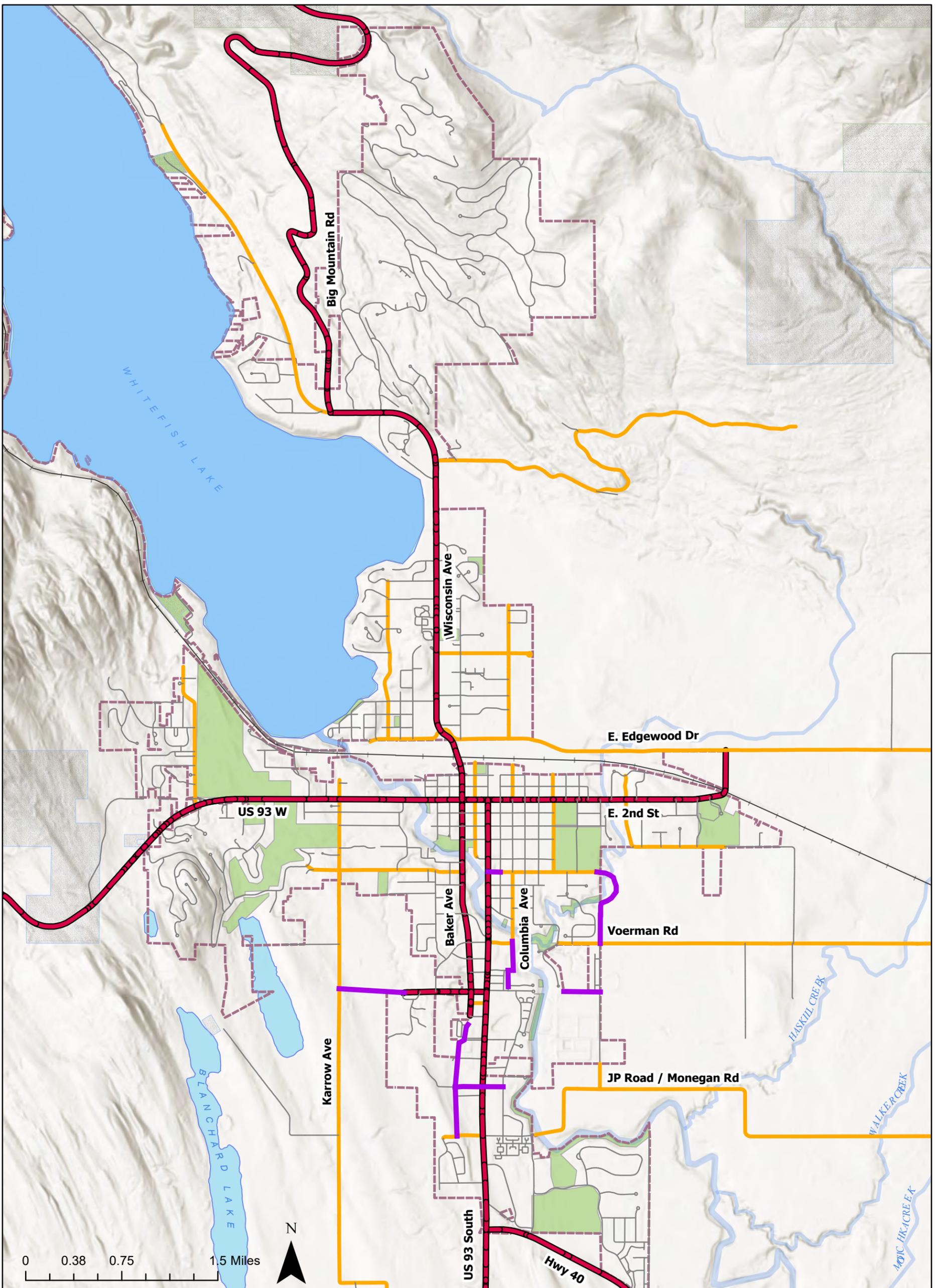
4. The City should explore improved public transit, both in the city, and inter-city, through support of the expansion of existing systems, agreements with Flathead County and surrounding jurisdictions and support for new transit systems.

Transit provides transportation for those who cannot or choose not to drive or do not want to contribute to congestion or carbon emissions. Although there are some limited public transit options in Whitefish, there could be better coordination between these transit providers. A small local punctual bus system in the city could greatly reduce dependence on vehicles and improve traffic and parking downtown and should be studied. The city should proactively work with transit agencies, surrounding jurisdictions and the State to support a regional commuter transit network within the Flathead Valley and to explore solutions to make public transit funded, more efficient, timely, easy to use, and reliable.

Objectives

- a. Develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) which outlines the roles and responsibilities of transit partners within an eventual regional transit organization, and determine the process and timeline by which such an organization will be formed.
- b. Study the feasibility and financing options for local public transit and opportunities for equitable transit-oriented development
- c. Improve coordination between S.N.O.W. Bus and Mountain Climber and identify funding sources to provide improved services to increase transit ridership locally and regionally.
- d. Explore development of new public transit service from Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA) to and from Whitefish.
- e. As public transit becomes more available and coordination more frequent, facilitate more efficient and reliable transit use by implementing intelligent transportation system (ITS) solutions such as electronic fare payment and automatic vehicle location (AVL) technology to communicate real-time location of buses through smartphone applications.

- f. Improve equity for underserved populations by enhancing ADA accessible public transit and non-motorized transportation options to improve access to employment, quality of life destinations and affordable housing.
- g. Collaborate with partners throughout Flathead County to achieve an integrated and efficient regional transit system. Leverage transit to connect workers, residents, and visitors to businesses and tourist destinations.

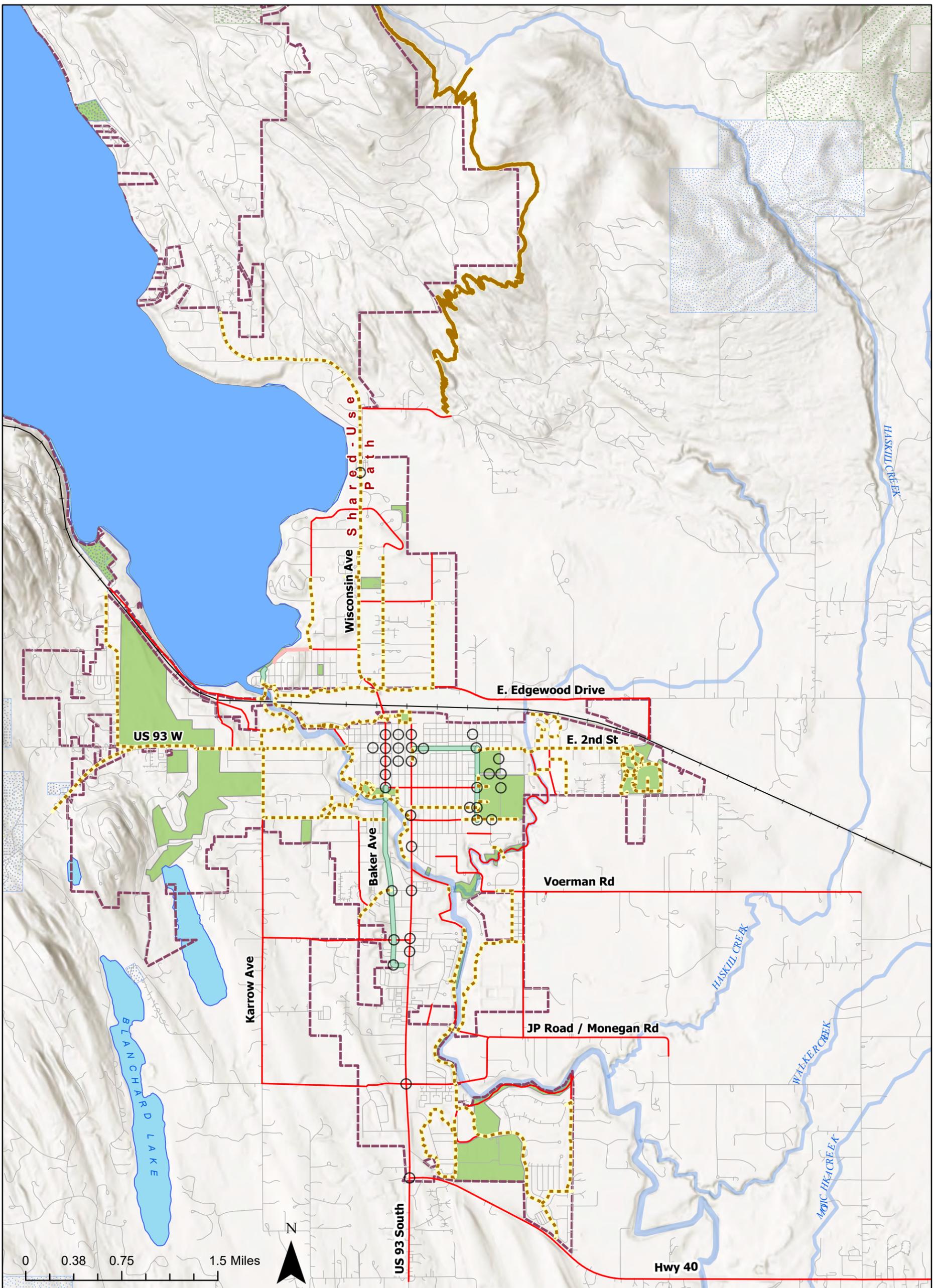


City of Whitefish Road Classifications

November 2025

- Local Road
- City Collector
- Arterial
- Future Road Extension

*The functional classification shown are recommended as part of this Plan and do not reflect the federally approved functional classification criteria.



- Bike Lane
- - - Bike Route
- Cycle Track
- - - Shared-Use Path
- Whitefish Trail
- Future Active Transportation Route
- Safe Streets for All Improvement Area

City of Whitefish Active Transportation Network

* Please refer to the 2022 Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan for specificity.
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PART TWO
VISION WHITEFISH 2045 RESOURCE DOCUMENT

HOUSING ELEMENT BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL HOUSING CRISIS

The Great Recession of 2008 was caused by unregulated predatory mortgage lending, massive amounts of homeowner debt and a collapse in home prices. This recession resulted in between six to eight million American households losing their homes to foreclosure and being forced into home rentals²⁸. By 2012, the housing market had mostly recovered, with some of the lowest interest rates being recorded just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. When the pandemic occurred (2020), stalled construction, low interest rates, expanded unemployment benefits and work from home options led to a decrease in inventory which drove up home prices. This resulted in more residents renting, with increases in rent costs and rent in many cities outpacing income growth. Millions of Americans now spend more than 30% of their income on housing, with homeownership increasingly out of reach for younger and lower-income households.

OVERVIEW OF MONTANA'S HOUSING CRISIS

Montana's housing prices retained value better than many states during the 2008 financial crisis due to Montana's locational desirability and number of already well-established retirees and empty nesters choosing to move here. However, recent in-migration to Montana has significantly intensified the state's housing crisis by driving up demand in communities already struggling with limited housing supply. This became particularly damaging during the Covid-19 pandemic as remote work, the desire to flee urban centers for mountain communities and lifestyle shifts drew new residents to Montana's scenic towns and rural areas. Home prices surged - greatly outpacing local incomes and pushing longtime residents out of the market.

This perfect storm of heightened demand, constrained supply, high interest rates and workforce wages could not keep up with increased housing costs. This deepened housing challenges for local residents and widened the gap between housing availability and need. This is particularly pertinent in Whitefish, where the average home price has tripled since 2019 (just prior to the pandemic) but the median household income in 2024 was approximately only \$71,000.

²⁸ Source: US Government Accountability Office, <https://www.gao.gov/blog/homeownership-during-recession>

MONTANA LAND USE PLANNING ACT HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

On May 17, 2023, Governor Gianforte signed Senate Bill 382, known as the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA, MCA Title 76-500). MLUPA gives particular attention to housing. It requires a qualifying city to project its anticipated population over the next 20 years, identify and analyze existing and projected housing needs for the projected population and provide regulations that allow for the rehabilitation, improvement, or development of the number of housing units needed. The jurisdiction is required to inventory the existing housing stock, analyze constraints to housing development, and describe what actions are being taken to provide the necessary housing. Progress toward the construction of the housing units identified as needed to meet projected housing needs during the 20-year planning period of the community plan must be documented every five years. In addition, MLUPA offers fourteen strategies to encourage the development of housing, in which a local jurisdiction must meet a minimum of five. This plan element includes a comprehensive discussion as to how the City of Whitefish meets those requirements of the Montana Land Use Planning Act.

VISIONING COMMENTS ON HOUSING

During visioning sessions for this plan, the declining availability of housing, particularly for the local workforce, dominated most of the responses. Affordable housing was listed as the top answer to “what do you believe is missing in Whitefish” and affordability was also indicated as the most significant threat to the city. Public sentiment was highly weighted toward a feeling of long-time locals being priced out of their community, not enough housing being built for the median household income, and “wealthy newcomers” recently moving into the city leading to increases in property values and loss of community identity. Ranking nearly as high as home affordability for what participants believed were the biggest threats to Whitefish were second and seasonal home ownership, short term rentals, and resistance to housing projects stopping housing projects - all concerns related to what the participants perceived as contributors to an increasing deficit of affordable housing.

While needed housing²⁹ (or lack thereof) was frequently mentioned at many of the visioning exercises and surveys, at the same time there were significant concerns directly related to the impacts of recent rapid growth and the increasing population which could be caused by or even contrary to the need to build more housing. “Small town character” was second only to “walkability” as the top answer to what participants listed as what was most unique about Whitefish. “Small town feel” was ranked number one in importance in listed values by visioning participants. Terms such as “traffic”, “overdevelopment”,

²⁹ For the purpose of this Housing Element, the term “needed housing” refers to the recommended number and type of housing units needed to support the local residents and employees as indicated by the Whitefish Area Housing Needs Bridge in the 2025 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment.

“sprawl”, and “uncontrolled growth” were commonly mentioned negatively throughout the visioning exercises. A very small number of individuals responded there should be “no new development”, “no density”, “only build single family residential” or to “leave Whitefish exactly as it is.” The community clearly understood the need to accommodate the existing and future citizens of Whitefish. However, the community also feels very passionately that any new housing must be implemented carefully to compliment and not change the character of the city that gives Whitefish its unique sense of place.

NEED FOR HOUSING

Housing that is attainable and affordable for the local community – for new parents, for the teacher, the service worker, or the senior living on a fixed income wanting to “age in place” - is necessary for economic and business success. The workforce needs stable, affordable housing options. People who live as well as work in a community tend to shop in local stores for their groceries, fuel, and goods, which they are unlikely to do if they live in other communities. The high cost of housing can reduce the number of employees a business can attract, as fewer will reliably commute long distances from larger population centers for service-level wages when they may earn similar wages in their home community. This can result in businesses facing severe staffing shortages and / or reducing their hours of operation and it hurts their ability to hire and retain employees across all wage levels. It can also add to traffic congestion as Whitefish workers must increasingly find housing elsewhere in the Flathead Valley and commute by vehicle. While Whitefish has a labor shortage, the more affordable communities of Columbia Falls and Kalispell are within commuting distance. A 2016 Housing Needs Assessment indicated approximately 50% of Whitefish employees commute into the city from other areas. In 2025, this percentage is indicated between 61% and 76%³⁰.

Definition of Cost Burdened

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a cost burdened household as that level of income at which housing costs consume more than 30% of gross household income. Housing costs include monthly payment for rent or mortgage (principal and interest) as well as taxes, insurance, utilities and HOA fees. When housing costs exceed this threshold, it often becomes difficult for families to afford other essential needs. A low to moderate income household is generally considered a household income between 50% to 80% of the average median income (AMI), which in 2024 amounted to \$35,400- 56,600 for a family of 2³¹ (the average household size in Whitefish). Severe cost burden occurs when more than 50% of income is spent on housing, placing even greater financial strain on individuals and families. The 2025 Housing Needs Assessment

³⁰ Sources: 60% was noted by the 2025 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment, 76% was noted by the GSBS 2025 Economic Growth Policy Update

³¹ Source: Montana Department of Commerce, Community Profiles

estimates approximately 20% of Whitefish owners and 61% of Whitefish renters as cost burdened. This disparity in percentages is likely accounted for by the number of wealthier Whitefish homeowners who can afford to buy, verses those who choose to live in Whitefish and cannot afford to purchase a home being forced to rent instead.

Housing Affordability:

Housing in Whitefish is first mentioned as a potential issue in the 1964 Whitefish Comprehensive Plan, and the 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan reports a severe shortage of housing affordability for the local workforce being an issue since at least the early 1990s. The first Whitefish Montana Comprehensive Plan (1964) reported a median home selling price of \$12,000, with a median household income of approximately \$5,500. The 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan reports the median selling price of a house at that time was \$115,000 and the median household income was \$33,000. In 2007, the time of the previously adopted community plan (growth policy), the median home sales price was \$319,000 with a median household income of \$44,000. The recent 2025 Housing Needs Assessment places the present median sales price of \$1.4 million whereas the median household income is \$71,000. Whereas the 2007 growth policy notes housing is out of reach for many working families, in 2025 housing in Whitefish is beyond the reach of even the upper middle class.

Whitefish Housing Prices and Median Household Income			
Year	Median Sales Price	Median HH Income	Price Above HH income
1964	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 5,500.00	2.18 x
1996	\$ 115,000.00	\$ 33,000.00	3.48 x
2000	\$ 148,000.00	\$ 33,000.00	4.48 x
2007	\$ 319,000.00	\$ 44,000.00	7.25 x
2020	\$ 447,000.00	\$ 69,919.00	6.39 x
2025	\$ 1,430,000.00	\$ 71,100.00	20.14 x

*Sources: Housing Needs Assessments, MLS, Montana Dept of Commerce

Although providing sufficient supply is part of the equation, given the desirability of Whitefish and the cost of land, a successful housing strategy to provide housing for a broader range of income levels must include such measures as addressing the gap between the funding needed to develop and operate a property and the revenue available, often in the form of subsidies to cover construction costs, rents or operating costs.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER, TYPE AND LOCATIONS OF NEEDED HOUSING

During visioning sessions, participants noted Whitefish’s “small town character” was what they valued the most about the city, and the term “quaint” was mentioned repeatedly. Although nearly every participant understood the importance of supporting new and denser necessary housing, many had concerns regarding the scale and speed of development and the importance of protecting and retaining existing neighborhoods.

“Community character” is a term often used to represent the architecture, streetscapes, and natural features of a place, and can also include cultural traditions, social dynamics, and economic patterns. Neighborhoods foster community character by creating shared spaces - like parks, libraries, and local events - that encourage connection and collaboration. Small acts like the ability to greet neighbors, organize block parties, and support local businesses can transform a place into a shared home. However, the term “community character” is sometimes used as a rationale to oppose new housing projects, especially when proposed developments are perceived to disrupt the established aesthetic, scale, or traffic patterns of a neighborhood.

There is a myriad of techniques that can be used to add new housing in a community and / or increase density in a manner that complements and does not detract from existing neighborhood character. One example is “gentle density,” which is a design approach which subtly increases the number of homes or dwellings in a neighborhood by integrating small-scale housing types - like duplexes, triplexes, or accessory dwelling

CONTRIBUTORS TO HIGH HOUSING COSTS

- Market Demand
- High Value of Short-Term Rentals
- Dark Homes
- Property Tax, Insurance and Interest Rates
- High Quality of Life
- General Desirability of Resort Towns
- Construction Costs
- HOAs
- Permitting and Engineering
- Lack of Labor
- Cost of Land
- Community Opposition to Housing Projects

units (ADUs) - into predominantly single-family areas³². Design options can also account for existing character. Apartments can be designed to fit into existing residential areas by transitioning height, matching surrounding rooflines, breaking up individual units to reduce massing, designing units to only have one exterior door and locating parking at the rear or along the side of the units. They could also be added above existing commercial spaces (i.e. mixed use buildings). Thoughtful design can add needed housing units into established neighborhoods while respecting the character of the area.

Location of Needed Housing

Higher density housing should be in appropriate locations, including areas with good access to public transportation, walkable and bikeable transportation routes, essential services such as schools, grocery stores, recreational facilities, and employment centers. Areas with existing infrastructure can more efficiently support increased population without requiring major upgrades. However, it is important to distribute higher density housing evenly rather than concentrate it all in one area or neighborhood to reduce impacts, promote equitable access to amenities, and not segregate residents by income.

During mapping exercises there were a few locations where participants indicated annexations to develop new greenfield or agricultural land for necessary housing were to be expected. However, most said that higher density should be in areas closer to the core of the city, areas with sufficient infrastructure along the US 93 South Corridor and in mixed use nodes.

HOUSING INVENTORY EXISTING CONDITIONS

Housing Diversity

At the time of the previous growth policy in 2007, there were approximately 4,508 housing units in the City of Whitefish³³, with approximately 80% of the residential units in 2007 being single family detached.

In 2025, there are approximately 5,700 residential units in the City of Whitefish (as identified in the housing inventory table below). 56% of these units are single family detached, and the remaining 44% are apartments, condominiums, single family attached (townhouses), duplexes, mixed use residential and resort residential (multiple self-contained vacation rentals on the same lot). Please refer to the Location of Housing Types Map to see the distribution of housing units. By comparison, the housing in all of Flathead

³² In 2023, due to Montana statute mandates (SB 323) the City of Whitefish revised zoning to allow duplexes and accessory dwelling units by right in all residential zone districts.

³³ Source: 2008 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment

County includes 67% single family detached with the remaining 33% being other housing types.

There have been approximately 1,237 units constructed since the adoption of the 2007 Growth Policy; in the last decade approximately 100 to 150 units have been constructed every year. According to the recent 2025 Housing Needs Assessment, there are approximately 715 residential units “in the pipeline.” 448 of these are multifamily apartment units, 150 are condos, and the remainder are single family homes or duplexes. As mentioned in the Demographics Element of this community plan, approximately 70% of the housing units in the city are occupied by full-time residents, with the other 30% being seasonal or short-term rentals.

City of Whitefish Housing Inventory³⁴

<i>Total Residential Units</i>	5,700	
<i>Single Family Detached</i>	3,185	56%
<i>Multifamily</i>	1,076	19%
<i>Townhouse</i>	542	10%
<i>Duplex</i>	543	10%
<i>Deed Restricted Units</i>	336	6%
<i>Resort Residential Units</i>	238	4%
<i>Mixed Use</i>	116	2%
<i>Number Units Approved or Under Construction</i>	715	
<i>Apartments</i>	448	63%
<i>Condos</i>	150	21%
<i>Single Family Residential (including duplex)</i>	117	16%
<i>Units Constructed since 2007 Growth Policy</i>	1,237	

³⁴ This housing inventory was based on comparing state, county and city GIS address point data against tax records, existing conditions mapping, aerial maps, and visual confirmation of the presence of housing units.

The areas of the highest density in the city are located just north of the viaduct surrounding Wisconsin, in the Downtown, and at the furthest extents of the southern city limits. These areas of density can be seen on the Density Map. The oldest residences in the city are located in and around the Downtown core, as could be expected. The more recent residential structures are located at the further extents of the city (see Ages of Residences Map). The average lifespan of a house is between 50 and 60 years. Approximately 35% of housing units in the City of Whitefish were built prior to 1979, representing around 2,000 units that are reaching their expected lifespan.

Zoning

87% of the zoned land in the City of Whitefish is zoned for residential uses-only. Of this residentially-zoned land, 77% allows only single family detached and duplexes. Triplexes and fourplexes are allowed as a ‘use by right’ in four zoning districts in about 20% of the land. The R-4 zoning district is the only residential zoning district that allows multifamily (up to 18 units) by right’. Multifamily residential is allowed ‘by right’ in all commercial zoning districts, as dictated by state law. Given the amount of land dedicated only to single family detached and duplexes, consideration could be given to providing a broader diversity or density of housing units in some of these areas. Please refer to the Housing Types by Zoning Map.

Workforce Housing Projects

Despite housing being out of reach for many residents, local workers and retirees, there has been success creating housing projects which are income restricted to be affordable to select economic segments of the population. Income restricted housing units represent approximately 5.8% of the total housing inventory in the City of Whitefish, which includes 58 permanently attainable homes for entry level ownership and 278 rental homes or apartments.

Whitefish Community Housing Inventory – Ownership Units

Project	Total Units	Income Level	Year Built	Expiration Date
Whitefish Housing Authority Scattered Homes	10	<80% AMI	Varies	90 years, renewable
Trailview	48	80-120% AMI	2019-2024	Never
Total Affordable Ownership	58	All less than 120% AMI	-	-

Source: 2025 Housing Needs Assessment

Whitefish Community Housing Inventory – Rental Units

Project	Total Units	Income Level	Year Built	Expiration Date
Whitefish Housing Authority BNSF Units	2	<80% AMI	Varies	Never, while WHA owns
Mountain View Manor	50	<40% AMI (senior)	1969-1997	Never, contract with HUD
Colorado Village Apartments	36	<60% AMI	1986	No information available
Whitefish Manor	30	<50-60% AMI	1988	No information available
Stonecreek Apartments	41	<60% AMI (senior)	1992	No information available
Mountain Apartments	30	<50-60% AMI	2001-2002	No information available
Mountain Senior Apartments	30	<50-60% AMI (senior)	2003	Never, per manager
Hailey Apartments	10	<50-60% AMI	2004	Never, per manager
Whitefish Crossing	6	<70% AMI	2017	Never
Riverview Meadows	5	<70% AMI	2021	Never
Alpenglow Apartments	38	<60% AMI	2021-2024	Never
Total Rentals	278	All under 80% AMI	-	-

Source: 2025 Housing Needs Assessment

Despite the addition of recent needed housing, Whitefish has experienced a consistent reduction in naturally affordable housing stock across both rental and ownership markets. Older rental units have increasingly been demolished, renovated, or converted into higher-end apartments or condominiums, resulting in rent levels that exceed affordability thresholds for moderate-income households. Similarly, older single-family homes, many located in historic neighborhoods developed between 1910 and 1940, have seen significant price increases due to rising land values and redevelopment activity. These homes often require substantial renovation or replacement, further elevating costs. As a result, housing options that once served first-time buyers and local workers are becoming less accessible.

SHORT TERM RENTALS

A short-term rental (STR) is the rental of an entire furnished, privately owned house, townhouse, condominium unit, apartment, or other dwelling unit - or any portion of a dwelling unit, for stays less than 30 days to transient guests or tourists.

Like traditional lodging, short term rentals within city limits must pay resort tax. Between October 2024 and October 2025, \$479,500 was collected in resort tax from short term rentals, a 28% increase from the previous 12 month period.

As of November, 2025, there are 410 licensed STR units (representing approximately 7% of all housing units) within the City of Whitefish, with two additional permits under review and eight properties in various stages of enforcement. The Whitefish Area (59937 zip code) has 1,220 short-term rentals, according to AirDNA. The number of active STR listings in the Whitefish Area is highly seasonal and has been increasing at an average rate of about 9% per year over the past three years. The number of active STR listings is consistently highest between June and September.

The Whitefish area’s STR listing rates are comparable to similar mountain town communities across the West. While there is no ‘right’ number of short-term units as a percentage of total units, it has been shown through planning and policy studies that evaluate STR impact thresholds that a number around 10% of total units is generally considered manageable. However, each community is different and the number of total STRs can be influenced by several factors, including the size of the tourism economy, availability of workforce and long-term rental housing, local zoning regulations, and the relative affordability or exclusivity of the community³⁵.

STRs may not be compatible with other residential areas when there are increased traffic and noise impacts, as well as the diminished availability of long-term rental and affordable housing units for the local population. Whitefish first introduced oversight of short-term rentals in 1982 by designating specific “resort” zoning districts where tourist accommodations were permitted. STR’s are permitted only in specific zoning districts, namely WB-3, WRR-1, WRR-2, WRB-1, and WRB-2, within the city limits of Whitefish, as shown in the Housing Types by Zone District Map. When looking at tools to incentivize *additional* needed housing units, it is important to consider whether these types of incentives should be extended to zoning districts that allow STRs, or how to ensure additional units resulting from incentivization do not become STRs.

DARK HOMES

Roughly one in five housing units (19%) in the City of Whitefish is classified as vacant according to the Census definition of vacancy. Of these 19% of units (978 units), the majority (77%) are occupied only a portion of the year, often seasonally or for recreational use, but are not occupied by a permanent resident. Seasonal units could be used to house a seasonal workforce, including hospital workers with short term positions, those employed in hospitality-related industries and in some cases construction. 25% of the city’s resort tax is reallocated back to property owners as tax rebates. The city could consider whether housing units unoccupied for the majority of the year should qualify and whether this money could be better allocated toward needed housing.

³⁵ 2025 Housing Needs Assessment

ADOPTED PLANS AND STUDIES

Whitefish’s housing strategy has evolved over decades in response to growing affordability challenges and shifting community dynamics. The 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan emphasized balanced development, moderate density, mixed-use development in the downtown core, and alignment of housing expansion with infrastructure capacity. The 2003 Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) highlighted the widening affordability gap and cost burdens among renters and homeowners. The 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy calls for diversified housing types and better coordination of land use and housing strategies. Seasonal and second-home ownership emerged as a persistent pressure point, reducing availability for full-time residents and driving up costs.

Worsening conditions, with home prices outpacing wage growth and rental markets tightening were documented in the 2008 and 2016 Housing Needs Assessments. 65% of the workforce was commuting from neighboring towns due to a lack of affordable housing, vacancy rates were below 2% and most prospective buyers were priced out of the market. Seasonal leasing trends and tourism-driven employment further strained housing access. In response, the 2016 assessment recommended inclusionary zoning, expanded public-private partnerships, and targeted programs for households earning between 60% and 120% of AMI.

In response to the 2016 Housing Needs Assessment, a 2017 Strategic Housing Plan was crafted to address the concerns of affordability and workforce displacement in Whitefish. This assessment resulted in the 2017 Whitefish Strategic Housing Plan which, among many other housing recommendations, resulted in the Legacy Homes Program - a program which included a mandatory inclusionary zoning policy³⁶ requiring 20% of units in new developments to be deed-restricted for moderate-income households (60–120% AMI), administered by the Whitefish Housing Authority. To offset costs to developers, the Legacy Homes Program offered incentives like increased building height, reduced lot sizes, reduced parking, and streamlined approvals, alongside zoning changes to promote higher-density, mixed-use development near transit and job centers. The State Legislature outlawed inclusionary zoning in Montana in 2021, so the city shifted its Legacy Homes Program into a voluntary program providing more robust incentives for 10% of the units deed restricted for affordability.

A 2022 Housing Needs Assessment update reaffirmed the urgency of Whitefish’s housing crisis, projecting a need for 1,310 new units by 2030, with most priced below market rate.

³⁶ In 2022 the Montana Legislature outlawed inclusionary zoning

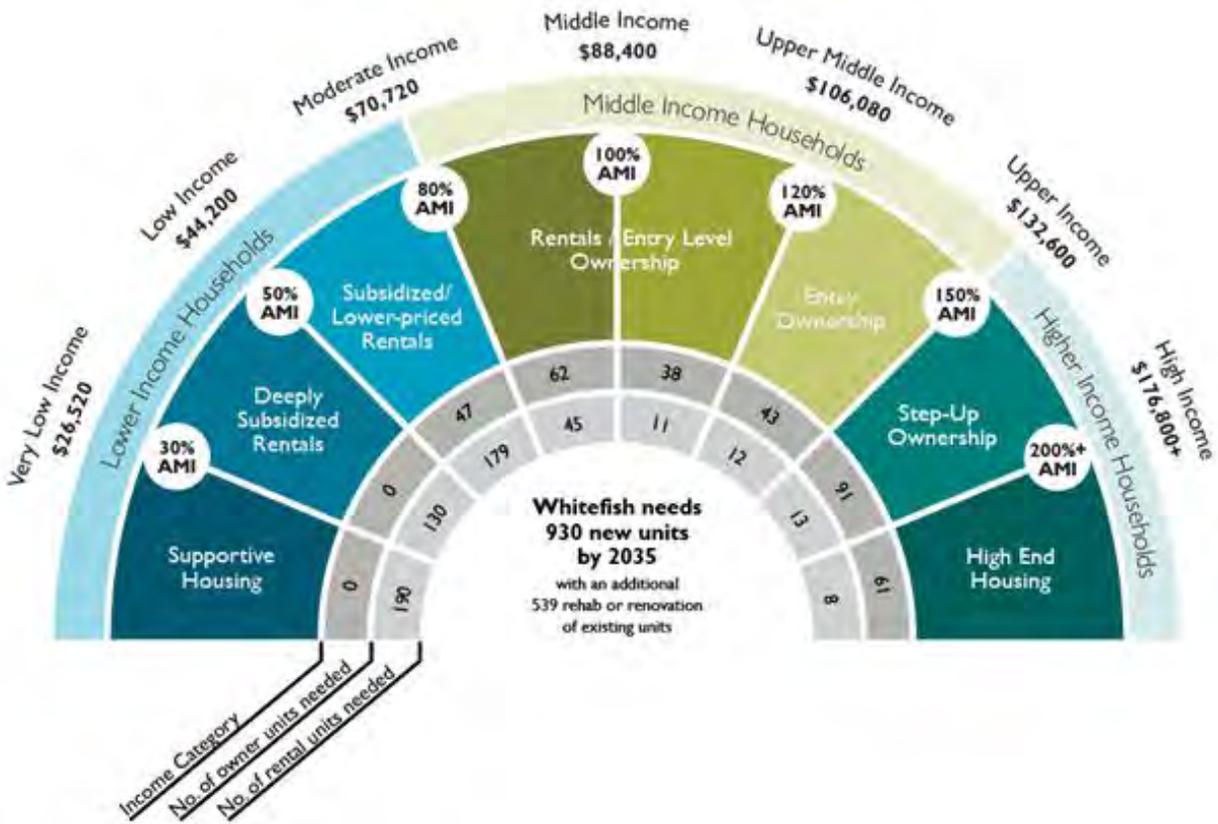
Despite modest wage growth, home prices and rents continued to climb, deepening the affordability gap and sustaining high commuter rates. Short-term rentals were identified as an accelerating threat to year-round housing stability.

In 2022, the Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap was adopted, which was an update of the 2017 Strategic Housing Plan. The roadmap is a five-year strategic guidance tool to address Community Housing needs, specifically methods to supply 1,310 additional units by 2030 with 75% being priced below market. It lays out four core strategy areas - mobilizing public/private development, securing funding, adopting supportive policies (zoning changes, deed restrictions, annexation agreements), and expanding housing programs (tenant protections, homebuyer assistance, employer-assisted housing) – with a newly formed Community Housing Committee appointed by the City Council to oversee its implementation.

2025 Housing Needs Assessment Update

As part of this community plan, a 2025 Housing Needs Assessment was completed to provide an updated forecast of housing demand and affordability challenges through 2035 and was specifically focused on the Whitefish city limits rather than the entire 59937 area. Whitefish’s population had exceeded 9,100 by the time of the study, with projections anticipating growth to 11,120 by 2035 - an increase of over 20% that will place significant strain on the existing housing stock. The assessment documented continued cost escalation, with median home prices exceeding one million dollars and rental rates well over \$2,000 for a two-bedroom unit, far outpacing local wage growth. Short-term rentals remained a key factor in reducing long-term housing availability, particularly for year-round residents and workforce households.

The report estimated a need for 930 to 1,500 additional housing units over the next decade, with roughly 75% required to be priced below market rate to serve households earning between 60% and 120% of AMI. The percentage distribution of housing by need is illustrated by the Housing Bridge as shown below. Although the recommended number and mix of housing units have continued to be built each year (at least 100 units per year), the report finds affordability at market rate continues to put housing units out of reach of the majority of the workforce.



COMMUNITY HOUSING COMMITTEE

Beginning in 2015, businesses began expressing their concerns about the difficulty in finding and retaining employees due to a lack of affordable housing. In response to these concerns, the Montana West Economic Development and Whitefish Chamber of Commerce facilitated an Affordable Housing Workforce Summit. Out of this Summit, the Affordable Workforce Housing Taskforce was formed, composing of a coalition of individuals ranging from business owners, city officials, nonprofits, and concerned citizens.

When the Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap was adopted by the Council in 2022 the Whitefish Community Housing Committee was established as a permanent city committee. The Committee makes recommendations to the City Council to implement the housing strategies in the 2022 Whitefish Housing Roadmap that are the responsibility of the City. Since its formation, the Committee has been working their way through the various strategies and coordinating their research and recommendations with the City Council. Most recently, the Committee is exploring the potential impacts of reducing the minimum lot size in residential zones and provided their input into the creation of this housing element. The Committee will continue to research and recommend various policy matters to support and encourage Community Housing.

WHITEFISH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH VARIOUS HOUSING AGENCIES

Many organizations and individuals in the Flathead Valley are working to build a strong and equitable community housing ecosystem. The systems that impact and influence housing are complex, so making any significant impact requires a broad array of partners working together.

- Whitefish Housing Authority. The Whitefish Housing Authority (WHA) is a quasi-governmental organization that provides housing services on behalf of the City. The organization manages deed and income-restricted units, qualifies tenants and purchasers for managed units, operates housing programs, and coordinates community housing development, among other tasks.
- Housing Whitefish. Housing Whitefish offers programs and projects to assist community members facing housing insecurity. The organization runs programs like the Workforce Rental Assistance Program, which offers rental assistance to income qualified households living and working in the Whitefish area. They aim to prevent displacement and expand housing options for low to moderate income individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity. The organization is also working to develop units that will be affordable for our local workforce to rent or purchase.
- Northwest Montana Community Land Trust. The mission of Northwest Community Land Trust, Inc. (NWMTCCLT) is to provide permanently affordable homeownership opportunities for low- and moderate-income families in Northwest Montana by owning the underlying land and offering the housing units built on the land at more affordable costs. In 2025 NWMTCCLT added three houses in Whitefish for a total of eleven (11).
- Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley. Habitat for Humanity's mission is to build decent, affordable homes and provide homeownership opportunities to qualified families (30% - 80% of AMI) who live and work in Flathead County. Habitat has built 73 homes to date in Flathead County (Somers, Lakeside, Kalispell, Columbia Falls, and Whitefish). Habitat Flathead currently builds 8 homes a year and is actively developing capacity to build up to 20 homes per year. Habitat Flathead is also co-developing mixed-income neighborhoods with private-sector builders to provide housing options from 30% - 200% of AMI.
- Community Action Partnerships of Northwest Montana. Provide weatherization services as well as Low Income Home Energy Assistance across the Whitefish zip code.

HOUSING FUNDING PROGRAMS

One of the most critical aspects of addressing housing affordability is ensuring sufficient financing is available to make market rate housing accessible to individuals and families across all income levels. A new federal policy released in 2025 means that Montana could receive 70% less federal funding programs aimed at helping low income residents.³⁷ Bridging the gap between the cost of housing and what residents can afford requires substantial financial resources and innovative funding approaches. Various initiatives and collaborations have been established to tackle this pressing concern. Among these efforts is the formation of committees and partnerships aiming to develop and implement strategies to ensure housing availability and affordability for the community. The city has the ability to partner with some of the agencies or apply for federal funding to offer financial opportunities for the development or renovation of needed housing.

- Montana Board of Housing Programs for Homebuyers. Montana Board of Housing helps make home ownership affordable for home buyers through low-interest mortgages, down payment assistance, various loan programs and the mortgage tax credit program.
- Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) subsidizes the acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income tenants. The federal government issues tax credits to state and territorial governments. State housing agencies then award the credits to private developers of affordable rental housing projects through a competitive process. Developers generally sell the credits to private investors to obtain funding.
- Community Development Block Grant. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program through HUD provides annual grants on a formula basis to states, cities, and counties to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income people. These grants can be used for a variety of purposes, including needed property rehabilitations.

³⁷ Source: “Montana could lose millions for low-income housing under new federal policy”, Montana Free Press, Katie Fairbanks, November 26, 2025, <https://montanafreepress.org/2025/11/26/montana-could-lose-millions-for-low-income-housing-under-new-federal-policy/>

- HOME Investment Partnerships Program. The HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) provides formula grants to states and localities that communities use - often in partnership with local nonprofit groups - to fund a wide range of activities including building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people. It is the largest Federal block grant to state and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households.

RECENT WHITEFISH HOUSING EFFORTS

The City of Whitefish has taken a multifaceted approach to address the growing demand for Community Housing. Through a combination of staffing investments, policy reforms, and regulatory updates, the City continues to work to address housing affordability. The following are some more notable examples. In some cases, the Montana State Legislature has passed measures which have reduced their effectiveness.

Administrative

- More Staffing. In 2024, the City hired a full time short-term rental specialist to oversee monitoring of more than 400 short-term rental properties within Whitefish City Limits. In addition to conducting fire and life safety inspections, this staff person also coordinates enforcement actions to ensure each property operates in accordance with city code. Recently, the city partnered with Airbnb to prevent property owners from advertising without a valid short-term rental permit. The creation of this position was recommended in the 2022 Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap. In 2024, the city also hired a Community Resiliency Planner that focuses on Community Housing as well as transportation and sustainability issues.

Policy

- 2022 Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap. As mentioned in the Adopted Plans and Studies Section previously, the 2022 Roadmap outlines a partnership framework and range of strategies to drive action to address Community Housing needs in the Whitefish area until 2027. The Roadmap identifies short, mid, and long-term action items and implementation is being executed by city staff under the oversight of the Whitefish Community Housing Committee.

Regulatory Updates

- Inclusionary Housing. At the recommendation of the 2017 Whitefish Strategic Housing Plan, in 2019 the city adopted an inclusionary zoning program which required proposed housing developments to set aside a certain number of deed restricted units to certain income levels or to pay fees in lieu of housing. (The City of Bozeman also instituted a similar program.) However, in 2021, the Montana Legislature signed House Bill 259 into law. This bill outlawed mandatory inclusionary zoning and / or fees in lieu of housing statewide.

Inclusionary zoning has been successfully used nationwide since it was first introduced in the State of Maryland in 1974. The city should encourage other municipalities, elected representatives and agencies such as the Montana League of Cities and Towns to continue dialogue with legislators for exemptions to the preemptions on inclusionary zoning.

- Legacy Homes Program. In 2019 the city created the Legacy Homes Program. Amended in 2021, this is a voluntary incentive-based inclusionary zoning program where a proposed development provides at least 10% of the total number of units within a development for people with specified income level in exchange for certain incentives. Options for providing affordable housing include integrating housing within the development, paying a fee in lieu of housing, developing units off-site, donating land or any other acceptable options. The Whitefish Housing Authority (WHA) guides prospective renters and owners through the application process and determines eligibility for a Legacy Home.
- Accessory Dwelling Units Allowed by Right. An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a secondary, self-contained residential unit located on the same lot as a primary home, often used to expand housing options within existing neighborhoods. In May of 2022, the city revised zoning to allow ADUs by right in every residential zoning district. Shortly afterward, the State passed legislation requiring Montana cities to allow ADUs wherever single-family homes are permitted.
- Duplexes Allowed by Right. In January of 2024, Senate Bill 323 went into effect, requiring the City to allow duplexes anywhere single family homes are allowed. The city updated all of its residential zoning regulations accordingly.
- Parking Reductions. In April 2018, the City Code was updated to require only 1.25 parking spaces for studio and efficiency apartments to encourage smaller multifamily units to be built. However, in 2023, Senate Bill 245 was passed, prohibiting cities from

requiring more than one parking space per unit for multifamily developments in commercial zones, rendering much of the city’s parking incentive program obsolete.

- Annexation Development Agreements. Annexations of land upon request by a property owner(s) for residential development offer an opportunity for new development to include Community Housing through mechanisms such as development agreements. In 2024, an annexation development agreement was agreed upon by a developer requesting to annex property into the city at Hwy 40 and US 93 South. As part of the agreement, the developer offered up 10% of the residential units to be deed restricted to a particular income level in order to receive Legacy Homes incentives for building height.

Financing

- Resort Tax Reallocation. In 1996, the voters of Whitefish approved a 3% “resort tax” that applies to lodging, bars, restaurants, and retail to offset visitor impacts to tax-funded services. This tax is allocated to infrastructure improvements, trails and open space acquisitions and maintenance, tax rebates, with 10% allocated to Community Housing. In 2025 the city collected \$675,346 for Community Housing. There is potential to increase the allocation for Community Housing subject to voter approval. The city has already committed funding to Housing Whitefish for the Workforce Rental Assistance Program. The city committed \$200,000 in Fiscal Year 2026, \$250,000 in Fiscal Year 2027, and \$300,000 in Fiscal Year 2028.
- Land Donation. The City donated land to develop townhomes at the “Snowlot” development.
- Trailview Donation. The city has funded the Northwest Montana Community Land Trust’s purchase of land under several homes at the Trailview development.

MONTANA LAND USE PLANNING ACT HOUSING STRATEGIES

MLUPA requires a city to meet a minimum of five of fourteen housing strategies outlined by the State of Montana as described below (76-24-203). The city presently meets six of these strategies (as shown in **bold** letters). Although already taking action to address the need for additional housing units, the city should continue looking for ways to exceed the minimum strategies set forth by MLUPA.

FOURTEEN HOUSING STRATEGY OPTIONS REQUIRED BY MLUPA

1. **Allow, as a permitted use, for at least a duplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted;**
2. **Zone for higher density housing near transit stations, places of employment, higher education facilities, and other appropriate population centers, as determined by the local government;**
3. Eliminate or reduce off-street parking requirements to require no more than one parking space per dwelling unit;
4. **Eliminate impact fees for accessory dwelling units or developments that include multi-unit dwellings or reduce the fees by at least 25%;**
5. **Allow, as a permitted use, for at least one internal or detached accessory dwelling unit on a lot with a single-unit dwelling occupied as a primary residence;**
6. Allow for single-room occupancy developments;
7. Allow, as a permitted use, a triplex or fourplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted;
8. Eliminate minimum lot sizes or reduce the existing minimum lot size required by at least 25%;
9. Eliminate aesthetic, material, shape, bulk, size, floor area, and other massing requirements for multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use developments or remove at least half of those requirements;
10. **Provide for zoning that specifically allows or encourages the development of tiny houses, as defined in Appendix Q of the International Residential Code as it was printed on January 1, 2023;**
11. Eliminate setback requirements or reduce existing setback requirements by at least 25%;
12. Increase building height limits for dwelling units by at least 25%;
13. **Allow multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use development as a permitted use on all lots where office, retail, or commercial are primary permitted uses; or**
14. Allow multi-unit dwellings as a permitted use on all lots where triplexes or fourplexes are permitted uses.

Yellow = Currently adopted by Whitefish

FUTURE HOUSING STRATEGIES

Whitefish has been very proactive in its efforts to provide a more diverse housing stock for our residents. This is reflected in the housing inventory, creation of income-restricted housing, construction of recommended units per year, recent studies and regulatory, policy and financial strategies. Despite these recent successes, an adequate supply of housing for our local population at affordable prices remains daunting. Numerous options still exist to bolster the supply of needed housing for our community.

- Land Use Strategies. As indicated in this housing element, the majority of land zoned for residential allows only single family detached and duplexes. Residential land uses should allow a broader range and distribution of housing types throughout the city, particularly in zoning districts which do not allow short term rentals. More locations and opportunities for adding residential over existing commercial should be identified and encouraged. Zoning and development standards should encourage and support alternative housing types for accommodating seasonal workers who are often young, single, and seeking affordable places to stay. These could include single occupancy developments, dormitories, or other accommodations that employers could offer or subsidize as well as the ability to convert motels or other lodging into extended stay temporary housing uses.

The city is presently meeting six of the fourteen MLUPA required housing strategies, but additional strategies should be implemented. The city should be proactive in meeting as many of the strategies as feasible. Allowing single room occupancy development and reducing minimum lot sizes are two recommended additional strategies.

- Development Standards Strategies. The city should continue to review zoning and development standards to ensure regulations encourage and do not impede the construction of needed housing. Zoning development standards could be revised to allow more efficient use of land and economize construction costs by reducing lot sizes and required setbacks as well as open space requirements. Zoning definitions could be revised, such as revising or eliminating definitions that prevent groups of unrelated people from living together in the same residence to encourage alternate housing options.
- Policy Strategies. The city should continue to review, implement and update strategies of the 2022 Housing Roadmap. As recommended in the 2022 Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap, the city should coordinate with other jurisdictions such as Big Sky, Missoula, and Bozeman as well as the Montana League of Cities and Towns to form a coalition to promote, oppose or influence legislation supportive of housing needs (such as revising prohibitions on inclusionary zoning).
- Financial Strategies. The city should be prioritizing new housing units constructed for the local workforce and senior population to remain affordable. There could be additional allocation of resort tax revenue reserved for construction of needed housing. The city could partner with local non-profit organizations to apply for community development block grants under the HUD to provide grants to

homeowners seeking to make necessary improvements, upgrades or additional housing units. The city could explore bond measures to provide funding to raise capital to incentivize or subsidize the construction of needed housing units.

SUMMARY

A diverse housing stock is essential for Whitefish to ensure safe and affordable living options for all residents, regardless of income level. This diversity supports a vibrant community by attracting various demographics and promotes economic stability by providing workforce housing. Despite significant success in constructing needed housing, housing affordable to the local population earning the median household income remains scarce. The Vision Whitefish 2045 Future Land Use Map and numerous zoning reforms offer strategies to increase housing availability, such as reducing minimum lot sizes, increasing building height limits, and allowing multi-unit dwellings in various zones. Policy strategies aim to meet more housing requirements and collaborate with other jurisdictions for supportive legislation.

To address the affordability gap, financial strategies prioritize affordability for the local workforce and seniors by utilizing resort tax revenues, partnering with non-profits for grants, and exploring bond measures for funding housing projects. The city's focus is on overcoming barriers to housing through public-private partnerships and aligning with state and federal programs. By implementing these strategies, Whitefish aims to create a more inclusive and economically stable community with diverse housing options serving all segments of the population.

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT BACKGROUND

Numerous transportation related plans and studies have been completed for Whitefish, including the recent 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. As such, this transportation element is not intended to duplicate the information, work programs or policies already established. This plan element will present a snapshot of the existing transportation system, discuss existing issues and the transportation-related comments received during visioning sessions. Existing plans will be summarized and consideration given to how these plans integrate with each other. General goals and objectives address the transportation system to serve the existing and projected population.

THE LAND USE TRANSPORTATION RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between land use and transportation is a fundamental concept in urban planning, shaping how communities grow and function. Land use decisions directly impact transportation needs, influence traffic patterns, infrastructure development, and accessibility. Conversely, investment in transportation infrastructure can stimulate desirable and appropriate incremental development in areas that are not otherwise accessible. A land use plan should steer the transportation plan and associated infrastructure and not the other way around so that growth occurs in a concurrent manner. When the land use - transportation connection is not managed properly and new road infrastructure makes undeveloped land more accessible, development often follows. New development can then change travel demand, forcing additional infrastructure to manage the new demand, impacting the city and taxpayers.

COMPLETE STREETS

Complete Streets are a transportation policy that ensures streets are designed, built, and operated to accommodate safe access for users of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. The City of Whitefish strives to design its streets to serve the needs of all users, and the engineering standards used by the city include Complete Streets components. Nonetheless, a formal Complete Streets Policy does not yet exist. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan recommends the city continue to incorporate Complete Streets concepts into the project planning, programming, and implementation processes. In addition, the plan recommends the city continue to advance toward the development and adoption of a formal Complete Streets Policy. Adopting a formal policy would formalize the city's future commitment and may require changes to zoning and design standards to ensure new facilities are constructed in a way to accommodate all users and enhance safety, mobility, and equity within the community.

AN INTEGRATED MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Multimodality is highly valued by the Whitefish community. Accordingly, the Whitefish transportation system is an integrated system which connects various modes of travel - walking, biking, options for mobility devices for the physically challenged, public transit, ride-share, personal vehicles and the transport of goods and services - into a unified network that prioritizes efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability. This interconnected system is being continuously improved to accommodate equitable access for people of all ages and abilities. The Whitefish transportation system is comprised of the road network, active transportation network, transit, rail and air transportation. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan should be consulted for details regarding transportation improvements and is incorporated as part of this community plan by reference.

The Road Network

Like most communities, Whitefish has what is known as a functional street classification system that designates city streets as arterials, collectors, or local streets. (See the Street Classifications Map.) Functional classification helps determine speed limits, roadway design, funding priorities, where to steer growth and development, and ensures streets will not be overbuilt or underbuilt for their intended purpose. When the existing and future functional classification of streets is a known quantity, informed land use decisions that do not overburden existing streets can be made. Safety and the ability of a street to carry the expected volume of traffic must remain primary concerns. The existing and future road network should also consider the capacity needed for safe and efficient public egress in the event of an emergency evacuation due to wildfire, toxic spill in the railyard, or other disaster.

- Arterials serve the most intensive land uses with the highest speeds and uninterrupted trips. These would include commercial centers, office/business parks or complexes, and large-scale multi-family residential. Arterials are the major traffic movers across a city or town. There are approximately 9.5 miles of arterial roads in the City of Whitefish. US Highway 93 South, US Highway 93 West, Wisconsin Avenue, Spokane Avenue, Baker Avenue and East 2nd Street are considered the arterials within the Whitefish city limits.
- Collectors distribute traffic between arterials and local streets and are designed for lower traffic speeds and shorter distances than arterials. Some commercial uses and multifamily residential areas take direct access from collectors. There are approximately 10 miles of collectors within the city limits. Some of the collectors in Whitefish include Edgewood, Karrow Avenue, Central Avenue, Columbia Avenue south of East 7th Street, and Dakota Avenue.

- Local Streets primarily provide direct access to a land use - a single-family home for example. A local street might also be called a “neighborhood street”. Residential access is taken directly from it, and through traffic is (or should be) discouraged. Local streets are the majority of the street network in the City of Whitefish, comprising approximately 70 miles, with alleys providing an additional seven-and-a-half miles.

Roadways in the study area are maintained by different agencies. Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) maintains US Highways such as Highway 93 and Highway 40, as well as Big Mountain Road, which is classified as a State Secondary Highway, and Wisconsin Avenue, which is classified as an Urban System. Flathead County maintains all other public roads not within the city limits. The remaining public roads in the city are maintained by the City of Whitefish.

The Active Transportation Network

Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered travel - such as walking, biking, or using a wheelchair. An active transportation network - sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails - is essential for creating sustainable, healthy, and inclusive communities. To be most effective, active transportation routes should connect to key places such as schools, parks, neighborhoods, and shopping areas. By prioritizing infrastructure for walking, cycling, and other forms of active mobility, including those with impaired accessibility, Whitefish can reduce traffic congestion, lower carbon emissions, encourage healthier lifestyles, and provide mobility options for all age groups, including those who do not own or cannot operate motor vehicles.

For a relatively small Montana town, Whitefish has an impressive network of shared-use paths for pedestrians and bicyclists. These paths range from ten-foot wide asphalt paths adjacent to the Whitefish River to five-foot wide sidewalks along recently reconstructed City streets. The city has a pedestrian and bicycle path advisory committee which provides advice and recommendations to decision makers related to the development of the active transportation network based on the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Proposed projects and improvements from this plan have been incorporated into the transportation projects of the 2022 Transportation Plan (indicated on the Active Transportation Map).

Types of active transportation routes in Whitefish are as follows:

- Sidewalks are paved paths for pedestrians that run alongside a road or street. There are approximately 41 miles of sidewalk in Whitefish.

- Bike Lanes are designated lanes within a portion of the roadway typically including striping, signage, and other pavement markings noting the space for cyclists. There are approximately two miles of bike lanes throughout Whitefish.
- Shared Use Pathways are typically paved pathways separate from the road right-of-way that do not allow motorized vehicles. There are approximately 24 miles of shared use pathways in Whitefish with the Whitefish River Trail being a notable example.
- Cycle Tracks are dedicated two-way paths designed specifically for bicycle uses, that are within the roadway but physically separated from vehicular traffic with barriers such as bollards or curbs. A cycle track exists along Skyles Place east of City Beach connecting to a shared use path at Dakota Avenue.
- Recreational Trails, although non-motorized, are intended more for active recreation rather than transportation purposes. The Whitefish Trail, designed for hiking, biking, and horseback riding, is an example of a recreational trail. (See the Parks and Recreation Section of the Public Facilities Element for a discussion of the Whitefish Trail.)

Public Transit

Public transit provides some limited transportation options for those who do not want to contribute to congestion or carbon emissions, or for other reasons choose not to drive, who cannot afford to own a vehicle, those with disabilities or those who are too young or too old to drive. A robust transit network could serve to provide efficient car-free mobility throughout the city as well as between the various cities in the Flathead Valley and the airport. Transit options in Whitefish are currently limited to the Mountain Climber (operated by Flathead County) and the S.N.O.W. Bus (operated by the Big Mountain Commercial Association (BMCA)).

- Shuttle Network of Whitefish (S.N.O.W.) Bus: The Shuttle Network of Whitefish (S.N.O.W. Bus) is a free fixed route service which serves eight stops from the Mountain Mall at the south side of the city to Whitefish Mountain Resort. The service is operated by the Big Mountain Commercial Association (BMCA) and is privately funded by their members as well as a small amount of funding from the city. The bus presently runs morning to evening from December to April and May to September.

Over 100,000 riders used the S.N.O.W. bus in Winter 2024/25. The bus is frequently at rider capacity, and additional hours are offered on select weekends and events to help meet demand.

The last summer count was approximately 12,000 riders in 2019. Recent surveys show more frequent service, especially in the summer, as the top request. Riders also request more coverage out of town, such as further south on Hwy 93, west on 2nd Street, and runs to Columbia Falls and Kalispell. Increased funding will be needed to increase service hours and routes.

- Mountain Climber: The Mountain Climber is the public transportation provider in Flathead County, operated by Flathead County, and provides the following routes/services:
 - Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls on-demand
 - Whitefish & Columbia Falls Commuter
 - S.P.A.R.K. Route (afterschool program for elementary school children operated by The Summit Medical Fitness Center in Kalispell)

Mountain Climber works with BMCA to coordinate and augment service with the S.N.O.W. Bus in both the winter and summer seasons.

The City of Whitefish currently contributes \$9,300 annually to Mountain Climber to support public transportation. Several years earlier, Whitefish worked with Mountain Climber and other stakeholders to create a new transportation hub at the north side of the library east of Depot Park, which includes a shelter, to allow for transfers between buses, intercity service, and Amtrak. It has been mentioned by some that parking lot redesigns could be considered to improve flow of vehicles and transit at this hub. Discussions have also focused on transit-based solutions to traffic and parking congestion, mobility and affordable housing for workers, as well as visitor management. Some options include expanded commuter service between the cities, connectivity with the airport and Park & Ride routes/stops.

Mountain Climber annual ridership has more than doubled since 2000 and has steadily been increasing. Due to the population influx, Mountain Climber's ability to fulfill requested rides is starting to become an issue. Funding continues to be a major barrier to creating and implementing transit-based solutions to pressing concerns, including traffic and parking congestion (especially during the summer season), worker mobility and economic development/sustainability, affordable housing, an aging population, access to health care and high-volume visitor management.

Timely commuter transit options are lacking throughout the Flathead Valley. Greater coordination is needed both within the City of Whitefish but also across Flathead County to provide a transit system which is more logically structured to existing and potential future transit system demands. It is critical that transit planning and funding

be approached jointly by the cities, the County, the airport, and the business community to ensure a coordinated, integrated, and sufficiently funded system. Due to the compact nature of Whitefish combined with large numbers of visitors during busy seasons, Whitefish can and should be a leader in developing a robust intra-city public transit network.

Air Transportation

- Whitefish Airport: Whitefish has a 2,560 foot long turf runway on the far east end of town adjacent to Armory Park. It has existed in this location since 1963 and is owned and controlled by the State of Montana Department of Aeronautics. Most of the airport is within unincorporated Flathead County, with only a small western portion beyond the runway within the city accessed through the Hugh Rogers Dog Park. There are no hangar facilities, but there is a windsock and a small grass-covered aircraft parking area near the runway with tiedowns. This airport uses a “visual runway” intended solely for operation of aircraft using visual approach procedures with no instrument designation during daytime only operations. The airport is rated for propeller planes of less than 12,500 pounds maximum takeoff weight.

Although the airport is surrounded by low density agricultural land on three sides, there is an increasing number of residences developing at moderate density to the west and south. This has led to an acceleration of complaints regarding aircraft activity and associated noise. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) considers 65 decibels to be the threshold to which aircraft noise is considered to be incompatible with residential uses, and either discourages or recommends additional building code standards beyond this threshold. However, this 65 decibel limit is an average over a 24-hour period, which would be negligible for the air strip given the small number of planes and daytime only operation.

Other potential impacts associated with this airport could include risks to adjacent structures, emergency landings, fire safety, and glare associated with lighting. Any major future expansion of the airport facilities, such as paving the runway, construction of buildings or adding lighting for nighttime landings, should be evaluated for potential impacts as well as the full range of mitigation options related to airport operations. This would require coordination with both the State of Montana and Flathead County. There could also be consideration of a zoning “aircraft influence zone” within a particular radius of this facility with additional standards such as limits on building and tree heights and other safety hazards in runway protection zones and requirements for “buyer beware” plat notes for future subdivisions.

The Whitefish Airport is also used by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation as a staging area for helicopters and airplanes fighting wildland fires in the area. It is important that any development at the airport not interfere with these operations. The flight patterns of aircraft from Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA) often fly over the area in which the Whitefish airport is located. The airport is occasionally used for hosting skydiving/parachute activity in and above the immediate area, which can pose safety risks. The overlap of these aviation uses from both the arriving and departing traffic at GPIA and the general aviation uses from the Whitefish Airport in uncontrolled airspace is important for all aviation users to be aware of.

- Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA): Glacier Park International Airport, while not located within the city limits of Whitefish, drives significant economic, social, and tourism activity within the city of Whitefish and the greater Flathead Valley area. In 2016 MDT completed a study estimating the economic benefit of GPIA to the local community at over \$228 million dollars. Since that time, traffic at GPIA has grown 103%, further increasing the economic benefit to the surrounding community.

The airport serves major commercial airlines and links Flathead Valley to much of the US and beyond through nine hubs as well as direct flights. The airport also serves local and general aviation needs such as medical response, military flights, aerial retardant and firefighting operations and search and rescue operations. GPIA has recently experienced strong growth in both flight operations and passenger traffic. Aircraft operations increased 38% between 2014 and 2024 and in 2024 GPIA reached an all-time high of 501,000 passenger boardings. When counting boarding and deplaning passengers, GPIA had over one million passengers utilize the airport in 2024. In 2026, the airport will complete a five-year \$165 million terminal renovation and expansion project which is part of a larger \$360 million 10-year (2021-2030) capital improvement plan. GPIA forecasts strong continued growth with additional air carriers, destinations, and terminal expansion over the next decade.

GPIA is tasked by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) with ensuring compatible land use around the airport for the protection and benefit of the traveling public and the community. Incompatible land uses in close proximity to an airport include residences, hospitals and other noise sensitive uses, uses that attract large gatherings of people under approach or departure paths, uses that create visual obstructions (i.e. glare, smoke), facilities that attract wildlife (particularly birds), or structures that interfere with navigational aids. With Whitefish being located more than seven miles from GPIA and not directly within the approach or departure paths, it is unlikely there are land uses in Whitefish that would be incompatible with GPIA unless features that

interfere with navigation aids are developed or expansions to the Whitefish airport occur.

There are currently no public transportation connections to Glacier International Airport, and public parking at the airport has become increasingly expensive.

Rail

Whitefish is served by Amtrak passenger rail and is located along the Empire Builder route which starts in Chicago and terminates in either Seattle or Portland. There are two passenger trains daily, one in the morning heading eastbound and one in the evening heading westbound. The train station is located at the north end of downtown Whitefish in the historic Whitefish Depot. In fiscal year 2024, the Whitefish Station had the greatest ridership in Montana at 46,400 followed by East Glacier (10,601) and Havre (8,816). This is 20,107 less riders since adoption of the 2007 Growth Policy. Ridership increased post-Covid, but there has been an overall decline in ridership since a peak in 2008.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway operates the rail freight service that passes through Whitefish. BNSF has 260 employees based in Whitefish and 34-38 trains per day go through the city. In 2024, BNSF freight trains mostly transported consumer products, agricultural products and mixed merchandise.

As noted in the Economic Development chapter, it is important to explore opportunities for a future rail spur to allow for the ability to better utilize the rail line for shipping and receiving large freight items locally.

The City has three 'at-grade' crossings at E 2nd Street, State Park Road and Birch Point Drive and one roadway viaduct over the Whitefish railyard at Baker/Wisconsin Avenue. Since the 2007 Growth Policy, the City and BNSF developed quiet crossings (a zone at least 1/2 mile long in which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded when trains are approaching crossings) at State Park Road and East 2nd Street. The City continues to explore a quiet crossing at Birch Point Drive and a grade-separated crossing at East 2nd Street. In 2025, the City commenced a railroad crossing study to analyze the existing crossings and identify projects along the railroad corridor that could improve traffic flows, mitigate the physical barrier created by the rail corridor and eliminate the risk of future highway-rail grade crossing accidents/incidents.

VISIONING COMMENTS ON TRANSPORTATION

Traffic and accessibility are often the issues most recognized and understood by the community, as excessive congestion or lack of connectivity is obvious and affects everyday life. During visioning sessions for this plan, seventy-five percent of map comments regarding what could be improved directly related to transportation, either motorized or active. Two issues were mentioned most frequently. The first was the need for a second grade-separated railroad crossing. The second was the necessity to complete links in the active transportation network, particularly missing connections along the Whitefish River Trail, with completing a connection north of River's Edge Park being mentioned the most.

Other transportation related comments related to better pedestrian crossings, missing or inadequate sidewalks, lack of public transit, better intersection control (lights or roundabouts), and requests for a downtown bypass. Nearly all of these comments are already addressed in the 2022 Transportation Plan or 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan, (as will be described below), although many improvements have yet to be completed. There were several requests to close roads to through-traffic, but this is unlikely to occur as the city is reluctant to reduce road connectivity and route options.

There were several transportation-related visioning suggestions involving Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) owned and maintained roadways. One example included improvements at the Highway 93 South Whitefish river crossing involving removing the two existing river culverts and replacing the crossing with a bridge to allow safer passage of watercraft (particularly during high water) and providing a shared use path underneath and around it to complete a gap in the Whitefish River Trail. Another common request was for development of a downtown bypass (described in the challenges below). MDT currently lacks funding for the implementation of these concepts but has noted they welcome further discussion in the future.

TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES IN THE PLANNING AREA

There has been a myriad of transportation plans and studies completed by the city, Flathead County, and the Montana Department of Transportation (see the Adopted Transportation Plans Section below). These projects have involved extensive background analysis and citizen participation through such methods as online surveys, listening sessions, mapping exercises, visioning sessions and comments received at public meetings. Although not the only transportation challenges, the following have been repeatedly identified as longstanding significant issues:

- Gaps in the Active Transportation Network: Whitefish is a community that prioritizes walkability and places non-motorized transportation equally or above automobile access. During visioning sessions, many comments about the active transportation

network related to completing the Whitefish River Trail from City Beach to Smith Fields, with completion of the section between the Pine Lodge Motel and River's Edge Park being the second most requested active transportation improvement. During the development of the 2022 Transportation Plan, connectivity from the north side of the Veteran's Bridge on Highway 93 West to the BNSF loop river trail was the most requested improvement. The city is diligently working toward completion of these links, particularly the acquisition of necessary public easements.

Other frequently mentioned non-motorized transportation improvements include safe walking routes to and from Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School, completing pathways along East Edgewood Drive from Texas Avenue to East Second Street, pathways along all of Armory Road, along Voerman and Monegan Roads and continuing to complete missing sidewalks throughout the city. All sections of Armory, Monegan and Voerman Roads within the city limits are planned for non-motorized improvements in the short term. As East Edgewood Drive borders the city limits to the north and runs between the city limits near Texas Avenue and East Second Street, the city could work with Flathead County to annex this section to improve active transportation routes.

There are several plans focusing specifically on active transportation connections throughout Whitefish, particularly to and from the schools. These include the 2025 Safe Streets for All Action Plan, the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, 2013 Parks and Recreation Master Plan and 2011 Whitefish Safe Routes to School Improvement Plan. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan considered the recommendations of all previous plans and compiled a map of existing and potential active transportation routes (see Active Transportation Network Map). Using various criteria such as usage, safety, congestion reduction and connectivity, the 2022 Transportation Plan ranked non-motorized projects by priority. The top ten of these rankings include the highest ranking non-motorized projects identified during visioning for Vision Whitefish 2045, specifically, completing sections along the Whitefish River Trail.

The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan (SS4A) builds on the 2022 Transportation Plan by analyzing existing and proposed active transportation routes in certain walkable areas for safety concerns and making additional improvement recommendations such as crosswalks, pedestrian timers and signage. The general areas of recommended SS4A improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Network Map.

- Lack of Regional Active Transportation Connectivity: Active transportation connectivity between Whitefish, surrounding jurisdictions and Flathead County was frequently mentioned by participants during visioning sessions. At present, outside of the city limits, MT Highway 40, US Highway 93 and surrounding Flathead County

roads such as East Edgewood Drive and Voerman Road have limited active transportation routes other than wider shoulders along some of the roadways. East Edgewood is a designated cycle route for both the Adventure Cycling Northern Tier Bike Route and for the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, yet has little shoulder for safe biking. Demand for infrastructure that supports safe non-motorized modes of travel is growing (both for transportation and recreational purposes) and this trend is expected to continue. Whitefish should proactively work with other surrounding jurisdictions, MDT and any other non-profits or agencies toward a regional bicycle and pedestrian plan and associated funding opportunities³⁸.

- Grade Separated Rail Crossings: The BNSF railroad tracks separate Whitefish into southern and northern halves and the Baker Avenue / Wisconsin Avenue Viaduct is the only grade separated road crossing over the tracks. This route is commonly congested for southbound traffic, and alternate routes are occasionally obstructed by trains or require lengthy travel along unpaved mountain roads or to the east toward Columbia Falls. A second grade-separated crossing is listed as a potential solution in the 2022 Transportation Plan and was the most mentioned recommended city improvement during visioning sessions. The 2022 Transportation Plan identified two options: E 2nd St or Texas/Columbia. This project would create an additional crossing of the BNSF Railway which would improve evacuation from the north in an emergency, improve north-south connectivity and traffic flow, and relieve traffic congestion at the Baker viaduct. The city is presently working with BNSF and the Federal Railroad Administration through a federal grant to identify crossing designs that could improve safety and reduce at-grade crossings.
- US Highway 93: State-maintained US Highway 93 provides the primary access through the City of Whitefish and is a principal route connecting the United States and Canada. US Highway 93 produces the highest traffic speeds and volumes, the most conflict points, the majority of the most congested intersections, and seven of the ten most dangerous intersections in Whitefish. Bike lanes and pedestrian connections are lacking. This corridor has been extensively studied. Recommendations for improvements include additional lanes, better intersection control, consolidating access points, connecting parking lots to reduce access points, improved signal timing, landscaping and median improvements to reduce two-way left turn lanes, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Any proposed highway right of way improvements require coordination with Montana Department of Transportation.

³⁸³⁸ The Flathead County Trails Plan requires community groups and other organizations being required to show monetary commitment for new trail development and the maintenance of those trails in perpetuity before the County approves the development of any new County trails.

- School Traffic. Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School (WHS) are integrated within existing single-family neighborhoods approximately one-quarter mile east of downtown. Daily traffic generated by the two schools infiltrates surrounding neighborhoods. With no signalized intersections along Spokane Avenue (US Hwy 93) directly west of this area, southbound traffic from the schools travel along Columbia Avenue to the light at East 13th Street or through the Creekwood neighborhood to Monegan Road. There are insufficient pick up and drop off areas, and discontinuous sidewalks, pathways and inadequate pedestrian road crossings lead to safety concerns for children walking and biking to school.

Whitefish Middle School is located on the northwest corner of Spokane Avenue and East 2nd Street. The drop off and parking area is on the east side of the school on Kalispell Avenue, but many drop offs and pickups occur on Spokane Avenue on the west side of the school, leading to congestion and dangerous drop off areas directly adjacent to a designated future cycle track.

Recommendations of previous studies to address traffic for all three schools have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Master Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. Solutions include completing sidewalk connections, better lighting, enhanced crossing areas and flashing pedestrian signs, road reconstruction to include multi-use trails and better signage. The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan includes improvements to Memorial Park north of WHS for additional parking and drop off areas for students. The general project areas for improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Map. If Monegan Road is extended north as is shown in the Road Classifications Map, a connection to East 7th Street can be made that will alleviate the infiltration of school traffic into Creekwood.

- Poor North – South Connectivity (south side of the city): US Highway 93 South is the only continuous north-south corridor through the southern half of Whitefish within the city limits. Because this is the primary route, it results in congestion and traffic diversion to city streets not designed for through-traffic, creating considerable impacts to established residential neighborhoods. This has been identified as a transportation issue since the adopted 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan (Growth Policy). Solutions identified in the 2022 Transportation Plan to improve mobility through the south end of Whitefish include the extension of three streets to create alternative north-south routes. (These road extensions are reflected on the Road Classifications Map.) Parallelling the highway on the east, Columbia Avenue would be extended south to Greenwood Drive, and Whitefish Avenue has been extended south to Shiloh Avenue. To parallel the highway on the west, Baker Avenue would be extended south to JP Road. Completion of these streets is for the most part developer driven, meaning

they are required to be constructed by developers as projects are planned and built that will rely on these streets for access. However, as of February 2025, resort tax allocation does allow funding for road extensions to help complete these connections.

- Poor East – West Connectivity (South Side): Due to the Whitefish River generally flowing north to south through the south side of the city, east-west connectivity is constrained, particularly at the southeast quadrant of the city. Rather than traffic being distributed among numerous potential routes, traffic is limited to bridge crossings at East 2nd Street, Baker Avenue, East 13th Street, and JP Road. This results in increased school congestion in the neighborhoods surrounding Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School, traffic being forced on to the same routes, and numerous residences along Karrow Avenue having no option into the city other than West 7th Street and West 2nd Street. Solutions in the 2022 Transportation Plan to improve east-west connectivity include extending West 18th Street to provide another connection to Karrow Avenue from US Highway 93 South and extending East 7th Street from US Highway 93 South to Voerman Road to help traffic circumnavigate the Creekwood Neighborhood. A corridor preservation project is also included in the 2022 Transportation Plan for a future collector roadway, including a new crossing of the Whitefish River to Monegan Road. As mentioned above, in general, these improvements are developer-driven, but the city does now have resort tax allocation to help fund these projects.
- Wisconsin Avenue: Wisconsin Avenue is a state-maintained urban route and the primary link between downtown and two major recreational destinations - Whitefish Lake and Whitefish Mountain Resort. It is the only continuous road from Edgewood Drive at the viaduct north until it intersects with Big Mountain Road. It is a very popular recreational corridor and the potential for conflict between bicycles and pedestrians and automobiles was a concern expressed at visioning sessions – particularly the lack of safe pedestrian crossings. The 2022 Transportation Plan recommends opportunities for widening, additional turn lanes, traffic calming measures and improved pedestrian crossings, but ultimately the Montana Department of Transportation has jurisdiction over improvements.

The Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan, page 3-10 states: “traffic in the corridor is increasing at an annual growth rate of 3.9% and will continue to increase.” The 3.9% growth rate is based on data from 2011-2015. A new calculation should be done based on data through 2024. Information on annual increases in ski days should also be included. Winter Sports Inc. on Big Mountain has currently 878 housing units sold, with an additional 644 units planned and approved by the County. The traffic effects on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor from all sources should be estimated out to 2045.

The Corridor Plan, page 3-10 states: “by the year 2030 several intersections and road segments along Wisconsin Avenue will experience unacceptable levels of congestion and delay.” The “several” is four out of seven intersections along Wisconsin Avenue, with projected levels of service at D or F by 2030 (page 2-17). The level of service for all intersections and segments along Wisconsin Avenue should be projected out to 2045.

The Corridor Plan, page 3-10 states: “the current right-of-way along Wisconsin is typically 60 feet.” Widening the right-of-way to about 95 feet would be necessary to make Wisconsin into a three lane highway (page 3-13). This would require extensive condemnation of private property by the state, which would be expensive. At present, there is no plan to make Wisconsin Avenue into a 3 lane highway.

- Truck Traffic / Downtown Bypass: US Highway 93 connects the city to regional, national and international trade routes. The stretch of highway through downtown presents challenges in balancing freight traffic with local automobile, pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Heavy truck traffic and other through traffic in the downtown area is one of the most frequently voiced complaints. A bypass of some kind has long been discussed in the community but was dismissed in the MDT 1994 US 93 Somers to Whitefish West Project and instead focused on improving traffic flow on Highway 93 through downtown Whitefish. Reasons for abandoning a bypass included difficulties with property acquisition, potential costs, funding, environmental issues, and substantial grades in some areas. The addition of better intersection control at West 13th Street/Flathead Avenue and Baker Avenue would improve the flow of traffic on Baker Avenue and would open up the possibility of designating Baker Avenue as an alternate truck route. The city has been communicating with MDT to designate Baker Avenue south of West 7th Street as a state route to increase funding opportunities for improvements.
- Karrow Avenue: Karrow Avenue, most of which is within unincorporated Flathead County, is the only alternate route to US 93 South which provides access from West 2nd Street to Highway 93 south of the city and serves as a de facto bypass. Karrow Avenue had also traditionally lacked bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Visioning sessions and the water and sewer master plans indicate a possibility of future development in the area. As traffic volumes increase on US Highway 93 (leading to more traffic using Karrow Avenue as a bypass) and potential development in the area, additional capacity will be needed. Karrow Avenue has recently been reconstructed between West 7th Street and West 2nd Street as a collector including construction of pedestrian and bicyclist facilities within the portion within the city limits.

- **Birch Point:** As is mentioned in the Hazards and Public Facilities portions of this Plan, the Birch Point neighborhood, along the southwest shore of Whitefish Lake, has only one point of vehicular access in and out. Crossing railroad tracks is required, and this access is occasionally blocked by trains. In the event a train is disabled and blocking this access, there is no other vehicular access other than emergency access across the Skypark pedestrian bridge by light vehicles if bollards are removed. There have been discussions regarding the possibility of alternative access to and from Birch Point or across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish. This should remain a priority for Whitefish. Due to lack of gates at this crossing, trains are also required to sound their horns when crossing in this area, leading to longtime noise complaints. MDT is currently working on a railroad safety improvement project to upgrade signal crossing equipment and add gates to make this a “quiet crossing”.
- **Big Mountain Road:** Big Mountain Road is a secondary highway maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and provides the only feasible access for the Whitefish Mountain Resort as well as the many residential subdivisions on Big Mountain. There is currently no viable secondary egress for the Big Mountain community. As the Big Mountain community is presently not within the city, the city should continue encouraging establishment of secondary access. If the city annexes the Big Mountain community, the lack of a reliable secondary egress in an extremely fire-prone area should be considered with any future subdivision development proposals.

There is presently a southbound stop at the intersection of Big Mountain Road and East Lakeshore Drive, at the bottom of the mountain. This intersection causes a significant amount of congestion, particularly during ski season. A potential roundabout in this location was suggested during visioning sessions and has been identified in the 2022 Transportation Plan, but funding or timing has not been identified. A potential development had proposed to build a roundabout in this location in the past, and that could be one mechanism to fund intersection improvements.

- **Parking Management:** The visitor economy and success of Whitefish’s Downtown has led to a significant amount of dialogue regarding parking availability and management. Several studies have focused on downtown parking availability. Earlier studies and plans favor parking solutions on the supply side focusing on providing additional parking through surface lots and construction of parking structures to stimulate investment and expansion in the commercial core. In 2017, the city constructed a new city hall building at the northeast corner of East 2nd Street and Baker Avenue which included a three-story public parking structure providing more than 200 parking spaces.

In 2019, a parking management plan was completed by Dixon Resources Unlimited. The Dixon study stated that “the 2006 Downtown Master Plan recommended construction of a parking facility, and immediate parking demand was satisfied by the construction of the City Hall facility.” A number of other parking strategies have been implemented, including adjusting parking time limits, a new parking enforcement vehicle with increased parking enforcement, an employee parking permit program for specific lots and some levels of the parking structure, and striping and curb painting to better define efficient parking options especially for parallel parking spaces. Recent City Council direction, including adopted City Council Goals, are to look at further studying different strategies to reduce parking congestion downtown.

ADOPTED TRANSPORTATION PLANS

Numerous transportation related plans and studies have been completed for Whitefish, some of them quite recently, such as the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. Below is a summary of these plans.

- 2025 Whitefish Safe Streets for All Action Plan: The Safe Streets for All Action Plan identifies the most significant multimodal transportation safety concerns in the community and suggests implementation steps and strategies. Solutions mostly involve vehicle speed reduction, better pedestrian crossings, signage, future transit stops, sidewalk completion and a pedestrian – bicycle crossing across Spokane Avenue to the Whitefish River Trail in the vicinity of East 6th and East 7th Streets. Most of these projects are in the vicinity of downtown and the three schools, however there are additional projects planned along Baker Avenue, several recommended intersection improvements along US Highway 93 South and a proposed transit hub near the Lodge at Whitefish Lake on the north side of the city. The general locations of recommended improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Network Map.
- 2022 City of Whitefish Transportation Plan³⁹: This plan reviews and incorporates all other transportation planning related documents and considers recommended improvements to the year 2040. The Plan identifies numerous projects needed for the future of Whitefish including major road construction, roadway expansions, intersection improvements, and millwork (resurfacing) projects. Active transportation projects from plans such as the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan are incorporated into the recommended road improvement projects. The plan includes many goals and strategies and is adopted as part of this community plan by reference. This plan should be consulted for all future transportation improvements.

³⁹ The 2022 City of Whitefish Transportation Plan is incorporated by reference as part of Vision Whitefish 2045 and should be consulted when reviewing or planning transportation improvements.

- 2022 Downtown Whitefish Highway Study: The Downtown Whitefish Highway Study was developed by Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to improve Highway 93 through the downtown area from 13th Street on the south end to East 2nd Street on the north end. Seven options were evaluated. Concept C was identified as the preferred concept by MDT.

The City of Whitefish diverged with MDT regarding the Study's final recommendation and supported Concept G as the preferred design. Concept C and Concept G diverge only in the segment of Hwy 93/Spokane Ave from 7th St to 2nd St. The City preferred the treatment of this segment in Concept G due to the superior multimodal accommodations that it provides, including larger buffers for safety, landscaping with trees, and fewer lanes for pedestrians to cross. The City considers these features necessary to achieve the pedestrian-oriented environment that it envisions for Downtown Whitefish. Regardless of the disagreement between MDT and the City of Whitefish on that segment, they did both agree that improvements were needed along Baker Avenue and the intersection of 13th Street and Spokane Avenue. Both these improvements are included in the 2022 Transportation Plan's Major Street Network (MSN) Recommendations and are considered high priorities for implementation.

- 2021 Highway 93 South Corridor Plan: The Highway 93 South Corridor Plan was adopted as an amendment to the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy. The plan studies the corridor in three separate portions from Highway 40 to East Second Street. The Plan provides detailed descriptions of each corridor segment, the public process, issues and opportunities plus recommended land use changes and proposed a new zoning district which was subsequently codified into the municipal code. Most transportation recommendations from this plan were incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2019 City of Whitefish Parking Management Plan: This plan reviewed earlier plans with recommendations generally advocated for additional parking (surface and structured). The 2019 Plan recommends a cost-conscious approach of managing existing parking through enforcement of parking time limits, paid parking, improved technologies, and downtown worker permit parking while evaluating the actual demand/need of all the downtown parking and other updated parking policies. Downtown worker parking permits, improved technology and improved enforcement have all been implemented. The plan called for a follow up study to further identify options, which the City Council has identified as a goal.

- 2018 Climate Action Plan. The City of Whitefish adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to be carbon neutral by 2050 and prepare for climate change. Although there are many strategies in this plan, the plan also contains transportation related strategies such as considering the transportation and land use relationship, promoting transit and employee carpooling, supporting the planning for walkable communities and mixed use development and discouraging excessive parking requirements.
- 2018 Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan: This plan provides a framework to maximize the City's infrastructure investment, protect the environment, help meet the City's housing needs, and maintain community character along the Wisconsin Corridor. It includes several action items relating to transportation involving road widening, intersection improvements, options for transit and park-and-ride lots, traffic calming solutions and improving the non-motorized network. Pertinent transportation recommendations have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2018 Downtown Business District Master Plan. This plan identifies opportunities to increase the vitality of the downtown business district. The plan contains principles for the downtown transportation network. These principles include intersections supporting rather than detracting from downtown, accommodating traffic volumes without degrading downtown livability and the retail environment, location of new parking facilities to support downtown retail and commercial activities and promoting alternative transportation modes. The plan envisions the downtown potential build-out capacity and necessary additional parking. Included in this plan is a transportation framework for downtown Whitefish with a comprehensive complete street network of integrated and balanced pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile facilities that connect to and within the downtown planning area. Pertinent recommendations of this plan were incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. This plan is an amendment to the previous 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy. The Connect Whitefish Plan envisions a connected and continuous network of well-maintained, safe, convenient and comfortable bicycle and pedestrian facilities linking key destinations inside and outside of town. The Plan identifies a series of trail and safety projects, a wayfinding project, strategies for maintenance, programming and possible sources of funding for projects and programming. The Whitefish Pedestrian and Bicycle Path Advisory Committee uses the plan for the basis of their recommendations to various boards, the Parks and Recreation Department and decision makers.

- 2015 Whitefish Highway 93 West Corridor Plan. This plan provides specific goals, policies, and recommended actions for the corridor that consider land use, scale, and transportation function. It identifies ways transportation infrastructure should support the desirable land uses identified in the plan. It encourages a grid network, identifies traffic calming measures to mitigate neighborhood impacts, discourages direct access to the highway by consolidating/eliminating approaches and identifies necessary sidewalk and active transportation improvements. Transportation recommendations from this plan have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2013 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Includes goals related to trail/path connectivity, water access, and park development and acquisition. The 2016 Connect Whitefish Plan described above superseded this plan's goals related to trail/path connectivity.

SUMMARY

The City of Whitefish prioritizes safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation options for current and future mobility needs. It emphasizes the integration of multimodal options - including roadways, walking, biking (and other non-motorized forms of mobility), public transit, rail and air transport - to provide accessibility for all individuals. Land use should steer transportation decisions and associated infrastructure and not the other way around. The city should continue to improve connectivity and encourage compact infill ~~and mixed-use~~ development for more efficient transportation infrastructure, enhanced accessibility for all users, increased transit ridership, decreased traffic congestion and reduction in the city's carbon footprint. Recognition of these principles during transportation planning will continue to improve the multimodality which is highly valued by the Whitefish community.

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January 7, 2026

**To: The Whitefish Planning Board/Commission
The Whitefish City Council
The Whitefish Planning staff: Alan Tiefenbach and Dave Taylor**

MLUPA requires that the city's Growth Policy include a population projection for the next 20 years. This projection can come from several sources, but the preferred source is the projection provided by the Montana Dept of Commerce. As current data comes available, the MT Dept of Commerce information is updated. The last 2 1/2 years has seen a sharp decline, statewide, in the previous extremely rapid growth during the Covid-19 growth bubble. The 2023/24 data for Whitefish shows a mere .9% increase.

<https://commerce.mt.gov/Infrastructure-Planning/Community-Planning-Platform/>

The 2024/25 data will likely be similar, resulting in a much lower total population projection than was initially modelled for the Vision Whitefish Plan back in 2023. By 2045 the projection is forecast to decrease to only a .3% increase per year.

Since the entire Growth Policy must be designed to meet the forecast population, it is essential that the population projection be updated with the most recent numbers to be as accurate as possible. Efforts to inflate the numbers are a disservice to the community.

Suggestions to greatly inflate the population growth numbers we do not find are accurate and strongly encourage the commission and the city council to rely on population numbers established by the Montana Department of Commerce as recommended under MLUPA.

Mayre Flowers,
Citizens for a Better Flathead
PO Box 2198, Kalispell, MT 59903
Mayre@flatheadcitizens.org

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, January 5, 2026 1:50 PM
To: Marti Brandt
Cc: Dana Meeker; Angela Jacobs; David Taylor; Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: RE: Comment on Community Housing Need

Thanks Marti. Your letter will be distributed to the Council for their consideration.

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Marti Brandt **Sent:** Monday, January 5, 2026
1:41 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Comment on Community Housing Need

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Hi Michelle,

Would you mind forwarding this letter to City Council for tonight? I hope it's not too much trouble to include the image with the graphic.

Thank you!

Best,

Marti

Dear City Council,

While reading public comments for the Jan 7 housing growth policy meeting, I found some info that might be useful for tonight's conversation about community housing need projections.

The [2016 Housing Needs Assessment](#) was focused on our workforce. This analysis included data on workforce commuters from the surrounding area, including 34% of commuters as a projected "need" for housing. This is first mentioned on page 35 (using page numbers listed on the document). It's again referenced on page 78, with the following graphic on page 79. (This assessment includes other workforce housing projections, but those don't seem relevant.)

In addition, Jon Heberling submitted a public comment on the housing chapter, including a concern that "There is no calculation for current needs for residents of Whitefish. There is no calculation for current affordable housing needs for those who commute in to Whitefish to work." Jon provides his own calculations for commuter need, available on what's currently the 6th page of public comments for the housing chapter. His numbers could also be considered.

It seems there's support from both sides of the housing debate to incorporate workforce commuter data when assessing housing needs, and there's also historic precedent. I hope we can find a way to add this information but also minimize the burden on our long range planner, who's using this data for the growth policy.

Thank you!

Best,
Marti Brandt
■■■■ Armory Road

Units Needed to House In-Commuters	
Total in-commuters	3,245
% want to move to the Whitefish Area	34%
# that want to move	1,095
Jobs per employee	1.2
Workers per household	1.64
New housing needed	555

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Devin Stus
Sent: Monday, January 5, 2026 1:38 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Shelter WF
Subject: Wednesday, January 7th: Planning Commission Public Comment

[Yearn why this is important](#)

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Hello,

I developed a 12 unit market rent apartment about 5 years ago at 718 Edgewood Pl and after 1 year of submissions with the city we recently received approval for another 12 units for market rent apartments. The city bylaws and administration make it very very difficult to bring affordable units. There are a lot of rules that add substantial cost to development in Whitefish. As a side note I support the state level parking change that allows developers to pick # of parking stalls because our parking lot is half full and has a significant cost that has to be recouped from rent. People needing affordable rent just don't have 2 cars per unit, some don't even have one. I support shelter WF's advocacy for the planning commission.

The planning commission should focus on:

1. Ensuring that the document **reflects the true scale of the housing shortage** in Whitefish. While Whitefish has taken some steps to address this shortage, we believe that the city has many regulatory and financial tools at its disposal. Parts of the document that minimize the scale and impact of the housing shortage in Whitefish must be returned to their original, more forceful, language.
2. **Supporting draft language that advocates for the necessity of zoning and land use reform to increase supply of workforce housing.**
3. Accurately **describing the shortage of attainable market-rate housing options** in Whitefish. Sections of the report that describe housing issues in Whitefish as merely a shortage of subsidized housing are both wrong and harmful when considering regulatory reforms under MLUPA.
4. **Contextualizing biased language.** Community sentiment supporting a "small-town feel" is equated throughout the document with opposition to mixed-use and dense development. "Small Town Character" is not antithetical to density and growth. It can be *interpreted* to mean "no new housing" but it can also be interpreted to represent the parts of Whitefish that are mixed-use, working-class, designed for locals, or myriad nebulous concepts. Indeed, our membership has told us that for those who are

scared of being priced out of Whitefish, "small town character" represents a place where people can live and work. Including "small town character" to represent opposition to density or mixed-use neighborhoods is not an explicit link but an opinion about what the term means.

5. **Removing ambiguous references to “neighborhood character.”** Much like “small-town feel” neighborhood character is *equated* with opposition to change to the physical environment by the report, but not by reality. Neighborhood character can similarly represent opinions about demographic and cultural change that would be resisted by building dense new housing. The inclusion of “neighborhood character” in numerous paragraphs as an equivocation to new housing implies that core neighborhoods can remain unchanged to solve Whitefish's housing needs, which is both wrong and pits parts of the city against each other. This language only serves to give NIMBY sentiment an opportunity to deny changes, which is directly opposed to the entire legal structure of MLUPA.
6. **Strengthening language supporting public housing developments,** such as additional suggestions to maximize density and funding for these projects.

Devin Stus

█ Edgewood Pl

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, December 30, 2025 12:39 PM
To: Keegan Siebenaler
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; Dana Meeker; Angela Jacobs; David Taylor
Subject: RE: City Council Public Comment for January 5, 2026

Will do. It will be placed under Communications from Mayor and City Councilors. The Council may or may not choose to address your request. A majority of Councilors must agree in order to direct staff or place your request as an actionable item on a future agenda. You will also have the opportunity to speak to your letter at the beginning of the meeting under Communications from the Public.

Happy Holidays!

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Keegan Siebenaler <policy@shelterwf.org>
Sent: Tuesday, December 30, 2025 12:30 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Re: City Council Public Comment for January 5, 2026

Michelle,

Yes, I would if that's acceptable. Normally we would only submit one comment, but this letter is in response to the consultant report.

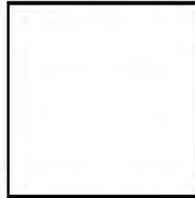
Best,

Keegan Siebenaler, Executive Director

ShelterWF

406-250-3707 | policy@shelterwf.org

Shelter WF aims to fix the broken housing system in Whitefish, the Flathead Valley, and Montana. Our community-led movement advocates for policy reforms that lead to an abundance of homes in all shapes and sizes.



shelterwf.org

On Tue, Dec 30, 2025 at 12:28 PM Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov> wrote:

Hi Keegan,

Thank you for your comments. Would you like this to be included on the Council agenda as a separate letter in addition to the letter you sent on December 10th?

Michelle Howke

Administrative Services Director/City Clerk

PO Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

(406)863-2402

mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Keegan Siebenaler <policy@shelterwf.org>
Sent: Tuesday, December 30, 2025 11:41 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: City Council Public Comment for January 5, 2026

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Dear Mayor Muhlfeld and City Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of Shelter WF in response to the Agnew Beck Memo *Re: Whitefish Community Housing Needs Assessment Talking Points* that was sent to Alan Tiefenbach on December 16, 2025. While the memo attempts to defend the current Housing Needs Assessment (HNA), it also contains several important admissions that reinforce Shelter WF's core conclusion: **Whitefish must plan for significantly more housing than the current HNA identifies.** At the same time, ShelterWF believes that the memo's response falls short in several critical areas that deserve Council's careful attention.

First, the consultants explicitly acknowledge that **higher housing numbers are warranted**. The memo recommends adding a new “high growth” scenario based on recent population trends and concedes that, if growth continues at post-2019 rates, Whitefish’s 10-year housing need would increase to as many as 2,150 units—well above the upper bound of the adopted HNA. **This is an important reversal. It confirms that the original assessment understated demand and that planning based solely on the existing HNA risks under-zoning for housing.**

However, even this revised “high scenario” remains materially incomplete.

Most notably, the memo reasserts that existing population growth is the best measure of existing demand. The consultants are narrowly correct that this method is in line with Department of Commerce estimates. But Whitefish should acknowledge that the unique demand of such a desirable mountain town means that simple population extrapolation is limiting. Next year, hundreds of new units will come online and the population of Whitefish will see significant growth. This is a perfect example of the central claim of our report: **Population forecasts are constrained by past development patterns and existing zoning limits.** When housing supply is restricted, population growth is artificially suppressed, and unmet demand simply shows up as longer commutes and worker displacement rather than as new residents.

The consultants further suggest that commuter demand should only be counted if housing is subsidized and deed-restricted. This framing misunderstands how housing markets function. The evidence is clear that **adding sufficient market-rate housing reduces price pressure across the entire housing stock**, freeing up naturally affordable units and reducing displacement without requiring every new home to be subsidized. **Treating commuter demand as exclusively a subsidized housing problem incorrectly shifts attention away from the core issue: overall supply.**

The memo also raises concerns about the scale of affordable housing required if commuter demand is acknowledged. Shelter WF agrees that this would require significant investment—but that conclusion strengthens, rather than weakens, the case for planning for higher total housing numbers. Underestimating need does not make affordability challenges disappear; it guarantees they will worsen.

The consultants’ memo confirms what residents already experience daily: Whitefish’s housing demand is higher than previously acknowledged. Shelter WF urges the City Council to treat the memo’s admissions seriously, correct the remaining omissions, and err on the side of **planning for abundance rather than scarcity**. Overestimating housing needs carries little risk. Underestimating it has already reshaped our community in painful and irreversible ways.

Thank you for your consideration and continued service to the City of Whitefish.

Sincerely,

Keegan Siebenaler
Executive Director

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jon L. Heberling
Sent: Friday, December 26, 2025 2:35 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Add to housing goals and objectives

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Hi Alan, Please post this to Housing comments. Thanks, Jon

All changes are to the 12/9/25 version.

- > 1. Page 1: After “encouraging a diversity of housing”, add “while
> preserving small town character.”
- >
- > Then add “the citizens of Whitefish value the scale, character and
> small town feel of the community and will preserve those values as
> the community grows.” (From 2007 Growth Policy, page 10)
- >
- > At page 2, item 1.b.i, strike “throughout the city” and add “in
> selected areas”.
- >
- > At page 3, objective 2.a, strike “both” and add “selected”.
- >
- > At page 3, objective 2.c.i, strike 150, and add 100%
- >
- > At page 3, objective 1.d, after “existing neighborhoods”, add “to the
> extent required by law. “
- >
- > At page 6, objective 6.a, after “density in”, add “selected”.
- >
- > At page 6, objective 6.c, after “development” add “in selected areas”.
- >
- > 2. At page 2, add objective 4.f, “End the cash in lieu of
> affordable housing units in the Legacy Home program.”

3. At page 2, Add to objective 1.c.ii, “ and provide for termination of short term rental permits, where fees are not paid.”
4. At page 2, Add to objective 1.c.iii, “redefine residential uses in business zones to eliminate short term rentals.”
5. At page 3, Add objective 1.e.i, “All staff reports for projects seeking approval of new housing units must state the most recent number for the affordable housing deficit, and must state the growth policy general goal to provide for affordable housing.”
6. Left Blank.
7. At page 5, add objective 4.i, "For any proposed development over five housing units, consider a condition requiring 20% or more relatively affordable housing units, under 800 ft.² each, as a condition for approval. Comment: to date I find no legal barrier to doing this.
8. At page 5, add objective 4.h, "Consider providing for a loan of perhaps \$500,000-\$1 million to make a project to build say 24 units under 800 ft.² financially feasible. If the project is not quite financially feasible in Whitefish, perhaps the city could use legacy affordable housing funds to loan the developer \$1 million to make the project feasible. The loan could be secured with a lien, including unusual terms, such as interest rate at 3%, just above the 2% target inflation rate, a provision that the lien may not be foreclosed for so long as the building is 80% rented at current market rates, a provision for periodic City inspections for compliance with codes, with a requirement to repair all defects within six months. Perhaps the lien could lapse if the building is rented at 80% plus occupancy for 30 years. Comment: we have freedom to contract. There is room to be creative in creating a contract, with an unusual lien. Details are left to the discretion of the City Council and City Attorney.
9. At page 5, add objective 4.j., “Consider a moratorium on approval of new development proposals over five units, until the affordable housing deficit is under 600, unless the development proposal is for over 60% relatively affordable housing units, under 800 ft.².”
10. At page 5, add objective 4.k, “Obtain public record information on the project described in the Flathead Beacon article of 12/4/25, “Workforce housing set to break ground in Kalispell”, describing a project of 24 units at a cost of \$8.7 million, as a model for projects in Whitefish, private or blended private and public, and particularly for development with units under 800 ft.².”

> Sent from my iPhone

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jon L. Heberling <jheberling@mcgarveylaw.com>
Sent: Friday, December 26, 2025 2:26 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Comments on the Housing Chapter
Attachments: img20251226_13434206.pdf

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Hi Alan, Please post this to the Housing comments. Thanks, Jon

The Housing Chapter 12/9/25 references HNA 2025, but does not discuss much of its information on affordable housing.

In the Visioning done in the Spring of 2024, with over 250 participants, the top concern was "affordability". When asked "what is the biggest threat to Whitefish?", the top answer was "affordability", meaning affordable housing. See engagewhitefish.com

A comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment 2025 was issued by the City of Whitefish in September 2025. The HNA 2025, at page 5, defines "affordable housing" as "when rent or mortgage payments are no more than 30% of gross household income." We will look at renters and owners separately.

HNA 2025 only calculates future needs for affordable housing for residents of Whitefish. There is no calculation for current needs for residents of Whitefish. There is no calculation for current affordable housing needs for those who commute in to Whitefish to work. Please refer to Chart 5 attached. The zeroes speak loudly as to what has happened here.

Fortunately, the above problems can be fixed. HNA 2025 does supply enough data to calculate current needs for affordable housing for residents and for those who commute in to Whitefish to work.

1. HNA 2025, page 44, calculates housing units needed in the future.

The bridge at page 44 is re-printed at Housing Chapter 12/9/25, page 19. The bridge states: "Whitefish needs 930 new units by 2035." HNA 2025, page 41, shows the calculation, starting with the 2024 population at 9278. The population then grows by 1.25% per year to 10,775 in 2035, with a net population increase of 1497 people. This is then converted from 1497 people to 741 housing units, using a conversion factor of 2.02, which is the average household size in Whitefish. HNA 2025, page 15. The 741 units grow by 5% for vacancy rate, and the result is 778 total housing units needed over the next 10 years. This is definitely a calculation of future needs, because it is based on future population growth. The bridge is presented at HNA 2025, page 5, with the following text note: "The housing bridge below illustrates the total projected housing demand in Whitefish through 2035." Projected needs are future needs.

HNA 2025, page 40, also includes 91 units for "overcrowding" and 61 units for "temporary" lodging. These numbers are based on surveys, which ask existing people questions about existing situations. The 91 and the 61 belong in current needs, and not in future needs.

The 778 total housing units needed out to 2035 can be distributed along the bridge at HNA 2025, page 44, proportionately to how the 930 units were distributed. $778/930$ equals 83.7%. So, the rental units for "under 80% AMI" at 498 (190+130+179) are adjusted to 417 (158+109+150), per this comment.

2. Affordable housing for renters – current needs: 696 units

HNA 2025 does not state the current need for affordable housing for renters. HNA 2025 does state that "61% of all renter occupied households" spend over 30% of their income on housing costs, page 27. From this 61% number, the current need for affordable housing units for renters can be calculated. It is 696, per Chart 1 attached. The calculation is as follows: 5700 is the number for total housing units in Whitefish. Housing Chapter Draft 12/9/25, p.13. 70% of all units are occupied by year round residents, Id. 13. $5700 \times 70\% = 3990$ occupied units. 40% of occupied units are renter units, HNA 2025, page 15. $3990 \times 40\% = 1596$ rental units in Whitefish. 61% of all renter occupied households currently need affordable housing. HNA 2025, page 27. $1596 \times 61\% = 974$, which is the current need for affordable housing units for renters. Of the 974, 278 are already in apparently affordable housing. HNA

2025, p. 20. 974 - 278 = 696. In addition to the 278 already covered, there may be additional households covered by below market rent bargains due to the kindness of certain landlords. Perhaps these could be quantified.

HNA 2025, page 27, does not give the basis for the 61% of renters being cost burdened, meaning they pay over 30% of total household income for housing costs. Disclosure of the data supporting the 61% would be consistent with good science, and would help the reader understand this important figure. The 61% might come from the 2023 ACS survey.

HNA 2025, page 40, projects 10 year housing needs. The projection includes “severe overcrowding” with a number of 91, based on a survey. The projection also includes 61 units on a “temporary basis”, also based on a survey. Overcrowding and temporary lodging numbers do not fit the standard definitions of need for affordable housing, which mean paying over 30% of income in rent or earning under 80% AMI. Including overcrowding and temporary numbers may lead to double counting, if proper definitions (the 30% or the 80%) are used. “Overcrowding” and “temporary” lodging may be viewed as just the way some of the 696 households in need manage to pay the rent. So the overcrowding number would simply be included in the larger number who are cost burdened. To avoid double counting, the 91 and the 61 should be excluded from the total current need for affordable housing, of 696.

HNA 2025, page 40, also uses a label “units needed due to pent up demand.” This is a misnomer. “Pent up demand” will be reflected in the current number of households in need of affordable housing, which is 696. HNA 2022, page 42, presents “estimated remaining community housing needs: 2016–2021” as 314 rental units below 80% AMI. This is an estimate of 314 units as the then current need for affordable housing. For some reason, HNA 2025 does not present updated data, and omits a number for current need for affordable housing units.

The Housing Chapter of the growth plan does not adequately present a “description of existing conditions of housing”, in violation of MLUPA 76–25–203(1).

3. Affordable housing for renters – future needs: 996 units

The Housing Chapter, 12/9/25, presents the total 10 year need for affordable housing units for renters as 498, at page 19, including those households under 80% AMI, who are renters: 190+130+179 = 498). **This comment adjusted the 498 to 417 per section 1 above.**

The Housing Chapter, at page 19, discusses only total units needed over the next 10 years. There is no discussion of the implications of a future need for 498 rental units. The Housing Chapter, page 15, uses “under 80% AMI” to describe the “community housing” inventory. The Housing Chapter, page one, uses a definition of community housing as “housing that is affordable... that is not being provided by the housing market.” This “under 80% AMI” definition of “affordable” appears to be acceptable. It includes more renters in the need for affordable housing than does the definition using those who pay over 30% of income for rent. See chart 4, compare columns five and six at 80% AMI, with columns three and four, referencing the 61% cost burdened definition.

The Housing Chapter only projects affordable housing needs for renters for 10 years. MLUPA 76–25–203(2) requires 20 years. For that 20 year projection, perhaps the 10 year projection could just be doubled from 498 to 996.

4. Affordable housing needs for those who commute in to work in Whitefish: 639 units

The Housing Chapter, page 9, gives three percentages of total workers in Whitefish who commute in to work. The Housing Chapter should only use the most recent figure of 60% from HNA 2025, page 34. Instead, it includes a 50% figure from 2016, which is wrong, and a 76% figure for 2025, which is wrong. We will use the 60% figure from HNA 2025, page 34, which seems to remain rather stable.

HNA 2025, page 34, states that 60% of Whitefish area workers commute in from outside ZIP Code 59937. Apparently, it was necessary to use ZIP Code data for workers, because that was all that was available from the US Census Bureau. The City of Whitefish has 62% of the jobs in the 59937 area. HNA 2022, page 45. From the 60% commuters number, one can estimate the need for affordable housing for commuters. See chart, 2, attached.

7833 is the total for workers in 59937. HNA 2025, page 34. 60% commute into work, page 34. $7833 \times 60\% = 4700$ workers commuting into 59937 to work. Assume 34% of workers commuting in would live in Whitefish if affordable housing were available in Whitefish. This is based on HNA 2022, page 41: 34%. $4700 \times 34\% = 1598$ workers commuting into 59937 who need affordable housing. To convert the number of workers to the number of housing units needed, divide by 1.55, which is the average occupancy of a rental household. $1598 \div 1.55 = 1031$, which estimates the number of affordable housing units apparently needed for workers who commute in to 59937 to work. To convert the 1031 to a number for the City of Whitefish multiply by 62%. $1031 \times 62\% = 639$, which is the number of affordable housing units apparently needed by workers who commute into Whitefish to work.

The Housing Chapter omits to calculate affordable housing needs for workers who commute in, and would live in Whitefish if there were sufficient affordable housing. This number is 639, when converted to the need for household units. This omission is substantial, and fails to describe “existing conditions of housing”, in violation of MLUPA 76–25–203(1).

5. Affordable housing units needed for owners who pay over 30% of income for housing costs: 479 units

Calculations similar to those done for rental units, can be done for owner units who pay over 30% of income for mortgage payments. The numbers for this calculation are on the same page numbers as cited for rental units. See chart 3. The result

is a current need for affordable housing units for owners of 479. It is noted that owners have the additional affordability hurdle of gathering sufficient funds to pay a 20% down payment. It is also important to note that owners who pay over 30% of income in mortgage payments are making an investment in the property, and this alone might justify paying over 30% of income in mortgage payments.

6. Affordability

The Housing Chapter discusses affordability in general terms. It does not put the wealth of data in the HNA 2025 to good use. Attached is chart 4: affordable housing for renters. Combination of figures 26, 41 and 46, from HNA 2025. Combining the figures allows for a comparison of income levels, with numbers of rental households below a certain income level, against what amount is 30% of monthly income, and what kind of rental in square feet the market will offer at that amount of monthly income. The results of the comparison show the dire straits facing most renters.

Let's start with the level 50% AMI, which is a household income of \$44,000 per year. 30% of monthly income is \$1100. And, for the \$1100 one can almost afford a 400 square-foot studio. That studio is affordable at \$1200 per month, which is 55% AMI. All levels of income below 55% AMI cannot afford even the 400 square-foot studio. They are out of luck completely. The market has nothing to offer them. This includes everyone in the orange area on Chart 4. 55% AMI is \$48,600 (.55. x \$88,000). This is nearly \$50,000, which level includes 68% of renters. Chart 4, column 3. So, nearly 68% of renters are excluded by a minimum market rent of \$1200 per month. Chart 4, column 8.

It is noted that the estimated rents in figure 41, HNA 2025, page 38, appear high. But as the text at page 41 points out, these are "new units", which may bring higher rents. The numbers are based upon what developers need to have a project pencil out.

We see that nearly 68% of renters are beyond the reach of what the market can offer in affordable housing. Also, there are incentive programs for affordable housing, but they seem to be producing only about 40 units per year. HNA 2025, page 19, lists pending projects offering some affordable housing. Only the last three projects listed are under construction. These three will produce 73 affordable units (21+8+44). If this represents two years production, that would

be perhaps 40 units per year. There is no indication that this production rate will increase. So, it is clear that the incentive programs at current levels cannot solve the affordable housing crisis.

As the Housing Chapter indicates, stronger measures in support of affordable housing will need to be applied. One such measure may be for the City Council to attach to a subdivision or project approval, a requirement that 20% of or more of the units be of affordable housing size, say under 800 ft.². This is not prohibited by HB 259 (2023), which only prohibits dedication of property to “specified income levels”, see MCA 7–2–4203 (3). The statute does not prohibit a condition to a project to include housing units of small sizes.

Another measure the City Council could undertake is to provide for a loan of perhaps \$500,000 to \$1 million , to make a project to build say 24 units under 800 ft.², financially feasible. The Flathead Beacon article “Workforce housing set to break ground in Kalispell“, of 12/4/25, describes a project of 24 units at a cost of \$8.7 million. If a similar project is not quite financially feasible in Whitefish, perhaps the city could use Legacy affordable housing funds to loan the developer \$1 million make the project feasible. The loan could be secured with a lien, including unusual terms, such as interest rate at 3%, just above the 2% target inflation rate, a provision that the lien may not be foreclosed for so long as the building is 80% rented at current market rates, a provision for periodic City inspection for compliance with codes, with a requirement to repair all defects within six months. Perhaps the lien could lapse if the building is rented at 80% plus occupancy for 30 years.

Using the above lien suggestion, the City could enable 24 small size units, which may be relatively affordable at market rental rates. The City would get 24 units in lieu of the two or three units, which could be built with \$1 million of Legacy housing funds. It is worthwhile to explore creative solutions which use market prices.

Summary

A summary of affordable rental housing units needed currently and in the future is on chart 5, attached. The numbers developed above, are presented on chart 5. We note that HNA 2025 only projected needs out to 2035, whereas MLUPA

requires a projection out to 2045. Perhaps the HNA 2025 projections could be doubled, for a projection out to 2045. The intent here is simply to use existing data to describe the severity of the affordable housing crisis in Whitefish. The public's right to know and public participation both depend on the presentation of clear, frank and open data on affordable housing. Under MLUPA, the central clearing house for facts on Whitefish is the land use plan and its statement of impacts.

CHART 1:

AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS FOR
RESIDENTS OF WHITEFISH

5700 TOTAL RESIDENTIAL HOUSING UNITS,
HOUSING CHAPTER DRAFT 12/9/25, p. 13

x 70% 70% OF OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS
ARE OCCUPIED BY FULL TIME
RESIDENTS, 12/9/25 ABOVE, p. 13

= 3990 OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS

x 40% 40% OF OCCUPIED UNITS ARE RENTAL
UNITS, HNA 2025, p. 15.

= 1596 RENTAL UNITS IN WHITEFISH.

x 61% 61% OF ~~RENTAL~~ ^{RENTAL} UNITS ARE "COST
BURDENED", MEANING THEY PAY
OVER 30% OF TOTAL INCOME FOR
HOUSING COSTS. HNA 2025, p. 27.

= 974 ^{APPARENTLY} RENTER HOUSEHOLDS IN NEED OF
AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

- 278 RENTER HOUSEHOLDS ALREADY IN
APPARENTLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING.
(IS RENT < 30% OF INCOME?) HNA 2025,
p. 20

EST: 696

NET RENTER HOUSEHOLDS APPARENTLY
IN NEED OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

CHART 2:

AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS FOR

WORKERS WHO COMMUTE IN TO WORK
IN WHITEFISH

7833 "TOTAL WORKERS FILLING JOBS" IN
59937. HNA 2025, p. 34

x 60% 60% IS "THE PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS
LIVING ~~OUTS~~ OUTSIDE 59937" WHO WORK
IN 59937, HNA 2025, p. 34

= 4700 WORKERS COMMUTING IN TO 59937 TO WORK

x ~~34%~~ 34%
"IN COMMUTERS THAT WANT TO MOVE (34%)
HNA 2022, p. 41. ASSUME THEY
WOULD MOVE IF AFFORDABLE HOUSING
WERE AVAILABLE.

= 1598 WORKERS COMMUTING IN TO ~~59937~~
WHO NEED AFFORDABLE HOUSING

÷ 1.55 DIVIDE BY 1.55, THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD
SIZE FOR RENTERS IN WHITEFISH HNA 2025

= 1031 AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS APPARENTLY^{P. 15}
NEEDED FOR WORKERS WHO COMMUTE IN
TO 59937 TO WORK.

x 62% REDUCE TO THE CITY OF WHITEFISH,
WHICH IS 62% OF THE 59937 JOBS, HNA
202~~5~~², p. 45

~~710~~
= 639 AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS APPARENTLY
NEEDED FOR WORKERS WHO COMMUTE
IN TO WHITEFISH TO WORK.

CHART 3: NEED FOR AFFORDABLE OWNER UNITS.

5700 TOTAL RESIDENTIAL HOUSING UNITS,
HOUSING CHARTER DRAFT 12/9/25, p. 13

$\times 70\%$ 70% OF HOUSING UNITS ARE OCCUPIED
BY FULL TIME RESIDENTS. 12/9/25, p. 13

= 3990 OCCUPIED UNITS

$\times 60\%$ 60% OF OCCUPIED UNITS ARE OWNER
UNITS. HNA 2025, p. 15

= 2394 OWNER UNITS

$\times 20\%$ 20% OF OWNER UNITS ARE PAYING
OVER 30% OF INCOME IN MORTGAGE
PAYMENTS. HNA 2025, p. 27

= 494 OWNER UNITS HOUSEHOLDS WHO
ARE IN NEED OF AFFORDABLE
HOUSING.

CHART 4:
AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR RENTERS. COMBINATION
OF FIGURES 26, 41 AND 46, FROM HNA 2025

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
INCOME BRACKET OF RENTAL HOUSEHOLDS X 1000	% OF HOUSEHOLDS	CUMULATIVE % OF ALL RENTERS HOUSEHOLDS	CUMULATIVE RENTAL UNITS NEEDED	HOUSEHOLD ANNUAL INCOME AT THE GIVEN AMI LEVEL X 1000	AMI LEVEL	30% OF MONTHLY INCOME HOUSEHOLD AT AMI LEVEL	AT % AMI. RENT AFFORDABLE	SQ FT OF RENTAL UNIT AT AFFORDABLE PRICE
FIG 26	FIG 26	FIG 26	FIG 26	FIG 46	FIG 46	FIG 46	FIG 41	FIG 41
UNDER \$25	33%	33%	527	\$27 \$27	30% AMI 30% AMI	\$45 \$675		
\$25-\$35	15%	48%	766					
\$35-\$50	20%	61%	974					
		68%	1085					
				\$44	50% AMI	\$1100	AT 55% \$1200 AMI	400 ft ²
\$50-\$75	14%	82%	1309	\$71	80% AMI	\$1775	\$1740	600 ft ²
\$75-\$100	8%	90%	1436	\$88	100% AMI	\$2200	\$2360 ^{AT 105%}	800 ft ²
\$100-\$150	9%	99%	1580	\$106	120% AMI	\$2650	\$2700	1000 ft ²
				\$133	150% AMI	\$3325	\$3360	1200 ft ²
\$150+	1%	100%	1596					
TOTAL	100%	100%	1596					

CHART 5:

SUMMARY OF RENTAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS

	HNA 2025	PER THIS COMMENT
CURRENT NEEDS FOR RESIDENTS (PER > 30% OF INCOME)	0	696
CURRENT NEEDS FOR THOSE WHO COMMUTE IN TO WORK	0	639
TOTAL CURRENT NEEDS	0	1335
FUTURE NEEDS TO 2035 (PER < 80% AMI)	498	417
FUTURE NEEDS 2035-2045 (PER < 80% AMI)	498	417
TOTAL FUTURE NEEDS	996	834
TOTAL NEEDS FOR RENTAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING	996	2169

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Jon L. Heberling
Sent: Friday, December 26, 2025 2:10 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Add to the Housing Chapter text, 12/9/25
Attachments: img20251226_13584412.pdf

ATTENTION: External Email - This email originated from outside the City of Whitefish. Use caution when clicking links or opening attachments unless you recognize the sender and are expecting the contents. Contact the [IT Helpdesk](#) if in doubt.

Hi Alan, Please post this to the Housing comments. Thanks, Jon

1. At page 9, top line, after "Whitefish" add "Small town feel was ranked #1 in importance among listed values by visioning participants. "
2. At page 9, just above "Definition of Cost Burdened", strike the sentence beginning "A 2016", and add "HNA 2025, page 34, states that approximately 60% of Whitefish employees commute into the city from other areas."
3. At page 12, under "Location of Needed Housing", strike "evenly" and add "to selected areas".
4. At page 19, before "Community Housing Committee", add:
Affordable housing for renters – current needs: 696 units

HNA 2025, page 27, states that "61% of all renter occupied households" spend over 30% of their income on housing costs. From this 61% number, the current need for affordable housing units for renters can be calculated. It is 696, per Chart 1 attached. The calculation is as follows: 5700 is the number for total housing units in Whitefish. Housing Chapter Draft 12/9/25, p.13. 70% of all units are occupied by year round residents, Id. 13. $5700 \times 70\% = 3990$ occupied units. 40% of occupied units are renter units, HNA

2025, page 15. $3990 \times 40\% = 1596$ rental units in Whitefish. 61% of all renter occupied households currently need affordable housing. HNA 2025, page 27. $1596 \times 61\% = 974$, which is the current need for affordable housing units for renters. Of the 974, 278 are already in apparently affordable housing. HNA 2025, p. 20. $974 - 278 = 696$.

Affordable housing needs for those who commute in to work in Whitefish: 639 units

HNA 2025, page 34, states that 60% of Whitefish area workers commute in from outside ZIP Code 59937. It was necessary to use ZIP Code data for workers, because that was all that was available from the US Census Bureau. The City of Whitefish has 62% of the jobs in the 59937 area. HNA 2022, page 45. HNA 2025, page 34, states that 60% of those who work in Whitefish commute in to work. From this 60% commuters number, one can estimate the need for affordable housing for commuters. See chart, 2, attached.

7833 is the total for workers in 59937. HNA 2025, page 34. 60% commute into work, page 34. $7833 \times 60\% = 4700$ workers commuting into 59937 to work. Assume 34% of workers commuting in would live in Whitefish if affordable housing were available in Whitefish. This is based on HNA 2022, page 41: 34%. $4700 \times 34\% = 1598$ workers commuting into 59937 who need affordable housing. To convert the number of workers to the number of housing units needed, divide by 1.55, which is the average occupancy of a rental household. $1598 \div 1.55 = 1031$, which estimates the number of affordable housing units apparently needed for workers who commute in to 59937 to work. To convert the 1031 to a number for the City of Whitefish multiply by 62%. $1031 \times 62\% = 639$, which is the number of affordable housing units apparently needed by workers who commute into page 26 Whitefish to work.

5. At page 26, under "Land Use Strategies" strike "throughout the city, particularly in zoning districts which do not allow short term rentals." and add "in selected areas."
6. At page 26, under "Development Standards Strategies" strike "ensure" and add "analyse whether".
7. At page 27, under "Summary" after population earning", add "under".

Rhonda Fitzgerald Comments

HOUSING ELEMENTS Public Comments on December 17, 2025 from Rhonda Fitzgerald

BEFORE THIS DOCUMENT IS ADOPTED, THE MOST UP-TO-DATE POPULATION PROJECTIONS MUST BE USED. According to the Montana Department of Commerce, Whitefish's population increased by only 0.9% (90 people) in 2024. In 2025 the increase will be approximately the same. This increase is well below the previous estimates that are currently being used in this Growth Policy. Because the 2024 and 2025 population figures are significantly lower than estimated previously, the current projected population for 2045 is 10,963. This is a total increase over 20 years of ~1,700 people, or 85 people per year. The population increase by 2035 is currently projected to be ~1,270 people, or 127 people per year. Figuring 2 people per household (the Whitefish average), by 2045 the need will be 850 more housing units, and by 2035 only 635 more units. In the next few months the Department of Commerce will be providing the updated 2025 figures, assuming another 0.9% increase, the projected housing need will be even lower.

Page 1, Paragraph 2

The desirability to live (and retire) or invest in Whitefish, in combination with a range of other factors including escalating mortgage rates, high demand coupled with low ~~supply of affordable housing,~~

Page 6, Goal 6, Objective b.

Reduce car trips ~~and improve quality of life~~ by promoting walkable neighborhoods. ~~Walkable needs to be defined. Walkable is often defined by urban planners as being within a 5-minute walk / 1./4 mile.~~

Page 7, Paragraph 2

Home prices surged - greatly outpacing local incomes ~~delete: and pushing longtime residents out of the market.~~

Page 8, Paragraph 2

During visioning sessions for this plan, the declining availability of housing, particularly for the local ~~workforce delete: working class,~~ dominated most of the responses.

Page 9, Paragraph 2

People who live as well as work in a community tend to shop in local stores for their groceries, fuel, and goods. ~~Delete: which they are unlikely to do if they live in other communities.~~ The high cost of housing can reduce the number of employees a business

can attract, as fewer will reliably commute long distances from larger population centers ~~delete: for service-level wages when they can earn those same wages in their home community.~~ Whitefish has higher wages than other nearby towns.

A 2016 Housing Needs Assessment indicated approximately 65% ~~(delete 50%- see page)~~ of Whitefish employees commute into the city from other areas. In 2025, this percentage is indicated between 61% ~~by the 2025 HNA~~, and 76% ~~by the Econ Dev Study~~. ~~Footnote is reversed indicating the HNA specifies 76%, which is inaccurate. A nearly equal number of Whitefish residents commute out for work. This should be included.~~

Page 12, Paragraph 3

However, most said that higher density should be in areas closer to the core of the city, areas with sufficient infrastructure along the US 93 South Corridor ~~and in other close-in areas.~~ ~~delete: and in mixed use nodes.~~

Page 14, Paragraph 1

~~The average lifespan of a house is between 50 and 60 years. Approximately 35% of housing units in the City of Whitefish were built prior to 1979, representing around 2,000 units that are reaching their expected lifespan. Delete. This statistic is not relevant in Whitefish where many of the oldest homes are highly desired.~~

Page 14, Paragraph 2

Given the amount of land dedicated only to single family detached and duplexes, consideration could be given to providing a broader diversity or density of housing units in some of these areas, ~~bearing in mind that the largest need for housing is for affordable ownership opportunities, not for rental units.~~

Page 15, last sentence

Between October 2024 and October 2025, \$479,500 was collected in resort tax from short term rentals, a 28% increase from the previous 12 month period, reflecting the increase in licensed short term rentals.

Page 17, Paragraph 2

~~Roughly one in five housing units (19%)???~~ ~~On page 13 it states that 30% of Housing units are vacant.~~ in the City of Whitefish is classified as vacant according to the Census definition of vacancy, which includes housing units used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of these ~~19%??~~ of units (978 units), the majority (77%) are occupied only a portion of the year, often seasonally or for recreational use, but are not occupied by a permanent resident. Seasonal units could be used to house ~~a seasonal workforce, including hospital~~

workers with short term positions, those employed in hospitality-related industries and in some cases construction. Delete: seasonal workforce, hospitality and construction which all coincide with high season when these units are occupied. 25% of the City of Whitefish resort tax is reallocated back to property owners as tax rebates. The city could consider whether housing units unoccupied for the majority of the year should qualify and whether this money could be better allocated toward needed housing.

Page 18 Paragraph 4

Whitefish's population had exceeded 9,100 by the time of the study, with projections anticipating growth to 11,120 current Department of Commerce projection is 10,963 and will decrease when 2025 figures are released by 2035 - an increase of over 20% that will place significant strain on the existing housing stock.

Page 19 Paragraph 1

escalation, with median home prices exceeding one million dollars and rental rates well over \$2,000 new rentals are listed at \$1800 and \$1950 currently, median rental is \$1313 per Dept of Commerce. for a two-bedroom unit, far outpacing local wage growth. Short-term rentals remained a key factor in reducing long-term housing availability, particularly for year round residents and workforce households.



As representatives of members across Flathead County, including Whitefish, Citizens for a Better Flathead endorses this housing chapter as drafted. The Whitefish Housing Committee dedicated time to ensure that affordable housing was well-discussed throughout this chapter. The measures highlighted within these pages aimed at addressing affordable housing are **practical and feasible** given the funding, jurisdiction and partnership that the City of Whitefish has over these matters (i.e. deed-restricted land use).

Unfortunately, there is no “one size fits all” model that can address the complexities of these concerns. Relying on the market to supply the housing needed is one thing, but relying on the market to regulate housing rates in favor of affordability is not realistic. By simply building more units, there is no guarantee that the rates will be affordable to the targeted groups unless they are paired with measures outlined in this chapter.

Only with measures taken by local governments, such as deed-restricted land use, can affordability truly be reached. As Whitefish Housing Executive Director, Daniel Sidder, commented “no neighborhood should experience rapid change, and no neighborhood should be exempt from change.”

Inclusionary Zoning, which was removed as mandatory via HB 291 (2021), allows for incentives so that developers may build housing that is approachable for lower-income levels. While it cannot be required, there has been success elsewhere in the state (Bozeman, Missoula) and efforts should be continued to implement such actions when attainable. While CBF disagrees with building homes on a recognized brownfield site for reasons involving environmental and health hazards, we applaud Missoula’s use of land trust property to provide more affordable housing options, while acknowledging that this example, the [Scott-Street Ravara Project](#), is not perfect. [Bozeman’s use of an ordinance](#) to incentivize affordable housing developments is also a step in the right direction, while remaining within the bounds prescribed by MLUPA. Of course, these examples could be modified to better suit the needs and layout of Whitefish.

CBF recognizes the necessity of providing affordable housing and believes that the City has created a practical plan for supplying such housing, while maintaining the character many in Whitefish seek to preserve. Housing units are needed, but should be supplied as infrastructure permits, so that growth happens in a concurrent manner. There are options, as evidenced in the Housing draft chapter and in articles cited within this comment, that support affordable housing without advocacy of high-density units. The chapter provides a comprehensive look at how these steps can be accomplished, while also being in compliance with MLUPA.

Respectfully submitted,
Cameron Dexter
Citizens for a Better Flathead
Director of Policy & Planning

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Whitefish Youth <whitefish.youth.social@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 17, 2025 8:06 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Re: Housing ideas

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Hi Alan,
Here is a copy of the transcript of what I said as well thank you

When determining the future of housing in whitefish we must remember that what makes whitefish great is not the appearance or location of housing but instead the people who live here. If when planning the future of whitefish's housing we are prioritizing the aesthetics or locations of housing we are betraying the ability for people to live in whitefish. We collected over 50 signatures of whitefish high school students and through other conversations i can confidently say that this is the majority opinion of young people in whitefish. A universal fear for not only myself but my friends who are now looking towards leaving for college is the fact that this may be the only time in our lives that we can live in whitefish as the cost appears to only go up. We are asking the whitefish city government to in the housing plan for the future of whitefish do more than just prioritize and create new pathways for housing but outline overarching changes to the housing process in whitefish. The Whitefish students were disappointed at the repeated appearance of could, should or would, and are rather in favor of what will happen. Has it not already been a priority of the city of whitefish to make housing more affordable, how will re-affirming that priority change the affordability of the housing in the future.

When examining the future of whitefish there are two worlds. One world we do not take the necessary drastic measures for housing and instead prioritize the aesthetics and looks of whitefish. In this world while physically whitefish will look the same the people living here will change because the average house price will price out the average person and destroy the culture of whitefish. And in the other world we instead prioritize housing above all else. In this world while physically whitefish may look different, the people who live here and the culture that we have all grown to love will remain and grow. Fundamentally we must prioritize the people of whitefish over the aesthetics of those who have been privileged enough to get in before housing got too expensive.

On Wed, Dec 17, 2025 at 6:08 PM Whitefish Youth <whitefish.youth.social@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Alan,

The whitefish students for city government found 11 key points we wished for greater discussion to be seen. Our general Greveince was the overwhelming occurrence of the words could should and would compared to concrete plans.

1st unanimously reduce lot sizes across whitefish to instead be in favor of smaller denser housing units.

2nd to act with consensus to state law to expand the height limit of buildings to 60ft and match residential zones with that commercial state legislation.

3rd rezone all of the "downtown" area to be mixed use high density housing.

4th To limit setbacks on residential streets and areas to the absolute minimum

5th to prioritize communal greenspaces as a replacement for personal greenspaces.

6th To limit zoning impacts in whitefish housing by creating easier rezoning processes that lead to an outcome of densification.

7th Allow mixed use housing unanimously across whitefish in any situation where more than 50% of a building remains residential. (or more than 2 units of said housing units of a building are transformed into commercial units)

8th To set up communal funds using resort taxes to help people afford housing in whitefish.

9th For the city of whitefish to invest in affordable social housing.

10th for the city of whitefish to expand their work with housing authorities to build housing units.

11th for all housing in the city of whitefish to be built in a manor that incorporates the community around & preventing any gated or restricted access neighborhoods.

Thank you,

Avery sorensen

Memo



To: Alan Tiefenbach
cc: Shanna Zuzpan, Emily Vitas
From: Aaron Mondada
Date: 12.16.2025
Re: **Whitefish Community Housing Needs Assessment Talking Points.**

The purpose of this Memo is to provide talking points for the city to use in response to questions related to the 2025 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment Update. Three broad topics are covered in this memo (1) the rationale behind using a 10-year assessment horizon, (2) population projection estimates and (3) housing demand from commuters.

The purpose of a housing needs assessment is to provide guiding information for a community to make informed decisions about the need for future housing. Projecting the need for new housing necessitates the use of assumptions about what a community's population and housing preferences will look like over a period of time. Considering recent community conversation and input, we recommend adding an additional "high" scenario to the potential spectrum of housing need. This new high scenario can help plan for the possibility that growth in Whitefish could continue at elevated rates in line with recent shorter-term population trends seen between 2019-2024.

10-year vs. 20-year assessment horizons

- Projecting housing need and housing demand out twenty years relies on current and historical data, as well as a set of assumptions that could change over time. The longer the forecast timeline, the more likely the assumptions could prove out of date. A shorter time frame typically produces more accurate results, especially if updates occur regularly.
- The 2025 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment Update used a 10-year housing horizon, as opposed to a 20-year timeline. The 10-year timeline is relevant to current planning efforts and near-term policy development.
- Regular updates (every 3-5 years) to the Housing Needs Assessment are the best way to check the assumptions used in projecting demand and allows for adjustments if there are changes in population, demographics, employment or regional planning initiatives.
- Using a 10-year planning horizon for this assessment does not imply that the city should not be thinking about, and investing in, strategies to ensure long-term housing affordability.

Population Projections

- Forecasts used in the 2025 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment Update relied on the Montana Department of Commerce and area historic growth rates as the foundation for assessing future population growth. This is consistent with the forecast the city is using for the update to the Comprehensive Plan.
- The Montana Department of Commerce projections represent the most localized inputs including economic and demographic factors,¹ and are used in planning documents across the region and in city efforts, allowing for further alignment and continuity across multiple planning efforts.
 - Population projections from the Montana Department of Commerce show a flattening of the population growth curve with growth projected as low as 0.3% starting in 2042. However, if substantially more housing is built in the next ten years, the population could increase (a result of accommodating for a larger segment of pent-up community demand). This further emphasizes the need for regular housing needs assessment updates and continued evaluation of need.
- As indicated in the HNA, the period of growth between 2019 and 2024 was higher than in years prior to 2019. COVID-19 and the surrounding economic impacts are difficult to rely on in terms of long-term trends and many communities experienced similar spikes in population during this time. It is unclear to what extent these migration patterns away from Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) will continue.
 - The number of people residing in MSAs has started to outpace overall population growth in the United States, highlighting a potential reversal of the recent migration trends seen during the pandemic.²

Flathead County Population Forecast		
Year	Dept of Commerce Forecast	Annual growth rate
2025	118,860	1.17%
2026	120,856	1.7%
2027	122,766	1.6%
2028	124,532	1.4%
2029	126,127	1.3%
2030	127,559	1.1%
2031	128,879	1.0%
2032	130,027	0.9%
2033	131,040	0.8%
2034	131,951	0.7%
2035	132,795	0.6%
2036	133,561	0.6%
2037	134,291	0.5%
2038	134,963	0.5%
2039	135,577	0.5%
2040	136,145	0.4%
2041	136,674	0.4%
2042	137,140	0.3%
2043	137,565	0.3%
2044	137,951	0.3%
2045	138,314	0.3%

Source: Montana Dept of Commerce

¹ <https://commerce.mt.gov/Data-Research/People-Housing/Population>

² <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2025/04/metro-area-trends.html>

- With additional economic strains fewer individuals and families are moving than ever before with moves between areas in the same county decreasing the most ³
- Integrating a scenario that captures a higher inflow of population (in line with the 3.9% growth of the last 5 years) is a viable option for understanding potential needs. If this were to become the new “high scenario” for Whitefish the estimated range for total need would shift from an approximate need of 930-1,500 housing units to 930-2,150 units over 10-years. Preparing for this higher growth scenario is of value to the city and could be integrated into the needs assessment as an additional finding.

Demand from Whitefish Area Commuters.

The “Shelter WF Revised Community Housing Needs Assessment” report states that there is an unmet need of 1,739 homes in Whitefish to accommodate for demand from Whitefish’s commuter population. The following points describe additional factors and considerations related to commuter demand.

- Population projections include population growth from movement within a regional housing market. This approach risks duplication of need as the demand from someone moving to Whitefish from Kalispell or Columbia Falls is already included in the number of units needed due to population growth.
- Commuters may represent a segment of additional pent-up community demand, but understanding the thresholds at which they would move to Whitefish from the surrounding area is difficult to parse out beyond the trends that are already being captured in existing population forecasts (which draw on historic growth factors).
- Assuming cost is a significant factor for many Whitefish commuters who choose to reside outside of Whitefish, substantially higher demand from commuters would potentially exist, but only to the extent that the city can reasonably add units that are affordable enough to attract these commuters. Interviews with developers and market research shows that adding housing units affordable at or below 150% AMI is challenging and often requires federal funding, grants, or other creative solutions, to close the feasibility gap.
- At the time of the Housing Needs Assessment only 5.8% of Whitefish’s existing housing inventory is deed restricted (336 units) with an additional 212 community housing units in the potential pipeline (many of which have not entered the permitting process). If even half of the suggested new unit demand from commuters would need to be affordable at 120% AMI or below, it would necessitate the development of at least 870 new affordable units over the next ten years (in addition to the existing demand for new housing development stated in the HNA) – a 258% increase in the inventory of affordable housing in Whitefish.
- Trends in affordable housing development would need to significantly change to accommodate this rate of demand from existing commuters, which would likely require a substantial change in resources available for affordable housing. If the affordable housing environments changes and additional sources of funding were to become available – an adjustment to the Housing Needs Assessment to better understand these effects could be warranted.

³ <https://lightcast.io/resources/blog/are-americans-really-not-moving>

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Richard Hildner
Sent: Tuesday, December 16, 2025 3:36 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Housing Element Draft Comments
Attachments: Housing Element Draft Comments.pdf

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Alan,
Attached please find my Draft Housing Element comments. Please share with the Planning Commission.

Thanks, and see you tomorrow evening,
Richard

Richard Hildner

Housing Element Comments
12/15/25

Introduction:

P.1, ¶ 2, ... in combination with a range of other factors including escalating mortgage rates, high demand coupled with low supply **of affordable housing**, increased construction costs, ...

P.2, Goals and Objectives; Goal 1, Objective b.ii.

Any regulatory update that suggests, “Reducing minimum lot sizes and setbacks in all residential zones with lot coverage, setbacks, height, massing, and floor area ratio requirements to ensure neighborhood compatibility.” **comes with the obligation to address the responsibility to create and maintain the home ignition zone (HIZ) to include all structures, including fences, on all housing developments within the wildland-urban interface (WUI).**

P.3, Objective d.i. **suggest defining**: “form-based code”.

P.5, Goal 4.d.: Ensure funding mechanisms remain relevant and create usable tools to increase Community Housing over time. **Suggest defining** “Community Housing.”

P.6, Goal 6, Objective b. Reduce car trips by promoting walkable neighborhoods. **While this is a laudable objective, what is the distance one is likely to walk?**

P.7 Overview of Montana’s Housing Crisis

¶1: Home prices surged - greatly outpacing local incomes. **(delete: and pushing longtime residents out of the market.)** **Is there any statistical evidence of longtime residents being pushed out of the market?**

P.9, Need For Housing

¶1, People who live as well as work in a community tend to shop in local stores for their groceries, fuel, and goods **(delete: which they are unlikely to do if they live in other communities.)** The high cost of housing can reduce the number of employees a business can attract, as fewer will reliably commute *long distances* (emphasis mine) from larger population centers ... **What constitutes *long distances*?**

At the end of this paragraph, if you mention the percentage who commute into the city it would seem logical to also report the percentage who commute out of the city.

Definition of Cost Burdened:

“Housing costs include monthly payment for rent or mortgage (principal and interest) as well as taxes, insurance, utilities **(add: and HOAs) HOA expenses can be significant in Whitefish.**”

P.11: Contributors To High Housing Costs:

The above referenced insert should also include: 12. Insurance Rates, 13. Property Taxes, 14. High HOA Fees

Housing Inventory Existing Conditions

P.14, Housing Diversity,

¶1: “The average lifespan of a house is between 50 and 60 years.” The source of this statistic is unclear. There are many factors that determine a house’s life span such as maintenance, quality of construction, etc.

P.15: Housing Inventory

¶1: How is “naturally affordable” defined?

Dark Homes

P.17, ¶1

“Roughly one in five housing units (19%) in the City of Whitefish’s classified as vacant according to the Census definition of vacancy, ...” This number seem to be in contrast to the number of vacant homes mentioned on page 13 which appears to be a vacancy rate of 30%.

Seasonal units could be used to house a seasonal workforce, including hospital workers with short term positions, those employed in hospitality-related industries and *in some cases construction* (emphasis mine). Why the distinction on construction?

It should be recognized that given Whitefish’s position in the wildland-urban interface, the cost or inability to obtain fire insurance will likely become a major impediment to any kind of housing, especially affordable housing.

Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Tuesday, December 16, 2025 11:44 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Housing Element of Growth Policy

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My name is Carol Atkinson and I have lived in this amazing town for almost 40 years. I live on Dakota Avenue and have watched development in my neighborhood expand considerably in the past few years. I am NOT opposed to development. But in order for construction to continue north of the viaduct, there MUST be serious efforts to plan and create an infrastructure that will support it.

Thank you for all you are doing.

Carol

Sent from my iPad

Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Monday, December 15, 2025 10:20 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: housing element of growth plan

[Learn why this is important](#)

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Housing Element of the growth policy

Dear Committee of the Housing and Growth policy,
I am writing to share my input and hopes for the future of Whitefish.

I hope you will create a plan that keeps the character of our town both in the variety of old and new homes, the beautiful avenues with trees, the many sidewalks and paths.

With the diversity of home needed we must include homes that are affordable for the range of citizens in our community. As a resort town we must acknowledge the market includes million dollar recreation style homes and smaller affordable homes for retirees and our workers. Recent internet search suggested a \$200,000 home would required annual income of \$58,000- \$65,000. Homeowner ship creates a grounding and connection to the vitality and diversity that we hope for our community.

The balance is also to keep and improve our green space and access to public lands with safe streets and paths. I believe that with access to our lakes, rivers and public lands we can then create high density neighborhoods.

Thank you for your time, energy and expertise,

Dear Alan and Planning Commission,

Please consider the following changes for the Housing growth policy element:

Request #1:

Goal 1, objective d, iv: Remove “including smaller projects.”

Add “ v. Establish a process that allows deviations to be approved for smaller projects.”

Explanation: I attended the Community Housing Committee’s meeting December 8 and this line was removed from the original draft. However, a committee member who has expertise in the construction industry presented a compelling case why smaller projects should receive their own line and additional attention in the draft. Red tape, additional paperwork, time—these things make it harder and costlier for homeowners to make necessary repairs to their aging homes, or to add density to their area with something like an ADU. We can theoretically support home repairs and gentle density, but we rely on people to do the work. If we make the process easier, we make it more cost effective and people are more likely to implement changes. Having a separate line emphasizes the importance of this concept.

This meeting was quite busy, with many ideas and suggestions being shared, and I’m not sure there was an official vote to remove this line and add it to the one above. I recommend re-adding the line because I think it supports those who are creating the changes we need.

Request #2

Goal 2, objective c, ii: Add more specificity to “Explore the role of HOAs.”

Explanation: I think more verbiage is needed to make it clear what role is being discussed.

Request #3:

Leave the Location of Needed Housing section, as is, particularly this line, “However, it is important to distribute higher density housing evenly rather than concentrate it all in one area or neighborhood to reduce impacts, promote equitable access to amenities, and not segregate residents by income.”

Explanation: When I moved back to town in 2014, we purchased a home on Colorado Ave. The first thing a coworker said to me about my home’s location was “you live in the Whitefish ghetto.” Segregated areas of town lead to an unhealthy, socially stratified community.

In addition, density can be added in a way that’s aesthetically very similar to single family homes. [AARP has a guide to Missing Middle housing](#), which explains how density can seamlessly fit within a neighborhood, with buildings like duplexes, fourplexes, townhomes, and

ADUs (not pictured). “Many single-family homes are so large that it’s easy to fill the same-sized building with multiple residences that are small, affordable and useful” (8).

Here are two relevant images from the guide, and I encourage members of the Commission—and members of the public who are reading this comment—to read the full PDF. Density can fit into an existing neighborhood—in a way that looks and feels the same as a single family home—while helping to solve our housing crisis.

<https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/housing/2023/AARP-Missing-Middle-Housing-singles-10202023.pdf>

Best,
Marti Brandt

Missing Middle Examples. ADUs are also an example but aren't pictured:



How Missing Middle housing can add density to a neighborhood, in a discrete way:

There are several ways to place Missing Middle-style homes

Distributed Throughout a Block

Missing Middle Housing types can exist along a street, standing side by side and intermingling with detached single-family homes. The blended pattern of detached single-family residences and Missing Middle Housing works well because these types are comparable in form and scale.



On the End of a Block

The streets that intersect the end of a block is often a busier corridor than the streets occupied by detached single-family homes. Placing Missing Middle Housing types on the “end grain” of a block allows for the use of slightly larger buildings because the structure isn’t sitting directly next to detached single-family homes. In this placement type, the alley to the rear of the Missing Middle structure also allows for a good transition in scale to the single-family lots.



As a Commercial Corridor Transition

When a Missing Middle residence is located in an area that’s adjacent to a neighborhood Main Street, the building itself provides a gradual transition point between residential and commercial or mixed-used properties. The nearness of residents provides a customer base for local businesses and services. By serving as a type of buffer, a Missing Middle-type structure can actually keep a single-family home in a walkable area from being located directly next to, say, a restaurant or bar (or a store or office building) and the parking lots needed by the businesses’ customers and employees.



As a Transition to Higher-Density Housing

Another transition benefit of Missing Middle Housing is achieved by placing small to mid-sized multiunit housing on a few of the lots that transition from a residential side street to a more populated corridor, thus providing a transition in scale to the larger buildings on the end grain of the block along the primary street.



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Alan Tiefenbach

From: Keegan Siebenaler <policy@shelterwf.org>
Sent: Monday, December 15, 2025 10:16 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Public Comment for Housing Element Draft
Attachments: ShelterWF Housing Element Public Comment.pdf

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Alan and Members of the Whitefish Planning Commission,

Please see attached our complete comments by ShelterWF for the housing element draft of the growth policy. **These comments include both suggested line-by-line edits to the Housing draft and additional context and comments in the margins of the document.**

Already in the packet of public comment is our *Shelter WF Revised Community Housing Needs Assessment*. While the adoption of this document is not an action item for the Planning Commission (as it will be discussed for adoption at the January 5, 2026 City Council Meeting) **we urge the Planning Commission and City Staff to read the document as we believe the accuracy of the Housing Needs Assessment provides crucial context to the Housing Element.** To quickly sum up the report, it finds that methodological failures in the current HNA underestimate housing need, capturing as little as 23% to 46% of the actual housing required over the next decade. When we underestimate housing need, we believe that “business as usual” in terms of development patterns will start to alleviate the housing shortage. **By contrast, the actual need for between 300 and 400 new units per year should be an urgent reminder that the housing system in Whitefish requires dramatic change to approach affordability.**

In sum, ShelterWF supports many of the goals and objectives in the element. The bulk of our revisions are centered around a few key items:

- 1.
- 2.
3. Ensuring
4. that the document
5. **reflects the true scale of the housing shortage** in
6. Whitefish. While Whitefish has taken some steps to address this shortage, we believe that the city has many regulatory and financial tools at its disposal. Parts of the document that minimize the scale and impact of the housing shortage in Whitefish must be

7. returned to their original, more forceful, language.

8.

9.

10.

11. Accurately

12. describing

13. **the shortage of attainable market-rate housing options in**

14. Whitefish. Sections of the report that describe housing issues in Whitefish as merely a shortage of subsidized housing are both wrong and harmful when considering regulatory reforms under MLUPA.

15.

16.

17.

18. Contextualizing

19. **biased language.** Community

20. sentiment supporting a “small-town feel” is equated throughout the document with opposition to mixed-use and dense development. “Small Town Character” is not antithetical to density and growth. It can be *interpreted*

21. to mean “no new housing” but it can also be interpreted to represent the parts of Whitefish that are mixed-use, working-class, designed for locals, or myriad nebulous concepts. Indeed, our membership has told us that for those who are scared of being priced

22. out of Whitefish, “small town character” represents a place where people can live and work. Including “small town character” to represent opposition to density or mixed-use neighborhoods is not an explicit link but an opinion about what the term means.

23.

24.

25.

26. Removing

27. **ambiguous references to “neighborhood**

28. **character.”** Much

29. like “small-town feel” neighborhood character is *equated*

30. with opposition to change to the physical environment by the report, but not by reality. Neighborhood character can similarly represent opinions about demographic and cultural change that would be resisted by building dense new housing. The inclusion of “neighborhood

31. character” in numerous paragraphs as an equivocation to new housing implies that core neighborhoods can remain unchanged to solve Whitefish’s housing needs, which is both wrong and pits parts of the city against each other. This language only serves to give

32. NIMBY sentiment an opportunity to deny changes, which is directly opposed to the entire legal structure of MLUPA.

33.

- 34.
- 35.
- 36. Strengthening**
- 37. language supporting public housing developments,**
- 38. such as additional suggestions to maximize density and funding for these projects.
- 39.
- 40.

We urge the planning commission to recognize the extreme housing shortage in Whitefish is directly connected to the stories of struggle and exclusion that so many locals feel; whether renters or prospective homeowners. **ShelterWF exists to represent these voices that are so often left out of the conversation. In the housing element of the growth policy, these voices are the most directly affected by the housing shortage. They are the voices we must prioritize.**

Best,
Keegan Siebenaler, Executive Director

ShelterWF
406-250-3707 | policy@shelterwf.org

Shelter WF aims to fix the broken housing system in Whitefish, the Flathead Valley, and Montana. Our community-led movement advocates for policy reforms that lead to an abundance of homes in all shapes and sizes.



shelterwf.org

ENCOURAGING A DIVERSITY OF HOUSING

"We encourage a diversity of stable housing types. We will provide for all demographic segments of our population, particularly our local workforce, to allow residents to move in, move up or age in place, ensuring everyone can remain here across multiple generations. ~~New housing will be complimentary to and respectful of existing neighborhoods."~~

INTRODUCTION

Housing is a critical part of and one of the distinctive physical aspects of a thriving community. Housing combines to form neighborhoods, and neighborhoods combine with other uses to form the community. Housing is more than just shelter; it is our living environment. Ensuring a range of housing options at a variety of sizes, with prices affordable to all segments of the population, is imperative. While shelter is one of the most basic human needs, the high cost of housing in the Whitefish area puts it out of reach for many working families. Like many high-amenity mountain towns across the United States, Whitefish is facing challenges in providing housing affordable and attainable to individuals who wish to live and work in one of Montana's most beautiful locales.

The City of Whitefish is experiencing ~~an extreme a-community housing~~¹ ~~crisis-shortage~~. The desirability to live (and retire) or invest in Whitefish, in combination with a range of other factors including escalating mortgage rates, high demand coupled with low supply, increased construction costs, neighborhood opposition to housing projects, greater interest from out-of-state buyers, the proliferation of short term rentals, the need to update outdated development standards, recent state legislation and job growth has brought the crisis to the forefront of the community. Many of these factors were compounded by the effects of the COVID19 pandemic. This brought a migration of well-paid remote workers from larger metropolitan regions with a spending power which could not be matched by local residents or employers. The 2007 adopted growth policy reported the median selling price of a single family home was \$319,000. In 2020 the median selling price was \$440,000 and in 2025 the median selling price now exceeds one million dollars².

¹ The 2025 Housing Needs Assessment defines Community Housing as "Housing that is affordable for community members that live and work in the Whitefish Area that is not being provided by the housing market. This refers to a range of household income levels for which market priced housing is unattainable, including both the traditionally low-income housing, as well as middle income, and, in Whitefish, upper middle income."

² Source: Montana Regional MLS

Commented [KS1]: "Respectful of existing neighborhoods" is too subjective of a statement to put in the mission statement of this chapter. Given that the point of MLUPA is to give the community more of a roadmap as to the type of development allowed, this statement is not concrete enough to merit inclusion in the first paragraph of the document.

Commented [KS2]: This was changed by the housing committee to water down the language. The housing crisis is extreme and ShelterWF's membership tells us this every day.

Commented [KS3]: The definition of "Community Housing" in the footnote contradicts the information in the housing needs assessment. but the housing needs assessment states that half of rentals are affordable to those earning <150% of the area median income, with some of those affordable to 70-80% AMI. The "upper middle income" range goes to 150%. There is some housing being provided for these income groups by the market, so saying these sections are entirely "not being provided" is objectively false and minimizes the shortage of market-rate homes that can serve middle and upper-middle income households.

This Housing Element promotes ~~a diverse housing supply~~ more housing options and preserves the existing housing stock by encouraging a mixture of housing types, ~~maintaining residential neighborhood quality,~~ and providing opportunities to create more affordable home choices for the workers the community relies on. ~~assist in the development of housing available to more economically diverse segments of the population.~~ It will provide a comprehensive analysis of recent statutory requirements and how the city will meet (or is meeting) those requirements.

Commented [KS4]: Centers those who are currently not served by the housing system.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

- 1. Achieve an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of Whitefish’s existing and projected populations as identified in the Housing Element of this document with a priority on permanent affordability.

Placeholder for Goal Description

Objectives

- a. Continue to implement the current 2022 Housing Roadmap.
- b. Continue to review and revise regulations and development standards to reduce barriers to the development of needed housing. Regulatory updates could include:
 - i. Revising zoning districts to allow a larger diversity in housing types and densities throughout the city.
 - ii. Reducing or eliminating minimum lot sizes and setbacks in all residential zones with lot coverage, setbacks, height, massing and floor area ratio requirements ~~to ensure neighborhood compatibility that promotes more efficient use of land.~~
 - iii. Explore new incentives for the Legacy Homes Program, such as reducing or eliminating open space requirements for Legacy Homes projects or when proposed housing developments include deed-restricted housing. Work to expand the program to lots that are already developed. ~~Exploring the reduction of open space requirements as part of the Legacy Homes program or when proposed housing developments are designed for targeted income levels.~~
 - iv. Providing pre-approved building plans for smaller homes that meet requirements for compatibility of different neighborhoods.

Commented [KS5]: Adds back in language from original draft. Eliminating minimum lot sizes is useful in multiple zones throughout the city.

Commented [KS6]: Open space requirements are not the only possible incentive the city can strengthen for the Legacy Homes program. This language clarifies that open space is one example of future policies under the program. It also adds in language about opening up funds from the legacy homes program to existing housing stock.

- c. Mitigate the impact of the short-term rental market on the long-term housing supply through interventions such as:
 - i. Expanded enforcement of existing regulations on short-term rentals.
 - ii. Exploring a limit on the total numbers of permitted short-term rentals.
- d. Support residential infill development by lifting restrictions that prevent the creation of more affordable and dense home choices, with gentle density that complements existing neighborhoods.
 - i. Adopt a form-based zoning code.
 - ii. Review and regularly update the land use plan to ensure an adequate future supply of land designated to housing.
 - iii. Encouraging innovative site planning techniques such as common open spaces, shared driveways, and strategically placed windows and landscaping to mitigate potential impacts on privacy and light.
 - iv. Explore design flexibility associated with zoning and public works standards and design standards, including for small projects.
 - v. Incentivize smaller starter homes on smaller lots by providing a process for innovative development and zoning deviations on small lots.
 - vi. Work with public and private sector housing developers when designing regulations to ensure feasibility.
- e. Track new housing towards meeting the 10-year housing needs, reporting regularly to City Council, Planning Commission and Community Housing committee.

Goal

- 2. Support a range of housing types and prices to fit the needs of ~~a diverse~~ the entire community.

Placeholder for Goal Description

- a. Promote a variety of needed housing types that can provide more housing options to increase density in both new and existing neighborhoods, such as smaller single family homes, duplexes, triplexes, multiplexes, apartments, cottage courts, townhomes, live-work housing, and accessory dwelling units, while respecting existing neighborhood character, acknowledging that every neighborhood will have to contribute to reducing the city's housing shortage.

Commented [KS7]: "respecting neighborhood character" at the end of this paragraph implies that some neighborhoods can remain unchanged to solve Whitefish's housing needs, which is both wrong and pits parts of the city against each other.

- b. Encourage developers to address and account for the housing needs of displaced residents whenever new projects are developed in place of existing housing.
- c. Encourage a diversity of housing types and lot sizes to promote mixed income neighborhoods.
 - i. Support the development of workforce housing serving residents at or below 150 percent area median income.
 - ii. Explore policies to allow the creation of new developments without HOA's, the role of HOAs.
 - iii. Revise definitions or standards to encourage and allow alternative housing options in various districts for local workers such as single-room occupancy developments, boarding houses, dormitories, converted motels or other types of lodging into extended stay housing uses.

Commented [KS8]: This is quite vague. Based on the discussion in the housing committee, this language actually addresses the direction the city should take towards eliminating the de facto mandate that new neighborhoods must form an HOA.

Commented [KS9]: ShelterWF applauds this language. SRO's and dormitories have great potential in housing those on the edge of homelessness.

Goal

3. Support existing property owners in maintaining and preserving housing stock.

Placeholder for Goal Description

- a. Encourage ongoing property maintenance and promote reinvestment and improvements in established neighborhoods by bringing substandard housing and unmaintained properties into compliance with city codes.
- b. Create a technical assistance program to help homeowners navigate repair and accessibility projects and understand available funding and regulatory requirements.
- c. Provide education and resources for grants or low-interest loans for low-to-moderate-income homeowners to make critical repairs and accessibility modifications.
- d. Preserve existing affordable rental housing by providing resources for owners to refinance, maintain units and offer long-term affordability. Explore utilizing current multi-family and naturally affordable rentals to qualify for the Whitefish Legacy Homes Program.

Commented [KS10]: This is a new idea from ShelterWF, but we suggest that if the owner commits to updating buildings without increasing affordability, allowing a certain density bonus to be added to the land. This program would require further discussion but is a great way to utilize our existing housing stock, which contains quite a few naturally affordable rentals that should be protected.

Goal

4. Pursue sustainable financing mechanisms and programs to support the development of Community Housing.

Placeholder for Goal Description

- a. Consider reallocation of resort tax revenues to increase city funding for needed housing.
- b. Seek and sponsor federal grants such as community development block grants to offer funding opportunities to property owners seeking to improve deficient properties to be used for long term rentals.
- c. Analyze ways to streamline application processes.
- d. Ensure funding mechanisms remain relevant and create usable tools to increase Community Housing over time.
- e. Explore alternative ways to increase city revenue allocated to Community Housing such as:
 - i. Eliminating impact fees for new deed-restricted workforce housing.
 - ii. Exploring funding mechanisms to assist with the purchase or construction of workforce homes such as down-payment assistance programs or construction loans.
 - iii. Explore increasing resort tax by **at least** one percent for Community Housing and reallocating existing resort tax funds to Community Housing.
 - iv. Consider whether housing units unoccupied for the majority of the year should qualify and whether this money could be better allocated toward needed housing.
 - iii.f. Ensure that city-owned land, when used for deed-restricted affordable housing, is leveraged to create the maximum number of affordable homes and create a process for these city-supported developments to receive additional zoning variances.

Commented [KS11]: This addition addresses the impact of restrictive zoning and NIMBY sentiment on affordable developments like the Snow Lot, which was significantly revised down in the amount of affordable units provided.

Goal

5. Foster partnerships and communication with local, state and national organizations to plan for future housing needs.

Placeholder for Goal Description

- a. Partner with developers to support the development of Community Housing in the private sector.
- b. Leverage community partners such as Housing Whitefish, Northwest Community Land Trust ("NWCLT"), Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley ("HHFV"), and other developers of affordable housing toward reaching needs. Utilize competitive requests for proposals from both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to find the most effective partners for Community Housing projects who are able to achieve success.
- c. ~~Continue~~ Increase and prioritize valley-wide communication with other jurisdictions on Community Housing progress, programs and collaborative opportunities.
- d. Utilize state-led housing programs which aim to increase Community Housing opportunities.
- ~~d.e.~~ Work to align affordable housing development incentives with other municipalities in Flathead County to ease the burden of development on local nonprofit partners.

Goal

- 6. Ensure new housing development aligns with other goals outlined in the Whitefish Vision 2045.

Placeholder for Goal Description

- a. Promote density in areas near transit and active transportation routes.
- b. Reduce car trips by promoting walkable neighborhoods.
- c. Prioritize infill and compact development within existing city limits where
- d. water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure are already in place or can be efficiently upgraded or expanded.

Commented [KS12]: ShelterWF strongly supports this language.

HOUSING ELEMENT BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL HOUSING CRISIS

The Great Recession of 2008 was caused by unregulated predatory mortgage lending, massive amounts of homeowner debt and a collapse in home prices. This recession resulted in between six to eight million American households losing their homes to foreclosure and being forced into home rentals³. By 2012, the housing market had mostly recovered, with some of the lowest interest rates being recorded just prior to the Covid19 pandemic. When the pandemic occurred (2020), stalled construction, low interest rates, expanded unemployment benefits and work from home options led to a decrease in inventory which drove up home prices. This resulted in more residents renting, with increases in rent costs and rent in many cities outpacing income growth. Millions of Americans now spend more than 30% of their income on housing, with homeownership increasingly out of reach for younger and lower-income households.

OVERVIEW OF MONTANA'S HOUSING CRISIS

Montana's housing prices retained value better than many states during the 2008 financial crisis due to Montana's locational desirability and number of already well-established retirees and empty nesters choosing to move here. However, recent in-migration to Montana has significantly intensified the state's housing crisis by driving up demand in communities already struggling with limited housing supply. This became particularly damaging during the Covid-19 pandemic as remote work, the desire to flee urban centers for mountain communities and lifestyle shifts drew new residents to Montana's scenic towns and rural areas. Home prices surged - greatly outpacing local incomes and pushing longtime residents out of the market.

This perfect storm of heightened demand, constrained supply, high interest rates and workforce wages that could not keep up with increased housing costs deepened housing challenges for local residents and widened the gap between housing availability and need. This is particularly pertinent in Whitefish, where the average home price has tripled to more than one million dollars since 2019 (just prior to the pandemic) but the median household income in 2024 was ~~approximately only just~~ \$71,000.

³ Source: US Government Accountability Office, <https://www.gao.gov/blog/homeownership-duringrecession>

MONTANA LAND USE PLANNING ACT HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

On May 17, 2023, Governor Gianforte signed Senate Bill 382, known as the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA, MCA Title 76-500). MLUPA gives particular attention to housing. It requires a qualifying city to project its anticipated population over the next 20 years, identify and analyze existing and projected housing needs for the projected population and provide regulations that allow for the rehabilitation, improvement, or development of the number of housing units needed. The jurisdiction is required to inventory the existing housing stock, analyze constraints to housing development, and describe what actions are being taken to provide the necessary housing. Progress toward the construction of the housing units identified as needed to meet projected housing needs during the 20-year planning period of the community plan must be documented every five years. In addition, MLUPA offers fourteen strategies to encourage the development of housing, in which a local jurisdiction must meet a minimum of five. This plan element includes a comprehensive discussion as to how the City of Whitefish meets those requirements of the Montana Land Use Planning Act.

VISIONING COMMENTS ON HOUSING

During visioning sessions for this plan, the declining availability of housing, particularly for the local working class, dominated most of the responses. Affordable housing was listed as the top answer to “what do you believe is missing in Whitefish” and affordability was also indicated as the most significant threat to the city. Public sentiment was highly weighted toward a feeling of long-time locals being priced out of their community, not enough housing being built for the median household income, and “wealthy newcomers” recently moving into the city leading to increases in property values and loss of community identity. Ranking nearly as high as home affordability for what participants believed were the biggest threats to Whitefish were second and seasonal home ownership, short term rentals, and resistance to housing projects stopping housing projects - all concerns related to what the participants perceived as contributors to an increasing deficit of affordable housing.

While needed housing⁴ (or lack thereof) was frequently mentioned at many of the visioning exercises and surveys, at the same time there were significant concerns directly related to the impacts of recent rapid growth and the increasing population which could be caused by or even contrary to the need to build more housing. ~~“Small town character” was second only to “walkability” as the top answer to what participants listed as what was~~

⁴ For the purpose of this Housing Element, the term “needed housing” refers to the recommended number and type of housing units needed to support the local residents and employees as indicated by the Whitefish Area Housing Needs Bridge in the 2025 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment.

~~most unique about Whitefish.~~ Terms such as “traffic”, “overdevelopment”, “sprawl”, and “uncontrolled growth” were commonly mentioned negatively throughout the visioning exercises. A very small number of individuals responded that there should be “no new development”, “no density”, “only build single family residential” or to “leave Whitefish exactly as it is.” The community clearly understood the need to accommodate the existing and future citizens of Whitefish. However, the community also feels very passionately that any new housing must be implemented carefully ~~to compliment and not change the character of the city that gives Whitefish its unique sense of place.~~

Commented [KS13]: “Small Town Character” is not antithetical to density and growth. It can be interpreted to mean “no new housing” but it can also be interpreted to represent dense development, cultural signifiers of rural areas, or myriad other nebulous concepts. Including “small town character” in a paragraph about opposition to housing is not an explicit link but an opinion about what the term means.

For those who are scared of being priced out of Whitefish, “small town character” represents a place where people can live and work.

NEED FOR HOUSING

Housing that is attainable and affordable for the local community – for new parents, for the teacher, the service worker, or the senior living on a fixed income wanting to “age in place” - is necessary for economic and business success. The workforce needs stable, affordable housing options. People who live as well as work in a community tend to shop in local stores for their groceries, fuel, and goods, which they are unlikely to do if they live in other communities. The high cost of housing can reduce the number of employees a business can attract, as fewer will reliably commute long distances from larger population centers for service-level wages when they can earn those same wages in their home community. This can result in businesses facing severe staffing shortages and / or reducing their hours of operation and it hurts their ability to hire and retain employees across all wage levels. In addition to economic and business success, the long-term social health of Whitefish depends on maintaining a diverse range of housing options, by type and affordability. Ensuring homes are affordable to residents across the economic spectrum strengthens community resilience, inclusivity, and the shared sense of belonging. It ~~can~~ also adds to traffic congestion as Whitefish workers must increasingly find housing elsewhere in the Flathead Valley and commute by vehicle. While Whitefish has a labor shortage, the more affordable communities of Columbia Falls and Kalispell are within commuting distance. A 2016 Housing Needs Assessment indicated approximately 50% of Whitefish employees commute into the city from other areas. In 2025, this percentage is indicated between 61% and 76%.⁵

Definition of Cost Burdened

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a cost burdened household as that level of income at which housing costs consume more than 30% of gross household income. Housing costs include monthly payment for rent or mortgage (principal and interest) as well as taxes, insurance, and utilities. When housing costs

⁵ Sources: GSBS 2025 Economic Growth Policy Update, 2025 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment ⁶
Source: Montana Department of Commerce, Community Profiles

exceed this threshold, it often becomes difficult for families to afford other essential needs. A low to moderate income household is generally considered a household income between 50% to 80% of the average-area median income (AMI), which in 2024 amounted to \$35,400- \$56,600 for a family of 2⁶ (the average household size in Whitefish). Severe cost burden occurs when more than 50% of income is spent on housing, placing even greater financial strain on individuals and families. The 2025 Housing Needs Assessment estimates approximately 20% of Whitefish owners and 61% of Whitefish renters as cost burdened. This disparity in percentages is likely accounted for by the number of wealthier Whitefish homeowners who can afford to buy, verses those who choose to live in Whitefish and cannot afford to purchase a home being forced to rent instead.

Housing Affordability.

Housing in Whitefish is first mentioned as a potential issue in the 1964 Whitefish Comprehensive Plan, and the 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan reports a severe shortage of housing affordability for the local workforce being an issue since at least the early 1990s. The first Whitefish Montana Comprehensive Plan (1964) reported a median home selling price of \$12,000, with a median household income of approximately \$5,500. The 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan reports the median selling price of a house at that time was \$115,000 and the median household income was \$33,000. In 2007, the time of the previously adopted community plan (growth policy), the median home sales price was \$319,000 with a median household income of \$44,000. The recent 2025 Housing Needs Assessment places the present median sales price of \$1.4 million whereas the median household income is \$71,000. Whereas the 2007 growth policy notes housing is out of reach for many working families, in 2025 housing in Whitefish is beyond the reach of even the upper middle class.

Whitefish Housing Prices and Median Household Income

	Year	Median Sales Price	Median HH Income	
	1964	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 5,500.00	(2.18x)
	1996	\$ 115,000.00	\$ 33,000.00	(3.48x)
	2000	\$ 148,000.00	\$ 33,000.00	(4.48x)
	2007	\$ 319,000.00	\$ 44,000.00	(7.25x)
	2020	\$ 447,000.00	\$ 69,919.00	(6.39x)
	2025	\$ 1,430,000.00	\$ 71,100.00	(20.14x)

Although providing sufficient supply is part of the equation, given the desirability of Whitefish and the cost of land, a successful housing strategy to provide housing for a broader range of income levels must include such measures as addressing the gap between the funding needed to develop and operate a property and the revenue available, often in the form of subsidies to cover construction costs, rents or operating costs.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER, TYPE AND LOCATIONS OF NEEDED HOUSING

During visioning sessions, participants noted Whitefish's "small town character" was what they valued the most about the city, and the term "quaint" was mentioned repeatedly. Although nearly every participant understood the importance of supporting new and denser necessary housing, many had concerns regarding the scale and speed of development and the importance of protecting and retaining existing neighborhoods.

CONTRIBUTORS TO HIGH HOUSING COSTS

1. Market Demand
2. High Value of Short-Term Rentals
3. Interest Rates
4. High Quality of Life
5. General Desirability of Resort Towns
6. Construction Costs
7. Permitting and Engineering
8. Lack of Labor
9. Cost of Land
10. Community Opposition to Housing Projects

11. ~~State Statute Limitations~~

Commented [KS14]: The limited effectiveness of local programs preempted by state law necessitates this removal as it is often used as an excuse.

“Community character” is a term often used to represent the architecture, streetscapes, and natural features of a place, and can also include cultural traditions, social dynamics, and economic patterns. Neighborhoods foster community character by creating shared spaces - like parks, libraries, and local events - that encourage connection and collaboration. Small acts like the ability to greet neighbors, organize block parties, and support local businesses can transform a place into a shared home. However, the term “community character” is sometimes used as a rationale to oppose new housing projects, especially when proposed developments are perceived to disrupt the established aesthetic, scale, or traffic patterns of a neighborhood.

There is a myriad of techniques that can be used to add new housing in a community and / or increase density in a manner that complements and does not detract from existing neighborhood character. One example is “gentle density,” which is a design approach which subtly increases the number of homes or dwellings in a neighborhood by integrating small-scale housing types - like duplexes, triplexes, or accessory dwelling units (ADUs) - into predominantly single-family areas⁶. Design options can also account for existing character. Apartments can be designed to fit into existing residential areas by transitioning height, matching surrounding rooflines, breaking up individual units to keep massing smaller, designing units to only have one exterior door and locating parking at the rear or along the side of the units. They could also be added above existing commercial spaces (i.e. mixed use buildings). Thoughtful design can add needed housing units into established neighborhoods while respecting the character of the area.

Location of Needed Housing

Higher density housing should be in appropriate locations, including areas with good access to public transportation, walkable and bikeable transportation routes, essential services such as schools, grocery stores, recreational facilities, and employment centers. Areas with existing infrastructure can more efficiently support increased population without requiring major upgrades. However, it is important to distribute higher density housing evenly rather than concentrate it all in one area or neighborhood to reduce impacts, promote equitable access to amenities, and not segregate residents by income.

During mapping exercises there were a few locations where participants indicated annexations to develop new greenfield or agricultural land for necessary housing were to be expected. However, most said that higher density should be in areas closer to the core of the city, areas with sufficient infrastructure along the US 93 South Corridor and in mixed use nodes.

HOUSING INVENTORY EXISTING CONDITIONS

⁶ In 2024 the City of Whitefish revised zoning to allow duplexes and accessory dwelling units by right in all residential zone districts.

Housing Diversity

At the time of the previous growth policy in 2007, there were approximately 4,508 housing units in the City of Whitefish⁷, with approximately 80% of the residential units in 2007 being single family detached.

In 2025, there are approximately 5,700 residential units in the City of Whitefish (as identified in the housing inventory table below). 56% of these units are single family detached, and the remaining 44% are apartments, condominiums, single family attached (townhouses), duplexes, mixed use residential and resort residential (multiple self-

contained vacation rentals on the same lot). Please refer to the Location of Housing Types Map to see the distribution of housing units. By comparison, the housing in all of Flathead County includes 67% single family detached with the remaining 33% being other housing types.

There have been approximately 1,237 units constructed since the adoption of the 2007 Growth Policy; in the last decade approximately 100 to 150 units have been constructed every year. According to the recent 2025 Housing Needs Assessment, there are approximately 715 residential units “in the pipeline.” 448 of these are multifamily apartment units, 150 are condos, and the remainder are single family homes or duplexes. As mentioned in the Demographics Element of this community plan, approximately 70% of the housing units in the city are occupied by full-time residents, with the other 30% being seasonal or short-term rentals.

City of Whitefish Housing Inventory ⁸

<i>Total Residential Units</i>	5,700
<i>Single Family Detached</i>	3,185 56%
<i>Multifamily</i>	1,076 19%
<i>Townhouse</i>	542 10%
<i>Duplex</i>	543 10%
<i>Mixed Use</i>	116 2%
<i>Resort Residential Units</i>	238 4%
<i>Deed Restricted Units</i>	336 6%

<i>Number Units Approved or Under Construction</i>	715
<i>Apartments</i>	448 63%

⁷ Source: 2008 Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment

⁸ This housing inventory was based on comparing state, county and city GIS address point data against tax records, existing conditions mapping, aerial maps, and visual confirmation of the presence of housing units.

	Condos	150	21%
	Single Family Residential (including duplex)	117	16%

Units Constructed since 2007 Growth Policy 1,237

The areas of the highest density in the city are located just north of the viaduct surrounding Wisconsin, in the Downtown, and at the furthest extents of the southern city limits. These areas of density can be seen in the Density Map. The oldest residences in the city are located in and around the Downtown core, as could be expected. The more recent residential structures are located at the further extents of the city (see Ages of Residences Map). The average lifespan of a house is between 50 and 60 years. Approximately 35% of housing units in the City of Whitefish were built prior to 1979, representing around 2,000 units that are reaching their expected lifespan.

Zoning

87% of the zoned land in the City of Whitefish is zoned for residential uses-only. Of this residentially-zoned land, 77% allows only single family detached and duplexes. Triplexes and fourplexes are allowed as a 'use by right' in four zoning districts in about 20% of the land. The R-4 zoning district is the only residential zoning district that allows multifamily (up to 18 units) by right'. Multifamily residential is allowed 'by right' in all commercial zoning districts, as dictated by state law. ~~Given the amount of land dedicated only to single family detached and duplexes, consideration could be given to providing a broader diversity or density of housing units in some of these areas.~~ Please refer to the Housing Types by Zoning Map.

Commented [KS15]: This allows NIMBY sentiment to overrule community need.

Workforce Housing Projects

Despite housing being out of reach for many residents, local workers and retirees, there has been success creating housing projects which are income restricted to be affordable to select economic segments of the population. Income restricted housing units represent approximately 5.8% of the total housing inventory in the City of Whitefish, which includes 58 permanently attainable homes for entry level ownership and 278 rental homes or apartments.

Whitefish Community Housing Inventory – Ownership Units

Whitefish Housing Authority 10 Scattered Homes	<80% AMI	Varies	90 years, renewable
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Trailview	48	80-120% AMI	2019-2024	Never
Total Affordable Ownership	58	All less than 120% AMI	-	-

Source: 2025 Housing Needs Assessment

Whitefish Community Housing Inventory – Rental Units

Whitefish Housing Authority BNSF Units	2	<80% AMI	Varies	Never, while WHA owns
Mountain View Manor	50	<40% AMI (senior)	1969-1997	Never, contract with HUD
Colorado Village Apartments	36	<60% AMI	1986	No information available
Whitefish Manor	30	<50-60% AMI	1988	No information available
Stonecreek Apartments	41	<60% AMI (senior)	1992	No information available
Mountain Apartments	30	<50-60% AMI	2001-2002	No information available
Mountain Senior Apartments	30	<50-60% AMI (senior)	2003	Never, per manager
Hailey Apartments	10	<50-60% AMI	2004	Never, per manager
Whitefish Crossing	6	<70% AMI	2017	Never
Riverview Trails	5	<70% AMI	2021	Never
Alpenglow Apartments	38	<60% AMI	2021-2024	Never
Total Rentals	278	All under 80% AMI	-	-

Source: 2025 Housing Needs Assessment

Despite the addition of recent needed housing, Whitefish has experienced a consistent reduction in naturally affordable housing stock across both rental and ownership markets. Older rental units have increasingly been demolished, renovated, or converted into higher-end apartments or condominiums, resulting in rent levels that exceed affordability thresholds for moderate-income households. Similarly, older single-family homes, many located in historic neighborhoods developed between 1910 and 1940, have seen significant price increases due to rising land values and redevelopment activity. These homes often require substantial renovation or replacement, further elevating costs. As a result, housing options that once served first-time buyers and local workers are becoming less accessible.

SHORT TERM RENTALS

A short-term rental (STR) is the rental of an entire furnished, privately owned house, townhouse, condominium unit, apartment, or other dwelling unit - or any portion of a dwelling unit, for stays less than 30 days to transient guests or tourists.

Like traditional lodging, short term rentals within city limits must pay resort tax. Between October 2024 and October 2025, \$479,500 was collected in resort tax from short term rentals, a 28% increase from the previous 12 month period.

As of November, 2025, there are 410 licensed STR units (representing approximately 7% of all housing units) within the City of Whitefish, with two additional permits under review and eight properties in various stages of enforcement. The Whitefish Area (59937 zip code) has 1,220 short-term rentals, according to AirDNA. The number of active STR listings in the Whitefish Area is highly seasonal and has been increasing at an average rate of about 9% per year over the past three years. The number of active STR listings is consistently highest between June and September.

The Whitefish area’s STR listing rates are comparable to similar mountain town communities across the West. While there is no ‘right’ number of short-term units as a percentage of total units, it has been shown through planning and policy studies that evaluate STR impact thresholds that a number around 10% of total units is generally considered manageable. However, each community is different and the number of total STR’s can be influenced by several factors, including the size of the tourism economy, availability of workforce and long-term rental housing, local zoning regulations, and the relative affordability or exclusivity of the community¹⁰.

Community	Short-Term Rentals (2025 Q2)	Total Housing Units	% of Total Units
Jackson, WY	369 5146 7%	Truckee, CA 1218 13964	9%
Ketchum, ID	416 4334 10%	Aspen, CO 698 6107	11%
	1220 8774 14%	McCall, ID 657 4292	15%
Mammoth Lakes, CA	2966	9885	30%

Source: AirDNA and 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Selected Housing Characteristics (Table DP04) (2025 HNA)

STR’s may not be compatible with other residential areas when there are increased traffic and noise impacts, as well as the diminished availability of long-term rental and affordable housing units for the local population. Whitefish first introduced oversight of short-term rentals in 1982 by designating specific “resort” zoning districts where tourist accommodations were permitted. STR’s are permitted only in specific zoning districts, namely WB-3, WRR-1, WRR-2, WRB-1, and WRB-2, within the city limits of Whitefish, as shown in the Housing Types by Zone District Map. When looking at tools to incentivize *additional* needed housing units, it is important to consider whether these types of

¹⁰ 2025 Housing Needs Assessment

incentives should be extended to zoning districts that allow STRs, or how it could be ensured that additional units resulting from incentivization do not become STRs.

DARK HOMES

Roughly one in five housing units (19%) in the City of Whitefish is classified as vacant according to the Census definition of vacancy, which includes housing units used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of these 19% of units (978 units), the majority (77%) are occupied only a portion of the year, often seasonally or for recreational use, but are not occupied by a permanent resident. Seasonal units could be used to house a seasonal workforce, including hospital workers with short term positions, those employed in hospitality-related industries and in some cases construction. 25% of the City of Whitefish resort tax is reallocated back to property owners as tax rebates. The city could consider whether housing units unoccupied for the majority of the year should qualify and whether this money could be better allocated toward needed housing.

Commented [KS16]: This should be included as an objective.

ADOPTED PLANS AND STUDIES

Whitefish's housing strategy has evolved over decades in response to growing affordability challenges and shifting community dynamics. The 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan emphasized balanced development, moderate density, mixed-use development in the downtown core, and alignment of housing expansion with infrastructure capacity. The 2003 Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) highlighted the widening affordability gap and cost burdens among renters and homeowners. The 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy calls for diversified housing types and better coordination of land use and housing strategies. Seasonal and second-home ownership emerged as a persistent pressure point, reducing availability for full-time residents and driving up costs.

Worsening conditions, with home prices outpacing wage growth and rental markets tightening were documented in the 2008 and 2016 Housing Needs Assessments. 65% of the workforce was commuting from neighboring towns due to a lack of affordable housing, vacancy rates were below 2% and most prospective buyers were priced out of the market. Seasonal leasing trends and tourism-driven employment further strained housing access. In response, the 2016 assessment recommended inclusionary zoning, expanded publicprivate partnerships, and targeted programs for households earning between 60% and 120% of AMI.

In response to the 2016 Housing Needs Assessment, a 2017 Strategic Housing Plan was crafted to address the concerns of affordability and workforce displacement in Whitefish. This assessment resulted in the Legacy Homes Program - a program which included a mandatory inclusionary zoning policy⁹ requiring 20% of units in new developments to be deed-restricted for moderate-income households (60–120% AMI), administered by the Whitefish Housing Authority. To offset costs to developers, the Legacy Homes Program

⁹ In 2022 the Montana Legislature outlawed inclusionary zoning

offered incentives like increased building height, reduced lot sizes, reduced parking, and streamlined approvals, alongside zoning changes to promote higher-density, mixed-use development near transit and job centers. The State Legislature outlawed inclusionary zoning in Montana in 2021, so the city shifted its Legacy Homes Program into a voluntary program that provides more robust incentives for 10% of the units deed restricted for affordability. Since this program has been voluntary, % of homes have been deed-restricted for affordability in projects that have taken advantage of the Legacy Homes Program incentives.

A 2022 Housing Needs Assessment update reaffirmed the urgency of Whitefish’s housing crisis, projecting a need for 1,310 new units by 2030, with most priced below market rate. Despite modest wage growth, home prices and rents continued to climb, deepening the affordability gap and sustaining high commuter rates. Short-term rentals were identified as an accelerating threat to year-round housing stability.

In 2022, the Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap was adopted, which was an update of the 2017 Strategic Housing Plan. The roadmap is a five-year strategic guidance tool to address Community Housing needs, specifically methods to supply 1,310 additional units by 2030 with 75% being priced below market. It lays out four core strategy areas—mobilizing public/private development, securing funding, adopting supportive policies (zoning changes, deed restrictions, annexation agreements), and expanding housing programs (tenant protections, homebuyer assistance, employer-assisted housing) – with a newly formed Community Housing Committee appointed by the City Council to oversee its implementation.

2025 Housing Needs Assessment Update

As part of this community plan, a 2025 Housing Needs Assessment was completed to provide an updated forecast of housing demand and affordability challenges through 2035 and was specifically focused on the Whitefish City Limits rather than the entire 59937 area. Whitefish’s population had exceeded 9,100 by the time of the study, with projections anticipating growth to 11,120 by 2035 - an increase of over 20% that will place significant strain on the existing housing stock. The assessment documented continued cost

escalation, with median home prices exceeding one million dollars and rental rates well over \$2,000 for a two-bedroom unit, far outpacing local wage growth. Short-term rentals remained a key factor in reducing long-term housing availability, particularly for year-round residents and workforce households.

The report estimated a need for 930 to 1,500 additional housing units over the next decade. This number is in dispute, with alternative analysis putting this number at between 3,200 and 4,000 units., with Rroughly 75% required to be priced below market

rate to serve households earning between 60% and 120% of AMI. This is likely an impossible goal, as only 7% of units built since 2016 were priced below market rate. The percentage distribution of housing by need is illustrated by the Housing Bridge as shown below. The report finds that although the recommended number and mix of housing units have continued to be built each year (at least 100 units per year), affordability at market rate continues to put housing units out of reach of the majority of the workforce.



Beginning in 2015, businesses began expressing their concerns about the difficulty in finding and retaining employees due to a lack of affordable housing. In response to these concerns, the Montana West Economic Development and Whitefish Chamber of Commerce facilitated an Affordable Workforce Summit. Out of this Summit, the Affordable Workforce Housing Taskforce was formed, composing of a coalition of individuals ranging from business owners, city officials, nonprofits, and concerned citizens.

When the Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap was adopted by the Council in 2022 the Whitefish Community Housing Committee was established as a permanent city committee. The Committee makes recommendations to the City Council to implement the housing strategies in the 2022 Whitefish Housing Roadmap that are the responsibility of the City. Since its formation, the Committee has been working their way through the various strategies and coordinating their research and recommendations with the City Council. Most recently, the Committee is exploring the potential impacts of reducing the minimum lot size in residential zones and provided their input into the creation of this

housing element. The Committee will continue to research and recommend various policy matters to support and encourage Community Housing.

WHITEFISH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH VARIOUS HOUSING AGENCIES

Many organizations and individuals in the Flathead Valley are working to contribute to rebuilding a strong and equitable community housing ecosystem. The systems that impact and influence housing are complex, so making any significant impact requires a broad array of partners working together.

- Whitefish Housing Authority. The Whitefish Housing Authority (WHA) is a quasigovernmental organization that provides housing services on behalf of the City. The organization manages deed and income-restricted units, qualifies tenants and purchasers for managed units, operates housing programs, and coordinates community housing development, among other tasks.
- Housing Whitefish. Housing Whitefish offers programs and projects to assist community members facing housing insecurity. The organization runs programs like the Workforce Rental Assistance Program, which offers rental assistance to income qualified households living and working in the Whitefish area. They aim to prevent displacement and expand housing options for low to moderate income individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity. The organization is also working to develop units that will be affordable for our local workforce to rent or purchase.
- Northwest Montana Community Land Trust. The mission of Northwest Community Land Trust, Inc. (NWMTCCLT) is to provide permanently affordable homeownership opportunities for low- and moderate-income families in Northwest Montana by owning the underlying land and offering the housing units built on the land at more affordable costs. In 2025 NWMTCCLT will add seven homes in Columbia Falls and is working to add homes in Whitefish and Kalispell through various public, private and nonprofit partnerships.
- Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley. Habitat for Humanity's mission is to build decent, affordable homes and provide homeownership opportunities to qualified families who live and work in Flathead County. Over the years, donated land and funding has allowed Habitat of Flathead Valley to continue to purchase lots and build in Whitefish, Columbia Falls, Lakeside, Somers, and Kalispell. Habitat is building approximately 4 homes per year but is developing the capacity to do more.

HOUSING FUNDING PROGRAMS

One of the most critical aspects of addressing housing affordability is ensuring sufficient financing is available to make market rate housing accessible to individuals and families

across all income levels. Bridging the gap between the cost of housing and what residents can afford requires substantial financial resources and innovative funding approaches. Various initiatives and collaborations have been established to tackle this pressing concern. Among these efforts is the formation of committees and partnerships that aim to develop and implement strategies to ensure housing availability and affordability for the community. The city has the ability to partner with some of the agencies or apply for federal funding to offer financial opportunities for the development or renovation of needed housing.

- Montana Board of Housing Programs for Homebuyers. Montana Board of Housing helps make home ownership affordable for home buyers through low-interest mortgages, down payment assistance, various loan programs and the mortgage tax credit program.
- Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) subsidizes the acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income tenants. The federal government issues tax credits to state and territorial governments. State housing agencies then award the credits to private developers of affordable rental housing projects through a competitive process. Developers generally sell the credits to private investors to obtain funding.
- Community Development Block Grant. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program through HUD provides annual grants on a formula basis to states, cities, and counties to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income people. These grants can be used for a variety of purposes, including needed property rehabilitations.
- HOME Investment Partnerships Program. The HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) provides formula grants to states and localities that communities use - often in partnership with local nonprofit groups - to fund a wide range of activities including building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people. It is the largest Federal block grant to state and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households.

RECENT WHITEFISH HOUSING EFFORTS

The City of Whitefish has taken a multifaceted approach to address the growing demand for Community Housing. Through a combination of staffing investments, policy reforms, and regulatory updates, the City continues to work to address housing affordability. The following are some more notable examples. In some cases, the Montana State Legislature has passed measures which have reduced their effectiveness.

Administrative

- More Staffing. In 2024, the City hired a full time short-term rental code-enforcement officer to oversee monitoring of more than 400 short-term rental properties within Whitefish City Limits. In addition to conducting fire and life safety inspections, this staff person also coordinates enforcement actions to ensure each property operates in accordance with city code. Recently, the city partnered with Airbnb to prevent property owners from advertising without a valid short-term rental permit. The creation of this position was recommended in the 2022 Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap. In 2024, the city also hired a Community Resiliency Planner that focuses on Community Housing as well as transportation and sustainability issues.

Policy

- 2022 Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap. As mentioned in the Adopted Plans and Studies Section above, the 2022 Roadmap outlines a partnership framework and range of strategies to drive action to address Community Housing needs in the Whitefish area until 2027. The Roadmap identifies short, mid, and long-term action items and implementation is being implemented by city staff under the oversight of the Whitefish Community Housing Committee.

Regulatory Updates

- Inclusionary Housing. At the recommendation of the 2017 Whitefish Strategic Housing Plan, in 2019 the city adopted an inclusionary zoning program which required proposed housing developments to set aside a certain number of deed restricted units to certain income levels or to pay fees instead. (The City of Bozeman also instituted a similar program.) However, in 2021, the Montana Legislature signed House Bill 259 into law. This bill outlawed mandatory inclusionary zoning and / or fees in lieu of housing statewide. ~~Inclusionary zoning has been successfully used nationwide since it was first introduced in the State of Maryland in 1974. The city should encourage other municipalities, elected representatives and agencies such as the Montana League of Cities and Towns to continue dialogue with legislators for exemptions to the preemptions on inclusionary zoning.~~
- Legacy Homes Program. In 2019 the city created the Legacy Homes Program. Amended in 2021, this is a voluntary incentive-based inclusionary zoning program where a proposed development provides at least 10% of the total number of units within a development for people with specified income level in exchange for certain incentives. Options for providing affordable housing include integrating housing within the development, paying a fee in lieu of housing, developing units off-site, donating

Commented [KS17]: This section should include data about the relative success of the voluntary IZ program in Whitefish, which has been orders of magnitude more successful than the mandatory program ever was.

Commented [KS18]: The weight of economic research suggests that inclusionary zoning is not effective, as the creation of new inclusionary units is offset by developments that cannot meet inclusionary zoning mandates never being built in the first place. We suggest deleting this as it is a claim not backed up by evidence.

land or any other acceptable options. The Whitefish Housing Authority (WHA) guides prospective renters and owners through the application process and determines eligibility for a Legacy Home.

Commented [KS19]: This section should include data about the actual percentages of affordable housing created through the program. It exceeds the 10% floor.

- Accessory Dwelling Units Allowed by Right. An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a secondary, self-contained residential unit located on the same lot as a primary home, often used to expand housing options within existing neighborhoods. In May of 2022, the city revised zoning to allow ADUs by right in every residential zoning district. Shortly afterward, the State passed legislation that required Montana city's to allow ADU's wherever single-family homes are permitted.
- Duplexes Allowed by Right. In January of 2024, Senate Bill 323 went into effect, requiring the City to allow duplexes anywhere that single family homes are allowed. The city updated all of its residential zoning regulations accordingly.
- Parking Reductions. In April 2018, the City Code was updated to require only 1.25 parking spaces for studio and efficiency apartments to encourage smaller multifamily units to be built. ~~However, in 2023, Senate Bill 245 was passed, prohibiting cities from requiring more than one parking space per unit for multifamily developments in commercial zones, rendering much of the city's parking incentive program obsolete.~~
- Annexation Development Agreements. Annexations of land upon request by the property owner(s) for residential development offer an opportunity for new development to include Community Housing through mechanisms such as development agreements. In 2024, an annexation development agreement was agreed upon by a developer requesting to annex property into the city at Hwy 40 and US 93 South. As part of the agreement, the developer offered up 10% of the residential units to be deed restricted to a particular income level in order to receive Legacy Homes incentives for building height.

Commented [KS20]: Given that most of these buildings aren't built on commercially zoned land that SB245 applies to, this is not applicable.

Financing

- Resort Tax Reallocation.

In 1996, the voters of Whitefish approved a 3% "resort tax" that applies to lodging, bars, restaurants, and retail to offset visitor impacts to tax-funded services. This tax is allocated to infrastructure improvements, trails and open space acquisitions and maintenance, tax rebates, with 10% allocated to Community Housing. In 2025 the city collected **XXX** for Community Housing. There is potential to increase the allocation for Community Housing subject to voter approval.

Montana Land Use Planning Act Housing Strategies

MLUPA requires a city to meet a minimum of five of fourteen housing strategies outlined by the State of Montana as described below. The city presently meets six of these strategies (as shown in **bold** letters). Although already taking action to address the need for additional housing units, the city should continue looking for ways to exceed the minimum strategies set forth by MLUPA.

FOURTEEN HOUSING STRATEGY OPTIONS REQUIRED BY MLUPA

1. **Allow, as a permitted use, for at least a duplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted;**
2. **Zone for higher density housing near transit stations, places of employment, higher education facilities, and other appropriate population centers, as determined by the local government;**
3. Eliminate or reduce off-street parking requirements to require no more than one parking space per dwelling unit;
4. **Eliminate impact fees for accessory dwelling units or developments that include multi-unit dwellings or reduce the fees by at least 25%;**
5. **Allow, as a permitted use, for at least one internal or detached accessory dwelling unit on a lot with a single-unit dwelling occupied as a primary residence;**
6. Allow for single-room occupancy developments;
7. Allow, as a permitted use, a triplex or fourplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted;
8. Eliminate minimum lot sizes or reduce the existing minimum lot size required by at least 25%;
9. Eliminate aesthetic, material, shape, bulk, size, floor area, and other massing requirements for multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use developments or remove at least half of those requirements;
10. **Provide for zoning that specifically allows or encourages the development of tiny houses, as defined in Appendix Q of the International Residential Code as it was printed on January 1, 2023;**
11. Eliminate setback requirements or reduce existing setback requirements by at least 25%;
12. Increase building height limits for dwelling units by at least 25%;
13. **Allow multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use development as a permitted use on all lots where office, retail, or commercial are primary permitted uses; or**
14. Allow multi-unit dwellings as a permitted use on all lots where triplexes or fourplexes are permitted uses.

Yellow = Currently adopted by Whitefish

FUTURE HOUSING STRATEGIES

Whitefish has ~~been very proactive~~ taken some steps in its efforts to provide a more diverse housing stock for our residents, but has much to do. This is reflected in the ~~housing inventory,~~ creation of some income-restricted housing, ~~construction of recommended units per year,~~ recent studies and regulatory, policy and financial strategies. ~~Despite these recent successes,~~ An adequate supply of housing for our local population at affordable prices remains daunting. Numerous options still exist to bolster the supply of needed housing for our community.

Commented [KS21]: We disagree with the characterization that Whitefish has been "very proactive" in increasing housing stock. This is why ShelterWF exists.

- Land Use Strategies. As indicated in this housing element, the majority of land zoned for residential allows only single family detached and duplexes. Residential land uses should allow a broader range and distribution of housing types throughout the city, particularly in zoning districts which do not allow short term rentals. More locations and opportunities for adding residential over existing commercial should be identified and encouraged. Zoning and development standards should encourage and support alternative housing types for accommodating seasonal workers who are often young, single, and seeking affordable places to stay. These could include single occupancy developments, dormitories, or other accommodations that employers could offer or subsidize as well as the ability to convert motels or other lodging into extended stay temporary housing uses.

The city is presently meeting six of the fourteen MLUPA required housing strategies, but additional strategies should be implemented. The city should be proactive in meeting as many of the strategies as feasible, and in many cases, should adopt additional strategies beyond those provided by the state. Allowing single room occupancy development and reducing minimum lot sizes are two recommended additional strategies.

- Development Standards Strategies. The city should continue to review zoning and development standards to ensure regulations encourage and do not impede the construction of needed housing. Zoning development standards could be revised to allow more efficient use of land and economize on construction costs by reducing lot sizes and required setbacks as well as open space requirements. Zoning definitions could be revised, such as revising or eliminating definitions that prevent groups of unrelated people from living together in the same residence to encourage alternate housing options.
- Policy Strategies. The city should continue to review, implement and update strategies of the 2022 Housing Roadmap. As recommended in the 2022 Whitefish Community Housing Roadmap, the city should coordinate with other jurisdictions such as Big Sky, Missoula, and Bozeman as well as the Montana League of Cities and Towns to form a coalition to promote, oppose or influence legislation supportive of housing needs (such as revising prohibitions on inclusionary zoning).

- Financial Strategies. The city should be prioritizing new housing units constructed for the local workforce and senior population to remain affordable. There could be additional allocation of resort tax revenue reserved for construction of needed housing. The city could partner with local non-profit organizations to apply for community development block grants under the HUD to provide grants to homeowners seeking to make necessary improvements, upgrades or additional housing units. The city could explore bond measures to provide funding to raise capital to incentivize or subsidize the construction of needed housing units.

SUMMARY

A diverse housing stock is essential for Whitefish to ensure safe and affordable living options for all residents, regardless of income level. This diversity supports a vibrant community by attracting various demographics and promotes economic stability by providing workforce housing. Despite significant success in constructing needed housing, housing affordable to the local population earning the median household income remains scarce. The Vision Whitefish 2045 Future Land Use Map and numerous zoning reforms offer strategies to increase housing availability, such as reducing minimum lot sizes, increasing building height limits, and allowing multi-unit dwellings in various zones. Policy strategies aim to meet more housing requirements and collaborate with other jurisdictions for supportive legislation.

To address the affordability gap, financial strategies prioritize affordability for the local workforce and seniors by utilizing resort tax revenues, partnering with non-profits for grants, and exploring bond measures for funding housing projects. The city's focus is on overcoming barriers to housing through public-private partnerships and aligning with state and federal programs. By implementing these strategies, Whitefish aims to create a more inclusive and economically stable community with diverse housing options that serve all segments of the population.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Elizabeth Pitman <
Sent: Sunday, December 14, 2025 7:40 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Housing Element of Growth Policy

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To Whom it May Concern,

I had a few general questions as we go through this process.

1. How do we continue to support middle class families in this process and provide them housing opportunities?
2. How do we prevent or manage corporations/investors who do not live in our community and do not contribute to our community from monopolizing the housing market?

Thanks for your time,
Elizabeth Pitman

Sent from my iPhone

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Daniel Sidder <daniel@housingwhitefish.org>
Sent: Friday, December 12, 2025 3:49 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Tammy Zamoyski
Subject: Public comments on Housing Element

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Alan,

I want to thank you for your time and patience for leading the city through this challenging process. As you've noted many times, it is unfortunate that there is not more time to have further discussion on these important topics. Below you find my feedback on the Housing Element. I have some high level thoughts and have also tried to provide specifics where applicable. I apologize for not having some of these comments for the Community Housing Committee review earlier this week - I had some unexpected travel.

High-level, I think that the goals and objectives are good. They provide specific objectives while allowing for enough wiggle room for interpretation. One thing that doesn't feel well represented is the need to have a responsive system that can produce the diverse types of housing we desire. To me, more important than and discussion about the *number of units* needed, is the capacity of the *people* (i.e. developers, builders, partners, etc.) to actually produce the desired outcome – homes that everyday people can afford. This is addressed under Goal 5, but I don't think the simply saying "Foster partnerships and communication" goes far enough. I think "Establish and strengthen relationships" is more germane than simply "fostering".

Another high-level comment – the document discusses *where* and what types of housing should be *where*. I'm generally okay with the "gentle density" language and would encourage the city to make it clear that *no neighborhood should experience rapid change, and no neighborhood should be exempt from change*. As it reads, it feels like this document doesn't acknowledge that collectively every neighborhood needs to evolve to meet our housing goals of having a diverse range of attainable homes.

On page 11 there is a list of "Contributors to High Housing Costs". I think this is a mostly comprehensive list, AND I don't think it is in the right order. Specifically, I think that Short Term Rentals should be further down the list. Additionally, "Dark Homes" is not mentioned in this list, even though more housing units are in this category than STRs. If we are talking about the high *costs*, then market demand should be followed by construction costs, lack of competitive labor, and cost of land.

A few additional "quick hits":

1. Missing from the list of Housing Agencies on page 20 is Community Action Partnerships of Northwest Montana. They provide weatherization services as well as Low Income Home Energy Assistance across the Whitefish zip code. I think they need to be acknowledged for the work they do in the community.

2. Under “Recent Efforts” starting on page 22, I think there should be some additions that could be captured as “Programmatically” or “Partnerships”:
 - a. The city has committed funding to Housing Whitefish to for the Workforce Rental Assistance Program. The city has committed \$200,000 in FY26, \$250,000 in FY27, and \$300,000 in FY28.
 - b. The city has committed land to develop townhomes at the “Snowlot”.
 - c. The city has funded the Northwest Montana Community Land Trust’s purchase of land under several homes at Trailview.

My overall takeaway is that this document reads very neutral. I wish it could be more of an aspirational document that provides more detail on future housing strategies, partnerships, and the funding opportunities. The last thing I’ll offer, which goes for the entire Growth Plan, is that this document doesn’t account for when things inevitably go awry. There is no “planning for the unexpected”. I know that is hard to capture, but in my opinion, any plan should acknowledge that things will change and offer an outlet to address this we are not yet aware of.

Best,
Daniel



Daniel Sidder

Executive Director, Housing Whitefish

Phone 406-318-6890

Web www.housingwhitefish.org

Email daniel@housingwhitefish.org

PO Box 4421, Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Wednesday, December 10, 2025 2:47 PM
To: MaryBeth Morand
Subject: RE: Housing Element Posted for Public Comment

Mary Beth,

This is not a problem at all. I will suggest the Planning Commission adopt the language you have written at the December 17, 2025 meeting.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413



From: MaryBeth Morand <director@habitatflathead.org>
Sent: Wednesday, December 10, 2025 1:39 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Re: Housing Element Posted for Public Comment
Importance: High

Hi Alan,

Thank you for sending this my way for comment. I do not agree entirely with the representation of Habitat Flathead in your draft report. It is not our current reality and contradicts my presentation to City Council last week and the subsequent article in the Whitefish Pilot. I suggest the following:

Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley. Habitat for Humanity's mission is to build decent, affordable homes and provide homeownership opportunities to qualified families (30% - 80% of AMI) who live and work in Flathead County. Habitat has built 73 homes to date in Flathead County (Somers, Lakeside, Kalispell, Columbia Falls, and Whitefish). Habitat Flathead currently builds 8 homes a year and is actively developing capacity to build up to 20 homes per year. Habitat Flathead is also co-developing mixed-income neighborhoods with private-sector builders to provide housing options from 30% - 200% of AMI. Currently, Habitat Flathead owns 21+ acres in Kalispell to pilot this mixed-income neighborhood model.

Please feel free to call me if you have any questions about the above. 4 [REDACTED]

Thanks for the correction,
MaryBeth

MaryBeth Morand

Executive Director

Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley

2535 Highway 93 South

Kalispell, MT 59901

office: (406) 257-8800

director@habitatflathead.org • habitatflathead.org

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 9, 2025 4:23 PM
To: MaryBeth Morand <director@habitatflathead.org>
Subject: FW: Housing Element Posted for Public Comment

FYI

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413



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Good afternoon everyone, pray for SNOW, NOT rain!

HOUSING ELEMENT DRAFT POSTED

A Draft Housing Element has been posted for public comment! A preliminary draft of this housing element was prepared by staff over a period of several months using the results of visioning sessions, the 2007 adopted growth policy, approximately 30 community plans from other jurisdictions and recent Whitefish housing needs assessments and studies. When the preliminary draft was completed, staff included the Whitefish Community Housing Committee as an advisory committee in two internal work sessions. At these work sessions, staff and the Committee worked together to arrive at mutually agreed upon housing goals and objectives. Please note - as the second work session with the Committee occurred yesterday (December 9) there are still placeholders (highlighted in yellow) where staff is to draft goal descriptions below each goal, as has already been done with the Transportation Element. These goal descriptions will be highlighted for review at a subsequent Planning Commission meeting or during review of the final compiled document in February.

[YOU CAN VIEW THE DRAFT HOUSING ELEMENT HERE.](#)

A Planning Commission Vision Whitefish 2045 Meeting to discuss the Draft Housing Element has been scheduled for **Wednesday, December 17th at 6PM**. Due to the time constraint to get the entire plan completed by the statutory 2026 deadline, if you have public comment on this draft, please submit it to Alan Tiefenbach at atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov by December 16th and it will be provided directly to the

Planning Commission in their meeting packets. You also have the ability to provide public comment in person during the upcoming meeting.

Thanks for staying involved!

Vision Whitefish 2045 Team

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Shelter WF Revised Community Housing Needs Assessment



Prepared By

Keegan Siebenaler, Executive Director

1. Executive Summary

As required under the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA), the City of Whitefish commissioned a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) that estimates the amount of housing that needs to be built in the city over the next 10 years to meet future population growth demand.

Methodological failures in the HNA have led to a projected future housing need that is far too low, and thus is profoundly inaccurate. Using the same data as the HNA itself, this report finds that the need for new homes in Whitefish over the next 10 years is between 3,230 and 4,044, rather than the 930-1,491 identified in the HNA. **Therefore, the existing Housing Needs Assessment captures only 23% - 46% of actual housing needs over the next 10 years.** Past HNAs conducted in 2017 and 2022 concluded (when viewed retrospectively) that Whitefish has been building enough new homes each year (around 150 units per year) to meet demand, yet home prices in Whitefish have continued to climb dramatically, indicating that the real demand far exceeds this number. The current 2025 HNA states that a significant and unrealistic number of new homes must be built below market-rate, requiring subsidization, to serve the local workforce in Whitefish, but this likely would not be the case if the number of market-rate homes built each year more closely matched the demand for homes, both in number and size. **The improved methodology in this report provides the City of Whitefish with an actual path to housing affordability: allowing for and encouraging the construction of 300 and 400 new homes each year.**

2. Background

The City of Whitefish 2025 Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) is a crucial document in determining future housing needs in Whitefish. The most important quantitative data contained within this report is in Section 5, the Community Housing Needs Estimate¹. This estimate of total housing need is the most important number contained within the report. As part of the Growth Policy process, 76-25-206 (1), MCA states that:

“A local governing body shall identify and analyze existing and projected housing needs for the projected population of the jurisdiction and provide regulations that allow for the rehabilitation, improvement, or development of the number of housing units needed, as identified in the land use plan and future land use map.”

Therefore, correctly projecting the housing needs for the City of Whitefish is of critical importance to the City’s compliance with state law, not to mention the importance of housing to the quality of life of Whitefish residents and workers. Note that MLUPA requires planning for housing growth over a 20-year timeframe, beyond the scope of the HNA. Based on the presentations made by land use consultants CZB, Inc., the resolution to this discrepancy is to double the 10-year figure. Therefore, the consequences of an inaccurate projection are only more important over a 20-year period.

The HNA estimates the 10-year housing need in Figure 1.

¹ City of Whitefish (2025). *2025 Housing Needs Assessment*.
<https://www.cityofwhitefish.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6103/City-of-Whitefish-2025-Housing-Needs-Assessment>

Figure 1: City of Whitefish 10-year Housing Need Estimate 2024-2034²

Item	High	Mid	Low	Notes
New Units Needed Due to Population Change 2024-2035	1,339	957	778	Montana Department of Commerce Population Projections (low, medium and high ranges of growth)
New Units Needed Due to Overcrowding	91	91	91	"Severe Overcrowding" is defined by Census and HUD as homes with more than 1.5 occupants per room. Rooms are defined as the total number of rooms, not just the bedrooms. American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate
Units needed due to existing pent-up demand	61	61	61	Calculated based on a modeled rate informed by community survey responses to the questions "Is there anyone currently staying in your house on a temporary basis because they cannot afford housing or have no other alternatives?" and "Would you or other people in your household like to be living in a different housing situation if they could?"
Total New Units Needed	1,491	1,109	930	
Estimated annual absorption	149	111	93	Calculated over a 10-year period
Rehab Needed Due to Housing Condition	539	539	539	American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate. Replacement rate based on age of housing stock (built before 1970), units without kitchen and plumbing and mobile home units
Total Need	2,030	1,649	1,469	

As shown in Figure 1, the most significant contribution to the city's total housing need is the construction of new units. This number, titled *Total New Units Needed*, ranges between 930 and 1,491 units based on different possible rates of future population growth.

These values, determined based on flawed methodology and assumptions, are much below realistic projections and mislead City staff, council, volunteers, and citizens as to the scale and the solutions to housing in Whitefish.

² City of Whitefish (2025). *2025 Housing Needs Assessment*. Page 40.

3. Methodological Failures in the Assessment

It is, of course, obvious to anyone in the valley that Whitefish is unaffordable to broad swaths of the population. The HNA's finding that the city could *reduce* the amount of new units it approves per year is not only facially inaccurate on first glance, it is in direct contradiction to the economic consensus around causality of the housing price increases in the past decade. The weight of economic research indicates that:

- 1) The primary cause of housing price acceleration over the past decade is due to a chronic shortage of housing supply.³
- 2) Increasing the supply of market-rate housing reduces market rents or slows the increase of rents throughout the region.^{4,5}
- 3) The chains of moves resulting from new supply frees up both sale and rental units down-market, providing affordability to more people than the additional units themselves create.⁶

With this background in mind, evaluating the methodology used to derive the *Total New Units Needed* figure reveals fundamental flaws that miss the primary sources of unmet housing demand in the City of Whitefish.

³ Khater et. al. (2025). *Housing Supply: A Growing Deficit*. Freddie Mac. <https://www.freddiemac.com/research/insight/20210507-housing-supply>

⁴ Been, V., Ellen, I. G., & O'Regan, K. (2025). *Supply Skepticism Revisited*. *Housing Policy Debate*, 35(1), 96–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2024.2418044>

⁵ Phillips et al. (2021). *Research Roundup: The Effect of Market-Rate Development on Neighborhood Rents*. UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5d00z61m>

⁶ Mast, E. (2019). *The Effect of New Market-Rate Housing Construction on the Low-Income Housing Market*. Upjohn Institute. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3426103

Problem 1: Overly Conservative Population Growth Estimates

Over 90% of the *Total New Units Needed* in the existing element are derived from projections of population growth. These population estimates are based on derivations from the 2010-2019 population growth rate in Whitefish (1.6%). There are two major problems with this estimate:

1. The HNA acknowledges that population growth since 2019 is much higher than growth from 2010 to 2019, with an annualized growth rate of 3.9% per year. **Relying on population projections from before pandemic-induced demand for mountain towns like Whitefish will dramatically underestimate population growth.** Given the continued population growth and rental price strength since 2019, a growth rate of 3.9% per year forms the basis for the “high growth” scenario of our revised estimate.
2. Population growth in the City of Whitefish has been limited by restrictive land use and zoning policies. Hundreds of potential units have been denied under the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process over the past 5 years. Additionally, an unknown number of units were not built because of existing limitations on density imposed by various elements of Whitefish City Code. **As such, basing housing demand on existing restrictive land use decisions is circular reasoning, as actual demand for housing gets further and further ahead of supply.** As such, the population growth under a more permissive regulatory environment for supply would be higher than the current rate of population growth. MLUPA essentially requires that cities allow for increased housing density, meaning that Whitefish’s new baseline will allow for more homes to be built by-right, rendering past development patterns somewhat moot in predicting future demand. As such, a more conservative estimate of population growth controlling for Whitefish-specific land use restrictions would be the growth rate of the valley as a whole. This rate has averaged out to around 2% since 2000.⁷ This forms the basis for the “low growth” scenario of our revised estimate.

⁷ US Census Bureau. (2025). *Resident Population in Flathead County, MT*.
<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MTFLAT0POP>

Problem 2: Ignoring Sources of Commuting Housing Demand

Whitefish has the highest rate of in-commuters within the Flathead Valley. The HNA estimates that 61% of workers in Whitefish, around 4,700 workers, commute into Whitefish from outside the ZIP code. Note that 59937 contains sources of population outside of city limits, such as Happy Valley and KM Ranch Road. Therefore, the number of workers commuting into city limits is even higher. Regardless, **the 61% of Whitefish workers commuting represents a significant source of housing demand.** This demand is ignored in the current HNA.

While not every worker would move to Whitefish if the opportunity presented itself, a significant percentage of Whitefish workers would live in Whitefish, and therefore contribute to the demand of housing in the city. To estimate the percentage of the Columbia Falls Housing Needs Study surveyed employers which estimated that 37% of commuters would move to the Columbia Falls area if housing was available⁸. **Applying this to the 4,700 workers commuting to Whitefish results in demand for an additional 1,739 homes.**

Note that this estimate is conservative as it only looks at current commuting demand and not the inevitable increase in commuting demand over the next 10 years.

⁸ City of Columbia Falls (2025). *Housing Needs Study*. Page 34. <https://www.cityofcolumbiafalls.org/media/4131>

4. Shelter WF Revised Estimate of Housing Needs

Including the new estimates of population growth and commuting demand, the number of new homes that the city of Whitefish needs over the next 10 years is between 3,230 and 4,044, which is much higher than the existing estimate of 930-1,491 homes. Therefore, the existing HNA captures only 23% - 46% of actual housing needs over the next 10 years.

Figure 2: ShelterWF 10-year Housing Need Estimate 2024-2034

Item	High Estimate (3.9%)	Low Estimate (2.0%)	Notes
Population Change 2024-2034	4,314	2,690	
New Units Needed Due to Population Change 2024-2034	2,153	1,339	<i>Assumes 2.02 occupants per residence, unchanged from original study</i>
New Units Needed Due to Overcrowding	91	91	<i>Unchanged from original study</i>
Units needed due to existing pent-up demand	61	61	<i>Unchanged from original study</i>
Units needed due to commuting demand	1739	1739	<i>37% of existing commuters</i>
Total New Units Needed 2024-2034	4,044	3,230	
Total New Units Needed Per Year	404	323	
Estimated annual absorption	40.44	32.3	<i>Unchanged from original study</i>
Rehab Needed Due to Housing Condition	539	539	<i>Unchanged from original study</i>
Total Need 2024-2034	4,623	3,801	

This number, while shocking to those operating under the assumptions of the existing estimate of housing needs, is much more realistic in the context of the HNA as a whole. Given the dramatic lack of supply in Whitefish, the rest of the HNA has to make unreasonable assumptions about the types of housing needed for the community's needs to be met. The Housing Bridge represented in Figure 2 of

the HNA shows that 86% of new rental units need to be priced below market-rate through subsidy. **Given that the percentage of rental units priced below market-rate that were added over the past 10 years was 12.2%, the figure of 86% is wholly unrealistic.** Figure 3 compares the percentage of rental units that would require subsidy in the existing HNA and the ShelterWF Revised estimates.

Figure 3: Comparison of Subsidized Unit Need

Item	2016-2024 Development	Existing HNA	High Estimate (3.9%)	Low Estimate (2.0%)	Notes
Total New Units Needed	1,259 units provided	957	4,044	3,230	
Total Rental Units Needed	792 units provided	580	2,548	2,035	<i>Rentals comprise 63% of total units (from original study)</i>
Subsidized Rental Units Needed	97 units provided	499	499	499	<i>Unchanged from original study</i>
Percentage of Rental Units Requiring Subsidy	12.2% provided	86.0%	19.6%	24.5%	

Note that MLUPA requires planning for housing growth over a 20-year timeframe, beyond the scope of the HNA. Based on the presentations made by land use consultants CZB, Inc., the resolution to this discrepancy is to double the 10-year figure. Therefore, the consequences of an inaccurate projection are only more important over a 20-year period. **Over 20 years, the HNA underestimates housing needs by between 3500 and 6200 units.**

5. Conclusions

ShelterWF is confident that our methodology better reflects actual demand for housing in Whitefish. Furthermore, **Whitefish must err on the side of overestimating housing need, not underestimating it.** Underestimating housing needs has severe consequences. In fact, this report reveals that the accelerating trends of displacement, cost spiral, and worker loss in Whitefish are evidence of undersupply in the past. By contrast, if you overestimate housing needs, and zone for more

housing than is eventually needed, the harms are virtually nonexistent. If zoning capacity is too low, the entire city suffers as we underbuild infrastructure in addition to housing. If zoning capacity is too high, then development simply doesn't take place.

The existing HNA highlights that Whitefish has significant need for deed-restricted and subsidized housing. ShelterWF agrees with this, and strongly supports the city and associated nonprofits like Housing Whitefish and the Whitefish Housing Authority in this mission. We must significantly increase funding to affordable housing initiatives and bolster the existing Legacy Homes Program to have a chance of achieving the required 50 units of subsidized rental housing per year. But a significant proportion of subsidized housing units are created through cross-subsidization in projects with mostly market-rate housing. Thus, accurately estimating the high demand for market-rate housing is entirely compatible, and in fact additive, to subsidized housing.

ShelterWF acknowledges that raising this concern, at this time, is not convenient. The housing element of the growth policy has already been drafted, and the land use element of the growth policy is already well underway. But a study that directs our city to *contract* the amount of housing it builds, not expand it, is one that demands further scrutiny. This single number has tremendous power for policymakers when building the land use plan and zoning reforms necessitated under MLUPA.

As the HNA highlights, the city of Whitefish is facing the most severe housing crisis in the Flathead Valley. 61% of all renter-occupied households in Whitefish are cost burdened (above the national average of 50%) with 38% falling into the severely cost burdened category (above the national average of 26.5%).⁹ Truly serving the community of Whitefish and those who are affected by the housing crisis necessitates correcting the faulty assumptions that underlie the Housing Needs Assessment before it is too late.

⁹ City of Whitefish (2025). *2025 Housing Needs Assessment*. Page 27.

Raising Montana’s base teacher pay to meet the actual cost of living, including affordable housing, is essential to strengthening our communities, improving student outcomes, and securing Montana’s long-term economic future.

By Terry Marasco, November 2025

Submitted to the Whitefish Planning Board, the Whitefish Community Council, and the Montana Legislature School Funding Commission (Current)

1. The Community Case: Teachers Build the Character of Montana Towns

Teachers are not just employees of a school district—they are cultural anchors of the community.

When teachers can afford to live where they work, two things reliably happen:

- 1. Stronger family and student relationships.**

Teachers understand local social, cultural, and economic conditions and use that knowledge to reach students more effectively.

- 2. Higher student engagement and connectedness.**

Connectedness is one of the strongest predictors of academic success.

Community identity and cohesion.

In many rural towns, teachers are coaches, mentors, volunteers, and leaders. When they cannot live locally, communities lose part of their identity.

Montana’s affordability crisis is eroding this foundation.

2. The Workforce Case: Montana Cannot Grow Without Educators

Every major industry identified for Montana’s 10–20 year growth depends on a strong education pipeline:

- **Clean energy** needs technicians, electricians, and environmental scientists.
- **Technology and remote work** need software and data talent.
- **Value-added agriculture:** needs ag-tech operators and logistics specialists.
- **Health care and telehealth** need nurses and behavioral health professionals.
- **Mass timber and advanced wood products** need engineers and CAD/CAM staff.
- **Outdoor recreation manufacturing** needs designers and skilled fabricators

None of these industries can expand if the education workforce collapses.

Teachers are the talent engine behind every other sector.

3. The Economic Case: Educators Stabilize Rural Labor Markets

Montana's number one economic threat is **labor shortages**, especially in rural areas. Educators directly influence three pillars of workforce stability:

1. **Labor force participation:**

Strong K–12 outcomes lead to higher wages and long-term workforce engagement.

2. **Family retention:**

Families stay—or leave—based on school quality.

3. **Youth retention:**

Students who experience strong academics and CTE programs are more likely to remain in Montana.

In short, **teachers are an economic development strategy.**

4. The Housing Reality: Current Teacher Pay Does Not Match Montana's Cost of Living

- **Average Montana base teacher salary:** ~\$42,762
- **Average high school teacher salary:** ~\$52,369
- **Entry-level teacher salary:** ~\$38,800

Housing:

- *Typical Montana home price:* ~\$635,000
- *Example:* A \$422,000 mortgage at 6.6% with 10% down produces a payment of **~\$2,700/month**
 - That is **61%** of income for an average high school teacher.
 - **83%** for an entry-level teacher

Rent:

- *Flathead Valley 2-bedroom:* ~\$1,700/month
 - **38%** of income for a high school teacher
 - **52%** for an entry-level teacher

Housing is the largest cost driver and the clearest gap between what teachers earn and what Montana requires for basic living.

5. The Academic Case: Why Higher Pay Improves Achievement

Four mechanisms are well supported in economic and education research:

1. **Recruitment:** Better pay broadens applicant pools and raises instructional quality.
2. **Retention:** Higher pay reduces turnover and preserves experience.
3. **Motivation:** Well-designed compensation systems encourage stronger performance.
4. **Opportunity cost:** If local wages and housing rise faster than teacher pay, quality declines as educators leave for other fields.

Teacher pay is not a symbolic gesture—it is an instructional intervention.

6. Cost of Living Benchmarks

- **Single adult in Montana:** ~\$2,500–\$2,700/month
- **Family of four:** ~\$5,700+/month
- **Healthcare:** ~\$9,081 annually per person
- **Housing:** the dominant affordability pressure for educators

The math is simple: **Current teacher salary structures are misaligned with the actual cost of living.**

7. Recommendation

Support and advance policies that:

1. **Raise base teacher pay to cost-of-living parity statewide**
(not through temporary stipends, but through permanent salary schedule adjustments).
2. **Incentivize local housing solutions for educators**
through partnerships with municipalities, nonprofits, and developers.
3. **Protect rural districts**
through funding formulas that recognize geographic disparities in housing markets.
4. **Stabilize the educator pipeline**
with competitive wages that make teaching a career Montana families can sustain.

Closing

Montana's future economy—from clean energy to healthcare to advanced manufacturing—runs on the strength of the education system. The education system runs on teachers. And teachers cannot sustain the profession if they cannot afford to live in the communities they serve.

Raising teacher pay to meet the actual cost of living is the clearest path to stronger schools, stronger communities, and a stronger Montana economy.

Michelle Howke

From: McCann <skibigmountain@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 22, 2026 6:34 AM
To: Michelle Howke
Subject: Re: public comment

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Good Morning Michelle,
Please forward this email letter to our Mayor and our City Council.
Thank you,
Paul McCann

January 22, 2026

Dear Mayor and City Council,

Last Tuesday's workshop before the city council meeting was very informative. Thank you for allowing the meeting and Alan Tiefenbach review of Vision Whitefish 2045.

During the meeting, one very concerning explanation by Alan is the rate of our population growth. I am concerned that the projected population increase for the Growth Policy does not reflect recent growth statistics, as reflected in the most recent Montana Department of Commerce report. Whitefish's population is currently growing by less than 1% per year. The Montana Department of Commerce's projections for Whitefish over the next 10 years are substantially lower than the projections Alan used. Alan explained that the state's Whitefish growth projections do not include second-home ownership, which accounts for nearly 30% of Whitefish. Alan stated that the projection had been substantially increased from his first projection and that the new rate of projection was "hot!"

I just do not understand why the projection is so hot. Please pay close attention to this projection. I feel the projection should not be hot. This projection serves as the very foundation for our land-use plan.

Thank you for all your hard work in making our Whitefish community a great place to live.

Paul McCann
██████████ Somers Ave.
Whitefish

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Subject: Transportation, Wisconsin Avenue

From: "Jon L. Heberling"

<jheberling@mcgarveylaw.com>

Date: 12/1/2025 8:58 AM

To: "Jon L. Heberling" <jheberling@mcgarveylaw.com>

Add to Transportation chapter, page 25, [REDACTED] Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan:

The Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan, page 3-10 states: "traffic in the corridor is increasing at an annual growth rate of 3.9% and will continue to increase." The 3.9% growth rate is based on data from 2011-2015. A new calculation should be done based on data through 2024. Information on annual increases in ski days should also be included. Winter Sports Inc. on Big Mountain has currently 878 housing units sold, with an additional 644 units planned and approved by the County. The traffic effects on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor from all sources should be estimated out to 2045.

The Corridor Plan, page 3-10 states: "by the year 2030 several intersections and road segments along Wisconsin Avenue will experience unacceptable levels of congestion and delay." The "several" is four out of seven intersections along Wisconsin Avenue, with projected levels of service at D or F by 2030, page 2-17. The level of service for all intersections and segments along Wisconsin Avenue should be projected out to 2045.

The Corridor Plan, page 3-10 states: "the current right of way along Wisconsin is typically 60 feet." Widening the right of way to about 95 feet would be necessary to make Wisconsin into a 3 lane highway, page 3-13. This would require extensive condemnation of private property by the state, which would be expensive. At present, there is no plan to make Wisconsin Avenue into a 3 lane highway.

The Corridor Plan, page 2-18, states: "Big Mountain Road provides the only general access for Whitefish Mountain Resort, as well as the many residential subdivisions on Big Mountain. Allowances for secondary emergency access, mainly egress, are in place and should

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, November 25, 2025 9:24 AM
To: McCann; Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: RE: public comment

Hi Paul,

Thank you for your comments. I have copied Long Range Planner Tiefenbach. He will distribute your letter to the Planning Commission.

Happy Thanksgiving!

[Michelle Howke](#)
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: McCann
Sent: Monday, November 24, 2025 8:35 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: public comment

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Good Morning, Michelle,
Please distribute the following comment for our December 3rd. Planning Commission Community Development meeting.
Thank you,

Paul

November 24, 2025

During the Public Comment at the November 19th Planning Commission Community Development meeting, I was directed to submit a written public comment.

My comment flows from our Downtown Historic Neighborhood's concern about maintaining street parking in front of our homes, due to the many new ADUs, which continue to increase demand for on-street parking, and our downtown users, who are consuming an ever-increasing number of neighborhood parking spaces. With our recent Montana Legislature changes to increase building heights and density, demand for our limited neighborhood parking spaces will increase substantially. Additionally, our neighborhood's street parking is cut in half during our snow removal months.

I ask the board to insert the following wording on page 5, paragraph k, Goal 2 of the VISION WHITEFISH 2024: Transportation Element, "k. Explore opportunities to improve connectivity in existing neighborhoods without widening existing streets" ADD: or materially reducing on-street parking spaces on any streets in our downtown neighborhoods.

I appreciate your consideration.

Paul McCann
[REDACTED] Somers Ave.

It has come to my attention that there is a discussion tonight regarding the Transportation plan. It has also come to my attention that there are people in the community who are trying to kill the ability to use mixed use developments. Decades ago, mixed use developments were normal. Little businesses sprung up in neighborhoods, increasing a sense of community and offering neighbors local shopping, restaurants and businesses. If one goes to larger communities and even older communities in the states and abroad, mixed-use developments create walkability, less traffic and a greater sense of community. Those communities that allow mixed use neighborhoods understand that these neighborhoods offer a lot of benefits to communities as a whole.

As it relates to transportation it gives people the opportunity to walk to places within their neighborhoods without having to get in a car and drive to some “homogenized box store development.” It also relieves congestion in downtown areas.

Mixed-use development also offers economic opportunities to small businesses that can't afford retail spaces on main street. I know there are people who think that only businesses who are main street should be allowed. In my opinion this is very short-sited and possibly even selfish. As far as transportation is concerned, by only allowing businesses in a small area creates not only traffic problems but also parking problems. Because of what has been allowed to happen in downtown Whitefish by people who are selfish and short-sighted, I no longer frequent downtown. Except for a few businesses downtown that make an effort to take care of locals, most downtown businesses only seem to care about tourists and as far as I am concerned, I will shed no tears, nor miss those businesses when they go out of business.

Sincerely,

Velvet Phillips-Sullivan

**Reynolds Cameron
Whitefish, MT 59937**

November 17, 2025

City of Whitefish Community Development Board
Attn: Vision Whitefish 2045 Work Session
P.O. Box 158 Whitefish, MT 59937

Re: Public Comment on Draft Transportation Element - Need for Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Planning

Dear Board Members and Staff,

I am commenting on the October 29, 2025 Draft Transportation Element. As a Whitefish resident with a background in business and technology- including work in DaimlerChrysler's Informatics and Autonomous Vehicles research group- I believe the draft overlooks a major factor that will influence Whitefish well before 2045: autonomous vehicles (AVs), including privately owned AVs and emerging robotaxi fleets, as well as personal humanoid robots. I know how this sounds to many people, but please consider the facts, to future-proof Whitefish from costly, but predictable retrofits in the future.

Fully autonomous services from Waymo, Cruise, and Tesla are already operating at scale in major U.S. cities and expanding each year. Regardless of opinions about this technology, AVs will inevitably influence traffic patterns, winter mobility, tourism logistics, and land-use decisions. A 20-year plan should anticipate these impacts. Elon Musk says that within 5-7 years, Tesla's Optimus Robots will be able to do everything from picking up a grain of sand with chopsticks, to playing Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata, to carrying said piano on its hands and feet, with four Optimus assistant robots to the Big Mountain summit. All at an unthinkable cost of ~\$30,000 each.

1 Transportation & Congestion

Whitefish consistently faces congestion during tourist seasons, and especially on powder days, school pickup, and along Highway 93 through Spokane Ave, 2nd Ave, Baker Ave, the Viaduct, and Big Mountain Road.

AVs offer practical advantages, especially in winter:

- safer operation on snow and ice through sensor-guided controls;
- routing that automatically avoids choke points;
- reduced school traffic when automated vehicles handle drop-offs;
- less pressure on downtown parking with more point-to-point trips.

Preparing for these changes now gives us more control over future seasonal congestion.

- cheaper, more efficient, more convenient, more comfortable, and safer than expensive 20th century transit technology like busses and rail: less empty vehicles clogging and polluting roads that transit must endure to provide convenient service; no bloated salary, benefits, and pension obligations to fund; less risk to users of crime that is ubiquitous on public transit in America; quicker trips without the hassle of walking blocks to a bus stop in pouring rain or -40°F temps, etc. These AVs can be partly or entirely privately-owned without depreciation risk of Whitefish owning a fleet of \$1M+ transit vehicles.

2 Infrastructure Readiness

This is not a call for expensive "smart city" systems. Instead, a few low-cost, future-proofing steps will prevent expensive retrofits later:

- well-designed pickup/drop-off areas Downtown and at Whitefish Mountain Resort;
- clear curb-management standards for automated loading;
- consistent, high-visibility lane markings and signage that support both human drivers and AV systems, especially in winter conditions;
- optional long-term easements for limited V2I sensors if needed;
- subdivision standards acknowledging increased EV charging demand;
- roadway designs that preserve-not mandate-the option for future AV-friendly lanes.

These modest preparations improve safety and long-term flexibility.

3 Housing & Land Use

Land use speculation around AVs often focuses on parking reduction, but this efficiency is only realized under specific conditions. AVs do not eliminate the need for parking unless they are summoned from shared, off-site holding or charging lots. If a privately owned AV returns to its owner's residence after dropping them off, the need for a garage and driveway remains exactly the same. Furthermore, the ability for families or joint owners to share one vehicle-a highly probable use case for AVs-further necessitates accessible off-site waiting facilities.

For AVs to actually enhance land-use efficiency by reducing parking demand, the community may wish to plan for and zone dedicated, high-density AV charging/waiting lots in near vicinity to neighborhoods and activity centers. Without these local holding areas, AVs will not improve parking efficiency.

I am not advocating for or against reducing parking requirements. The point is simply that AV adoption introduces uncertainty, and good planning should acknowledge the prerequisites for realizing efficiency gains without predetermining policy outcomes. In fact, mandated parking minimums become potentially more important, as street charging lacks infrastructure and is problematic during heavy snowplow usage, without dedicated charging lots.

Furthermore, as planning extends to 2045, we must consider the potential, albeit distant, effects of robot automation on the workforce commute. If for \$30,000, you can buy a robot to load the dishwasher, do the laundry, mow the lawn, take out the trash, and clean grandpa's diaper, would you buy it? How many service industry jobs will be performed by robots, instead of "workforce housing" beneficiaries? As humanoid robots become mass-market products over the next decade, potentially costing less than a new car, this means the reduction in human-driven vehicle trips required for both residential and business labor will decrease, significantly reducing overall peak-time traffic demand from service workers. This potential shift impacts the long-term need for workforce transportation infrastructure and potentially influences regional housing demand patterns.

If off-site waiting/charging lots become common and/or automated service work reduces commute traffic, potential effects include:

- changes in on-site parking demand (context-dependent, not guaranteed);
- more flexibility for infill without overloading neighborhood streets;
- better viability for outlying neighborhoods;
- growth patterns that avoid pushing development into our cherished timberlands.

Planning for flexibility respects resident choice while avoiding premature zoning shifts. None of these likely developments diminishes a need to consider increasing density with infill and adjacent development. In fact, as robots are increasingly our form of "social interaction", humans may increasingly crave the chance for random interactions with other humans in their neighborhoods. What better way to foster this, than to encourage walkable neighborhoods? Increasing density from R-2 to R-4 in central neighborhoods, if designed right, can enhance quality of life while more efficiently utilizing existing water, sewer, utilities, and roads infrastructure.

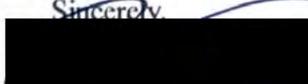
Conclusion

The Vision Whitefish 2045 documents should include a concise, practical section on autonomous vehicles-free of ideology and mandates-simply recognizing that AV technology and broader automation trends will shape transportation and land use well within this planning horizon.

A short AV appendix or set of planning principles would make the plan more resilient. I am available to assist further if needed.

Thank you for your time and effort.

Sincerely,



Reynolds Cameron
Whitefish, MT

Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Thursday, November 13, 2025 3:22 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor
Subject: Growth Policy - Transportation Element

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Attn: Chair and members of the Community Development Board

In reviewing the draft Transportation element, I noticed that there are no objectives that promote accessibility or mobility. The narrative and Goal 1 discusses the need to accommodate populations with mobility issues but there are no objectives to support this concept. There was a public comment submitted that suggested that the transportation element include an objective on accessibility. Staff's response was that since this is an objective of the Transportation Plan (2022), it is not necessary to repeat the objective in the Growth Policy.

I have several concerns with this approach.

- There are many objectives in the Growth Policy that are also part of the Transportation Plan. It is important to reiterate important concepts to demonstrate their importance to the community.
- In reviewing development proposals, staff reports rely primarily on the Growth Policy to evaluate a project. It is critical to have accessibility objectives in the Growth Policy so this important transportation feature is not overlooked in the review process.
- The public should not have to cross reference multiple documents to determine the city's priorities for transportation. If accessibility is a priority, it should be mentioned up-front as an objective in the growth policy so the public can find it.
- I have experience in grant writing and it is common for grant and funding applications to reference city objectives to support their applications. Some grant reviewers, however, will rank projects lower if they feel the objectives are outdated. The Transportation Plan is almost 4-years old. The Growth Policy will be adopted in 2026 and accessibility objectives will be regarded more favorably if they are include in a current document.

For these reasons, I urge the Community development board to add an objective under Goal 1 that specifically mentions mobility and accessibility for people of all ages and ability.

Thank you for consideration of my comments.

Kate McMahon

Heart of Whitefish Suggestions

Transportation Element of Growth Policy 11/5/25

Page 2



Add: Goal 1. Objective e. Vehicular Speed limits should be reduced throughout the community. Reducing speeds improves safety, mobility and comfort. This is a recommendation from each of the recent Transportation Plans.

2022 Transportation Plan pages 14, 19, & page 24

2025 Safe Streets for All pages 38-40, 66 & 70

2018 Downtown Business District Master Plan

Add: Goal 1, Objective f. Adopt a Traffic-Calming Program as recommended in Safe Streets For All page 66.

Page 4

Goal 2. Add new Objective a. Reduce vehicle speeds throughout community.

Objective f. Continue to prioritize additional east-west arterial and/or collector street connectivity throughout the city road network, especially from Pine Avenue (high school area) to Spokane Avenue and between major parallel north-south arterials such as Monegan Road, Whitefish Avenue, Baker Avenue, and Karrow Avenue incorporating Complete Streets strategies and reduced vehicular speeds.

Objective g. Plan for through, continuous streets to the greatest extent possible, incorporating Complete Streets strategies and reduced vehicular speeds.

Objective j. Protect residential neighborhoods by designing the road network to minimize the incursion of commercial and transient traffic into residential neighborhoods, and by incorporating Complete Streets strategies and reduced vehicular speeds.

Page 5

Goal 3. Recognize the transportation - land use relationship and associated impacts and encourage infill and compact ~~mixed-use~~ development patterns over development which results in inefficient or excessive transportation infrastructure requirements.

The city should prioritize compact, ~~mixed-use~~ and infill development in appropriate areas already served by adequate infrastructure by placing residential, commercial, schools and

job creating uses within close proximity ~~and encouraging the integration of residential and commercial uses.~~

Existing and future land uses should steer infrastructure planning. ~~Investments in transportation infrastructure should be made to stimulate desired development patterns.~~ ~~and~~ Transportation related impacts on surrounding land uses should be identified and/or mitigated where feasible.

Page 6

Objective f. ~~Prioritize mixed-use land use patterns.~~ Encourage and enable the development of housing, jobs, and services in close proximity to one ~~another in proximity to jobs and services~~ to prevent sprawl and encourage infill development.

Objective h. Transportation infrastructure should be prioritized in areas that are ideally located for ~~“affordable/attainable” higher density~~ housing.

Objective i. Determine appropriate design treatments ~~to incorporate traffic calming strategies~~ ~~, reduce vehicular speeds, traffic calming strategies~~ and traffic noise in residential neighborhoods and mixed-use residential areas before a major road capacity improvement project is initiated.

- Objective l. Review roadway improvement plans to ensure the desired design character of the area, as defined by ~~Complete Streets Program~~ and zoning designations, is not adversely impacted.

Objective p. Continue evaluating parking management programs for downtown Whitefish to increase availability of customer parking, provide more available employee parking in designated areas, reduce impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods, and to potentially generate revenue for downtown improvements, new public ~~parking structures~~, parking lots, and/or public transit.

Page 9

The Land Use Transportation Relationship

The relationship between land use and transportation is a fundamental concept in urban planning, shaping how communities grow and function. Land use decisions directly impact transportation needs, influence traffic patterns, infrastructure development, and accessibility. ~~Conversely, investment in transportation infrastructure can stimulate desirable and appropriate incremental development in areas that are not otherwise accessible.~~ A land use plan should steer the transportation plan and associated infrastructure and not the other way around so that growth occurs in a concurrent manner.

Page 23

2025 Whitefish Safe Streets for All Action Plan: The Safe Streets for All Action Plan identifies the most significant multimodal transportation safety concerns in the community and suggests implementation steps and strategies. Solutions mostly involve **vehicle speed reduction**, better pedestrian crossings, signage, future transit stops, sidewalk completion and a pedestrian – bicycle crossing across Spokane Avenue to the Whitefish River Trail in the vicinity of East 6th and East 7th Streets.

Page 26

SUMMARY

The city should continue to improve connectivity and encourage compact, infill **and mixed-use** development for more efficient transportation infrastructure,



November 5, 2025
Whitefish Planning Commission,

Citizens for a Better Flathead submitted comments on the Whitefish Transportation Chapter in October. In addition to these comments, we'd like to share our support of Heart of Whitefish's comprehensive comments and those of Richard Hildner. Both sets of input are representative of the community we represent and, thus, we encourage you to strongly consider and implement them. We also share the concerns raised by the Columbia Ave. residents and want to know where the source of this recommendation for the change of road classification comes from.

In addition, we noticed that this chapter does not include the referenced, adopted reports in its appendices nor does it imply that the reports will be adopted as part of an appendix. We believe it has been the City's practice to date to adopt such plans as incorporated into and part of the Whitefish Growth Policy. We want to make sure that this practice is being carried forward.

Finally, we believe that a concurrency approach to growth should be consistent and comprehensive throughout this growth policy, any future developments and city planning in general. We cannot "put the cart before the horse" and risk overwhelmed infrastructure resulting in community strain. Concurrent growth is integral not only to keeping Whitefish the community residents enjoy today but, also keeping growth responsible and appropriate.

Thank you for your efforts and consideration of our comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Cameron Dexter
Director of Policy & Planning
Citizens for a Better Flathead

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Monday, November 3, 2025 8:19 AM
To: 'Cathy Watkins'
Subject: RE: Parking on Columbia Avenue

Hi Cathy, thanks for the email.

There are no discussions regarding completely banning parking on Columbia. We only had a temporary ban for the Halloween event.

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413



From: Cathy Watkins

Sent: Saturday, November 1, 2025 7:49 PM

To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>

Subject: Parking on Columbia Avenue

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I fully support pedestrian and bike friendly infrastructure in Whitefish. Living on Columbia Avenue I am witness to all the vitality of the community where young and old share and enjoy the richness of the neighborhood. On special occasions, such as Halloween, I also support a limited ban on parking and closure of the street to allow our treaters to fully enjoy the fun and spirit of the holiday safely. All of Whitefish knows that Columbia Avenue is a "main drag" for treaters. I personally had 1,584 trick or treaters this year not including accompanying parents.

I do not, however, support a permanent ban on parking on Columbia Avenue. Most of our homes are bungalows with limited personal parking as it is. Banning street parking will pose a burden to residents and to our visitors. Columbia is already busy and eliminating parking and reinforcing it as a thoroughfare will not improve safety but will increase speeds, congestion, and hazards for both pedestrians and bikers. I strongly encourage the city to investigate other alternatives to address congestion and improve safety while maintaining the integrity of our neighborhoods.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Cathy Watkins

█ Columbia Avenue

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Whitefish Youth <whitefish.youth.social@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 28, 2025 12:42 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: City hall meeting

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Hi Allen,

We had our first meeting on Monday and it went well. We should be able to present our opinions at the meeting wednesday november 5th. Our current plan for meetings is the first and second monday of each month so i don't think the current plan of meeting with the city staff on the second monday of each month will work for us. You previously requested that before we come to the meetings we would email you our ideas ahead of time. So here's our main focus coming out of the first meeting.

These items we supported but wanted to expand their implementation.

--Our group additionally found that wherever bicycle lanes are mentioned in the land use plan instead they should be instead independent cycle tracks(to be expanded upon in our next meeting)

-- our group supported development of mixed use zoning laws in whitefish(where and stipulations associated with them to be expanded upon in our next meeting)

-- largely supported the ideas of paid parking on central avenue with periods of no payments (needed to be expanded upon next meeting).

-- supported the idea of collaborating with public transportation between c-falls, kalispell, whitefish. However wanted this idea to be expanded with an outline for potential light rail systems between the 3 and glacier airport. We supported the idea of funding this system partly through parking meters placed downtown. Additioanlly supported potential expansion of mountain climber bus system funding in the meantime (to be expanded next meeting)

-- supported idea of a roundabout for entrance into big mountain, and wanted to expand potential spots for roundabouts. edgewood, and wisconsin viaduct crossing roundabout. (potential for a roundabout somewhere on columbia near the 7th st intersection. will research next meeting if that idea is feasible)

The following items are things we theoretically supported but were not written clearly in the development plan

- support infill development(as far as we were aware most methods of supporting infill development is illegal in montana)
- clarification on desired design character with regards to zoning and street classifications.

The following ideas are things we were firmly against

- we saw unanimous opposition for a second viaduct crossing on east second street. As a group even those of us who lived on edgewood found that that project would be far more expensive than the perceived benefit. As an alternative we suggested collaborating with flathead county for a potential second edgewood connection to viaduct road further up the road to avoid rail backups from the train station
- we saw unanimous opposition to any widening of wisconsin, and us highway 93. (additionally underconsideration for next meeting is collaboration of msdot and potential shrinking of us highway 93 earlier to increase safety of making turns in that area.)

Other than these sections we agreed with all other plans of action on the proposed draft. We are mostly looking for those two items that we theoretically supported but felt they needed more expansion.

Thank you,

Avery Sorensen

MEMO

To: Whitefish Community Development Board

From: Kate McMahon

Date: 10-27-25

Re: Whitefish Growth Policy – Transportation Element

The purpose of this memo is to submit comments on the Growth Policy “Transportation Element” draft currently under review by the Community Development Board. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

1. Goal 3 – Policy F

Please consider the following edits to broaden the scope to include a range of environmental practices rather than limit it to just the ones listed.

f. Road design and construction should consider environmental impacts and sensitive areas by encouraging **practices such as minimizing land disturbance, using recycled materials and eco-friendly** surface treatments, **and adopting** erosion control measures, stormwater control practices, and vegetation management.

2. Goal 1 – Policy G

I strongly support the policy to prioritize completion of the Whitefish River Trail along with all policies to support active transportation, mobility, and accessibility for all.

3. Whitefish Airport (pg. 13)

There are several places in the section on the Whitefish Airport where it is referred to as an airstrip. For matters of consistency, and to reduce any confusion, it should be referred to as an “Airport” throughout the section.

Additionally, it should be clarified that major expansions to the airport include any new construction of buildings or structures. (See edits below)

“Any major future expansion of the airport facilities, such as paving the runway, **construction of buildings** or adding lighting for nighttime landings, should evaluate the potential impacts as well as the full range of mitigation options related to airport operations.”

This section should also note that the Whitefish Airport is used by DNRC as a staging area for helicopters and airplanes fighting wildland fires in the area. (See attached photos from September 2025) It is important that any development at the airport not interfere with this public safety aspect.



5. Goal 3: Objective J

While this objective encourages MDT to study potential impacts from airport operations, it is unlikely MDT will undertake such a study, and the objective does not provide any direction on actually mitigating impacts from proposed developments at the airport. Consider adding the following objective.

“Any development of buildings or other facilities at the airport should be for the public benefit, should not interfere with public safety operations at the airport and should mitigate adverse impacts related to airport operations.”

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Cameron Dexter <cameron@flatheadcitizens.org>
Sent: Friday, October 17, 2025 3:01 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; Michelle Howke
Subject: WF Transportation Element Comments
Attachments: CBF Comments _ WF Transportation Element.docx.pdf

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Alan,

Please see our comments attached for the WF transportation element. When I transferred it to a google doc to add in our comments, the page format got a little messed up— but all should be there. Thanks! Happy Friday!

Cameron Dexter, J.D.
Director of Planning and Policy
Citizens for a Better Flathead
137 South Main Street
Kalispell, MT. 59901

Flatheadcitizens.org

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CITIZENS FOR A BETTER FLATHEAD

Being a Multimodal Community

“We champion alternatives to private automobile use. We will be a connected, walkable community and will prioritize a safe, efficient, and convenient transportation system for all modes of travel. We place equal emphasis on non-motorized and motorized forms of transportation while considering associated impacts on land use and existing transportation infrastructure”.

INTRODUCTION

A well-designed transportation system is the backbone of a thriving community. It shapes how people move, interact, and access essential services and community amenities. By integrating various modes of mobility, a cohesive transportation network can reduce congestion, lower environmental impact, promote healthier lifestyles and improve accessibility for all communities. A well-designed transportation system also enhances safety, ensuring accessible routes for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Of all the impacts growth can have on a community, the one most often cited is traffic. Increases in traffic volumes, traffic congestion, speed, noise, air pollution and difficulty finding parking spaces are issues many people raise when talking about growth in their communities. Children’s safety walking or cycling is a big concern, and increased traffic overtaking neighborhood streets and intersections can frustrate residents.

Many of Whitefish’s traditional neighborhoods are compact and walkable, as they were laid out before the widespread distribution of the automobile. As the city continues to grow, much of the new development has occurred southward along US Highway 93 South and other extents of the city limits - further away from schools, the downtown, and amenities. This has led to more road infrastructure, less walkability and increased automobile usage. Connected compact infill development should be prioritized, positioning residential, institutional and commercial areas closer together to reverse this trend. This will reduce dependence on single-occupancy vehicles, promote transit ridership, and encourage active transportation modes like walking and biking. By integrating diverse uses into compact areas and providing better pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between these uses, a more efficient alternative transportation network will result, reducing traffic congestion and supporting environmentally sustainable growth.

While many residents still choose to drive for most daily trips, demand for infrastructure supporting non-motorized modes of travel is growing. In addition, a growing percentage of the Whitefish population is aging. Mobility is an issue for older or disabled residents

who are no longer able to drive but still need to access services around the city. Automobiles will likely remain an integral part of the community over the next twenty years, but thoughtful planning should prioritize diverse and sustainable alternative transportation and mobility options as well.

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

1. Continue to develop a safe, balanced, and well-integrated multimodal transportation system that provides easy access to priority community locations including stores, banks, schools, neighborhoods, pathways, trails, and river access and gives equal preference to and enhances mobility for all modes of transportation.

During visioning sessions for Vision Whitefish 2045, the top response regarding how citizens saw Whitefish in twenty years was that Whitefish should be a multimodal community. This means placing equal emphasis on all modes of transport including walking, biking, accessibility for those with mobility-challenges, transit, rail for goods or passengers as well as automobiles. However, safety and convenience for pedestrians and bicyclists is compromised in areas by lack of sidewalks and pathways, with safe ~~routes to~~ routes to schools being voiced as a particularly high priority. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan incorporates the multimodal recommendations of previous plans (including the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan) into its transportation projects. The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan builds on this plan with additional recommended improvements for enhanced bicycle and pedestrian safety. Frequent reviews and updates of these plans should occur to continue to improve all forms of mobility and guide future transportation infrastructure.

Objectives

- a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to support non-motorized active transportation through planning and capital improvements. [The city shall seek ways to reduce its carbon footprint through efficiencies in the transportations system. \(2007 WF Growth Policy, p. 136\).](#)
- b. Continue to implement the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan (or future revisions adopted hereafter) when reviewing future transportation improvements or projects.
- c. At least every five years, review road network and active transportation network project priorities of the 2022 Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan and amend if necessary.

- d. Conduct periodic resident transportation surveys to identify travel trends over time and track progress toward meeting mode share goals.
- e. Develop prioritization criteria to continue the construction of missing sidewalk and trail links throughout the City, with those providing safe routes to school, connectivity to other city trail systems, downtown access and along arterial and major collector streets being the highest priority.
- f. Whenever feasible, traffic-separated multi-use pathways are the preferred active transportation option.
- g. Prioritize connection of fragmented sections of the Whitefish River Trail and trails linking to it.
- h. As East Edgewood Drive borders the city limits to the north, and spans between the city limits near Texas Avenue and East Second Street, the city should work with Flathead County to improve active transportation options and provide connections to existing paths and sidewalks that **enhance and preserve the character of the neighborhood**.
- i. Adopt an official complete streets policy which considers and balances the needs of all transportation users, rather than prioritizing a specific mode. Commit to developing transportation projects that address the needs of all transportation users.
- j. Continue to support federal funding that will keep Amtrak passenger service operating in Montana.

Goal

2. Develop and maintain a transportation network that provides multiple reliable route options between key destinations to improve connectivity.

“Connectivity” refers to how effectively different routes, streets, or modes of transportation are linked together to allow smooth, direct, and efficient movement of people and goods. High connectivity means there are multiple, accessible routes between destinations, which aids in dispersing traffic, providing multiple options to key destinations, increasing evacuation routes, reducing travel times, and easing congestion. Secondary access to and from areas with limited connectivity has been one of the most commonly mentioned transportation challenges in Whitefish, with additional grade-separated railroad crossings and emergency egresses mentioned

as critical. During planning for enhanced connectivity, it is imperative to be cognizant of how new routes or transportation infrastructure impact existing neighborhoods.

Objectives

- a. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for a second grade-separated railroad crossing.
- b. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for alternative access to Birch Point Drive and across the railroad yard separating north and south Whitefish.
- c. Pursue and prioritize options and public access easements and funding mechanisms for [typo]
- d. Road improvements for reliable alternate access and egress from the Big Mountain area and discourage new ~~significant~~ development which relies on Haskill Basin Road as presently developed for secondary emergency access. *New development of roadways and transportation networks should reflect and preserve the character of the neighborhood.*
- e. Plan for through, continuous streets to the greatest extent possible. When cul-de-sacs are necessary due to ownership, topography, or other constraints, ensure a future street extension can be made via a right-of-way dedication, public access easements, or at the very least, a pedestrian connection.
- f. Continue to explore options for future road extensions to better disperse vehicular traffic across the transportation network, providing different route options to key locations and reducing congestion.
- g. Protect residential neighborhoods by designing the road network to minimize the incursion of commercial and transient traffic into residential neighborhoods.
- h. Explore opportunities to improve connectivity in existing neighborhoods without widening existing streets.
- i. Coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions, Flathead County, and MDT toward construction of multi-use pathways between Columbia Falls and Kalispell.
- j. *The community shall encourage sustainability in all aspects of the transportation system so that the needs of the present are met, while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities. (2007 WF Growth Policy, p. 136).*
- k. *Transportation infrastructures should be prioritized in areas that can and have*

the potential to support affordable housing over more affluent areas.

Goal

3. Recognize the transportation - land use relationship and associated impacts and encourage infill and mixed-use development patterns over development which results in inefficient or excessive transportation infrastructure requirements.

draft

Transportation decisions can have significant impacts on land use by encouraging expansion and providing accessibility to previously inaccessible places. Likewise, land use decisions directly impact transportation needs, influencing traffic patterns, affecting environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife corridors, creating parking issues and necessitating additional infrastructure. The city should prioritize compact, mixed use and infill development in appropriate areas already served by adequate infrastructure, placing residential, commercial, schools and job creating uses within close proximity. This reduces driving and associated emissions, economizes existing infrastructure, and promotes alternative forms of mobility. Existing and future land uses should steer infrastructure planning, and transportation related impacts on surrounding land uses should be identified and / or mitigated where feasible. Existing and future land uses should be determined and built in concurrence with infrastructure.

Objectives

- a. Ensure future development is served by appropriate street classifications, particularly in residential neighborhoods.
- b. Evaluate existing street classifications to determine if updates are necessary to accommodate or be more compatible with existing or future land use.
- c. Prioritize mixed-use land use patterns. Encourage and enable the development of housing, jobs, and services in close proximity to one another to prevent “sprawl” and encourage infill development.
- d. Encourage infill development in order to avoid costly extensions of transportation facilities and to minimize travel distances.
- e. Determine appropriate design treatments to reduce noise in residential neighborhoods and mixed-use residential areas before a major capacity improvement project is initiated.
- f. Road design and construction should consider environmental impacts and sensitive areas by encouraging eco-friendly surface treatments, erosion control measures, stormwater control practices, and vegetation management.
- g. Consider impacts to wildlife habitat in road design and adopt measures to reduce collisions.
- h. Review roadway improvement plans to ensure the desired design character of the area, as defined by zoning designations, is not adversely impacted.

- i. Consider a study in the area surrounding the Whitefish Airport to determine future needs and restrictions of development in close proximity to the airport. ~~if there needs to be a distance in which “buyer beware” plat notes would be required with new subdivision proposals or whether there should be additional height restrictions within a particular distance from the runway zone.~~
- j. Encourage the State of Montana to facilitate a study of potential local impacts related to future airport expansion and a full range of mitigation options.
- k. Continue to pursue a BNSF quiet crossing at Birch Point Drive.
- l. Continue evaluating parking management programs for downtown Whitefish to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking, provide more available employee parking in designated areas, reduce impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods, ~~and create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit.~~
REPLACE WITH: “Pursue the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan recommendations for increasing pedestrian-friendly retail parking facilities including a second parking structure and parking lots.”
 - **Note: The community does not support paid parking in the downtown area. This is evidenced by the adoption of the Economic Development revisions on pages 14 and 17. Instead, it is suggested that the language from the Economic Chapter Draft Staff Response be added instead (above).**
- m. The City shall make the provision of sidewalks, pathways, and other non-motorized transportation facilities part of a concurrency program and policy.

Goal

- 4. The City should explore improved public commuter transit, both in the city, and inter-city, through support of the expansion of existing systems, agreements with Flathead County and surrounding jurisdictions and support for new transit systems.

Transit provides transportation for those who cannot or choose not to drive or do not want to contribute to congestion or carbon emissions. Although there are some limited public transit options in Whitefish, there could be better coordination between these transit providers. A small local punctual bus system in the city could greatly reduce dependence on vehicles and improve traffic and parking downtown and should be studied. The city should proactively work with transit agencies, surrounding jurisdictions and the State for a regional transit network with the Flathead Valley and to explore solutions to make public transit funded, more efficient, comfortable and reliable.

- b. Using HUD ProHousing grant money, study the feasibility and financing options for local commuter transit, and provide opportunities for equitable transit oriented development
- c. Improve coordination between S.N.O.W. Bus and Mountain Climber and identify funding sources to provide improved services to increase transit ridership locally and regionally.
- d. Explore development of new public transit service from Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA) to and from Whitefish.
- e. [As public transit becomes more available and coordination more frequent,](#) facilitate more efficient and reliable transit use by implementing intelligent transportation system (ITS) solutions such as electronic fare payment and automatic vehicle location (AVL) technology to communicate real-time location of buses through smartphone applications.
- f. Improve equity for underserved populations by [providing English as a Second Language \(ESL\) services and](#) enhancing ADA accessible public transit and non-motorized transportation options to improve access to employment, quality of life destinations and affordable housing.
- g. Collaborate with partners throughout Flathead County to achieve an integrated and efficient regional transit system. Leverage transit to connect workers, residents, and visitors to businesses and tourist destinations.

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT BACKGROUND

Numerous transportation related plans and studies have been completed for Whitefish, including the recent 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. As such, this transportation element is not intended to duplicate the information, work programs or policies already established. This plan element will present a snapshot of the existing transportation system, discuss existing issues and the transportation- related comments received during visioning sessions. Existing plans will be summarized and consideration given to how these plans integrate with each other. General goals and objectives address the transportation system to serve the existing and projected population.

THE LAND USE TRANSPORTATION RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between land use and transportation is a fundamental concept in urban planning, shaping how communities grow and function. Land use decisions directly impact transportation needs, influence traffic patterns, infrastructure development, and accessibility. A land use plan should steer the transportation plan and associated infrastructure and not the other way around, [so that growth happens in a concurrent manner](#). When the land use - transportation connection is not managed properly and new road infrastructure makes undeveloped land more accessible, development often follows. New development can then change travel demand, forcing additional infrastructure to manage the new demand, impacting the city and taxpayers.

COMPLETE STREETS

Complete streets are streets that are designed, built, and operated to accommodate safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. The City of Whitefish strives to design its streets to serve the needs of all users, and the engineering standards used by the city include complete streets components. Nonetheless, a formal complete streets policy does not yet exist. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan recommends the city continue to incorporate complete streets concepts into the project planning, programming, and implementation processes. In addition, the plan recommends the city continue to advance toward the development and adoption of a formal complete streets policy. Adopting a formal policy would formalize the city's future commitment and may require changes to zoning and design standards to ensure new facilities are constructed in a way to accommodate all users and enhance safety, mobility, and equity within the community.

AN INTEGRATED MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Multimodality is highly valued by the Whitefish community. Accordingly, the Whitefish transportation system is an integrated system which connects various modes of travel - walking, biking, options for mobility devices for the physically challenged, public transit,

ride-share, personal vehicles and the transport of goods and services - into a unified network that prioritizes efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability. This interconnected system is being continuously improved to accommodate equitable access for people of all ages and abilities. The Whitefish transportation system is comprised of the road network, active transportation network, transit, rail and air transportation. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan should be consulted for details regarding transportation improvements and is incorporated as part of this community plan by reference.

The Road Network

Like most communities, Whitefish has what is known as a functional street classification system that designates city streets as arterials, collectors, or local streets. Functional classification helps determine speed limits, roadway design, funding priorities, where to steer growth and development, and ensures streets will not be overbuilt or underbuilt for their intended purpose. When the existing and future functional classification of streets is a known quantity, informed land use decisions that do not overburden existing streets can be made. Safety and the ability of a street to carry the expected volume of traffic must remain primary concerns. See the Street Classifications Map.

- Arterials serve the most intensive land uses with the highest speeds and uninterrupted trips. These would include commercial centers, office/business parks or complexes, and large-scale multi-family residential. Arterials are the major traffic movers across a city or town. There are approximately 9.5 miles of arterial roads in the City of Whitefish. US Highway 93 South, US Highway 93 West, Wisconsin Avenue, Spokane Avenue, Baker Avenue and East 2nd Street are considered the arterials within the Whitefish city limits.
- Collectors distribute traffic between arterials and local streets and are designed for lower traffic speeds and shorter distances than arterials. Some commercial uses and multifamily residential [areas](#) take direct access from collectors. There are approximately 10 miles of collectors within the city limits. Some of the collectors in Whitefish include Edgewood, Karrow Avenue, Central Avenue, Columbia Avenue, and Dakota Avenue.
- Local Streets primarily provide direct access to a land use - a single-family home for example. A local street might also be called a “neighborhood street”. Residential access is taken directly from it, and through traffic is (or should be) discouraged. Local streets are the majority of the street network in the City of Whitefish, comprising approximately 70 miles, with alleys providing an additional seven-and-a-half miles.

Roadways in the study area are maintained by different agencies. Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) maintains US Highways such as Highway 93 and Highway 40, as well as Wisconsin Avenue/Big Mountain Road which is classified as a State Secondary Highway. Flathead County maintains all other public roads not within the city limits. The remaining public roads in the city are maintained by the City of Whitefish.

The Active Transportation Network

Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered travel - such as walking, biking, or using a wheelchair. An active transportation network - comprising sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails - is essential for creating sustainable, healthy, and inclusive communities. To be most effective, active transportation routes should connect to key places such as schools, parks, neighborhoods, and shopping areas. By prioritizing infrastructure for walking, cycling, and other forms of active mobility, including those with impaired accessibility, Whitefish can reduce traffic congestion, lower carbon emissions, encourage healthier lifestyles, and provide mobility options for all age groups, including those who do not own or cannot operate motor vehicles.

For a relatively small Montana town, Whitefish has an impressive network of shared-use paths for pedestrians and bicyclists. These paths range from ten-foot wide asphalt paths adjacent to the Whitefish River to five-foot wide sidewalks along recently reconstructed City streets. The city has a pedestrian and bicycle path advisory committee which provides advice and recommendations to decision makers related to the development of the active transportation network based on the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Proposed projects and improvements from this plan have been incorporated into the transportation projects of the 2022 Transportation Plan (indicated on the Active Transportation Map).

Types of active transportation routes in Whitefish are as follows:

- Sidewalks are paved paths for pedestrians that run alongside a road or street. There are approximately 41 miles of sidewalk in Whitefish.
- Bike Lanes are designated lanes within a portion of the roadway typically including striping, signage, and other pavement markings noting the space for cyclists. There are approximately two miles of bike lanes throughout Whitefish.
- Shared Use Pathways are typically paved pathways separate from the road right-of-way that do not allow motorized vehicles. There are approximately 24 miles of shared use pathways in Whitefish with the Whitefish River Trail being a notable example.

- Cycle Tracks are dedicated paths designed specifically for bicycle uses, that are within the roadway but physically separated from vehicular traffic with barriers such as bollards or curbs. A cycle track exists along Skyles Place east of City Beach connecting to a shared use path at Dakota Avenue.
- Recreational Trails, although non-motorized, are intended more for active recreation rather than transportation purposes. The Whitefish Trail, designed for hiking, biking, and horseback riding, is an example of a recreational trail.

Public Transit

Public transit provides some limited transportation options for those who do not want to contribute to congestion or carbon emissions, or for other reasons choose not to drive, who cannot afford to own a vehicle, those with disabilities or those who are too young or too old to drive. A robust transit network could serve to provide efficient car-free mobility throughout the city as well as between the cities in the Flathead Valley. Transit options in Whitefish are currently limited to the Mountain Climber (operated by Flathead County) and the S.N.O.W. Bus (operated by the Big Mountain Commercial Association (BMCA)).

- Shuttle Network of Whitefish (S.N.O.W.) Bus: The Shuttle Network of Whitefish (S.N.O.W. Bus) is a free fixed route service which serves eight stops from the Mountain Mall at the south side of the city to Whitefish Mountain Resort. The service is operated by the Big Mountain Commercial Association (BMCA) and is privately funded by their members as well as a small amount of funding from the city. The bus presently runs morning to evening from December to April and May to September.

Over 100,000 riders used the S.N.O.W. bus in Winter 2024/25. The bus is frequently at rider capacity, and additional hours are offered on select weekends and events to help meet demand.

The last summer count was approximately 12,000 riders in 2019. Recent surveys show more frequent service, especially in the summer, as the top request. Riders also request more coverage [out](#) of town, such as further south on Hwy 93, west on 2nd Street, and runs to Columbia Falls and Kalispell. Increased funding will be needed to increase service hours and routes.

- Mountain Climber: The Mountain Climber is the public transportation provider in Flathead County, operated by Flathead County, and provides the following routes/services:

- o Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls on-demand
- o Whitefish & Columbia Falls Commuter
- o S.P.A.R.K. Route (afterschool program for elementary school children operated by The Summit Medical Fitness Center in Kalispell)

Mountain Climber works with BMCA to coordinate and augment service with the S.N.O.W. Bus in both the winter and summer seasons. BMCA had also facilitated a grant that allowed Mountain Climber to provide on-demand Saturday service during the 2021/2022 ski season in Whitefish.

The City of Whitefish contributes \$9,300 annually to Mountain Climber to support public transportation. Several years earlier, Whitefish worked with Mountain Climber and other stakeholders to create a new transportation hub at the north side of the library east of Deport Park, which includes a shelter, to allow for transfers between buses, intercity service, and Amtrak. It has been mentioned by some that parking lot redesigns could be considered to improve flow of vehicles and transit at this hub. Discussions have also focused on transit-based solutions to traffic and parking congestion, mobility and affordable housing for workers, as well as visitor management. Some options include expanded commuter service between the cities, connectivity with the airport and Park & Ride routes/stops.

Mountain Climber annual ridership has more than doubled since 2000 and has steadily been increasing. Due to the population influx, Mountain Climber's ability to fulfill requested rides is starting to become an issue. Funding continues to be a major barrier to creating and implementing transit-based solutions to pressing concerns, including traffic and parking congestion (especially during the summer season), worker mobility and economic development/sustainability, affordable housing, an aging population, access to health care and high-volume visitor management.

Timely commuter transit options are lacking throughout the Flathead Valley. Greater coordination is needed both within the City of Whitefish but also across Flathead County to provide a transit system which is more logically structured to existing and potential future transit system demands. It is critical that transit planning and funding be approached jointly by the ~~cities~~ ~~eities~~, the County, and the business community to ensure a coordinated, integrated, and sufficiently funded system. Due to the compact nature of Whitefish combined with large numbers of visitors during busy seasons, Whitefish can and should be a leader in developing a robust intra-city public transit network. This could be a first step to achieving greater collaboration and buy-in throughout the county.

Air Transportation

- Whitefish Airport: Whitefish has a 2,560 foot long turf runway on the far east end of town adjacent to Armory Park. It has existed in this location since 1963 and is owned and controlled by the State of Montana Department of Aeronautics. Most of the airport is within unincorporated Flathead County, with only a small western portion beyond the runway within the city accessed through the Hugh Rogers Dog Park. There are no ~~hanger~~ hangar facilities, but there is a windsock and a small grass-covered aircraft parking area near the runway with tiedowns. This airstrip is a “visual runway” intended solely for operation of aircraft using visual approach procedures with no instrument designation during daytime only operations. The airport is rated for ~~propeller~~ propeller planes of less than 12,500 pounds maximum takeoff weight.

Although the air strip is surrounded by low density agricultural land on three sides, there is an increasing number of residences developing at moderate density to the west and south. This has led to an acceleration of complaints regarding aircraft activity and associated noise. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) considers 65 decibels to be the threshold to which aircraft noise is considered to be incompatible with residential uses, and either discourages or recommends additional building code standards beyond this threshold. However, this 65 decibel limit is an average over a 24-hour period, which would be negligible for the air strip given the small number of planes and daytime only operation.

Other potential impacts associated with this airport could include risks to adjacent structures, emergency landings, fire safety, and glare associated with lighting. Any major future expansion of the airport facilities, such as paving the runway or adding lighting for night time landings, should evaluate the potential impacts as well as the full range of mitigation options related to airport operations. This would require coordination with both the State of Montana and Flathead County. There could also be consideration of a zoning “aircraft influence zone” within a particular radius of this facility with additional standards such as limits on building and tree heights and other safety hazards in runway protection zones and requirements for “buyer beware” plat notes for future subdivisions.

The flight patterns of aircraft from Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA) often fly over the area in which the Whitefish airstrip is located. The airstrip is occasionally used for hosting skydiving/parachute activity in and above the immediate area, which can pose safety risks. The overlap of these aviation uses from both the arriving and departing traffic at GPIA and the general aviation uses from the Whitefish Airport in uncontrolled airspace is important for all aviation users to be aware of.

- Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA): Glacier Park International Airport, while not located within the city limits of Whitefish, drives significant economic, social, and tourism activity within the city of Whitefish and the greater Flathead Valley area. In 2016 MDT completed a study estimating the economic benefit of GPIA to the local community at over \$228 million dollars. Since that time, traffic at GPIA has grown 103%, further increasing the economic benefit to the surrounding community.

The airport serves major commercial airlines and links Flathead Valley to much of the US and beyond through nine hubs as well as direct flights. The airport also serves local and general aviation needs such as medical response, military flights and search and rescue operations. GPIA has recently experienced strong growth in both flight operations and passenger traffic. Aircraft operations increased 38% between 2014 and 2024 and in 2024 GPIA ~~reached~~ reached an all-time high of 501,000 passenger boardings. When counting boarding and deplaning passengers, GPIA had over one million passengers utilize the airport in 2024. In 2026, the airport will complete a five-year \$165 million terminal renovation and expansion project which is part of a larger \$360 million 10-year (2021-2030) capital improvement plan. GPIA forecasts strong continued growth with additional air carriers, destinations, and terminal expansion over the next decade.

GPIA is tasked by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) with ensuring compatible land use around the airport for the protection and benefit of the traveling public and the community. Incompatible land uses in close proximity to an airport include residences, hospitals and other noise sensitive uses, uses that attract large gatherings of people under approach or departure paths, uses that create visual obstructions (i.e. glare, smoke), facilities that attract wildlife (particularly birds), or structures that interfere with navigational aids. With Whitefish being located more than seven miles from GPIA and not directly within the approach or departure paths, it is unlikely there are land uses in Whitefish that would be incompatible with GPIA unless features that interfere with navigation aids are developed or expansions to the Whitefish airstrip occur.

Rail

Whitefish is served by Amtrak passenger rail and is located along the Empire Builder which starts in Chicago and terminates in either Seattle or Portland. There are two passenger trains daily, one in the morning heading eastbound and one in the evening heading westbound. The train station is located at the north end of downtown Whitefish in the historic Whitefish Depot. In fiscal year 2024, the Whitefish Station had the greatest ridership in Montana at 46,400 followed by East Glacier (10,601) and Havre (8,816). This is 20,107 less riders since the 2007 Growth Policy was adopted and, while an increase

since the covid pandemic, there has been an overall decline in ridership since a peak in 2008.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway operates the rail freight service that passes through Whitefish. BNSF has 260 employees based in Whitefish and 34-38 trains per day go through the city. In 2024, BNSF freight trains mostly transported consumer products, agricultural products and mixed merchandise.

As noted in the Economic Development chapter, it is important to explore opportunities for a future rail spur to allow for the ability to better utilize the rail line for shipping and receiving large freight items locally.

The City has three 'at-grade' crossings at E 2nd Street, State Park Road and Birch Point Drive and one roadway viaduct over the Whitefish railyard at Baker/Wisconsin Avenue. Since the 2007 Growth Policy, the City and BNSF developed quiet crossings (a zone at least 1/2 mile long in which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded when trains are approaching crossings) at State Park Road and East 2nd Street. The City continues to explore a quiet crossing at Birch Point Drive and a grade-separated crossing at East 2nd Street. In 2025, the City commenced a railroad crossing study to analyze the existing crossings and identify projects along the railroad corridor that could improve traffic flows, mitigate the physical barrier created by the rail corridor and eliminate the risk of future highway-rail grade crossing accidents/incidents.

VISIONING COMMENTS ON TRANSPORTATION

Traffic and accessibility are often the issues most recognized and understood by the community, as excessive congestion or lack of connectivity is obvious and affects everyday life. During visioning sessions for this plan, seventy-five percent of map comments regarding what could be improved directly related to transportation, either motorized or active. Two issues were mentioned most frequently. The first was the need for a second grade-separated railroad crossing. The second was the necessity to complete links in the active transportation network, particularly missing connections along the Whitefish River Trail, with completing a connection north of River's Edge Park being mentioned the most.

Other transportation related comments related to better pedestrian crossings, missing or inadequate sidewalks, lack of public transit, better intersection control (lights or roundabouts), and requests for a downtown bypass. Nearly all of these comments are already addressed in the 2022 Transportation Plan or 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan, (as will be described below), although many improvements have yet to be completed. There were several requests to close roads to through-traffic, but this is unlikely to occur as the city is reluctant to reduce road connectivity and route options.

There were several transportation-related visioning suggestions involving Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) owned and maintained roadways. One example included improvements at the Spokane Avenue Bridge involving removing the river culverts to allow safer passage of watercraft under the bridge (particularly during high water) and modifying the bridge or providing a shared use path underneath and around it to complete a gap in the Whitefish River Trail. Another common request was for development of a downtown bypass (described in the challenges below). MDT currently lacks funding for the implementation of these concepts but has noted they welcome further discussion in the future.

TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES IN THE PLANNING AREA

There has been a myriad of transportation plans and studies completed by the city, Flathead County, and the Montana Department of Transportation (see the Adopted Transportation Plans Section below). These projects have involved extensive background analysis and citizen participation through such methods as online surveys, listening sessions, mapping exercises, visioning sessions and comments received at public meetings. Although not the only transportation challenges, the following have been repeatedly identified as longstanding significant issues:

- Gaps in the Active Transportation Network: Whitefish is a community that prioritizes walkability and places non-motorized transportation equally or above automobile access. During visioning sessions, many comments about the active transportation network related to completing the Whitefish River Trail from City Beach to Smith Fields, with completion of the section between the Pine Lodge Motel and River's Edge Park being the second most requested active transportation improvement. The city is diligently working toward completion of these links, particularly the acquisition of easements.

Other frequently mentioned non-motorized transportation improvements include safe walking routes to and from Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School, completing pathways along East Edgewood Drive from Texas Avenue to East Second Street, pathways along all of Armory Road, along Voerman and Monegan Roads and continuing to complete missing sidewalks throughout the city. All sections of Armory, Monegan and Voerman Roads within the city limits are planned for non-motorized improvements in the short term. As East Edgewood Drive borders the city limits to the north and runs between the city limits near Texas Avenue and East Second Street, the city could work with Flathead County to annex this section to improve active transportation routes. There are several plans focusing specifically on active transportation connections throughout Whitefish, particularly to and from the schools. These include the 2025 Safe Streets for All Action Plan, the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, 2013 Parks and Recreation Master Plan and

2011 Whitefish Safe Routes to School Improvement Plan. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan considered the recommendations of all previous plans and compiled a map of existing and potential active transportation routes (see Active Transportation Network Map). Using various criteria such as usage, safety, congestion reduction and connectivity, the 2022 Transportation Plan ranked non-motorized projects by priority. The top ten of these rankings include the highest ranking non-motorized projects identified during visioning for Vision Whitefish 2045, specifically, completing sections along the Whitefish River Trail.

The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan (SS4A) builds on the 2022 Transportation Plan by analyzing existing and proposed active transportation routes in certain walkable areas for safety concerns and making additional improvement recommendations such as crosswalks, pedestrian timers and signage. The general areas of recommended SS4A improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Network Map.

- Lack of Regional Active Transportation Connectivity: Active transportation connectivity between Whitefish, surrounding jurisdictions and Flathead County was frequently mentioned by participants during visioning sessions. At present, outside of the city limits, MT Highway 40, US Highway 93 and surrounding Flathead County roads such as East Edgewood Drive and Voerman Road have limited active transportation routes other than wider shoulders along some of the roadways. Demand for infrastructure that supports safe non-motorized modes of travel is growing (both for transportation and recreational purposes) and this trend is expected to continue. Whitefish should proactively work with other surrounding jurisdictions, MDT and any other non-profits or agencies toward a regional bicycle and pedestrian plan and associated funding opportunities¹.
- Grade Separated Rail Crossings: The BNSF railroad tracks separate Whitefish into southern and northern halves and the Baker Avenue / Wisconsin Avenue Viaduct is the only grade separated road crossing over the tracks. This route is commonly congested for southbound traffic, and alternate routes are occasionally obstructed by trains or require lengthy travel along unpaved mountain roads or to the east toward Columbia Falls. A second grade-separated crossing is listed as a potential solution in the 2022 Transportation Plan and was the most mentioned recommended city improvement during visioning sessions. The city is presently working with BNSF and the Federal Railroad Administration through a federal grant to identify crossing designs that could improve safety and reduce at-grade crossings.

¹¹ The Flathead County Trails Plan requires community groups and other organizations being required to show monetary commitment for new trail development and the maintenance of those trails in perpetuity before the County approves the development of any new County trails.

- US Highway 93: State-maintained US Highway 93 provides the primary access through the City of Whitefish and is a principal route connecting the United States and Canada. US Highway 93 produces the highest traffic speeds and volumes, the most conflict points, the majority of the most congested intersections, and seven of the ten most dangerous intersections in Whitefish. Bike lanes and pedestrian connections are lacking. This corridor has been extensively studied. Recommendations for improvements include additional lanes, better intersection control, consolidating access points, connecting parking lots to reduce access points, improved signal timing, landscaping and median improvements to reduce two-way left turn lanes and bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Any proposed highway right of way improvements require coordination with Montana Department of Transportation.
- School Traffic. Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School (WHS) are integrated within existing single-family neighborhoods approximately one-quarter mile east of downtown. Daily traffic generated by the two schools infiltrates surrounding neighborhoods. With no signalized intersections along Spokane Avenue (US Hwy 93) directly west of this area, southbound traffic from the schools travel along Columbia Avenue to the light at East 13th Street or through the Creekwood neighborhood to Monegan Road. There are insufficient pick up and drop off areas, and discontinuous sidewalks, pathways and inadequate pedestrian road crossings lead to safety concerns for children walking and biking to school.

Whitefish Middle School is located on the northwest corner of Spokane Avenue and East 2nd Street. The drop off and parking area is on the east side of the school on Kalispell Avenue, but many drop offs and pickups occur on Spokane Avenue on the west side of the school, leading to congestion and dangerous drop off areas.

Recommendations of previous studies to address traffic for all three schools have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Master Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. Solutions include completing sidewalk connections, better lighting, enhanced crossing areas and flashing pedestrian signs, road reconstruction to include multi-use trails and better signage. The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan includes improvements to Memorial Park north of WHS for additional parking and drop off areas for students. The general project areas for improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Map. If Monegan Road is extended north as is shown in the Road Classifications Map, a connection to East 7th Street can be made that will alleviate the infiltration of school traffic into Creekwood.

- Poor North – South Connectivity (south side of the city): US Highway 93 South is the only continuous north-south corridor through the southern half of Whitefish within the

city limits. Because this is the primary route, it results in congestion and traffic diversion to city streets not designed for through-traffic, creating considerable impacts to established residential neighborhoods. This has been identified as a transportation issue since the adopted 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan (Growth Policy). Solutions identified in the 2022 Transportation Plan to improve mobility through the south end of Whitefish include the extension of three streets to create alternative north-south routes. (These road extensions are reflected on the Road Classifications Map.) Paralleling the highway on the east, Columbia Avenue would be extended south to Greenwood Drive, and Whitefish Avenue has been extended south to Shiloh Avenue. To parallel the highway on the west, Baker Avenue would be extended south to JP Road. Completion of these streets is for the most part developer driven, meaning they are required to be constructed by developers as projects are planned and built that will rely on these streets for access. However, as of February 2025, resort tax allocation does allow funding for road extensions to help complete these connections.

- Poor East – West Connectivity (South Side): Due to the Whitefish River generally flowing north to south through the south side of the city, east-west connectivity is constrained, particularly at the southeast quadrant of the city. Rather than traffic being distributed among numerous potential routes, traffic is limited to bridge crossings at East 2nd Street, Baker Avenue, East 13th Street, and JP Road. This results in increased school congestion in the neighborhoods surrounding Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School, traffic being forced on to the same routes, and numerous residences along Karrow Avenue having no option into the city other than East 2nd Street. Solutions in the 2022 Transportation Plan to improve east-west connectivity include extending West 18th Street to provide another connection to Karrow Avenue from US Highway 93 South, extending East 7th Street from US Highway 93 South to Voerman Road to help traffic circumnavigate the Creekwood Neighborhood, and extending dead-end Greenwood Drive across the river to Monegan Road for an additional eastern route. As mentioned above, in general, these improvements are developer-driven, but the city does now have resort tax allocation to help fund these projects.
- Wisconsin Avenue: Wisconsin Avenue is a state-maintained urban route and the primary link between downtown and two major recreational destinations - Whitefish Lake and Whitefish Mountain Resort. It is the only continuous road from Edgewood Drive at the viaduct north until it intersects with Big Mountain Road. It is a very popular recreational corridor and speeding and the potential for conflict between bicycles and pedestrians and automobiles was a concern expressed at visioning sessions – particularly the lack of safe pedestrian crossings. The 2022 Transportation Plan recommends opportunities for widening, additional turn lanes, traffic calming

measures and improved pedestrian crossings, but ultimately the Montana Department of Transportation has jurisdiction over improvements.

- Truck Traffic / Downtown Bypass: US Highway 93 connects the city to regional, national and international trade routes. The stretch of highway through downtown presents challenges in balancing freight traffic with local automobile, pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Heavy truck traffic and other through traffic in the downtown area is one of the most frequently voiced complaints. A bypass of some kind has long been discussed in the community but was dismissed in a 2022 downtown Whitefish Highway Study. Reasons for this include difficulties with property acquisition, disagreement between the city and MDOT on road improvement scenarios, potential costs of bridges, political differences, funding, environmental issues, and substantial grades in some areas. The addition of better intersection control at West 13th Street/Flathead Avenue and Baker Avenue would improve the flow of traffic on Baker Avenue and would open up the possibility of designating Baker Avenue as an alternate truck route. The city has been communicating with MDT to designate Baker Avenue as a state route to increase funding opportunities for improvements.
- Karrow Avenue: Karrow Avenue, most of which is within unincorporated Flathead County, is the only alternate route to US 93 South which provides access from East 2nd Street to Highway 93 south of the city and serves as a de facto bypass. Karrow Avenue had also traditionally lacked bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Visioning sessions and the water and sewer master plans indicate a possibility of future development in the area. As traffic volumes increase on US Highway 93 (leading to more traffic using Karrow Avenue as a bypass) and potential development in the area, additional capacity will be needed. Karrow Avenue has recently been reconstructed between W 7th Street and W 2nd Street as a collector including construction of pedestrian and bicyclist facilities within the portion within the city limits.
- Birch Point: As is mentioned in the hazards and public facilities portions of this Plan, the Birch Point neighborhood, along the southwest shore of Whitefish Lake, has only one point of vehicular access in and out. Crossing railroad tracks is required, and this access is occasionally blocked by trains. In the event a train is disabled and blocking this access, there is no other vehicular access. There have been discussions regarding the possibility of alternative access to and from Birch Point or across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish. This should remain a priority for Whitefish. Due to lack of gates at this crossing, trains are also required to sound their horns when crossing in this area, leading to longtime noise complaints. MDT is currently working on a railroad safety improvement project to upgrade signal crossing equipment and add gates to make this a “quiet crossing”.

- Big Mountain Road: Big Mountain Road is a secondary highway maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and provides the only feasible access for the Whitefish Mountain Resort as well as the many residential subdivisions on Big Mountain. There is purportedly a summer secondary egress that can be provided by Haskill Creek Road for emergencies, but this route is a difficult unpaved forest road that requires high clearance vehicles, a familiarity with the surroundings and could be a “fire trap” during a wildfire situation. As the Big Mountain community is presently not within the city, the city should continue encouraging establishment of secondary access. If the city annexes the Big Mountain Community, the lack of a reliable secondary egress in an extremely fire-prone area should be considered with any future development proposals.

There is presently a south bound stop at the intersection of Big Mountain Road and East Lakeshore Drive, at the bottom of the mountain. This intersection causes a significant amount of congestion, particularly during ski season. A potential roundabout in this location was suggested during visioning sessions and has been identified in the 2022 Transportation Plan, but funding or timing has not been identified. A potential development had proposed to build a roundabout in this location in the past, and that could be one mechanism to fund intersection improvements.

- Parking Management: The visitor economy and success of Whitefish’s Downtown has led to a significant amount of dialogue regarding parking availability and management. Several studies have focused on downtown parking availability. Earlier studies and plans favor parking solutions on the supply side focusing on providing additional parking through surface lots and construction of parking structures. In 2017, the city constructed a new city hall building at the northeast corner of East 2nd Street and Baker Avenue which included a three-story public parking structure providing approximately 200 parking spaces.

In 2019, a parking management plan was completed by Dixon Resources Unlimited. The plan indicated the new parking structure had provided little benefit toward increasing the availability of on-street parking in the Downtown. Also, although there were areas in the Downtown where parking shortages still existed, there were other nearby areas where on-street parking was approximately 50% or less occupied, even during peak periods. The report concludes the perceived parking problem is more of a “most convenient parking” problem or a parking management problem. From 2018 to 2020, city staff initiated their own parking occupancy study in which several staff members physically counted parking spaces during peak periods and different days in summer and winter, and these parking counts generally collaborated with the Dixon Resources Unlimited findings.

The Dixon Resources Unlimited study suggested prior to the costly construction of another parking garage, better parking management strategies should be initiated first. These are numerous, but examples include formulating employee parking plans, increasing transit, seeking parking agreements, residential parking permits, adjusting parking time limits, adding more parking enforcement officers or providing “parking ambassadors” who greet downtown visitors and help direct them to areas with potential parking.

One strategy of particular controversy is to potentially look at adding paid parking in select areas downtown. Paid parking typically frees up valuable spaces in front of downtown businesses, discourages employees from parking in valuable customer spaces, aids in more parking turnover, and generates revenue for parking garage maintenance or new parking facilities. There are various technologies that are now available, such as exempting “locals” from paid parking requirements through license plate recognition. A very common objection regarding paid parking comes from the business community who have concerns patrons will drive to other areas rather than pay for parking to shop at their business. Although this a very typical concern voiced whenever cities contemplate paid parking programs, all studies seem to contradict this concern. While there is no simple solution, the city should continue to engage the business owners, decision makers, other stakeholders and the community in discussions of parking management strategies.

ADOPTED TRANSPORTATION PLANS

Numerous transportation related plans and studies have been completed for Whitefish, some of them quite recently, such as the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. Below is a summary of these plans.

- 2025 Whitefish Safe Streets for All Action Plan: The Safe Streets for All Action Plan identifies the most significant multimodal transportation safety concerns in the community and suggests implementation steps and strategies. Solutions mostly involve better pedestrian crossings, signage, future transit stops, sidewalk completion and a pedestrian – bicycle crossing across Spokane Avenue to the Whitefish River Trail in the vicinity of East 6th and East 7th Streets. Most of these projects are in the vicinity of downtown and the three schools, however there are additional projects planned along Baker Avenue, several recommended intersection improvements along US Highway 93 South and a proposed transit hub near the Lodge at Whitefish Lake on the north side of the city. The general locations of recommended improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Network Map.

- 2022 City of Whitefish Transportation Plan²: This plan reviews and incorporates all other transportation planning related documents and considers recommended improvements to the year 2040. The Plan identifies numerous projects needed for the future of Whitefish including major road construction, roadway expansions, intersection improvements, and millwork (resurfacing) projects. Active transportation projects from plans such as the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan are incorporated into the recommended road improvement projects. The plan includes many goals and strategies and is adopted as part of this community plan by reference. This plan should be consulted for all future transportation improvements.
- 2022 Downtown Whitefish Highway Study: The Downtown Whitefish Highway Study was developed by Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to improve Highway 93 through the downtown area from 13th Street on the south end to East 2nd Street on the north end. Through evaluation of seven options, one option, Concept C, was preferred by MDT. However, there were disagreements between the City and MDOT regarding whether Spokane Avenue should be one or two lanes northbound from East 7th Street to East Second Street with the city ultimately choosing the “no build” option. At this point, no MDT funded reconstruction is anticipated along this corridor.
- 2021 Highway 93 South Corridor Plan: The Highway 93 South Corridor Plan was adopted as an amendment to the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy. The plan studies the corridor in three separate portions from Highway 40 to East Second Street. The Plan provides detailed descriptions of each corridor segment, the public process, issues and opportunities plus recommended land use changes and proposed a new zoning district which was subsequently codified into the municipal code. Transportation recommendations from this plan have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2019 City of Whitefish Parking Management Plan: This plan reviewed earlier plans with recommendations generally advocated for additional parking (surface and structured). The 2019 Plan recommends a cost-conscious approach of managing existing parking through enforcement of parking time limits, paid parking, improved technologies, and downtown worker permit parking while evaluating the actual demand/need of all the downtown parking and other updated parking policies.
- 2018 Climate Action Plan. The City of Whitefish adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to be carbon neutral by 2050 and prepare for climate change. Although there are many strategies in this plan, the plan also

² The 2022 City of Whitefish Transportation Plan is incorporated by reference as part of Vision Whitefish 2045 and should be consulted when reviewing or planning transportation improvements.

contains transportation related strategies such as considering the transportation and land use relationship, promoting transit and employee carpooling, supporting the planning for walkable communities and mixed use development and discouraging excessive parking requirements.

- 2018 Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan: This plan provides a framework to maximize the City's infrastructure investment, protect the environment, help meet the City's housing needs, and maintain community character along the Wisconsin Corridor. It includes several action items relating to transportation involving road widening, intersection improvements, options for transit and park-and-ride lots, traffic calming solutions and improving the non-motorized network. Pertinent transportation recommendations have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2018 Downtown Business District Master Plan. This plan identifies opportunities to increase the vitality of the downtown business district. The plan contains principles for the downtown transportation network. These principles include intersections supporting rather than detracting from downtown, accommodating traffic volumes without degrading downtown livability and the retail, addressing parking and promoting alternative transportation modes. Included in this plan is a proposed design for downtown Whitefish with a comprehensive complete street network of integrated and balanced pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile facilities that connect to and within the downtown planning area. Pertinent recommendations of this plan were incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. This plan is an amendment to the previous 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy. The Connect Whitefish Plan envisions a connected and continuous network of well-maintained, safe, convenient and comfortable bicycle and pedestrian facilities linking key destinations inside and outside of town. The Plan identifies a series of trail and safety projects, a wayfinding project, strategies for maintenance, programming and possible sources of funding for projects and programming. The Whitefish Pedestrian and Bicycle Path Advisory Committee uses the plan for the basis of their recommendations to various boards, the Parks and Recreation Department and decision makers.
- 2015 Whitefish Highway 93 West Corridor Plan. This plan provides specific goals, policies, and recommended actions for the corridor that consider land use, scale, and transportation function. It identifies ways transportation infrastructure should support the desirable land uses identified in the plan. It encourages a grid network, identifies traffic calming measures to mitigate neighborhood impacts, discourages direct access

to the highway by consolidating/eliminating approaches and identifies necessary sidewalk and active transportation improvements. Transportation recommendations from this plan have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.

- 2013 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Includes goals related to trail/path connectivity, water access, and park development and acquisition. The 2016 Connect Whitefish Plan described above superseded this plan's goals related to trail/path connectivity.

SUMMARY

The City of Whitefish prioritizes safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation options for current and future mobility needs. It emphasizes the integration of multimodal options - including roadways, walking, biking (and other non-motorized forms of mobility), public transit, rail and air transport - to provide accessibility for all individuals. Land use should steer transportation decisions and associated infrastructure and not the other way around. The city should continue to improve connectivity and encourage compact, infill and mixed- use development for more efficient transportation infrastructure, enhanced accessibility for all users, increased transit ridership, decreased traffic congestion and reduction in the city's carbon footprint. Recognition of these principles during transportation planning will continue to improve the multimodality which is highly valued by the Whitefish community.

draft

Roadways in the study area are maintained by different agencies. Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) maintains US Highways such as Highway 93 and Highway 40, as well as Wisconsin Avenue/Big Mountain Road which is classified as a State Secondary Highway. Flathead County maintains all other public roads not within the city limits. The remaining public roads in the city are maintained by the City of Whitefish.

The Active Transportation Network

Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered travel - such as walking, biking, or using a wheelchair. An active transportation network - comprising sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails - is essential for creating sustainable, healthy, and inclusive communities. To be most effective, active transportation routes should connect to key places such as schools, parks, neighborhoods, and shopping areas. By prioritizing infrastructure for walking, cycling, and other forms of active mobility, including those with impaired accessibility, Whitefish can reduce traffic congestion, lower carbon emissions, encourage healthier lifestyles, and provide mobility options for all age groups, including those who do not own or cannot operate motor vehicles.

For a relatively small Montana town, Whitefish has an impressive network of shared-use paths for pedestrians and bicyclists. These paths range from ten-foot wide asphalt paths adjacent to the Whitefish River to five-foot wide sidewalks along recently reconstructed City streets. The city has a pedestrian and bicycle path advisory committee which provides advice and recommendations to decision makers related to the development of the active transportation network based on the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Proposed projects and improvements from this plan have been incorporated into the transportation projects of the 2022 Transportation Plan (indicated on the Active Transportation Map).

Types of active transportation routes in Whitefish are as follows:

- Sidewalks are paved paths for pedestrians that run alongside a road or street. There are approximately 41 miles of sidewalk in Whitefish.
- Bike Lanes are designated lanes within a portion of the roadway typically including striping, signage, and other pavement markings noting the space for cyclists. There are approximately two miles of bike lanes throughout Whitefish.
- Shared Use Pathways are typically paved pathways separate from the road right-of-way that do not allow motorized vehicles. There are approximately 24 miles of shared use pathways in Whitefish with the Whitefish River Trail being a notable example.

- Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls on-demand
- Whitefish & Columbia Falls Commuter
- S.P.A.R.K. Route (afterschool program for elementary school children operated by The Summit Medical Fitness Center in Kalispell)

Mountain Climber works with BMCA to coordinate and augment service with the S.N.O.W. Bus in both the winter and summer seasons. BMCA had also facilitated a grant that allowed Mountain Climber to provide on-demand Saturday service during the 2021/2022 ski season in Whitefish.

The City of Whitefish contributes \$9,300 annually to Mountain Climber to support public transportation. Several years earlier, Whitefish worked with Mountain Climber and other stakeholders to create a new transportation hub at the north side of the library east of Deport Park, which includes a shelter, to allow for transfers between buses, intercity service, and Amtrak. It has been mentioned by some that parking lot redesigns could be considered to improve flow of vehicles and transit at this hub. Discussions have also focused on transit-based solutions to traffic and parking congestion, mobility and affordable housing for workers, as well as visitor management. Some options include expanded commuter service between the cities, connectivity with the airport and Park & Ride routes/stops.

Mountain Climber annual ridership has more than doubled since 2000 and has steadily been increasing. Due to the population influx, Mountain Climber's ability to fulfill requested rides is starting to become an issue. Funding continues to be a major barrier to creating and implementing transit-based solutions to pressing concerns, including traffic and parking congestion (especially during the summer season), worker mobility and economic development/sustainability, affordable housing, an aging population, access to health care and high-volume visitor management.

Timely commuter transit options are lacking throughout the Flathead Valley. Greater coordination is needed both within the City of Whitefish but also across Flathead County to provide a transit system which is more logically structured to existing and potential future transit system demands. It is critical that transit planning and funding be approached jointly by the cities, the County, and the business community to ensure a coordinated, integrated, and sufficiently funded system. Due to the compact nature of Whitefish combined with large numbers of visitors during busy seasons, Whitefish can and should be a leader in developing a robust intra-city public transit network. This could be a first step to achieving greater collaboration and buy-in throughout the county.

measures and improved pedestrian crossings, but ultimately the Montana Department of Transportation has jurisdiction over improvements.

- Truck Traffic / Downtown Bypass: US Highway 93 connects the city to regional, national and international trade routes. The stretch of highway through downtown presents challenges in balancing freight traffic with local automobile, pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Heavy truck traffic and other through traffic in the downtown area is one of the most frequently voiced complaints. A bypass of some kind has long been discussed in the community but was dismissed in a 2022 downtown Whitefish Highway Study. Reasons for this include difficulties with property acquisition, disagreement between the city and MDOT on road improvement scenarios, potential costs of bridges, political differences, funding, environmental issues, and substantial grades in some areas. The addition of better intersection control at West 13th Street/Flathead Avenue and Baker Avenue would improve the flow of traffic on Baker Avenue and would open up the possibility of designating Baker Avenue as an alternate truck route. The city has been communicating with MDT to designate Baker Avenue as a state route to increase funding opportunities for improvements.
- Karrow Avenue: Karrow Avenue, most of which is within unincorporated Flathead County, is the only alternate route to US 93 South which provides access from East 2nd Street to Highway 93 south of the city and serves as a de facto bypass. Karrow Avenue had also traditionally lacked bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Visioning sessions and the water and sewer master plans indicate a possibility of future development in the area. As traffic volumes increase on US Highway 93 (leading to more traffic using Karrow Avenue as a bypass) and potential development in the area, additional capacity will be needed. Karrow Avenue has recently been reconstructed between W 7th Street and W 2nd Street as a collector including construction of pedestrian and bicyclist facilities within the portion within the city limits.
- Birch Point: As is mentioned in the hazards and public facilities portions of this Plan, the Birch Point neighborhood, along the southwest shore of Whitefish Lake, has only one point of vehicular access in and out. Crossing railroad tracks is required, and this access is occasionally blocked by trains. In the event a train is disabled and blocking this access, there is no other vehicular access. There have been discussions regarding the possibility of alternative access to and from Birch Point or across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish. This should remain a priority for Whitefish. Due to lack of gates at this crossing, trains are also required to sound their horns when crossing in this area, leading to longtime noise complaints. MDT is currently working on a railroad safety improvement project to upgrade signal crossing equipment and add gates to make this a “quiet crossing”.

- 2022 City of Whitefish Transportation Plan²: This plan reviews and incorporates all other transportation planning related documents and considers recommended improvements to the year 2040. The Plan identifies numerous projects needed for the future of Whitefish including major road construction, roadway expansions, intersection improvements, and millwork (resurfacing) projects. Active transportation projects from plans such as the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan are incorporated into the recommended road improvement projects. The plan includes many goals and strategies and is adopted as part of this community plan by reference. This plan should be consulted for all future transportation improvements.
- 2022 Downtown Whitefish Highway Study: The Downtown Whitefish Highway Study was developed by Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to improve Highway 93 through the downtown area from 13th Street on the south end to East 2nd Street on the north end. Through evaluation of seven options, one option, Concept C, was preferred by MDT. However, there were disagreements between the City and MDOT regarding whether Spokane Avenue should be one or two lanes northbound from East 7th Street to East Second Street with the city ultimately choosing the “no build” option. At this point, no MDT funded reconstruction is anticipated along this corridor.
- 2021 Highway 93 South Corridor Plan: The Highway 93 South Corridor Plan was adopted as an amendment to the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy. The plan studies the corridor in three separate portions from Highway 40 to East Second Street. The Plan provides detailed descriptions of each corridor segment, the public process, issues and opportunities plus recommended land use changes and proposed a new zoning district which was subsequently codified into the municipal code. Transportation recommendations from this plan have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2019 City of Whitefish Parking Management Plan: This plan reviewed earlier plans with recommendations generally advocated for additional parking (surface and structured). The 2019 Plan recommends a cost-conscious approach of managing existing parking through enforcement of parking time limits, paid parking, improved technologies, and downtown worker permit parking while evaluating the actual demand/need of all the downtown parking and other updated parking policies.
- 2018 Climate Action Plan. The City of Whitefish adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to be carbon neutral by 2050 and prepare for climate change. Although there are many strategies in this plan, the plan also

² The 2022 City of Whitefish Transportation Plan is incorporated by reference as part of Vision Whitefish 2045 and should be consulted when reviewing or planning transportation improvements.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Sandra Alessi
Sent: Friday, October 17, 2025 4:34 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; Michelle Howke
Subject: Greenwood Dr Corridor
Attachments: Cadstra records hybrid map.pdf; Plat map final.pdf

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Dear Alan,

The Greenwood East West Corridor remains on the transportation plan, despite the bridge project's removal by the City Council during its October 3, 2022, meeting. At that meeting, the Council requested a feasibility study for the Greenwood East West Corridor and the exploration of other options. Based on Craig Workman's memo dated October 10, 2022—just seven days after the City Council meeting—I am concerned that neither a feasibility study nor an exploration of alternative options has occurred, even though several viable alternatives exist.

Historically, a 30-foot-wide street was donated to the City of Whitefish in March 1977. In May 1988, a county road (an extension of Greenwood Drive) was deeded to Flathead County. It was not until November 2, 1998, that Flathead County deeded the remainder of Greenwood Drive to the City of Whitefish. All homes on Greenwood Drive were built on or before 1990, with the exception of one new home constructed in 2024 on a vacant lot, which aligns with the existing street architecture. This explains why the homes were built based on a 30 foot

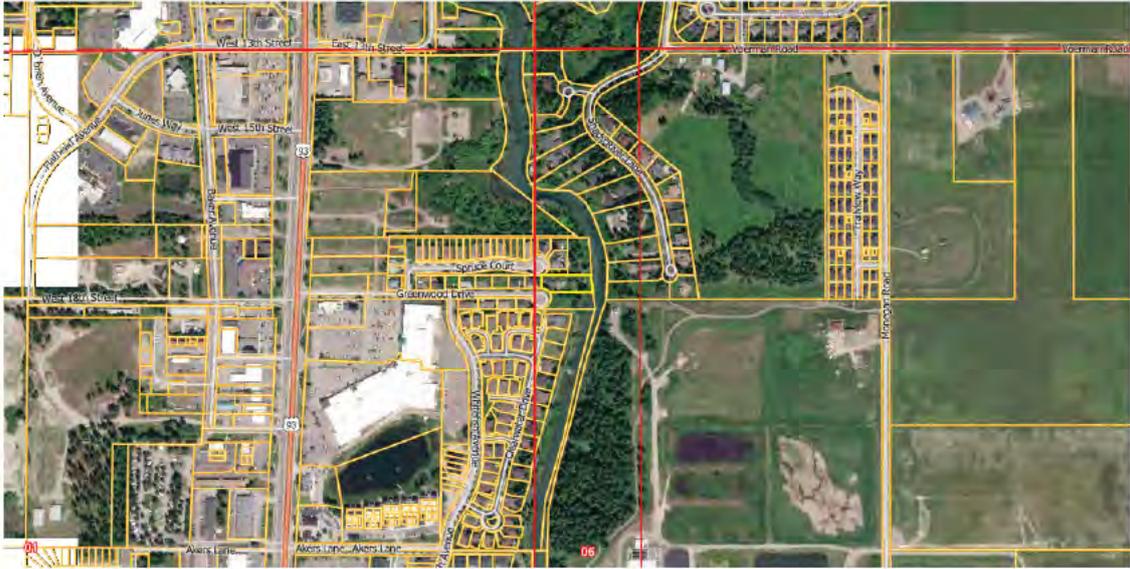
roadway. The two attached hybrid maps clearly illustrate how the current road easement extends to or beyond the front doors of these homes.

Greenwood Terrace is a significantly older subdivision compared to those adjacent to us, and our properties are not as valuable. Forcing us to sacrifice our driveways, yards, and homes, particularly when other options involving undeveloped land between 13th Street and JP Road are available, directly contradicts principles of environmental justice.

We respectfully request that the Greenwood Corridor be removed from the Transportation Plan.

Sincerely,
Saundra Alessi and the Greenwood Terrace Residents

Scale: 1:9027.98 Basemap: Imagery Hybrid



1

Geocode: [07-4184-01-1-03-05-0000](#)

Property Address: 812 GREENWOOD DR WHITEFISH, MT 59937

Property Type: N/A

Disclaimer

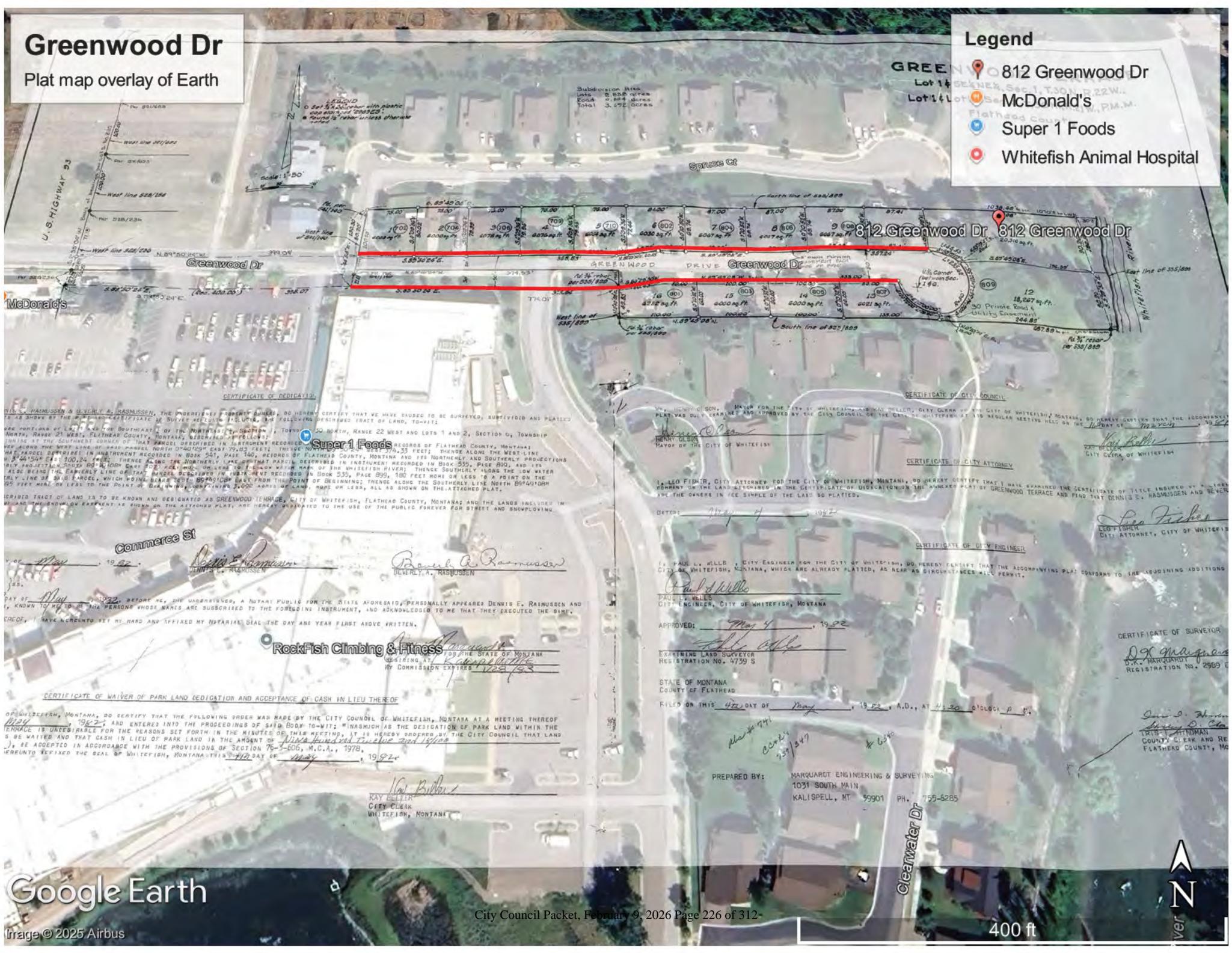
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Greenwood Dr

Plat map overlay of Earth

Legend

- 812 Greenwood Dr
- McDonald's
- Super 1 Foods
- Whitefish Animal Hospital



Google Earth

Image © 2025 Airbus

400 ft



Alan Tiefenbach

From:
Sent: Thursday, October 16, 2025 2:41 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Input for Transportation Element of Vision Whitefish 2045

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Columbia Ave is an organically developed – over many decades – residential street with approximately 50 homes between 2nd St and 7th St that has become one of the most desirable locations for an in-town, pedestrian friendly, walkable Whitefish lifestyle. Many owners on Columbia Ave, having carefully evaluated their options, have chosen “The Avenues” and have paid a premium for the bucolic charm of these classic small town Americana characteristics. Many visitors to Whitefish on an exploratory walk-about taking in the local neighborhoods express their desire one day to have the opportunity to live in just such a place. As a homeowner at the corner of 3rd St and Columbia Ave, I hear about it directly daily.

For The Planning Commission in the Transportation Plan to consider the advice of experts-from-afar – paid outside consultants with the only vested interest in Whitefish a lucrative consulting fee, is ludicrous. Proposing Columbia Ave be designated an alternate thoroughfare to Spokane Ave, would be capriciously shirking the stewardship of the interests of current property owners. Eliminating on-street parking and taking other measures to increase traffic through-put obviously severely degrades, if not totally destroys, the very attributes that were the foundational basis for choosing to live on Columbia Ave.

Providing increased capacity for vastly increased vehicular traffic is a tough problem to solve. But destroying the very linchpin desirable attributes – children and pet safety, walkability, controlled traffic, pedestrian friendly – of an historic district to accommodate that traffic growth is not the answer, it's folly.

If it's not obvious from the above three paragraphs, I call for any and all City of Whitefish administrative bodies and agents, to emphatically reject any attempt to disrupt and undermine Columbia Ave residents quality of life by increasing traffic count and throughput on Columbia Avenue.

Dane Boat

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Melanie Boat
Sent: Thursday, October 16, 2025 2:19 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Input for Transportation Element of Vision Whitefish 2045

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Dear Planning Commissioners,

I have recently been made aware of potential changes to our historic east downtown area. This led me to start reviewing the Transportation Element of Vision Whitefish 2045. I was surprised to see in this document that Columbia Ave was identified as a collector for its entire length and that there was a proposed extension. I also heard that out of town consultants are recommending Columbia Ave for development and the removal of on street parking. I find this to be extremely objectionable for a multitude of reasons.

- This is in direct conflict with your own stated goals in the Transportation Element of Vision Whitefish 2045 released on October 2, 2025. In this document it clearly states the following goal:

“g: Protect residential neighborhoods by designing the road network to minimize the incursion of commercial and transient traffic into residential neighborhoods.”

Making Columbia Ave an alternative route to Spokane would absolutely destroy the residential character of the most historic neighborhood in Whitefish. It won't just impact Columbia Ave (arguably the most iconic in downtown) but would spill over into the adjacent downtown streets.

- Using Columbia as an alternative does nothing to alleviate through traffic on north and south bound Hwy 93. Traffic would still have to traverse right through the middle of downtown, on 2nd in particular. It would make a lot more sense to divert traffic way out of town much like Kalispell did with Alt 93.
- Columbia and Kalispell Aves between 2nd and 3rd have evolved into a parking area for parents waiting to pick up children from the Middle school. Adding more vehicles and potentially commercial and transient traffic creates an extreme safety hazard for our residential community and particularly our school children. Children from the school walk to Columbia Ave to get to their homes or to their parents waiting in vehicles. It will also take away much needed local parking.
- This is an historic neighborhood. Many houses, like ours, are over 100 years old. It is 100% residential with children riding bikes and walking to school, people walking their dogs, and people walking to downtown. East downtown Whitefish and Columbia Ave in particular are a huge part of the charming ambience of Whitefish. Diverting traffic onto Columbia Ave would change Whitefish from an idyllic, historical community to just another tourist stop. Let's keep Whitefish a place to call home.

Summarizing, if Columbia Ave north of 7th street is redesigned to handle more traffic as an alternative to Spokane Ave in the Growth Policy you will not only have violated your own stated goals but our Historic East Downtown Neighborhood's character will suffer greatly. Our safety will be drastically impacted and you will not have solved any traffic issues. Your stated goals merely become lip service if you ram traffic through our iconic residential and historic area in Whitefish. You will also have completely endangered the residents of our

community and we are truly a community. The outside consultants recommending these changes to Columbia Ave obviously don't understand the historical significance of our neighborhood and it's associated value to Whitefish. It is beyond disappointing that this is even being considered. Please save our historic neighborhood and the character of Whitefish.

Melanie Boat

Sent from my iPad

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Nichole Harris <
Sent: Wednesday, October 15, 2025 5:10 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Columbia Ave - The Planning Commission (formerly The Community Development Board and The Planning Board) Transportation

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Good afternoon,

I do not support the City planning commission or transportation departments/growth policy and plan to utilize Columbia Ave in Whitefish to divert traffic off of Baker, 93 or any surrounding areas.

We are a family community with children that play on our blocks, not to be further through fare. Columbia is already busy and traffic travels down this road at a much higher speed than what is designated. We need street parking on Columbia, as it is already challenging having snow streets and moving vehicles around all winter. I don't support removing parking from Columbia Ave to accommodate traffic and this is not a long term growth policy strategy. Diverting traffic into our communities doesn't help solve the problem.

We need to divert traffic to a more sensible route to accommodate the congestion of vehicles that don't stop downtown. How about removing 4 way stop signs and using roundabouts to keep traffic from backing up? How about incorporating designated entrances to hwy 93 (adding an additional merge/entrance lane) which keeps the traffic flowing. We use these on the bypass in Kalispell and it keeps the traffic moving. Many towns have park and rides to keep the congestion out of their popular towns and shopping is alive and well. I

I don't know what has been proposed, but I am sharing that as a property owner. This type of decision will degrade our neighborhood community. I didn't buy a house on HWY 93 or Baker. I bought it on Columbia Ave to be a part of my community. Columbia Ave needs more stop signs to regulate the speeding vehicles, not adding more congestion to it.

Thank you, Nichole Harris, [REDACTED] columbia Ave

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Tuesday, October 14, 2025 9:20 AM
To: Ron
Cc: Maria Butts
Subject: RE: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

Hi Ron, these are great comments.

I agree the Whitefish Trail and FAMB references do not belong in the transportation element as these are related to recreational trails, not the transportation network.

How I went about the composition of the transportation element is a bit of a new paradigm for us. I put all the “active transportation” facilities (multiuse trails, etc) as part of the transportation network because I wanted to make sure this network was treated equally for funding and future priorities and not just “for fun.”

When discussing the WF trails, and mountain biking opportunities, this truly is recreation and not so much transportation.

I think you are spot on that if this discussion were to occur, it would be appropriate in the Parks and Recreation Section of the Public Facilities Element – namely in the WF Trail section. I can talk to Maria about how this could occur. I think it’s fine to quickly reference licenses and easements, but I want to be careful about discussing or calling attention to any particular agencies because this is the City’s community plan and there are many, many agencies and partners in numerous different topics that could all deserve some recognition.

That said, I am certainly open to considering some additional language if you want to submit it.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413





From:
Sent: Friday, October 10, 2025 2:40 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Re: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

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Hello Alan,

I'm circling back on the Transportation chapter after a Legacy Lands Advisory Committee meeting, which included Andy Fury, Steve Qunell, Parks and Rec, and Angie Jacobs. During that meeting, Heidi Van Everen (Whitefish Legacy Partners Executive Director) and I shared with the committee that we didn't feel like Flathead Area Mountain Bikers (FAMB) or Whitefish Legacy Partners (WLP) really fit into the existing Transportation section. We also didn't realize we could submit a new paragraph or section to be included.

Maria Butts noted at that time that Whitefish Legacy Partners was mentioned in the Facilities section. What was missing in Facilities was a recognition of the Land Use Licenses and Easements that the City holds with the Montana DNRC for recreation assets on State Trust lands. This is where both FAMB and WLP fit in.

For example, FAMB manages the Spencer Mountain Freeride Trails through an MOU with the City of Whitefish.

I think there's an important gap that should be addressed, since these licenses and easements are a key part of how the City supports recreation on State Trust lands in partnership with nonprofits like FAMB and WLP.

I'm not sure if this mention would fit best in Transportation, Public Facilities, or Land Use. I'm not sure if any of the people involved have reached out to you on this yet: city council, WLP, or Parks and Rec. If so, could we add to the paragraph that they'll be writing on Land Use Licenses and Easements? We would like to make sure that FAMB is included in that and would be happy to provide any details you might need.

I appreciate all the work you've done on this project. Thank you for your time.

Please submit any comments you have by August 22, 2025.

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner

City of Whitefish

418 E. 2nd Street

P.O. Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

Ph: 406-863-2413



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VISION WHITEFISH 2045

Growth Policy Update

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Alan Tiefenbach

From: Janice McCann
Sent: Monday, October 13, 2025 2:25 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Transportation plan

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Dear Planning Commissioners,

I've been following along with this Growth Policy process and I want to say thank you.

To get right to the point: If Columbia Ave north of 7th street is redesigned to handle more through traffic as an alternative to Spokane Ave our Historic East Downtown Neighborhood will suffer greatly.

Sure you may decrease the pooling of vehicles on Spokane, but you are only shifting it a few blocks to the east. Most traffic still has to move west onto 2nd creating the same bottleneck we've had for years. When the line gets too long waiting for a left hand turn onto 2nd Street from Columbia the traffic will move to Somers Ave to turn left, then perhaps even to Park Ave. The light on Spokane and 2nd will have to be retimed to allow more traffic to enter from 2nd. Spokane will back up even more. It's not a real solution. What about all the caregivers that park on Columbia to pick up kids from the middle school?

We appreciate that the city has been aware of our special traffic safety requirements because of the schools, parks and many pedestrian and bicyclists. Our alleys have poor visibility with their limited line of site. The city has placed many stop signs and bump-outs to slow traffic and discourage through traffic. Why are we looking at a change now when safety concerns are elevated with the increased density we are experiencing?

Our historic neighborhood provides a lot to the people of Whitefish. We have diversified housing consisting of multi-family, rental houses, and single family homes, (many of which are affordable) and probably more ADU's than any other neighborhood. We have day cares, preschools, high school, middle school and elementary schools. We provide overflow parking to the downtown and schools. Because of our high density and providing parking for downtown and the schools we require on-street parking. ADU's don't have parking requirements. We are a neighborhood full of bike and pedestrian traffic. Will the people of our neighborhood have to park in the downtown business district instead of in front of their homes?

I don't think the consultants understand that our neighborhood is one of the few left that is intact. We are a treasure and worth protecting.

With highest regards,
Janice McCann

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Thursday, October 9, 2025 9:36 AM
To: 'Pete Herzog'; alessi812@gmail.com
Subject: RE: Transportation Element Posted for Public Review

Hi Pete, sorry about the delay, I have been out of town at a conference.

A previous version of the 2022 plan indicated Greenwood as a bridge extending across the WF River to Monegan as a major project.

When the plan went to hearing, it appears that due to opposition of Greenwood Area residents, at request of Council this connection was removed from the Major Street Network Projects Map. (See Page xviii of the attached link).

Although this link was removed from the Major Street Network Projects map, you can still see a connection described on MSN 10 (page xix) although it does not specifically refer to Greenwood.

If you look at the map on Page 108, you can see this direct link shown again as a “preservation project” and described as Preservation Project #10 on Page 107.

What this means it that although a Greenwood extension (including a bridge crossing the river) was removed as an actual recommended project under the 2022 Transportation Plan, this corridor is being “preserved” for the future.

In addition, the City does own land on either side of the river to allow this extension, so the right of way is there. This option has not completely gone away.

That said, I have removed that segment as a road extension on the Transportation Element “Road Classifications Map.” After the public review period is complete, I will look at all public comments, make revisions as appropriate, and provide the updated plan element with a staff report to the Planning Commission a week in advance of their November 5 meeting.

Understand the Transportation Element (which is just an element of Vision Whitefish 2045) is a 10,000 ft. summary of what all the transportation plans and policies indicate. Actual changes to the transportation network must happen under a revised transportation plan, which is an engineering document, not with Vision Whitefish 2045. However, if the Council wants to add an objective to the transportation element that a Greenwood extension may never be considered with future transportation plans, they can certainly do that if they believe it is in the best interest of the public.

<https://www.cityofwhitefish.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3324/WhitefishTransPlan---Final-October-2022>

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
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Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413



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From: Pete Herzog
Sent: Thursday, October 2, 2025 11:15 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>; alessi812@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Transportation Element Posted for Public Review

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Hi Alan-

I tried calling you. Hope all is well. My family owns a home on Greenwood. I read the document below and it still mentions extending Greenwood across the river. That was taken off the plans back in 2022 (see attached document). Can you please tell me why extending Greenwood is still being discussed?

Maybe I am misreading something so would appreciate your help.

Including my neighbor Sandra on this email.

Thanks,

Pete

Sent from [Outlook](#)

From: Engage Whitefish <support@engagementhq.com>

Sent: Thursday, October 2, 2025 10:24 AM

To: peteherzog@hotmail.com < **Subject:** Transportation

Element Posted for Public Review



Good Morning,

The Transportation Element of Vision Whitefish 2045 is available for public review.

You may notice the format of this element is different than the other plan elements previously presented. The goals and objectives are near the beginning of the plan element (after a short introduction). After each goal, there is a brief summary describing the intent of the goals and the objectives, and all the detailed narrative follows. This format was developed after a cooperative discussion between staff and the Planning Commission. Staff is in the process of reformatting the already completed plan elements in this same manner.

Numerous transportation related plans and studies have been completed for Whitefish, including the recent 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. As such, this transportation element is not intended to duplicate the information, work programs or policies already established. This plan element presents a snapshot of the existing transportation system, discusses existing issues and the transportation-related comments received during visioning sessions. Existing plans are summarized and consideration is given to how these plans integrate with each other. General goals and objectives address the transportation system to serve the existing and projected population. Maps have been created to visually depict the components of the transportation network.

This transportation element is scheduled for a **November 5, 2025 Planning Commission meeting at 6PM**. Please submit any comments by 5PM on Friday, October 17th.

The Draft Transportation Element is located [HERE](#).

REVISIONS TO WATER, SEWER AND STORMWATER SECTIONS OF PUBLIC FACILITIES ELEMENT

At their October 1, 2025 Vision Whitefish 2045 Meeting, the Planning Commission made minor revisions to the draft water, sewer and stormwater sections of the public facilities element. Staff is presently incorporating these changes, and will post the revised versions for public review. There will be an opportunity for public comment on the red-marked changes at the beginning of the November 5, 2025 Vision Whitefish 2045 meeting. You will receive an email notification when the revised sections have been posted.

Thank you for your involvement!

Kind regards,

Vision Whitefish 2045 Team

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Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Wednesday, October 8, 2025 1:59 PM
To: Sharon Shafer
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: RE: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element PUBLIC COMMENT
Attachments: cidf_mgd5dojz0.pdf

Hi Sharon,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter has been forwarded to Alan Tiefenbach, Long-Range Planner to distribute to the Community Development Board/Planning Commission for consideration.

Have a wonderful day!

[Michelle Howke](#)
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Sharon Shafer
Sent: Wednesday, October 8, 2025 1:56 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element PUBLIC COMMENT

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Dear Michelle,

On page 26 of the draft Transportation Element, there is a map that shows a bridge at the end of Greenwood Drive.

During the City Council Meeting on October 3, 2022, MSN Project #13 was revised to remove the Greenwood Drive

bridge. I have attached a copy of the memo from Craig Workman to the City Council, which memorializes this change. I believe this change is also reflected in the meeting minutes.

Please update the plan on page 26 to reflect this change and remove the Greenwood Drive bridge from the map.

Many thanks,
Sharon Shafer

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Tuesday, October 7, 2025 4:13 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: FW: Vision WF 2024 transportation Element Public Comment

From: Kristin Lamonica
Sent: Monday, October 6, 2025 10:05 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Vision WF 2024 transportation Element Public Comment

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To the City of Whitfish city counsel,
My address is 706 Greenwood drive, Whitefish. I am writing in regards to the proposal of a bridge to be built causing Greenwood Drive to be widened. There is NOT enough footage yo allow for widening the road. There will be more of a negative impact on the community than a positive one. In 2022, the citizens of Whitefish petitioned and Won not to have that bridge built. I encourage you to uphold the 2022 decision. If you decide to try and sneak yhis proposal in you are taking advantage of the elderly and will discourage any future young families to move into the area. Do the right thing build the bridge further down.

Sincerely,
Kristin LaMonica

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 6, 2025 11:45 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: FW: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element Public Comment

From: Kristin Lamonica
Sent: Monday, October 6, 2025 10:19 AM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element Public Comment

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To the City of Whitefish Counsel,

On behalf of Glen LaMonica and Kristin LaMonica, Update the plan on page 26 to tefelct the change in the removal of the Greenwoid drive bridge, MSN Project 13 October 3, 2022.

Please let me know when this has been done.

Sincerely,

Kristin LaMonica

Glen LaMonica

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 6, 2025 8:22 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor
Subject: FW: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element PUBLIC COMMENT
Attachments: cidf_mgd5dojz0.pdf

From: Mail.prakash4india.org
Sent: Sunday, October 5, 2025 1:55 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element PUBLIC COMMENT

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Please update the plan on page 26 to reflect this change and remove the Greenwood Drive bridge from the map.

Many thanks,
Loren Eckhardt

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 6, 2025 8:22 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach; David Taylor
Subject: FW: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element PUBLIC COMMENT
Attachments: cidf_mgd5dojz0.pdf

From: Sylvia Eckhardt
Sent: Sunday, October 5, 2025 1:48 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element PUBLIC COMMENT

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Please update the plan on page 26 to reflect this change and remove the Greenwood Drive bridge from the map.

Many thanks,
Sylvia Eckhardt

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, October 6, 2025 8:27 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: FW: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element PUBLIC COMMENT
Attachments: Council Memo - Transportation Plan (10-17-2022 Meeting).pdf

From: Sandra Alessi
Sent: Saturday, October 4, 2025 9:35 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Vision WF 2045 Transportation Element PUBLIC COMMENT

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Please update the plan on page 26 to reflect this change and remove the Greenwood Drive bridge from the map.

Many thanks,
Sandra Alessi



City of Whitefish

Department of Public Works

418 E. 2nd Street | PO Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

(406) 863-2460 | Fax (406) 863-2419

Memo

Date: 10/10/2022

To: Whitefish City Council

From: Craig Workman

Re: FINAL Changes to Transportation Plan

Council,

The September 2022 Transportation Plan was presented to council at a public hearing on October 3, 2022. The following changes have been made to the plan as a result of Council direction at the 10/3/2022 meeting:

- An asterisk was added to MSN 11 in Table 1.4 (pg. xiii) and Table 6.2 (pg. 97).
- The spelling of the word "Promenade" was corrected on pg. xix.
- MSN Project #13 was revised to remove the Greenwood Drive Bridge. This project now extends from Monegan Road to ¼ Mile west of Monegan Road.
- Corridor preservation project #10 was added to show the collector roadway across the Whitefish River required to support future affordable housing projects.
- Cost estimates were updated to reflect these changes.

It is the recommendation of staff that the enclosed October 2022 Transportation Plan be approved by Council.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Michelle Howke
Sent: Monday, September 29, 2025 4:56 PM
To: Nichole Harris
Cc: Alan Tiefenbach; Dana Smith; Angela Jacobs; Craig Workman
Subject: RE: Growth Policy at City Hall

Hi Nichole,

Thank you for your comments. Your letter will be distributed to the Community Development Board for their consideration.

Michelle Howke
Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Nichole Harris <Sent: Monday, September 29, 2025 4:43 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Growth Policy at City Hall

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Good afternoon,

My name is Nichole Harris and I live at [REDACTED] Columbia Ave. I do not support the Columbia Ave being a thorough fair to divert traffic off of HWY93.

Thank you, Nichole Harris

MEMO

To: Whitefish Community Development Board

From: Kate McMahon

Date: 8-22-25

Re: Whitefish Growth Policy – Transportation Element

The purpose of this memo is to submit comments on the Growth Policy “Transportation Element” draft currently under review by the Community Development Board. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

1. Environmental Impacts

The transportation plan does not make any mention of environmental impacts of transportation facilities. These include impacts from storm water runoff, heat island affect, air pollution from dust and emissions, soil erosion, carbon emissions from road construction (concrete, hauling materials...), and wildlife impacts.. I recommend that Goal 4 address “Land Use and Environmental Impacts” of transportation and add the following objectives:

- Road design and construction should consider environmental impacts by minimizing land disturbance, avoiding sensitive areas, and encouraging eco-friendly practices such as recycled asphalt, erosion control, reduction of storm-water runoff, and vegetation management.
- Consider impacts to wildlife habitat in road design and adopt measures to reduce collisions.

2. Air Transportation (pg. 11)

This section references the Whitefish “Air Strip.” The Montana Department of Aeronautics Division is the owner and operator of the Whitefish Airport. All of their documents refer to this facility as an “Airport,” including the recent lease for a proposed hangar. The Whitefish Growth Policy from 2007, refers to the facility as an airport. The signage at the facility, says “Whitefish Airport.” The facility is listed in the FAA **Airport** Data and Information portal.

(See Attachment) Furthermore, the facility clearly meets the definition of the Montana Code Annotated definition for “airport.”

(9) "Airport" means an area of land or water that is intended or designed for the landing and takeoff of aircraft, whether or not facilities are provided for the shelter, servicing, or repair of aircraft or for receiving or discharging passengers or cargo, and all appurtenant areas used or suitable for airport buildings or other airport facilities and all appurtenant rights-of-way. (MCA 67-1-101.Definitions.)

It is unclear and confusing why the draft refers to the facility as an “air strip.” To be consistent with the owner and regulatory authority, the draft should refer to the facility as “WHITEFISH AIRPORT.”

3. Air Transportation

The draft states that the airport is controlled by the Flathead Municipal Airport Authority. The FAA states that the owner is “Montana Aeronautics Division.” It is listed as a state-owned airport on the state’s website. The Flathead Municipal Airport Authority Board website makes no mention of Whitefish Airport. (<https://iflyglacier.com/about-us/>) The draft should reference the correct ownership.

4. Air Transportation

The description of the Whitefish Airport and potential issues is incomplete. A recent staff report for a zoning amendment contained more detailed background information. There was also significant public comment during public hearings that highlighted the range of potential impacts related to the airport. For consistency and to provide a more thorough basis for evaluating potential development, it would be useful to expand the section on the Whitefish Airport to include the complete information from the staff report and consider all of the impacts from airport operations. (See attachment B)

5. Goal 3: Objective G

The draft recommends a study to determine if there should be a “buyer beware” plat notes and height restrictions. This objective does not address all of the potential impacts from airport operations (see Attachment B). Replace this objective with the following language:

“Additional development of facilities at the airport should be based on a study that evaluates the potential impact of existing and potential and future development at the airport and considers the full range of mitigation options related to airport operations.”

Attachment A: FAA

AIRPORT MASTER RECORD

Data Source: https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/flight_info/aeronav/aero_data/ Print Date: 08/22/2025

1 ASSOC CITY: WHITEFISH	4 STATE: MT	LOC ID: 58S	FAA SITE NR: 12552.1*A
2 AIRPORT NAME: WHITEFISH		5 COUNTY: FLATHEAD, MT	
3 CBD TO AIRPORT (NM): 1 E	6 REGION/ADO: ANM /HLN	7 SECT AERO CHT: GREAT FALLS	

GENERAL		SERVICES	BASED AIRCRAFT
10 OWNERSHIP: PUBLIC		70 FUEL:	Source: Self-reported
11 OWNER: MONTANA AERONAUTICS DIVISION		71 AIRFRAME RPRS: NONE	90 SINGLE ENG:
12 ADDRESS: PO BOX 200507		72 PWR PLANT RPRS: NONE	91 MULTI ENG:
HELENA, MT 59620-0507		73 BOTTLE OXYGEN: NONE	92 JET:
13 PHONE NR: 406-444-2506		74 BULK OXYGEN: NONE	93 HELICOPTERS: _____
14 MANAGER: TIM CONWAY		75 TSNT STORAGE: TIE	TOTAL:
15 ADDRESS: PO BOX 200507		76 OTHER SERVICES:	94 GLIDERS:
HELENA, MT 59620-0507			95 MILITARY:
16 PHONE NR: 406-444-2506			96 ULTRA-LIGHT:
			VTOL:
17 ATTENDANCE SCHEDULE:			
MONTHS DAYS HOURS			
UNATNDD			
		FACILITIES	OPERATIONS
18 AIRPORT USE: PUBLIC		80 ARPT BCN:	Information on aircraft operations
19 ARPT LAT: 48-24-28.872N ESTIMATED		81 ARPT LGT SKED:	is available from FAA's Aviation
20 ARPT LONG: 114-17-58.474W		BCN LGT SKED:	System Performance Metrics
21 ARPT ELEV: 3066.0 ESTIMATED		82 UNICOM:	https://aspm.faa.gov
22 ACREAGE: 41		83 WIND INDICATOR: YES	
23 RIGHT TRAFFIC: NO		84 SEGMENTED CIRCLE: NONE	
24 NON-COMM LANDING: NO		85 CONTROL TWR: NO	
25 NPIAS/FED AGREEMENTS:		86 FSS: GREAT FALLS	
26 FAR 139 INDEX: /		87 FSS ON ARPT: NO	
		88 FSS PHONE NR:	
		89 TOLL FREE NR: 1-800-WX-BRIEF	

RUNWAY DATA	
30 RUNWAY IDENT:	11/29
AVL FOR PART 121/380 OPS:	
31 LENGTH:	2,560
32 WIDTH:	75
33 SURF TYPE-COND:	TURF-G
34 SURF TREATMENT:	NONE
35 GROSS WT: S	
36 (IN THSDS) D	
37 2D	
38 2D/2DS	
39 PCN / PCR:	
LIGHTING/APCH AIDS	
40 EDGE INTENSITY:	
42 RWY MARK TYPE-COND:	- / -
43 VGSI:	/
44 THR CROSSING HGT:	/
45 VISUAL GLIDE ANGLE:	/
46 CNTRLN-TDZ:	- / -
47 RVR-RVV:	- / -
48 REIL:	/
49 APCH LIGHTS:	/
OBSTRUCTION DATA	
50 FAR 77 CATEGORY:	A(V) / A(V)
51 DISPLACED THR:	278 /
52 CTLG OBSTN:	TREES / TREES
53 OBSTN MARKED/LGTD:	/
54 HGT ABOVE RWY END:	60 / 97
55 DIST FROM RWY END:	686 / 442
56 CNTRLN OFFSET:	148R / 159R
57 OBSTN CLNC SLOPE:	11:1 / 4:1
58 CLOSE-IN OBSTN:	N / N
DECLARED DISTANCES	
60 TAKE OFF RUN AVBL (TORA):	/
61 TAKE OFF DIST AVBL (TODA):	/
62 ACLT STOP DIST AVBL (ASDA):	/
63 LNDG DIST AVBL (LDA):	/

- 110 REMARKS:
- \ 042 RWY 11 RWY 11 MKD WITH W CONES.
 - \ 042 RWY 29 RWY 29 MKD WITH W CONES.
 - \ 110-001 RWY 11/29 TREES, RAIL ROAD & P-LINES IN TRSNL SFC FULL RWY LEN ON N SIDE. MAY BE GOPHER HOLES OR IREG SFC.
 - \ 110-003 FREE BICYCLES FOR ARPT USE LCTD IN STORAGE SHED. TO ACCESS USE EMERG FREQ ON LOCK.
 - \ 110-004 FOR CD CTC SALT LAKE ARTCC AT 801-320-2568.
 - \ 110-005 ARPT SFC COND UNMON, CALL AMGR OR LCL CTC FOR CURRENT CONDS 406-444-2506, LCL CTC 406-261-4385, OR 303-918-9042.

<https://adip.faa.gov/agis/public/#/public>

Attachment B: Whitefish Airport Background Information

The existing Whitefish Airport was established in October of 1963, when it was moved from the Whitefish golf course site. It is currently owned by the State of Montana Aeronautics Division. The airport contains turf airstrip suitable for short take-off and landing (STOL) aircraft. The Whitefish Airport features a windsock and multiple aircraft tie downs. There is no lighting at the airport. In addition, there are several equipment storage sheds and a gazebo. There are mapped wetlands located on the airport property.

FAA standards for public turf runways are minimal, focusing on runway length, width clear areas, grading, boundary markers, and turf types. Whitefish Airport is a state-owned public facility that is not included in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) and therefore is not eligible for federal funding. The majority of rules and standards governing airports only apply to those in the NPIAS, but the FAA does include guidelines for turf runways regarding safety and airport layout.

According to FAA standards, the turf runway in Whitefish is considered a “visual runway,” intended solely for operation of aircraft using visual approach procedures, with no straight-in instrument approach procedure and no instrument designation. That includes daylight only operations for prop planes of less than 12,500 lbs. maximum takeoff weight. The minimum width for the primary surface for visual approach utility runways is 250’. The width of the Whitefish airfield property parallel to the runway is approximately 300’, the majority of which is outside city limits in Flathead County. The width would need to be at least 500’ to be expanded to a different classification of runway such as a non-precision instrument runway.

As noted throughout Title 67 in the MCA and in the FAA Advisory Circular for airport design (FAS AC 150/5300-13B), there are potential safety and land use impacts associated with any type of airport operation. These include:

- Safety of airport users, persons, and property in the vicinity of the airport
- Obstructions from height of structures and trees within and around the airport
- Noise impacts on surrounding area
- Electromagnetic radiation that may interfere with electronic navigation
- Lights and/or glare that may interfere with navigation
- Wildlife or bird attractants that may interfere with flight operation
- Incompatible land uses (residences, schools, hospitals, day-care centers, or other concentrations of people indoors or outdoors)
- Safety of taxi areas and parked aircraft
- Imaginary surfaces for air navigation
- Fire suppression and safety

- Emergency landing areas and other critical equipment areas
- Aircraft movement areas between parking, hangars, and support facilities
- Protection of nearby environmentally sensitive areas. (i.e., wetlands)

Additional studies are needed to determine the extent and appropriate mitigations for airport impacts on surrounding areas.



Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan,

I am sending these comments in support of the Vision Whitefish 2045 Growth Policy, Transportation element. I am also in support of the comments developed with the Safe Trails Whitefish group.

My personal comments follow:

The River Trail should be the highest priority, and several immediate trails linking to it, the next highest priority. These linking trails are: Birch Point to West Lakeshore (also an emergency access); Veterans Peace Park; Spokane Ave. underpass; 13th St. connection; Cow Creek Connection; and River Lakes Park Area to Kalner Lane to MT Hwy. 40. Combined, these trails are the core of the Connect Whitefish Trail system and need to be prioritized as such.

For the nearly 30 years since the first Whitefish Trails Master Plan (now the Connect Whitefish Plan) was adopted, the Trails have been touted as one of the highest priorities by the City, however limited funding is assigned to this budgetary item. New Trail construction still relies on mostly on development projects to build these segments.

Trails are expensive to build in Whitefish due to terrain, waterways, soils and constraints from the existing built environment. Construction costs keep rising, land costs and inflation keep making the trails more expensive. Significant progress will not be made until consistent funding for the trails is made a priority.

Thank you to the City Staff and volunteers for the great work on the Whitefish Vision 2045 Growth Policy and work on other Committees and projects.

Regards,

Bruce Boody ASLA PLA

█ Second St. E. Ste. █

(Mail; PO Box █)

Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

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Regards,

Bruce Boody ASLA PLA

██████████ Second St. E. Ste. ██████████

(Mail; PO Box ██████████)

Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Heidi Van Everen <heidi@whitefishlegacy.org>
Sent: Friday, August 22, 2025 12:17 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Re: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element
Attachments: City DRAFT Transportation Element August 22 2025.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

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Hello Alan – I’ve attached my edited version of the Transportation element. I’m happy to possibly meet with you next week or sometime prior to the next public version of this document if that would be of any value to you and the process.

I’m a bit confused by a few elements of the document and included a general comment on this regard...Objective 1 could be more broad Continue to develop a safe, balanced, and integrated...that provides easy access to priority locations including stores, banks, schools, neighborhoods, pathways, trails, and river access and gives equal preference....from my perspective, this would be an important addition right at the start.

Seems odd the transportation section is making such big statements regarding development, infill, etc I suggest the priorities be more focused on transportation & associated transportation values - connectivity, ease, improved access, etc. but maybe this was an idea that came from public input and I don’t know that.

And I'm also surprised there's so little mention of the Whitefish Trail, Whitefish River, need for improved efficiencies for vehicular and non-vehicular access, growing interest in e-bikes, needed sidewalk connections, etc. throughout the city - in the goals, objectives, and background sections. I'd also expected to see mention of the Whitefish Trail Master Plan or Whitefish Area Neighborhood Plan. Is that in a different section possibly?

I added numerous other comments throughout that I hope you'll be able to see – I'm not sure what the best way is to provide input in a pdf? But I hope my comments are helpful.

I haven't been very engaged in this process and maybe there are other sections that I should consult. it was my understanding that trail connectivity and the Whitefish Trail fits into this section, yet there is very little mentioned. I think it's a big part of people's outdoor interests, community engagement, and providing improved access and connectivity is important on so many levels – in addition to all the other transportation needs.

Let me know if this is helpful and how best I can get more engaged. Thanks, Heidi

Heidi Van Everen
Whitefish Legacy Partners
406.862.3880
heidi@whitefishlegacy.org

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Date: Tuesday, August 12, 2025 at 2:53 PM

To:
Subject: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

Good afternoon,

You have received this email because you have been identified as an agency associated with transportation in Flathead County.

Attached is the draft transportation element of Vision Whitefish 2045, the City of Whitefish's growth policy update (community plan).

Following agency review and comment, we will make any necessary revisions and post for public comment.

This plan element is scheduled for review with the Whitefish Community Development Board on September 18, 2025 at 6PM.

Please submit any comments you have by August 22, 2025.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413



Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Tuesday, September 2, 2025 4:00 PM
To: Rachel Schmidt
Subject: RE: Growth policy comments

Hi Rachel,

Thanks for the letter. I read all of your suggestions.

The objectives you suggest are good ones and essentially good transportation planning.

The 2022 Transportation Plan incorporated the ideas of previous non-motorized transportation plans (Safe Streets to School, Connect Whitefish, Parks and Rec Plan) into all of its suggested roadway projects (multiuse paths, bike lanes, etc). When I did my research, I reviewed and compared ALL these plans to make sure none of the trails projects had been missed, which they had not. The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan builds on the 2022 Transportation Plan by recommending specific safety improvements for pedestrians and bikes (signs, intersection painting, crosswalk timers, etc.). I mentioned this SS4A plan and mapped all the areas of recommended improvements on the “Active Transportation Map” so they would not be missed.

The Vision Whitefish 2045 Draft Transportation Element mentions the 2022 Plan has been adopted as part of the plan, has several objectives referencing it, mentions trail connectivity, the mobility challenged, funding opportunities, the importance of promoting alternative transportation modes to reduce driving, and increasing safety throughout the entire draft. Accordingly, all the objectives you favor have been addressed throughout, although not in the exact same words or objectives. Which exact goals and objectives from which plans should be carried over and re-emphasized? Hopefully none of them, as eliminating duplication was one of my tasks with this project. This is why I generally describe the intent of all of them and refer to the already adopted plans.

In regard to your comment about working with stakeholder groups to connect fragmented sections of the WF River Trail that includes a sub-area park plan for River Lakes - I have received comments from several others regarding their preferred WF river trail connections, such as to River Lakes, the WF Trail, Cow Creek Connection, Birch Point to West Lakeshore, City Beach, etc. Which connection is the priority one? It depends on who you talk to. This is why I wrote the objective to read:

“Prioritize connection of fragmented sections of the Whitefish River Trail and trails linking to it.”

Staff did not mention specific trail segments because these are preferences of specific individuals and the city needs to make trail improvement priorities based on plans, community preferences, cost, design, feasibility, etc.

In regard to your suggestion for a sub-area park plan for River Lakes, this would fall more within the public facilities element, particularly the parks and recreation element. There are objectives in there that talk about an updated parks plan, increasing parks diversity, and an open space designation plan. We do however, show future trail connections in this area on the Active Transportation Map. Again, I am

keeping this high level because which new parks should be included is something that should be determined during community preferences, cost, design, feasibility, etc not the preference of one particular group or individual(s).

Hopefully this explains everything for you. Thanks for being involved.

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413



From: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, September 2, 2025 12:11 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Cc: Rachel Schmidt <schmidtoutsidethebox@gmail.com>
Subject: FW: Growth policy comments

Hi Alan,

My apologies for forwarding this to you late. I have been on vacation.

Michelle Howke

Administrative Services Director/City Clerk
PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
(406)863-2402
mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov

Please note, our website has changed to www.cityofwhitefish.gov. Please update if you have the website included in your bookmarks.

From: Rachel Schmidt <schmidtoutsidethebox@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, August 22, 2025 3:01 PM
To: Michelle Howke <mhowke@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: Growth policy comments

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Happy Friday Michelle!

Please include these comments for the community planning board's work on the Transportation section of the Growth Policy.

Thank you! I plan to attend the meeting on the 18th virtually.

Rachel Schmidt
Be-OTB, LLC.

406-261-4039

be-otb.com

this email is checked every 24-48 hours, if your message is time sensitive please call or text- thank you



8/20/2025

To: Community Planning Committee and growth plan city staff – Growth Policy
TRANSPORTATION inclusion/modification request

Re: written copy of verbal comments submitted via email for inclusion in committee
packet

The following are comments regarding the bike and pedestrian facilities in the proposed Transportation Element. Many of these comments are found in existing planning documents and it is important to emphasize these concepts and include them in the updated Growth Policy since this will be the primary document for evaluating proposals and allocating resources.

*A general question: Are these existing individual plans adopted by reference in the new Growth Policy?

Goal 1. Continue to develop a safe, balanced, and well-integrated multimodal transportation system that gives equal preference to and enhances mobility for all modes of transportation options.

- *Modify the “Objective F” to read:*

Work with stakeholder groups to develop an implementation plan to connect the fragmented sections of Whitefish River Trail that includes a sub-area park plan for the River Lakes Area Park and Trails.

- *Add the following Objectives:*

Connectivity

Work with developers to include trails and greenways in new subdivisions to provide the connectivity between parks and fill gaps in the trail system. (Source: Park and Recreation Master Plan)

Promote alternative transportation modes (pedestrian, bicycle, and transit) within and connecting to downtown to reduce single-occupancy vehicle use. (Park and Recreation Master Plan)

Support efforts to fund, construct and maintain a trail system that provides connectivity between city trails, county trails, and recreational trails. (Transportation Plan - 2022)

Road reconstruction projects within city limits should continue to consider the connectivity and safety benefits of bicycle and pedestrian use, and include shared use paths, bicycle lanes and sidewalks where appropriate. (Connect Whitefish-2017 & Transportation Plan 2022)

Accessibility

Create accessible and safe pedestrian facilities for users of all abilities by providing ADA-compliant walkways and trails that are clear of obstacles and obstructions and promote mobility. (Transportation Plan – 2022)

Safety

Improve safety by striving to provide sidewalks or other bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure along all city streets and marked crosswalks at all intersections and other areas where appropriate. ((Transportation Plan – 2022)

Improve the safety of existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities to help people feel more comfortable while walking, jogging and bicycling. (Connect Whitefish – 2017)

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Tammy Zamoyski
Sent: Monday, August 25, 2025 8:32 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: FW: FW: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

Here are the comments on the Transportation element from the Climate Action Plan Committee.

Thanks,



Tammy Zamoyski (she/her)
Community Resiliency Long-Range Planner II
City of Whitefish
Phone: 406-863-1255
NEW EMAIL ADDRESS:
tzamoyski@cityofwhitefish.gov

418 E. 2nd Street/PO Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

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From: Nathan Dugan
Sent: Friday, August 22, 2025 10:59 AM
To: Robin Paone
Cc: Tammy Zamoyski <tzamoyski@cityofwhitefish.gov>; **Subject:** Re: FW: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

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Tammy, here is my feedback to pass along.

Objective 1a - I would like to see this objective reflect that the policy of the city will prefer fully traffic-separated non-motorized transportation. I would like to see that language added to the objective.

Objective 4b - I would like to see it added to this objective that the city will work to identify funding sources and invest in public transportation rather than just improving coordination.

Page 10, Shuttle Network of Whitefish (S.N.O.W. Bus) - A couple of notes here: the city does contribute funds to the SNOW Bus (\$20k/year currently), the number of stops is different between winter and summer seasons, and there is not every 30-minute service during the winter (that is the frequency during the morning and afternoon rush only).

Page 11, first full paragraph - It may be helpful to note that the "transportation hub" at Depot Park (assuming that this is on Central Ave, though that is not a summer bus stop) could be significantly improved by removing parking spaces in front of the shelter. The "transportation hub" located by the library could also be significantly improved to improve the flow of buses through this area. Anecdotally, bus drivers skip this stop all the time in the winter, which is indicative of poor design.

Page 11, end of Public Transit section - It may be helpful to add text indicating that due to the compact nature of Whitefish combined with large numbers of visitors during busy seasons, Whitefish can and should be a leader in developing a robust intra-city public transit network and that this may be a requisite first step to achieve greater collaboration and buy-in throughout the county.

Page 18, Truck Traffic/Downtown Bypass - I am concerned about the mention of a traffic light at 13th/Flathead/Baker. I personally feel that a roundabout would work much better for improving traffic flow in this location as the traffic demand from each street is significantly unequal. I am sensitive to the fact that at least one of the board members hates roundabouts, so I would prefer that this read something like, "The addition of a traffic control/calming device at West 13th..."

Page 19, Big Mountain Road, last paragraph - I would like to see the addition to the end of this paragraph of something like, "A proposed development would have funded and constructed a roundabout in this location, however this development was denied by the Whitefish City Council in 2022."

Others have expressed concern about the mention of widening some roads in the challenges section, however, I feel that this is adequately addressed in **Objective 2g**. If that objective alone is not deemed to be sufficient, then further context should be added to the paragraphs that describe road-widening plans that have been discussed in the past.

Nathan

On Thu, Aug 21, 2025 at 3:16 PM Nathan Dugan wrote:

I agree, thanks for pointing this out.

On Thu, Aug 21, 2025, 3:12 PM Robin Paone wrote:

Nathan and Keegan - I scanned the transportation draft and only saw a one bothersome topic:

I am not in favor of adding lanes to 93. Instead I think we should focus on alternative routes. I see several alternative route plans mentioned and I like this idea. Expanding lanes for 93 only leads to more traffic and more dangerous situations for pedestrians and cyclists, in my opinion.

Overall, without real close study, I think it is a great document.

Robin

Robin L. Paone, Whitefish, MT
Co-Leader, Flathead Valley Chapter
State Co-Coordinator, Montana
Co-Leader Geothermal Power Action Team
[Citizens' Climate Lobby](#)
[406-885-1021](tel:406-885-1021)

On Wed, Aug 13, 2025 at 11:20 AM Tammy Zamoyski <tzamoyski@cityofwhitefish.gov> wrote:

Hello CAP Committee,

We'd love your feedback on the DARFT Transportation section of the Vision Whitefish 2045 plan, as transportation is an essential part of our Climate Action Plan! Please see the details in Alan's email below and let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks in advance,



Tammy Zamoyski (she/her)

Community Resiliency Long-Range Planner II
City of Whitefish

Phone: 406-863-1255

NEW EMAIL ADDRESS:

tzamoyski@cityofwhitefish.gov

418 E. 2nd Street/PO Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

www.cityofwhitefish.gov

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From: Alan Tiefenbach

Sent: Tuesday, August 12, 2025 2:53 PM

Subject: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

Good afternoon,

You have received this email because you have been identified as an agency associated with transportation in Flathead County.

Attached is the draft transportation element of Vision Whitefish 2045, the City of Whitefish's growth policy update (community plan).

Following agency review and comment, we will make any necessary revisions and post for public comment.

This plan element is scheduled for review with the Whitefish Community Development Board on September 18, 2025 at 6PM.

Please submit any comments you have by August 22, 2025.

Alan Tiefenbach

MDT Comments

Being a Multimodal Community

“We champion alternatives to private automobile use. We will be a connected, walkable community and will prioritize a safe, efficient, and convenient transportation system for all modes of travel. We place equal emphasis on non-motorized and motorized forms of transportation while considering associated impacts on land use and existing transportation infrastructure”.

INTRODUCTION

A well-designed transportation system is the backbone of a thriving community, shaping how people move, interact, and access essential services. By integrating various modes of transport, a cohesive transportation network can reduce congestion, lower environmental impact, promote healthier lifestyles and improve accessibility for all communities. It also enhances safety, ensuring accessible routes for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Of all the impacts growth can have on a community, the one most often cited is traffic. Increases in traffic volumes, traffic congestion, speed, noise, air pollution and difficulty finding parking spaces are the issues most people raise when talking about growth in their communities. Even children walking or cycling encounter traffic, and traffic growth overtaking neighborhood streets and intersections can make the best of communities seem unlivable at times.

Many of Whitefish’s traditional neighborhoods are compact and walkable, as they were laid out before the widespread distribution of the automobile. As more recent development has occurred, it has grown southward along US Highway 93 South and other extents of the city limits - further away from schools, the downtown, and amenities. This has led to more road infrastructure, less walkability and increased automobile usage. The city should prioritize connected compact infill development, positioning residential, institutional and commercial areas closer together to reverse this trend. This will reduce dependence on single-occupancy vehicles, promote transit ridership, and encourage active transportation modes like walking and biking. By integrating diverse uses into compact areas, a more efficient alternative transportation network will result, reducing traffic congestion and supporting environmentally sustainable growth.

While many residents still choose to drive for most daily trips, demand for infrastructure supporting non-motorized modes of travel is growing. In addition, a growing percentage of the Whitefish population is aging. Mobility is an issue for older or disabled residents who are no longer able to drive but still need to access services around the city.

Automobiles will likely remain an integral part of the community over the next twenty years, but thoughtful planning should prioritize diverse and sustainable alternative transportation and mobility options as well.

Goal

1. Continue to develop a safe, balanced, and well-integrated multimodal transportation system that gives equal preference to and enhances mobility for all modes of transportation options.

During visioning sessions for Vision Whitefish 2045, the top response regarding how citizens saw Whitefish in twenty years was that Whitefish should be a multimodal community. This means placing equal emphasis on all modes of transport including walking, biking, accessibility for those with mobility-challenges, transit, rail for goods or passengers as well as automobiles. However, safety and convenience for pedestrians and bicyclists is compromised in areas by lack of sidewalks and pathways, with safe routes to routes to schools being voiced as a particularly high priority. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan incorporates the multimodal recommendations of previous plans (including the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan) into its transportation projects. The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan builds on this plan with additional recommended improvements for enhanced bicycle and pedestrian safety. Frequent reviews and updates of these plans should occur to continue to improve all forms of mobility and guide future transportation infrastructure.

Objectives

- a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to support non-motorized transportation through planning and capital improvements.
- b. Utilize the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan (or future revisions adopted hereafter) when reviewing future transportation improvements or projects.
- c. At least every five years, review the motorized and non-motorized project priorities of the 2022 Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan and amend if necessary.
- d. Conduct periodic resident transportation surveys to identify travel trends over time and track progress toward meeting mode share goals.
- e. Develop prioritization criteria to continue the construction of missing sidewalk and trail links throughout the City, with those providing safe routes to school,

downtown access and along arterial and major collector streets being the highest priority.

- f. Prioritize connection of fragmented sections of Whitefish River Trail within corridor.
- g. As East Edgewood Drive borders the city limits to the north, and spans between the city limits near Texas Avenue and East Second Street, the city should work with Flathead County to add bike lanes or a separated shared use path to improve active transportation options along this corridor.
- h. Adopt an official complete streets policy which considers and balances the needs of all transportation users, rather than prioritizing a specific mode. Commit to developing transportation projects that address the needs of all transportation users.
- i. Continue to support federal funding that will keep Amtrak passenger service operating in Montana.

Goal

- 2. Develop and maintain a transportation network that provides multiple reliable route options between key destinations to improve connectivity.

“Connectivity” refers to how effectively different routes, streets, or modes of transportation are linked together to allow smooth, direct, and efficient movement of people and goods. High connectivity means there are multiple, accessible routes between destinations, which aids in dispersing traffic, providing multiple options to key destinations, increasing evacuation routes, reducing travel times, and easing congestion. Secondary access to and from areas with limited connectivity has been one of the most commonly mentioned transportation challenges in Whitefish, with additional grade-separated railroad crossings and emergency egresses mentioned as critical. During planning for enhanced connectivity, it is imperative to be cognizant of how new routes or transportation infrastructure impact existing neighborhoods.

Objectives

- a. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for a second grade-separated railroad crossing.
- b. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for alternative access to Birch Point Drive and across the railroad yard separating north and south Whitefish.

- c. Pursue and prioritize options for reliable alternate access out of the Big Mountain community and discourage new significant development which relies on Haskill Basin Road as presently developed for secondary emergency access.
- d. Plan for through, continuous streets to the greatest extent possible. When cul-de-sacs are necessary due to ownership, topography, or other constraints, ensure a future street extension can be made via a right-of-way dedication, or at the very least, a pedestrian connection.
- e. Continue to explore options for future road extensions to better disperse vehicular traffic across the transportation network, providing different route options to key locations and reducing congestion.
- f. Protect residential neighborhoods by designing the road network to minimize the incursion of commercial and transient traffic into residential neighborhoods.
- g. Explore opportunities to improve connectivity in existing neighborhoods without widening existing streets.
- h. Coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions, Flathead County, and MDT toward construction of pathways between Columbia Falls and Kalispell.

Goal:

- 3. Recognize the transportation - land use relationship and associated impacts and encourage infill and mixed-use development patterns over development which results in inefficient or excessive transportation infrastructure requirements.

Transportation decisions can have significant impacts on land use by encouraging expansion and providing accessibility to previously inaccessible places. Likewise, land use decisions directly impact transportation needs, influencing traffic patterns, creating parking issues and necessitating additional infrastructure. The city should prioritize compact, mixed use and infill development in appropriate areas already served by adequate infrastructure, placing residential, commercial, schools and job creating uses within close proximity. This reduces driving, economizes existing infrastructure, and promotes alternative forms of mobility. Existing and future land uses should steer infrastructure planning, and transportation related impacts on surrounding land uses should be identified and / or mitigated where feasible.

Objectives

- a. Ensure future development is served by appropriate street classifications, particularly in residential neighborhoods.
- b. Evaluate existing street classifications to determine if updates are necessary to accommodate or be more compatible with existing or future land use.
- c. Prioritize mixed-use land use patterns. Encourage and enable the development of housing, jobs, and services in close proximity to one another.
- d. Encourage infill development in order to avoid costly extensions of transportation facilities and to minimize travel distances.
- e. Determine appropriate design treatments to reduce noise in residential neighborhoods and mixed-use residential areas before a major capacity improvement project is initiated.
- f. Review roadway improvement plans to ensure the desired design character of the area, as defined by zoning designations, is not adversely impacted.
- g. Consider a study in the area surrounding the Whitefish Air Strip to determine if there needs to be a distance in which “buyer beware” plat notes would be required with new construction or subdivision proposals or whether there should be additional height restrictions within a particular distance from the runway zone.
- h. Continue to evaluate improvements to pursuing a BNSF quiet crossing at Birch Point Drive.
- i. Continue exploring parking management programs to increase turn-over and availability of customer parking, provide more available employee parking in designated areas, reduce impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods, and create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit.

Goal

4. The City should explore improved public commuter transit, both in the city, and inter-city, through support of the expansion of existing systems, agreements with Flathead County and surrounding jurisdictions and support for new transit systems.

Transit provides transportation for those who do not want to contribute to congestion or carbon emissions, or for other reasons choose not, or cannot drive. Although there are some limited public transit options in Whitefish, there could be better coordination between these transit providers. The city should proactively work with transit agencies, surrounding jurisdictions and the State for a regional transit network with the Flathead Valley and to explore solutions to make public transit funded, more efficient, comfortable and reliable.

Objectives:

- a. Develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) which outlines the roles and responsibilities of transit partners within an eventual regional transit organization, and the process and timeline by which such an organization will be formed.
- b. Improve coordination between S.N.O.W. Bus and Mountain Climber to provide improved services to increase transit ridership locally and regionally.
- c. Explore development of new public transit service from Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA) to and from Whitefish.
- d. Facilitate more efficient and reliable transit use by implementing intelligent transportation system (ITS) solutions such as electronic fare payment and automatic vehicle location (AVL) technology to communicate real-time location of buses through smartphone applications.
- e. Improve equity for underserved populations by enhancing ADA accessible public transit and non-motorized transportation options to improve access to employment, quality of life destinations and affordable housing.
- f. Collaborate with partners throughout Flathead County to achieve an integrated and efficient regional transit system. Leverage transit to connect workers, residents, and visitors to businesses and tourist destinations.

BACKGROUND

Numerous transportation related plans and studies have been completed for Whitefish, some of them quite recently, such as the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. As such, this transportation element is not intended to duplicate the information, work programs or policies already established. This plan element will present a snapshot of the existing transportation system, discuss existing issues and the transportation-related comments received during visioning sessions. Existing plans will be summarized and consideration given to how these plans integrate with each other. General goals and objectives address the transportation system to serve the existing and projected population.

THE LAND USE TRANSPORTATION RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between land use and transportation is a fundamental concept in urban planning, shaping how communities grow and function. Land use decisions directly impact transportation needs, influence traffic patterns, infrastructure development, and accessibility. A land use plan should steer the transportation plan and associated infrastructure and not the other way around. When the land use - transportation connection is not managed properly and new road infrastructure makes undeveloped land more accessible, development follows. The new development then changes the travel demand, forcing additional infrastructure to manage the new demand.

COMPLETE STREETS

Complete streets are streets that are designed, built, and operated to accommodate safe access for all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. The City of Whitefish strives to design its streets to serve the needs of all users, and the engineering standards used by the city include complete streets components. Nonetheless, a formal complete streets policy does not yet exist. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan recommends the city continue to incorporate complete streets concepts into the project planning, programming, and implementation processes. In addition, the plan recommends the city continue to advance toward the development and adoption of a formal complete streets policy. Adopting a formal policy would formalize the city's future commitment and may require changes to zoning and design standards to ensure new facilities are constructed in a way to accommodate all users and enhance safety, mobility, and equity within the community.

AN INTEGRATED MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Multimodality is highly valued by the Whitefish community. Accordingly, the Whitefish transportation system is an integrated system which connects various modes of travel - walking, biking, options for mobility devices for the physically challenged, public transit, ride-share, personal vehicles and the transport of goods and services - into a unified

network that prioritizes efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability. This interconnected system is being continuously improved to accommodate equitable access for people of all ages and abilities. The Whitefish transportation system is comprised of the road network, active transportation network, transit, rail and air transportation. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan should be consulted for details regarding transportation improvements and is incorporated as part of this community plan by reference.

The Road Network

Like most communities, Whitefish has what is known as a functional street classification system that designates city streets as arterials, collectors, or local streets. Functional classification helps determine speed limits, roadway design, funding priorities, where to steer growth and development, and ensures streets will not be overbuilt or underbuilt for their intended purpose. When the existing and future functional classification of streets is a known quantity, informed land use decisions that do not overburden existing streets can be made. Safety and the ability of a street to carry the expected volume of traffic must remain primary concerns (please see the Street Classifications Map).

- Arterials serve the most intensive land uses with the highest speeds and uninterrupted trips. These would include commercial centers, office/business parks or complexes, and large-scale multi-family residential. Arterials are the major traffic movers across a city or town. There are approximately 9.5 miles of arterial roads in the City of Whitefish. US Highway 93 South, US Highway 93 West, Wisconsin Avenue, Spokane Avenue, Baker Avenue and East 2nd Street are considered the arterials within the Whitefish city limits.
- Collectors distribute traffic between arterials and local streets and are designed for lower traffic speeds and shorter distances than arterials. Some commercial uses and multifamily residential take direct access from collectors. There are approximately 10 miles of collectors within the city limits. Some of the collectors in Whitefish include Edgewood, Karrow Avenue, Central Avenue, Columbia Avenue, and Dakota Avenue.
- Local Streets primarily provide direct access to a land use - a single-family home for example. A local street might also be called a “neighborhood street”. Residential access is taken directly from it, and through traffic is (or should be) discouraged. Local streets are the majority of the street network in the City of Whitefish, comprising approximately 70 miles, with alleys providing an additional seven-and-a-half miles.

Roadways in the study area are maintained by different agencies. Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) maintains US Highways such as Highway 93 and Highway 40, as well as Wisconsin Avenue/Big Mountain Road which is classified as a State Secondary

Highway. Flathead County maintains all other public roads not within the city limits. The remaining public roads are maintained by the City of Whitefish.

The Active Transportation Network

Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered travel - such as walking, biking, or using a wheelchair. An active transportation network - comprising sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails - is essential for creating sustainable, healthy, and inclusive communities. By prioritizing infrastructure for walking, cycling, and other forms of active mobility, including those with impaired accessibility, Whitefish can reduce traffic congestion, lower carbon emissions, encourage healthier lifestyles, and provide mobility options for all age groups, including those who do not own or cannot operate motor vehicles.

For a relatively small Montana town, Whitefish has an impressive network of shared-use paths for pedestrians and bicyclists. These paths range from ten-foot wide asphalt paths adjacent to the Whitefish River to five-foot wide sidewalks along recently reconstructed City streets. The city has a pedestrian and bicycle path advisory committee which provides advice and recommendations to decision makers related to the development of the active transportation network based on the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Proposed projects and improvements from this plan have been incorporated into the transportation projects of the 2022 Transportation Plan (indicated on the Active Transportation Map).

Types of active transportation routes in Whitefish are as follows:

- Sidewalks are paved paths for pedestrians that run alongside a road or street. There are approximately 41 miles of sidewalk in Whitefish.
- Bike Lanes are designated lanes within a portion of the roadway typically including striping, signage, and other pavement markings noting the space for cyclists. There are approximately two miles of bike lanes throughout Whitefish.
- Shared Use Pathways are typically paved pathways separate from the road right-of-way that do not allow motorized vehicles. There are approximately 24 miles of shared use pathways in Whitefish with the Whitefish River Trail being a notable example.
- Cycle Tracks are dedicated paths designed specifically for bicycle uses, that are within the roadway but physically separated from vehicular traffic with barriers such as bollards or curbs. A cycle track exists along Skyles Place east of City Beach connecting to a shared use path at Dakota Avenue.

- Recreational Trails, although non-motorized, are intended more for active recreation rather than transportation purposes. The Whitefish Trail, designed for hiking, biking, and horseback riding, is an example of a recreational trail.

Public Transit

Public transit provides some limited transportation options for those who do not want to contribute to congestion or carbon emissions, or for other reasons choose not to drive, who cannot afford to own a vehicle, those with disabilities or those who are too young or too old to drive. A robust transit network could serve to provide efficient car-free mobility throughout the city as well as between the cities in the Flathead Valley. Transit options in Whitefish are currently limited to the Mountain Climber (operated by Flathead County) and the S.N.O.W. Bus (operated by the Big Mountain Commercial Association (BMCA)).

- Shuttle Network of Whitefish (S.N.O.W.) Bus: The Shuttle Network of Whitefish (S.N.O.W. Bus) is a free fixed route service which serves eight stops from the Mountain Mall at the south side of the city to Whitefish Mountain Resort. The service is operated by the Big Mountain Commercial Association (BMCA) and is privately funded by their members. The bus runs from December to April from 7am to 11pm with service every 30 minutes. The S.N.O.W. Bus also provides summer service from May to September from 8am to 10pm with hourly service.

Over 100,000 riders used the S.N.O.W. bus in Winter 2024/25. The bus is frequently at rider capacity, and additional hours are offered on select weekends and events to help meet demand.

The last summer count was approximately 12,000 riders in 2019. Recent surveys show more frequent service, especially in the summer, as the top request. Riders also request more coverage of town, such as further south on Hwy 93, west on 2nd Street, and runs to Columbia Falls and Kalispell. Increased funding will be needed to increase service hours and routes.

- Mountain Climber: The Mountain Climber is the public transportation provider in Flathead County, operated by Flathead County, and provides the following routes/services:
 - Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls on-demand
 - Whitefish & Columbia Falls Commuter
 - S.P.A.R.K. Route (afterschool program for elementary school children operated by The Summit Medical Fitness Center in Kalispell)

Mountain Climber works with BMCA to coordinate and augment service with the S.N.O.W. Bus in both the winter and summer seasons. BMCA had also facilitated a

grant that allowed Mountain Climber to provide on-demand Saturday service during the 2021/2022 ski season in Whitefish.

The City of Whitefish contributes \$9,300 annually to Mountain Climber to support public transportation. Several years earlier, Whitefish worked with Mountain Climber and other stakeholders to create a new transportation hub at Depot Park, which includes a shelter, to allow for transfers between buses, intercity service, and Amtrak. Discussions have also focused on transit-based solutions to traffic and parking congestion, mobility and affordable housing for workers, as well as visitor management. Some options include expanded commuter service between the cities, connectivity with the airport and Park & Ride routes/stops.

Mountain Climber annual ridership has more than doubled since 2000 and has steadily been increasing. Due to the population influx, Mountain Climber's ability to fulfill requested rides is starting to become an issue. Funding continues to be a major barrier to creating and implementing transit-based solutions to pressing concerns, including traffic and parking congestion (especially during the summer season), worker mobility and economic development/sustainability, affordable housing, an aging population, access to health care and high-volume visitor management.

Timely commuter transit options are lacking throughout the Flathead Valley. Greater coordination is needed both within the City of Whitefish but also across Flathead County to provide a transit system which is more logically structured to existing and potential future transit system demands. It is critical that transit planning and funding be approached jointly by the cities, the County, and the business community to ensure a coordinated, integrated, and sufficiently funded system.

Air Transportation

- Whitefish Air Strip: Whitefish has a 2,560 foot long grass airstrip on the far east end of town adjacent to Armory Park. It has existed in this location since 1963, is owned by the State of Montana and is controlled by the Flathead Municipal Airport. Most of the air strip is within unincorporated Flathead County, with only a small western portion within the city. There are no hanger facilities, but there is a small unpaved parking area near the runway. This airstrip allows daytime only operations for propellor planes of less than 12,500 pounds maximum takeoff weight.

Although the air strip is surrounded by low density agricultural land on three sides, there is an increasing number of residences developing at moderate density directly across the street to the west and south. This has led to an acceleration of complaints regarding aircraft activity and associated noise. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) considers 65 decibels to be the threshold to which aircraft noise is considered to be incompatible with residential uses, and either discourages or recommends additional building code standards beyond this threshold. However, this 65 decibel

limit is an average over a 24-hour period, which would be negligible for the air strip given the small number of planes and only daytime operation. Nonetheless, there could be consideration of an “aircraft influence zone” within a particular radius of this facility with additional standards such as additional limits on building heights in runway protection zones and requirement for “buyer beware” plat notes.

- Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA): Glacier Park International Airport, while not located within the city limits of Whitefish, drives significant economic, social, and tourism activity within the city of Whitefish and the greater Flathead Valley area. In 2016 MDT completed a study estimating the economic benefit of GPIA to the local community at over \$228 million dollars. Since that time, traffic at GPIA has grown 103%, further increasing the economic benefit to the surrounding community.

The airport serves major commercial airlines and links Flathead Valley to much of the US and beyond through nine hubs as well as direct flights. The airport also serves local and general aviation needs such as medical response, military flights and search and rescue operations. GPIA has recently experienced strong growth in both flight operations and passenger traffic. Aircraft operations increased 38% between 2014 and 2024 and in 2024 GPIA reach an all-time high of 501,000 passenger boardings. When counting boarding and deplaning passengers, GPIA had over one million passengers utilize the airport in 2024. In 2026, the airport will complete a five-year \$165 million terminal renovation and expansion project which is part of a larger \$360 million 10-year (2021-2030) capital improvement plan. GPIA forecasts strong continued growth with additional air carriers, destinations, and terminal expansion over the next decade.

GPIA is tasked by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) with ensuring compatible land use around the airport for the protection and benefit of the traveling public and the community. Incompatible land uses in close proximity to an airport include residences, hospitals and other noise sensitive uses, uses that attract large gatherings of people under approach or departure paths, uses that create visual obstructions (i.e. glare, smoke), facilities that attract wildlife (particularly birds), or structures that interfere with navigational aids. With Whitefish being located more than seven miles from GPIA and not within the approach or departure path, it is unlikely there are land uses in Whitefish that would be incompatible with GPIA unless features that interfere with navigation aids are developed or expansions to the Whitefish airstrip occur.

The flight patterns of aircraft from GPIA aircraft frequently fly over the area in which the Whitefish airstrip is located. The airstrip is occasionally used for hosting skydiving/parachute activity in and above the immediate area. Skydivers in the approach and departure paths of any runway pose serious safety issues to air traffic

(for both airplanes and skydivers). The overlap of these multiple aviation uses from both the arriving and departing traffic at GPIA and the general aviation uses from the Whitefish Airport in uncontrolled airspace is vital for all current and future aviation users to be aware of.

Rail

Whitefish is served by Amtrak passenger rail and is located along the Empire Builder which starts in Chicago and terminates in either Seattle or Portland. There are two passenger trains daily, one in the morning heading eastbound and one in the evening heading westbound. The train station is located at the north end of downtown Whitefish in the historic Whitefish Depot. In fiscal year 2024, the Whitefish Station had the greatest ridership in Montana at 46,400 followed by East Glacier (10,601) and Havre (8,816). This is 20,107 less riders since the 2007 Growth Policy was adopted and, while an increase since the covid pandemic, there has been an overall decline in ridership since a peak in 2008.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway is the freight train that passes through Whitefish. BNSF has 260 employees based in Whitefish and 34-38 trains per day go through the city. In 2024, BNSF freight trains mostly transported consumer products, agricultural products and mixed merchandise.

The City has three 'at-grade' crossings at E 2nd Street, State Park Road and Birch Point Drive and one roadway viaduct over the Whitefish railyard at Baker/Wisconsin Avenue. Since the 2007 Growth Policy, the City and BNSF developed quiet crossings (a zone at least 1/2 mile long in which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded when trains are approaching crossings) at State Park Road and East 2nd Street. The City continues to explore a quiet crossing at Birch Point Drive and a grade-separated crossing at East 2nd Street. In 2025, the City commenced a railroad crossing study to analyze the existing crossings and identify projects along the railroad corridor that could improve traffic flows, mitigate the physical barrier created by the rail corridor and eliminate the risk of future highway-rail grade crossing accidents/incidents.

VISIONING COMMENTS ON TRANSPORTATION

Traffic and accessibility are often the issues most recognized and understood by the community, as excessive congestion or lack of connectivity is obvious and affects everyday life. During visioning sessions for this community plan, seventy-five percent of map comments regarding what could be improved directly related to transportation, either motorized or active. Two issues were mentioned most frequently. The first was the need for a second grade-separated railroad crossing. The second was the necessity to complete links in the active transportation network, particularly missing connections along the Whitefish River Trail, with completing a connection north of River's Edge Park being mentioned the most.

Other transportation related comments related to better pedestrian crossings, missing or inadequate sidewalks, lack of public transit, better intersection control (lights or roundabouts), and requests for a downtown bypass. Nearly all of these comments are already addressed in the 2022 Transportation Plan or 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan, (as will be described below), although many improvements have yet to be completed. There were several requests to close roads to through-traffic, but this is unlikely to occur as the city is reluctant to reduce road connectivity and route options, and it could be politically difficult.

There were several transportation-related visioning suggestions involving MDT owned and maintained roadways. One example included improvements at the Spokane Bridge involving removing the culverts to allow safer passage of watercraft under the bridge (particularly during high water) and modifying the bridge or providing a shared use path underneath and around it to complete a gap in the Whitefish River Trail. Another common request was for development of a downtown bypass (described in the challenges below). These are unlikely in the short term due to lack of support from MDT.

TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES IN THE PLANNING AREA

There has been a myriad of transportation plans and studies completed by the city, Flathead County and the Montana Department of Transportation (see the Adopted Transportation Plans Section below). These projects have involved extensive background analysis and citizen participation through such methods as online surveys, listening sessions, mapping exercises, visioning sessions and comments received at public meetings. Although not the only transportation challenges, the following have been repeatedly identified as longstanding significant issues:

- Gaps in the Active Transportation Network: Whitefish is a community that prioritizes walkability and places non-motorized transportation equally or above automobile access. During visioning sessions, many comments about the active transportation network related to completing the Whitefish River Trail from City Beach to Smith Fields, with completion of the section between the Pine Lodge Motel and River's Edge Park being the second most requested active transportation improvement. The city is diligently working toward completion of these links, particularly the acquisition of easements.

Other frequently mentioned non-motorized transportation improvements include safe walking routes to and from Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School, completing pathways along East Edgewood Drive from Texas Avenue to East Second Street, pathways along all of Armory Road, along Voerman and Monegan Roads and continuing to complete missing sidewalks throughout the city. All sections of Armory, Monegan and Voerman Roads within the city limits are planned for non-motorized improvements in the short term. As East Edgewood Drive borders the city limits to the north and runs between the city limits near Texas Avenue and East Second Street, the

city could work with Flathead County to add a bike lane or shared use path to this section to improve active transportation routes.

There are several plans focusing specifically on active transportation connections throughout Whitefish, particularly to and from the schools. These include the 2025 Safe Streets for All Action Plan, the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, 2013 Parks and Recreation Master Plan and 2011 Whitefish Safe Routes to School Improvement Plan. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan considered the recommendations of all previous plans and compiled a map of existing and potential active transportation routes (see Active Transportation Network Map). Using various criteria such as usage, safety, congestion reduction and connectivity, the 2022 Transportation Plan ranked non-motorized projects by priority. The top ten of these rankings include the highest ranking non-motorized projects identified during visioning for Vision Whitefish 2045, specifically, completing sections along the Whitefish River Trail.

The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan (SS4A) builds on the 2022 Transportation Plan by analyzing existing and proposed active transportation routes in certain walkable areas for safety concerns and making additional improvement recommendations such as crosswalks, pedestrian timers and signage. The general areas of recommended SS4A improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Network Map.

- Lack of Regional Active Transportation Connectivity: Active transportation connectivity between Whitefish, surrounding jurisdictions and Flathead County was frequently mentioned by participants during visioning sessions. At present, outside of the city limits, MT Highway 40, US Highway 93 and surrounding Flathead County roads such as East Edgewood Drive and Voerman Road have limited active transportation routes other than wider shoulders along some of the roadways. Demand for infrastructure that supports safe non-motorized modes of travel is growing (both for transportation and recreational purposes) and this trend is expected to continue. Whitefish should proactively work with other surrounding jurisdictions, MDT and any other non-profits or agencies toward a regional bicycle and pedestrian plan and associated funding opportunities.
- Grade Separated Rail Crossings: The BNSF railroad tracks separate Whitefish into southern and northern halves and the Baker Avenue / Wisconsin Avenue Viaduct is the only grade separated road crossing over the tracks. This route is commonly congested for southbound traffic, and alternate routes are occasionally obstructed by trains or require lengthy travel along unpaved mountain roads or to the east toward Columbia Falls. A second grade-separated crossing is listed as a potential solution in the 2022 Transportation Plan and was the most mentioned recommended city improvement during visioning sessions. The city is presently working with BNSF and

the Federal Railroad Administration through a federal grant to identify crossing designs that could improve safety and reduce at-grade crossings.

- US Highway 93: State-maintained US Highway 93 provides the primary access through the City of Whitefish and is a principal route connecting the United States and Canada. US Highway 93 produces the highest traffic speeds and volumes, the most conflict points, the majority of the most congested intersections, and seven of the ten most dangerous intersections in Whitefish. Bike lanes and pedestrian connections are lacking. This corridor has been extensively studied. Recommendations for improvements include additional lanes, better intersection control, consolidating access points, connecting parking lots to reduce access points, improved signal timing, landscaping and median improvements to reduce “suicide lanes” and bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Any proposed highway right of way improvements require coordination with Montana Department of Transportation.
- School Traffic. Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School (WHS) are integrated within existing single family neighborhoods approximately one-quarter mile east of downtown. Daily traffic generated by the two schools infiltrates surrounding neighborhoods. With no signalized intersections along Spokane Avenue (US Hwy 93) directly west of this area, southbound traffic from the schools travel along Columbia Avenue to the light at East 13th Street or through the Creekwood neighborhood to Monegan Road. There are insufficient pick up and drop off areas, and discontinuous sidewalks, pathways and inadequate pedestrian road crossings lead to safety concerns for children walking and biking to school.

Whitefish Middle School is located on the northwest corner of Spokane Avenue and East 2nd Street. The drop off and parking area is on the east side of the school on Kalispell Avenue, but many drop offs and pickups occur on Spokane Avenue on the west side of the school, leading to congestion and dangerous drop off areas.

Recommendations of previous studies to address traffic for all three schools have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Master Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. Solutions include completing sidewalk connections, better lighting, enhanced crossing areas and flashing pedestrian signs, road reconstruction to include multi-use trails and better signage. The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan includes improvements to Memorial Park north of WHS for additional parking and drop off areas for students. The general project areas for improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Map. If Monegan Road is extended north as is shown in the Road Classifications Map, a connection to East 7th Street can be made that will alleviate the infiltration of school traffic into Creekwood.

- Poor North – South Connectivity (south side of the city): US Highway 93 South is the only continuous north-south corridor through the southern half of Whitefish within the city limits. Because this is the primary route, it results in congestion and traffic diversion to city streets not designed for through-traffic, creating considerable impacts to established residential neighborhoods. This has been identified as a transportation issue since the adopted 1996 Whitefish City County Master Plan (Growth Policy). Solutions identified in the 2022 Transportation Plan to improve mobility through the south end of Whitefish include the extension of three streets to create alternative north-south routes. (These road extensions are reflected on the Road Classifications Map.) Paralleling the highway on the east, Columbia Avenue would be extended south to Greenwood Drive, and Whitefish Avenue has been extended south to Shiloh Avenue. To parallel the highway on the west, Baker Avenue would be extended south to JP Road. Completion of these streets is for the most part developer driven, meaning they are required to be constructed by developers as projects are planned and built that will rely on these streets for access. However, as of February 2025, resort tax allocation does allow funding for road extensions to help complete these connections.
- Poor East – West Connectivity (South Side): Due to the Whitefish River generally flowing north to south through the south side of the city, east-west connectivity is constrained, particularly at the southeast quadrant of the city. Rather than traffic being distributed among numerous potential routes, traffic is limited to bridge crossings at East 2nd Street, Baker Avenue, East 13th Street, and JP Road. This results in increased school congestion in the neighborhoods surrounding Muldown Elementary and Whitefish High School, traffic being forced on to the same routes, and numerous residences along Karrow Avenue having no option into the city other than East 2nd Street. Solutions in the 2022 Transportation Plan to improve east-west connectivity include extending West 18th Street to provide another connection to Karrow Avenue from US Highway 93 South, extending East 7th Street from US Highway 93 South to Voerman Road to help traffic circumnavigate the Creekwood Neighborhood, and extending dead-end Greenwood Drive across the river to Monegan Road for an additional eastern route. As mentioned above, in general, these improvements are developer-driven, but the city does now have resort tax allocation to help fund these projects.
- Wisconsin Avenue: Wisconsin Avenue is a state-maintained urban route and the primary link between downtown and two major recreational destinations - Whitefish Lake and Whitefish Mountain Resort. It is the only continuous road from Edgewood Drive at the viaduct north until it intersects with Big Mountain Road. It is a very popular recreational corridor and speeding and the potential for conflict between bicycles and pedestrians and automobiles was a concern expressed at visioning sessions – particularly the lack of safe pedestrian crossings. The 2022 Transportation Plan

recommends opportunities for widening, additional turn lanes, traffic calming measures and improved pedestrian crossings, but ultimately the Montana Department of Transportation has jurisdiction over improvements.

- Truck Traffic / Downtown Bypass: US Highway 93 connects the city to regional, national and international trade routes. The stretch of highway through downtown presents challenges in balancing freight traffic with local automobile, pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Heavy truck traffic and other through traffic in the downtown area is one of the most frequently voiced complaints. A bypass of some kind has long been discussed in the community but was dismissed in a 2022 downtown Whitefish Highway Study. Reasons for this include difficulties with property acquisition, disagreement between the city and MDOT on road improvement scenarios, potential costs of bridges, political differences, funding, environmental issues, and substantial grades in some areas. The addition of an intersection light at West 13th Street/Flathead Avenue and Baker Avenue would improve the flow of traffic on Baker Avenue and would open up the possibility of designating Baker Avenue as an alternate truck route. The city has been communicating with MDT to designate Baker Avenue as a state route to increase funding opportunities for improvements.
- Karrow Avenue: Karrow Avenue, most of which is within unincorporated Flathead County, is the only alternate route to US 93 South which provides access from East 2nd Street to Highway 93 south of the city and serves as a de facto bypass. Karrow Avenue had also traditionally lacked bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Visioning sessions and the water and sewer master plans indicate a possibility of future development in the area. As traffic volumes increase on US Highway 93 (leading to more traffic using Karrow Avenue as a bypass) and potential development in the area, additional capacity will be needed. Karrow Avenue has recently been reconstructed as a collector including construction of pedestrian and bicyclist facilities within the portion within the city limits, however the majority of Karrow Avenue is within unincorporated Flathead County.
- Birch Point: As is mentioned in the hazards and public facilities portions of this Plan, the Birch Point neighborhood, along the southwest shore of Whitefish Lake, has only one point of vehicular access in and out. Crossing railroad tracks is required, and this access is occasionally blocked by trains. In the event a train is disabled and blocking this access, there is no other vehicular access. There have been discussions regarding the possibility of alternative access to and from Birch Point or across the railroad yards separating north and south Whitefish. This should remain a priority for Whitefish.

- Big Mountain Road: Big Mountain Road is a secondary highway maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and provides the only feasible access for the Whitefish Mountain Resort as well as the many residential subdivisions on Big Mountain. There is purportedly a summer secondary egress that can be provided by Haskill Creek Road, but this route is a difficult unpaved forest road that requires high clearance vehicles, a familiarity with the surroundings and could be a “fire trap” during a wildfire situation. As the Big Mountain community is presently not within the city, the city should continue encouraging establishment of secondary access. If the city annexes the Big Mountain Community, the lack of a reliable secondary egress in an extremely fire-prone area should be considered with any future development proposals.

There is presently a south bound stop at the intersection of Big Mountain Road and East Lakeshore Drive, at the bottom of the mountain. This intersection causes a significant amount of congestion, particularly during ski season. A potential roundabout in this location was suggested during visioning sessions and has been identified in the 2022 Transportation Plan, but funding or timing has not been identified.

- Parking Management: The visitor economy and success of Whitefish’s Downtown has led to a significant amount of dialogue regarding parking availability and management. Several studies have focused on downtown parking availability. Earlier studies and plans favor parking solutions on the supply side focusing on providing additional parking through surface lots and construction of parking structures. In 2017, the city constructed a new city hall building at the northeast corner of East 2nd Street and Baker Avenue which included a three-story public parking structure providing approximately 200 parking spaces.

In 2019, a parking management plan was completed by Dixon Resources Unlimited. The plan indicated the new parking structure had provided little benefit toward increasing the availability of on-street parking in the Downtown. Also, although there were areas in the Downtown where parking shortages still existed, there were other nearby areas where on-street parking was approximately 50% or less occupied, even during peak periods. The report concludes the perceived parking problem is more of a “most convenient parking” problem or a parking management problem. The study suggested prior to the costly construction of another parking garage, better parking management strategies should be initiated first. These are numerous, but examples include formulating employee parking plans, increasing transit, seeking parking agreements, residential parking permits, adjusting parking time limits, adding more parking enforcement officers or providing “parking ambassadors” who greet downtown visitors and help direct them to areas with potential parking.

One strategy of particular controversy is paid parking in select areas throughout downtown. This could free up the most valuable spaces in front of downtown businesses, discourage employees from parking in certain areas, aid in more parking turnover and generate revenue for downtown improvements or other parking facilities. There are various technologies that are now available, such as exempting “locals” from paid parking requirements through license plate recognition. A very common objection regarding paid parking comes from the business community who have concerns patrons will drive to other areas rather than pay for parking to shop at their business. Although this a very typical concern voiced whenever cities contemplate paid parking programs, all studies seem to contradict this concern. While there is no simple solution, the city should continue to engage the business owners, decision makers, other stakeholders and the community in discussions of parking management strategies.

ADOPTED TRANSPORTATION PLANS

Numerous transportation related plans and studies have been completed for Whitefish, some of them quite recently, such as the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan. Below is a summary of these plans.

- 2025 Whitefish Safe Streets for All Action Plan: The Safe Streets for All Action Plan identifies the most significant multimodal transportation safety concerns in the community and suggests implementation steps and strategies. Solutions mostly involve better pedestrian crossings, signage, future transit stops, sidewalk completion and a pedestrian – bicycle crossing across Spokane Avenue to the Whitefish River Trail in the vicinity of East 6th and East 7th Streets. Most of these projects are in the vicinity of downtown and the three schools, however there are additional projects planned along Baker Avenue, several recommended intersection improvements along US Highway 93 South and a proposed transit hub near the Lodge at Whitefish Lake at the north side of the city. The general locations of recommended improvements are indicated on the Active Transportation Network Map.
- 2022 City of Whitefish Transportation Plan¹: This plan reviews and incorporates all other transportation planning related documents and considers recommended improvements to the year 2040. The Plan identifies numerous projects needed for the future of Whitefish including major road construction, roadway expansions, intersection improvements, and millwork (resurfacing) projects. Active transportation projects from plans such as the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan are incorporated into the recommended road improvement projects. The

¹ The 2022 City of Whitefish Transportation Plan is incorporated by reference as part of Vision Whitefish 2045 and should be consulted when reviewing or planning transportation improvements.

plan includes many goals and strategies and is adopted as part of this community plan by reference. This plan should be consulted for all future transportation improvements.

- 2022 Downtown Whitefish Highway Study: The Downtown Whitefish Highway Study was developed by Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to improve Highway 93 through the downtown area from 13th Street on the south end to East 2nd Street on the north end. Through evaluation of seven options, one option, Concept C, was preferred by MDT. However, there were disagreements between the City and MDOT regarding whether Spokane Avenue should be one or two lanes northbound from East 7th Street to East Second Street with the city ultimately choosing the “no build” option. At this point, no MDT funded reconstruction is anticipated along this corridor.
- 2021 Highway 93 South Corridor Plan: The Highway 93 South Corridor Plan was adopted as an amendment to the 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy. The plan studies the corridor in three separate portions from Highway 40 to East Second Street. The Plan provides detailed descriptions of each corridor segment, the public process, issues and opportunities plus recommended land use changes and proposed a new zoning district which was subsequently codified into the municipal code. Transportation recommendations from this plan have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2019 City of Whitefish Parking Management Plan: This plan reviewed earlier plans with recommendations generally advocated for additional parking (surface and structured). The 2019 Plan recommends a cost-conscious approach of managing existing parking through enforcement of parking time limits, paid parking, improved technologies, and downtown worker permit parking while evaluating the actual demand/need of all the downtown parking and other updated parking policies.
- 2018 Climate Action Plan: The City of Whitefish adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to be carbon neutral by 2050 and prepare for climate change. Although there are many strategies in this plan, the plan also contains transportation related strategies such as considering the transportation and land use relationship, promoting transit and employee carpooling, supporting the planning for walkable communities and mixed use development and discouraging excessive parking requirements.
- 2018 Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan: This plan provides a framework to maximize the City’s infrastructure investment, protect the environment, help meet the City’s housing needs, and maintain community character along the Wisconsin Corridor. It includes several action items relating to transportation involving road widening, intersection improvements, options for transit and park and ride lots, traffic calming

solutions and improving the non-motorized network. Pertinent transportation recommendations have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.

- 2018 Downtown Business District Master Plan. This plan identifies opportunities to increase the vitality of the downtown business district. The plan contains principles for the downtown transportation network. These principles include intersections supporting rather than detracting from downtown, accommodating traffic volumes without degrading downtown livability and the retail, addressing parking and promoting alternative transportation modes. Included in this plan is a proposed design for downtown Whitefish with a comprehensive complete street network of integrated and balanced pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile facilities that connect to and within the downtown planning area. Pertinent recommendations of this plan were incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. This plan is an amendment to the previous 2007 Whitefish City-County Growth Policy. The Connect Whitefish Plan envisions a connected and continuous network of well-maintained, safe, convenient and comfortable bicycle and pedestrian facilities linking key destinations inside and outside of town. The Plan identifies a series of trail and safety projects, a wayfinding project, strategies for maintenance, programming and possible sources of funding for projects and programming. The Whitefish Pedestrian and Bicycle Path Advisory Committee uses the plan for the basis of their recommendations to various boards, the Parks and Recreation Department and decision makers.
- 2015 Whitefish Highway 93 West Corridor Plan. This plan provides specific goals, policies, and recommended actions for the corridor that consider land use, scale, and transportation function. It identifies ways transportation infrastructure should support the desirable land uses identified in the plan. It encourages a grid network, identifies traffic calming measures to mitigate neighborhood impacts, discourages direct access to the highway by consolidating/eliminating approaches and identifies necessary sidewalk and active transportation improvements. Transportation recommendations from this plan have been incorporated into the 2022 Transportation Plan.
- 2013 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Includes goals related to trail/path connectivity, water access, and park development and acquisition. The 2016 Connect Whitefish Plan described above superseded this plan's goals related to trail/path connectivity.

SUMMARY

The City of Whitefish prioritizes safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation options for current and future mobility needs. It emphasizes the integration of multimodal options - including roadways, walking, biking (and other non-motorized forms of mobility), public transit, rail and air transport - to provide accessibility for all individuals. Land use should steer transportation decisions and associated infrastructure and not the other way around. The city should continue to improve connectivity and encourage compact, infill and mixed use development for more efficient transportation infrastructure, enhanced accessibility for all users, increased transit ridership, decreased traffic congestion and reduction in the city's carbon footprint. Recognition of these principles during transportation planning will continue to improve the multimodality which is highly valued by the Whitefish community.

DRAFT



**FLATHEAD COUNTY
ROAD AND BRIDGE
DEPARTMENTS**

**1249 WILLOW GLEN DRIVE
KALISPELL, MT 59901
Phone: (406) 758-5790
Fax: (406) 758-5794**

August 18, 2025

Mr. Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

Re: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

Dear Mr. Tiefenbach:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above-referenced project. In reviewing the document provided, we noted several references to collaboration between the City of Whitefish and Flathead County on the construction of alternative transportation infrastructure such as separated paths, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes.

Flathead County values these collaborative efforts with our cities. However, at present we have a moratorium on the construction of additional pathways in the County. While we currently maintain approximately 35 miles of pathways, we do not have a secured funding source to support the long-term maintenance of additional infrastructure at the required standard.

One possible path forward for the locations identified in the plan would be for the City to annex the roadways into city limits. The City could then construct and maintain the improvements as funding becomes available.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss further.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Prunty".

David Prunty
Public Works Director
Flathead County

Cc: Pete Melnick, County Administrator

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Daniel Reimer <dreimer@glacierairport.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2025 3:03 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Will Monin
Subject: Re: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

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Alan,

Looks like you are making progress.

My only comment at this time is on Page 11 - Whitefish Air Strip.

The Whitefish Air Strip is owned and operated by the State of Montana. Where it says "and is controlled by the Flathead Municipal Airport." is incorrect and should be removed.

Regards,

Daniel Reimer, C.M.
Director of Development
Glacier Park International Airport
dreimer@glacierairport.com | C: 406-270-5891



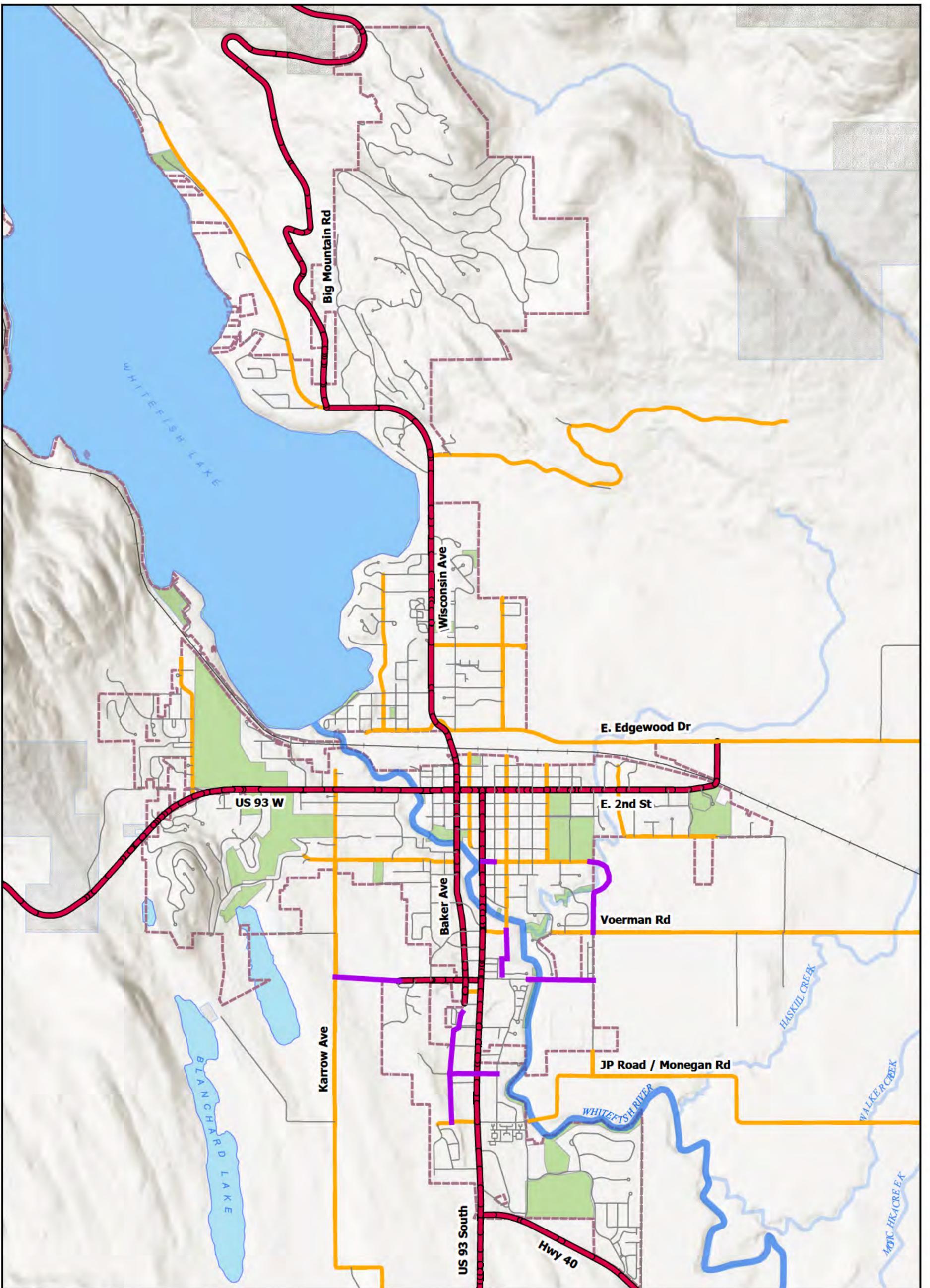
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From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, August 12, 2025 2:52 PM
Subject: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

Good afternoon,

You have received this email because you have been identified as an agency associated with transportation in Flathead County.

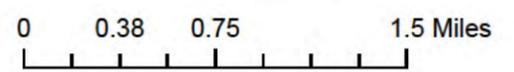
Attached is the draft transportation element of Vision Whitefish 2045, the City of Whitefish's growth policy update (community plan).



Road Classifications

- Local Road
- City Collector
- Arterial
- Future Road Extension

City of Whitefish Road Classifications



May 2025

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Heidi Van Everen <heidi@whitefishlegacy.org>
Sent: Friday, August 22, 2025 12:17 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Re: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element
Attachments: City DRAFT Transportation Element August 22 2025.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

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Hello Alan – I’ve attached my edited version of the Transportation element. I’m happy to possibly meet with you next week or sometime prior to the next public version of this document if that would be of any value to you and the process.

I’m a bit confused by a few elements of the document and included a general comment on this regard...Objective 1 could be more broad Continue to develop a safe, balanced, and integrated...that provides easy access to priority locations including stores, banks, schools, neighborhoods, pathways, trails, and river access and gives equal preference....from my perspective, this would be an important addition right at the start.

Seems odd the transportation section is making such big statements regarding development, infill, etc I suggest the priorities be more focused on transportation & associated transportation values - connectivity, ease, improved access, etc. but maybe this was an idea that came from public input and I don’t know that.

And I'm also surprised there's so little mention of the Whitefish Trail, Whitefish River, need for improved efficiencies for vehicular and non-vehicular access, growing interest in e-bikes, needed sidewalk connections, etc. throughout the city - in the goals, objectives, and background sections. I'd also expected to see mention of the Whitefish Trail Master Plan or Whitefish Area Neighborhood Plan. Is that in a different section possibly?

I added numerous other comments throughout that I hope you'll be able to see – I’m not sure what the best way is to provide input in a pdf? But I hope my comments are helpful.

I haven’t been very engaged in this process and maybe there are other sections that I should consult. it was my understanding that trail connectivity and the Whitefish Trail fits into this section, yet there is very little mentioned. I think it’s a big part of people’s outdoor interests, community engagement, and providing improved access and connectivity is important on so many levels – in addition to all the other transportation needs.

Let me know if this is helpful and how best I can get more engaged. Thanks, Heidi

Heidi Van Everen
Whitefish Legacy Partners
406.862.3880
heidi@whitefishlegacy.org

From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Date: Tuesday, August 12, 2025 at 2:53 PM

To:
Subject: Vision Whitefish 2045 Transportation Element

Good afternoon,

You have received this email because you have been identified as an agency associated with transportation in Flathead County.

Attached is the draft transportation element of Vision Whitefish 2045, the City of Whitefish's growth policy update (community plan).

Following agency review and comment, we will make any necessary revisions and post for public comment.

This plan element is scheduled for review with the Whitefish Community Development Board on September 18, 2025 at 6PM.

Please submit any comments you have by August 22, 2025.

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413



Being a Multimodal Community

“We champion alternatives to private automobile use. We will be a connected, walkable community and will prioritize a safe, efficient, and convenient transportation system for all modes of travel. We place equal emphasis on non-motorized and motorized forms of transportation while considering associated impacts on land use and existing transportation infrastructure”.

INTRODUCTION

A well-designed transportation system is the backbone of a thriving community, shaping how people move, interact, and access essential services. By integrating various modes of transport, a cohesive transportation network can reduce congestion, lower environmental impact, promote healthier lifestyles and improve accessibility for all communities. It also enhances safety, ensuring accessible routes for all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Of all the impacts growth can have on a community, the one most often cited is traffic. Increases in traffic volumes, traffic congestion, speed, noise, air pollution and difficulty finding parking spaces are the issues most people raise when talking about growth in their communities. Even children walking or cycling encounter traffic, and traffic growth overtaking neighborhood streets and intersections can make the best of communities seem unlivable at times.

Many of Whitefish’s traditional neighborhoods are compact and walkable, as they were laid out before the widespread distribution of the automobile. As more recent development has occurred, it has grown southward along US Highway 93 South and other extents of the city limits - further away from schools, the downtown, and amenities. This has led to more road infrastructure, less walkability and increased automobile usage. The city should prioritize connected compact infill development, positioning residential, institutional and commercial areas closer together to reverse this trend. This will reduce dependence on single-occupancy vehicles, promote transit ridership, and encourage active transportation modes like walking and biking. By integrating diverse uses into compact areas, a more efficient alternative transportation network will result, reducing traffic congestion and supporting environmentally sustainable growth.

While many residents still choose to drive for most daily trips, demand for infrastructure supporting non-motorized modes of travel is growing. In addition, a growing percentage of the Whitefish population is aging. Mobility is an issue for older or disabled residents who are no longer able to drive but still need to access services around the city.

Automobiles will likely remain an integral part of the community over the next twenty years, but thoughtful planning should prioritize diverse and sustainable alternative transportation and mobility options as well.

Goal

1. Continue to develop a safe, balanced, and well-integrated multimodal transportation system that gives equal preference to and enhances mobility for all modes of transportation options.

During visioning sessions for Vision Whitefish 2045, the top response regarding how citizens saw Whitefish in twenty years was that Whitefish should be a multimodal community. This means placing equal emphasis on all modes of transport including walking, biking, accessibility for those with mobility-challenges, transit, rail for goods or passengers as well as automobiles. However, safety and convenience for pedestrians and bicyclists is compromised in areas by lack of sidewalks and pathways, with safe routes to routes to schools being voiced as a particularly high priority. The 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan incorporates the multimodal recommendations of previous plans (including the 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan) into its transportation projects. The 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan builds on this plan with additional recommended improvements for enhanced bicycle and pedestrian safety. Frequent reviews and updates of these plans should occur to continue to improve all forms of mobility and guide future transportation infrastructure.

Objectives

- a. It shall be the policy of the City of Whitefish to support non-motorized transportation through planning and capital improvements.
- b. Utilize the 2022 Whitefish Transportation Plan (or future revisions adopted hereafter) when reviewing future transportation improvements or projects.
- c. At least every five years, review the motorized and non-motorized project priorities of the 2022 Transportation Plan and 2025 Safe Streets for All Plan and amend if necessary.
- d. Conduct periodic resident transportation surveys to identify travel trends over time and track progress toward meeting mode share goals.
- e. Develop prioritization criteria to continue the construction of missing sidewalk and trail links throughout the City, with those providing safe routes to school,

downtown access and along arterial and major collector streets being the highest priority.

- f. Prioritize connection of fragmented sections of Whitefish River Trail within corridor.
- g. As East Edgewood Drive borders the city limits to the north, and spans between the city limits near Texas Avenue and East Second Street, the city should work with Flathead County to add bike lanes or a separated shared use path to improve active transportation options along this corridor.
- h. Adopt an official complete streets policy which considers and balances the needs of all transportation users, rather than prioritizing a specific mode. Commit to developing transportation projects that address the needs of all transportation users.
- i. Continue to support federal funding that will keep Amtrak passenger service operating in Montana.

Goal

- 2. Develop and maintain a transportation network that provides multiple reliable route options between key destinations to improve connectivity.

“Connectivity” refers to how effectively different routes, streets, or modes of transportation are linked together to allow smooth, direct, and efficient movement of people and goods. High connectivity means there are multiple, accessible routes between destinations, which aids in dispersing traffic, providing multiple options to key destinations, increasing evacuation routes, reducing travel times, and easing congestion. Secondary access to and from areas with limited connectivity has been one of the most commonly mentioned transportation challenges in Whitefish, with additional grade-separated railroad crossings and emergency egresses mentioned as critical. During planning for enhanced connectivity, it is imperative to be cognizant of how new routes or transportation infrastructure impact existing neighborhoods.

Objectives

- a. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for a second grade-separated railroad crossing.
- b. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for alternative access to Birch Point Drive and across the railroad yard separating north and south Whitefish.

- c. Pursue and prioritize options for reliable alternate access out of the Big Mountain community and discourage new significant development which relies on Haskill Basin Road as presently developed for secondary emergency access.
- d. Plan for through, continuous streets to the greatest extent possible. When cul-de-sacs are necessary due to ownership, topography, or other constraints, ensure a future street extension can be made via a right-of-way dedication, or at the very least, a pedestrian connection.
- e. Continue to explore options for future road extensions to better disperse vehicular traffic across the transportation network, providing different route options to key locations and reducing congestion.
- f. Protect residential neighborhoods by designing the road network to minimize the incursion of commercial and transient traffic into residential neighborhoods.
- g. Explore opportunities to improve connectivity in existing neighborhoods without widening existing streets.
- h. Coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions, Flathead County, and MDT toward construction of pathways between Columbia Falls and Kalispell.

Goal:

- 3. Recognize the transportation - land use relationship and associated impacts and encourage infill and mixed-use development patterns over development which results in inefficient or excessive transportation infrastructure requirements.

Transportation decisions can have significant impacts on land use by encouraging expansion and providing accessibility to previously inaccessible places. Likewise, land use decisions directly impact transportation needs, influencing traffic patterns, creating parking issues and necessitating additional infrastructure. The city should prioritize compact, mixed use and infill development in appropriate areas already served by adequate infrastructure, placing residential, commercial, schools and job creating uses within close proximity. This reduces driving, economizes existing infrastructure, and promotes alternative forms of mobility. Existing and future land uses should steer infrastructure planning, and transportation related impacts on surrounding land uses should be identified and / or mitigated where feasible.

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Craig Workman
Sent: Wednesday, October 22, 2025 10:07 AM
To: Pete Herzog; Alan Tiefenbach; Sandra Alessi
Subject: RE: Transportation Element Posted for Public Review
Attachments: GREENWOOD_TERRACE_4-1-21_GWT.tiff

Hey guys. Good chat this morning. Here is a copy of the plat map I found for Greenwood Terrace. I also wanted to let you know the Community Development Board meeting on the Transportation Section of the Growth Policy is scheduled for **Wednesday November 5, 2025 at 6PM.**

Alan – for your information, we discussed a recommendation in the growth policy that proposes a corridor preservation project between Voerman Road and JP Road connecting directly to HWY 93. This is a recommendation I support.

Craig C. Workman, PE

[New email address: cworkman@cityofwhitefish.gov](mailto:cworkman@cityofwhitefish.gov)

Director of Public Works

City of Whitefish | 418 E. 2nd Street | Whitefish, MT 59937

O: (406) 863-2455 | F: (406) 863-2419



From: Pete Herzog
Sent: Wednesday, October 22, 2025 9:04 AM
To: Craig Workman <cworkman@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>; S **Subject:** Re: Transportation Element Posted for Public Review

Done. It came from my work email.

-Pete

October 18, 2025

Transportation Element comments:

Page 4, Goal 3

Recognize the transportation-land use relationship. Consider City investment in transportation infrastructure to stimulate compact infill development where it is most appropriate to meet the community's stated preferences, rather than development which results in inefficient or excessive infrastructure requirements.

Page 6, Goal 3, Objective I:

Continue evaluating parking management programs for downtown Whitefish to increase ~~turn-over and~~ availability of customer parking, provide more available employee parking in designated areas, and reduce impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods, ~~and create revenue for downtown improvements, new public parking lots, and/or public transit.~~ (Turn-over is not a desired goal. Encouraging customers to patronize multiple businesses without additional car trips is the preferred goal.)

Page 8 The Land Use Transportation Relationship

“Land Use decisions directly impact transportation needs . A land use plan should steer the transportation plan.” (Why is this element being adopted prior to the completion of the Land Use Plan? The two should be developed congruently.)

Page 16

Gaps in the Active Transportation Network

During visioning sessions, many comments about the active transportation network related to completing the Whitefish River Trail from City Beach to Smith Fields, with completion of the section between the Pine Lodge Motel and River's Edge Park being the second most requested active transportation improvement. During the development of the 2022 Transportation Plan, the section between Kay Beller Park /Miles Avenue was the most requested improvement.

Page 17

Grade Separated Rail Crossings

A second grade-separated crossing is listed as a potential solution in the 2022 Transportation Plan and was the most mentioned recommended city improvement during visioning sessions. The 2022 Transportation Plan identified two options: E 2nd St or Texas/Columbia, both require further study. This project would create an additional crossing of the BNSF Railway which would improve evacuation from the north in an emergency, improve north-south connectivity and traffic flow, and relieve traffic congestion at the Baker viaduct. (2022 Transportation Plan TSM #7 page xxii)

Truck Traffic/Downtown Bypass

A bypass of some kind has long been discussed in the community but was dismissed in ~~a 2022 downtown Whitefish Highway Study~~. the MDT 1994 US 93 Somers to Whitefish West Project. Reasons for this include difficulties with property acquisition, ~~disagreement between the city and MDT on road improvement scenarios~~, potential costs ~~of bridges, political differences~~, funding, environmental issues, and substantial grades in some areas. The 2018 Downtown Business District Masterplan recommends a strategy for minimizing the impact of truck through-traffic in the Downtown core, utilizing Baker Ave. The addition of better intersection control at West 13th Street/Flathead Avenue and Baker Avenue would improve the flow of traffic on Baker Avenue and would open up the possibility of designating Baker Avenue as an alternate truck route. The city has been communicating with MDT to designate Baker Avenue as a state route to increase funding opportunities for improvements.

Parking Management

Earlier studies and plans including the 2018 Downtown Business District Masterplan favor parking solutions on the supply side focusing on providing additional parking through surface lots and construction of parking structures, to stimulate investment and expansion in the commercial core. In 2017, the city constructed a new city hall building at the northeast corner of East 2nd Street and Baker Avenue which included a three-story public parking structure providing ~~approximately 200~~ 212 parking spaces. In 2019, a parking management plan was completed by Dixon Resources Unlimited. The Dixon study stated that “the 2006 Downtown Master Plan recommended construction of a parking facility, and immediate parking demand was satisfied by the construction of the City Hall facility.” (page 6, Whitefish Parking Management Plan) ~~The plan indicated the new parking structure had provided little benefit toward increasing the availability of on-street parking in the Downtown. (this finding is not in the Dixon study)~~ Also, ~~a~~ Although there were areas in the Downtown where parking shortages still existed, there were other nearby areas where on-street parking was approximately 50% or less occupied, even during peak periods. The report concludes the perceived parking problem is more of a “most convenient parking” problem or a parking management problem. From 2018 to 2020, city staff initiated their own parking occupancy study in which several staff members physically counted parking spaces during peak periods and different days in summer and winter, and these parking counts generally collaborated with the Dixon Resources Unlimited findings. The Dixon Resources Unlimited study suggested prior to the costly construction of another parking garage, better parking management strategies should be initiated first. A number of these strategies have been implemented, including adjusting parking time limits, a new parking enforcement vehicle with increased parking enforcement, an employee parking permit program for specific lots and some levels of the Parking Structure, and striping and curb painting to better define efficient parking options especially for parallel parking spaces. ~~These are numerous, but~~ Other examples include ~~expanding wayfinding, formulating employee parking plans~~, increasing transit, seeking parking agreements, and implementing residential parking permits, ~~adjusting parking time limits, adding more parking enforcement officers or providing “parking ambassadors” who greet downtown visitors and help direct them to areas with potential parking. One strategy of particular controversy~~ A highly controversial

strategy, strongly opposed by the business community, is to consider ~~potentially look at~~ adding paid parking in select areas downtown. ~~Advocates claim that paid~~ parking typically frees up valuable spaces in front of downtown businesses, discourages employees from parking in valuable customer spaces, ~~aids in more parking turnover,~~ (the DTMP calls for increasing amount of time customers spend downtown, visiting multiple business without additional driving- “turnover” is counter to that intent) and generates revenue for parking garage maintenance or new parking facilities. There are various technologies that are now available, such as exempting “locals” from paid parking requirements through license plate recognition. A very common objection regarding paid parking comes from the business community who ~~have concerns~~ ~~are convinced~~ patrons will drive to other nearby shopping areas rather than pay for parking to shop at their business. ~~Although~~ this a very typical concern voiced whenever cities contemplate paid parking programs, ~~at some~~ studies, ~~conducted for other cities,~~ seem to contradict this concern. While there is no simple solution, the city should continue to engage the business owners, decision makers, other stakeholders and the community in discussions of parking ~~management~~ strategies.

Page 23

2022 Downtown Whitefish Highway Study

The Downtown Whitefish Highway Study was developed by Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to improve Highway 93 through the downtown area from 13th Street on the south end to East 2nd Street on the north end. ~~Through evaluation of Seven options, including Concept C and Concept G were evaluated. Concept C was preferred by MDT, However, there were disagreements between the City and MDOT regarding whether Spokane Avenue should be one or two lanes northbound from East 7th Street to East Second Street with the city ultimately choosing the “no build” option. At this point, no MDT funded reconstruction is anticipated along this corridor.~~ and was identified by the Study as the preferred concept. The City of Whitefish diverges with MDT regarding the Study’s final recommendation and supports Concept G as the preferred design. Concept C and Concept G diverge only in the segment of Hwy 93/Spokane Ave from 7th St to 2nd St. The City prefers the treatment of this segment in Concept G due to the superior multimodal accommodations that it provides, including larger buffers for safety, landscaping with trees, and fewer lanes for pedestrians to navigate. The City considers these features necessary to achieve the pedestrian-oriented environment that it envisions for Downtown Whitefish. Regardless of the disagreement between MDT and the City of Whitefish, improvements were agreed to along Baker Avenue and the intersection of 13th Street and Spokane Avenue. Both these improvements are included in the 2022 Transportation Plan’s Major Street Network (MSN) Recommendations and are considered high priorities for implementation. (2022 Downtown Whitefish Highway Study page 119)

2019 City of Whitefish Parking Management Plan

This plan reviewed earlier plans with recommendations generally advocated for additional parking (surface and structured). The 2019 Plan recommends a cost-conscious approach of managing existing parking through enforcement of parking time limits, highly controversial paid parking, improved technologies, and downtown worker permit parking while evaluating the actual demand/need of all the downtown parking and other updated parking policies. Downtown worker parking permits, improved technology and improved enforcement have all been implemented.

2018 Downtown Business District Masterplan

These principles include intersections supporting rather than detracting from downtown, accommodating traffic volumes without degrading downtown livability and the retail **environment**, ~~addressing parking~~ **location of new parking facilities to support downtown retail and commercial activities**, and promoting alternative transportation modes. **The plan envisions the downtown potential build-out capacity of over 300,000 sq.ft , requiring an additional 555 parking spaces. (page 12, 2018 DTMP)** Included in this plan is a ~~proposed design~~ **Transportation Framework** for downtown Whitefish with a comprehensive complete street network of integrated and balanced pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile facilities that connect to and within the downtown planning area.

Active Transportation Network Map

This map omits the Cycletrack on Spokane Ave., from 6th St to Railway Street, which is included in the Downtown Masterplan, The 2017 Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Masterplan, and the 2022 Transportation Plan. It is ranked the number one priority Active Transportation Project in the 2022 Transportation Plan. (see page 137 & 138 of 2022 Transportation Plan)

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Rebecca Norton
Sent: Tuesday, October 14, 2025 9:52 AM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Cc: Dana Smith; Craig Workman
Subject: Re: Transportation section

Thanks. I don't mean to be snarky about the County Commissioners not funding the idea (not publicly anyways) but with CF now also having a resort tax I wonder if the cities could allocate funds to a tri-city commuter bus system? And within our city year round trolley cars would be cute

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From: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, October 14, 2025 9:03:42 AM
To: Rebecca Norton <rnorton@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Cc: Dana Smith <dsmith@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Craig Workman <cworkman@cityofwhitefish.gov>
Subject: RE: Transportation section

Thanks Rebecca, I'll talk to Dave and Craig.

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937
Ph: 406-863-2413





From: Rebecca Norton <rnorton@cityofwhitefish.gov>

Sent: Monday, October 13, 2025 9:11 AM

To: Alan Tiefenbach <atiefenbach@cityofwhitefish.gov>

Cc: Dana Smith <dsmith@cityofwhitefish.gov>; Craig Workman <cworkman@cityofwhitefish.gov>

Subject: Transportation section

Very comprehensive. The only thing I wondered about was whether we should mention was that the City was approached about starting a commuter service and I think we voted to commit \$60,000 to expand the Mountain Climber hours to do that but the County Commissioners refused to move it forward. The reason why it might be worth bringing up is because the model is in existence and with very little \$ could be implemented. We are also looking at resort tax reallocation and that might be one area to begin a fund for because if it was a year long reliable service it could really help retain our workforce. Thanks Alan-another great effort. It's so nice to see our great city celebrated through your deep analysis and excellent summaries. I very much appreciate you

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Alan Tiefenbach

From: Kevin Fitzgerald <kevin.fitzgerald1477@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, October 10, 2025 1:29 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Transportation Comment

You don't often get email from kevin.fitzgerald1477@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Love the prioritization of active modes of transit and would encourage the inclusion of the downtown master plans mention of enhancing the pedestrian corridor along central. This has been included since the 2005 edition.

The best enhancement would be a closure of the street for at most 4 blocks or min of two blocks(Railway to 2nd). The pedestrian and bike safety and flow would be greatly enhanced while connecting existing paths and parking lots to the downtown commercial space. The possibility of allowing expanded services at many of the restaurants could also provide an economic boost for downtown businesses.

Good luck with the comments!
Kevin Fitzgerald

VISION WHITEFISH 2024:Transportation Element Comments

Page 1, INTRODUCTION

¶ 3: The last sentence requires a citation in order to substantiate the statement.

Page 3, Objective f:

After within, add; *the Whitefish River*

Page 4, Objective c:

Did you intend to combine objectives c. and d.? As it is now, objective c is incomplete.

Objective d:

Delete *as presently developed*. What constitutes *significant* development?

Goal 3:

What does it mean to "... encourage infill and mixed-use development patterns.

Examples would be helpful.

How is "infill" defined?

Page 5, Objectives:

Objective c:

How is *close proximity* defined?

Objective e:

Can you provide examples?

Page 6, Goal 4:

¶ 2: In the last sentence, after network strike '*with*' and insert '*within*' and after Valley strike '*to*'.

Page 9, The Road Network:

¶1: At the end of this paragraph add: *The existing and future road network must consider the capacity needed for safe and efficient egress in the event of an emergency evacuation due to wildfire, toxic spill in the railyard, or other disaster.*

Arterials: Highway 93 is more properly described as US Highway 93 *North* rather than US Highway 93 *West*.

Page 10, The Active Transportation Network:

Shared use Pathways: Is this a good place to introduce the issues that are developing around the use of e-bikes and that are likely to be an issue into the future? Is this also a place to reiterate the need to complete the gaps in the Whitefish River trail?

Page 10, Mountain Climber:

Delete the last sentence. Not a big deal one way or another but the sentence refers to a past action.

Page 12:

¶ 1: Delete the last sentence.

¶ 2: In the first sentence add *currently* between Whitefish and Contributes.

Page 13:

Air Transportation:

Whitefish Airport:

¶ 1: Why the ellipsis at the end of the second sentence? Didn't the City just approve a 5,000 sq.ft. hanger at the airstrip? Also, I believe the airstrip is controlled by the Flathead Municipal Airport Authority.

Page 14:

Glacier Park International Airport (GPIA):

¶ 2: In the second sentence you might want to include aerial retardant operations in the list of aviation services that operate out of GPIA; both fixed wing and rotor aircraft. This can have a major impact on operations in the event of a major wildfire event.

Rail:

¶ 1 Insert *route of* between *the* and *Empire*.

Edit the last sentence as follows: *This is 20,107 fewer riders since adoption of the 2007 Growth Policy. Ridership increased post-Covid but there has been an overall decline in ridership since a peak in 2008.*

VISIONING COMMENTS ON TRANSPORTATION

Page 21: Big Mountain Road

¶ 1: I strongly suggest eliminating *any* reference to an egress off of Big Mountain through Haskill Creek, purportedly or otherwise. This is a gated, single track road through dense timber with at least five wooden bridges. Also, in the last sentence replace *should* with *must*.

as critical. During planning for enhanced connectivity, it is imperative to be cognizant of how new routes or transportation infrastructure impact existing neighborhoods.

Objectives

- a. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for a second grade-separated railroad crossing.
- b. Pursue and prioritize opportunities for alternative access to Birch Point Drive and across the railroad yard separating north and south Whitefish.
- c. Pursue and prioritize options and public access easements and funding mechanisms for [typo]
- d. Road improvements for reliable alternate access and egress from the Big Mountain area and discourage new ~~significant~~ development which relies on Haskill Basin Road as presently developed for secondary emergency access. [New development of roadways and transportation networks should reflect and preserve the character of the neighborhood.](#)
- e. Plan for through, continuous streets to the greatest extent possible. When cul-de-sacs are necessary due to ownership, topography, or other constraints, ensure a future street extension can be made via a right-of-way dedication, public access easements, or at the very least, a pedestrian connection.
- f. Continue to explore options for future road extensions to better disperse vehicular traffic across the transportation network, providing different route options to key locations and reducing congestion.
- g. Protect residential neighborhoods by designing the road network to minimize the incursion of commercial and transient traffic into residential neighborhoods.
- h. Explore opportunities to improve connectivity in existing neighborhoods without widening existing streets.
- i. Coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions, Flathead County, and MDT toward construction of multi-use pathways between Columbia Falls and Kalispell.
- j. [The community shall encourage sustainability in all aspects of the transportation system so that the needs of the present are met, while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities. \(2007 WF Growth Policy, p. 136\).](#)
- k. [Transportation infrastructures should be prioritized in areas that can and have](#)

Please submit any comments you have by August 22, 2025.

Alan Tiefenbach

Long Range Planner

City of Whitefish

418 E. 2nd Street

P.O. Box 158

Whitefish, MT 59937

Ph: 406-863-2413



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VISION WHITEFISH 2045
Growth Policy Update
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Alan Tiefenbach

From: Janice McCann
Sent: Monday, October 13, 2025 2:25 PM
To: Alan Tiefenbach
Subject: Transportation plan

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Dear Planning Commissioners,

I've been following along with this Growth Policy process and I want to say thank you.

To get right to the point: If Columbia Ave north of 7th street is redesigned to handle more through traffic as an alternative to Spokane Ave our Historic East Downtown Neighborhood will suffer greatly.

Sure you may decrease the pooling of vehicles on Spokane, but you are only shifting it a few blocks to the east. Most traffic still has to move west onto 2nd creating the same bottleneck we've had for years. When the line gets too long waiting for a left hand turn onto 2nd Street from Columbia the traffic will move to Somers Ave to turn left, then perhaps even to Park Ave. The light on Spokane and 2nd will have to be retimed to allow more traffic to enter from 2nd. Spokane will back up even more. It's not a real solution. What about all the caregivers that park on Columbia to pick up kids from the middle school?

We appreciate that the city has been aware of our special traffic safety requirements because of the schools, parks and many pedestrian and bicyclists. Our alleys have poor visibility with their limited line of site. The city has placed many stop signs and bump-outs to slow traffic and discourage through traffic. Why are we looking at a change now when safety concerns are elevated with the increased density we are experiencing?

Our historic neighborhood provides a lot to the people of Whitefish. We have diversified housing consisting of multi-family, rental houses, and single family homes, (many of which are affordable) and probably more ADU's than any other neighborhood. We have day cares, preschools, high school, middle school and elementary schools. We provide overflow parking to the downtown and schools. Because of our high density and providing parking for downtown and the schools we require on-street parking. ADU's don't have parking requirements. We are a neighborhood full of bike and pedestrian traffic. Will the people of our neighborhood have to park in the downtown business district instead of in front of their homes?

I don't think the consultants understand that our neighborhood is one of the few left that is intact. We are a treasure and worth protecting.

With highest regards,
Janice McCann

Alan Tiefenbach

From: Alan Tiefenbach
Sent: Thursday, October 9, 2025 9:36 AM
To: 'Pete Herzog'; alessi812@gmail.com
Subject: RE: Transportation Element Posted for Public Review

Hi Pete, sorry about the delay, I have been out of town at a conference.

A previous version of the 2022 plan indicated Greenwood as a bridge extending across the WF River to Monegan as a major project.

When the plan went to hearing, it appears that due to opposition of Greenwood Area residents, at request of Council this connection was removed from the Major Street Network Projects Map. (See Page xviii of the attached link).

Although this link was removed from the Major Street Network Projects map, you can still see a connection described on MSN 10 (page xix) although it does not specifically refer to Greenwood.

If you look at the map on Page 108, you can see this direct link shown again as a “preservation project” and described as Preservation Project #10 on Page 107.

What this means it that although a Greenwood extension (including a bridge crossing the river) was removed as an actual recommended project under the 2022 Transportation Plan, this corridor is being “preserved” for the future.

In addition, the City does own land on either side of the river to allow this extension, so the right of way is there. This option has not completely gone away.

That said, I have removed that segment as a road extension on the Transportation Element “Road Classifications Map.” After the public review period is complete, I will look at all public comments, make revisions as appropriate, and provide the updated plan element with a staff report to the Planning Commission a week in advance of their November 5 meeting.

Understand the Transportation Element (which is just an element of Vision Whitefish 2045) is a 10,000 ft. summary of what all the transportation plans and policies indicate. Actual changes to the transportation network must happen under a revised transportation plan, which is an engineering document, not with Vision Whitefish 2045. However, if the Council wants to add an objective to the transportation element that a Greenwood extension may never be considered with future transportation plans, they can certainly do that if they believe it is in the best interest of the public.

<https://www.cityofwhitefish.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3324/WhitefishTransPlan---Final-October-2022>

Alan Tiefenbach

Alan Tiefenbach
Long Range Planner
City of Whitefish
418 E. 2nd Street
P.O. Box 158
Whitefish, MT 59937

Alan,

I am sending these comments in support of the Vision Whitefish 2045 Growth Policy, Transportation element. I am also in support of the comments developed with the Safe Trails Whitefish group.

My personal comments follow:

The River Trail should be the highest priority, and several immediate trails linking to it, the next highest priority. These linking trails are: Birch Point to West Lakeshore (also an emergency access); Veterans Peace Park; Spokane Ave. underpass; 13th St. connection; Cow Creek Connection; and River Lakes Park Area to Kalner Lane to MT Hwy. 40. Combined, these trails are the core of the Connect Whitefish Trail system and need to be prioritized as such.

For the nearly 30 years since the first Whitefish Trails Master Plan (now the Connect Whitefish Plan) was adopted, the Trails have been touted as one of the highest priorities by the City, however limited funding is assigned to this budgetary item. New Trail construction still relies on mostly on development projects to build these segments.

Trails are expensive to build in Whitefish due to terrain, waterways, soils and constraints from the existing built environment. Construction costs keep rising, land costs and inflation keep making the trails more expensive. Significant progress will not be made until consistent funding for the trails is made a priority.

Thank you to the City Staff and volunteers for the great work on the Whitefish Vision 2045 Growth Policy and work on other Committees and projects.

Regards,

Bruce Boody ASLA PLA
301 Second St. E. Ste.1B
(Mail; PO Box 1363)
Whitefish, MT 59937