WHITEFISH
MONTANA

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
MANAGEMENT PLAN

WHITEFISH
• MONTANA •
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of people spending time in Whitefish, especially during the peak summer season. There is concern that too much visitation will diminish the quality of life that the community values and that visitors find so attractive. The purpose of this Plan is to promote sustainable community-based tourism development that is beneficial to community members, employees, and visitors.

> *"Sustainable Tourism: A sustainable approach to tourism means that neither the natural environment nor the socio-cultural fabric of the host communities will be impaired by the arrival of tourists. On the contrary, the natural environment and the local communities should benefit from tourism, both economically and culturally. Sustainability implies that tourism resources and attractions should be utilized in such a way that their subsequent use by future generations is not compromised."*
> (Source: World Tourism Organization)

A resident survey showed concerns related to housing prices, traffic, infrastructure, and community character. While residents identified challenges related to growth in visitation, they also recognized the benefits that accompany the tourism industry. These include positive economic impact from nonresident visitors that contributed $614 million to the regional economy in Flathead County in 2018. Each year skiers at Whitefish Mountain Resort contribute $12.1 million to the economy and Whitefish Trail visitors contribute $6.4 million in consumer spending. The resort tax provides funding for roads, parks, other infrastructure, and a portion allocated for a property tax rebate.

This Plan relies on community input to identify fundamental values that underlie plan recommendations. These values are expressed as the three key pillars.

KEY PILLARS

Community Character | Livability | Community Engagement

Data regarding population growth, new construction, and visitation reveal that nonresident tourists only account for a portion of the increase in summer crowds. Whitefish experienced a 3% annual average population growth rate since 2010 while Flathead County experienced an annual average growth rate of 2% per year. In addition to this population increase, there has been corresponding growth in seasonal/vacation homes that are primarily used during the peak summer months. New hotel construction has contributed to visitor growth but the increase in short-term rentals, through companies such as AirBnB and VRBO, has far outpaced the number of new hotel rooms. All these factors contribute to increased traffic, higher housing costs, workforce shortages, longer wait times at restaurants, and user conflicts on trails.

Trends also indicate that tourism growth will continue over the next decade or longer. As visitors discover Whitefish, many choose to relocate to the area, generating more population growth. The airport is expanding, and more flights will bring more visitors to the area. National Park visitation has increased nationwide, with Glacier National Park recording record visitation in recent years. Visitors and locals use social media to share their vacation experiences, generating even more interest in visiting the area. While the Convention and Visitor Bureau focuses on marketing off-season activities, businesses and state agencies continue to market Glacier Country during summer months.

While the pillars represent the overarching principles, five specific focus areas were identified to provide an organizational framework for addressing priority issues. Within each focus area, are recommended goals and actions to address concerns that emerged from public input and the data analysis. The table below indicates the page number to find the list of actions for each focus area.

Focus Area	Action Item
Tourism	pg. 26
Economic Diversification	pg. 55
Housing & Development	pg. 78
Environment	pg. 99
Transportation	pg. 113

Although Whitefish has little control over the trends that underlie this growth, it can take action to respond and manage the growth that is occurring. Several initiatives are underway to address concerns. The City is implementing recommendations from the "Workforce Housing Strategic Plan" and recently adopted a "Parking Management Plan." The City enacted a water conservation ordinance in 2019, and upgrades to the wastewater treatment plan will commence in 2020. Other plans include "Downtown Business District Master Plan," "Connect Whitefish Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan," "Climate Action Plan," and "Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan." Given the work already completed, the "Sustainable Tourism Management Plan" builds on these processes, establishes next steps, and identifies actions to maintain the quality of life.

Such a framework includes the following steps for completing this plan.

1. Inventory and define the problem
2. Include the public to develop solutions
3. Identify initial actions to build capacity
4. Identify strategies to address key issues
5. Measure, monitor, and adjust

A community workshop solicited suggestions on policy and action items that are reflected in these recommendations. The implementation chapter compiles the recommended actions from each of the focus areas and identifies the following high priorities actions. Implementation depends on partnerships between community organizations, state/federal agencies, funders, and businesses.

High Priority Organizational Actions

- **Benchmarking & Data Collection:** Indicators to monitor progress and process to refine data
- **Appoint Standing Committee:** Responsible for implementing plan
- **Business Survey:** Identify support for buy local, green business, workforce development
- **Education & Outreach:** Promote responsible tourism and recreation

High Priority Issue Oriented Actions

- **Short-Term Rentals:** Enforce, educate, zoning for parking, incentives for long-term rentals
- **Recycling:** Research and expand opportunities for recycling, support local recycling businesses, and reduce overall waste
- **Funding:** Legislature outreach to secure funding for various programs in 2021 Legislative session
- **Wildfire:** Emergency Preparedness – Education, outreach, coordination, firesafe best practices
- **Transportation:** Transit, park-n-ride, employee parking permits, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities

Work Program

	2020		2021				2022
	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	1st Qtr
Education -Outreach Campaign Dev.	■	■	■				
Education – Outreach Implementation		■	■	■	■	■	
Appoint Tourism Standing Committee		■					
Business Survey		■					
Recycling Research		■					
Fire Preparedness Workshop - Audits	■				■		
Legislative Outreach		■	■	■			
Update Trail User Policies			■				
Summer/Special Event Shuttle – Policies		■				■	
Benchmarking – Data Collection Project				■	■	■	
Refine Whitefish Brand Guides				■	■		
Update STR Zoning-Parking regulations.				■	■		
Incentivize STR conversion to workforce housing				■	■	■	■
Downtown Employee Parking permit	■	■	■	■			
Pilot Park-N-Ride – Carpool program					■	■	■
Coordination Activities							
US 93 Urban Core Transportation Plan	▨	▨	▨				
Whitefish Transportation Plan	▨	▨	▨				
County Transit Plan	▨	▨	▨				
Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan	▨	▨	▨	▨			
City Growth Policy Update						▨	▨

To Be Scheduled:
- Landlord – Realtor Education
- Day Care Initiative
- Car share Feasibility Study (If employer interest)
- Worker Apprenticeship Programs thru FVCC
- Business Incubator
- Commercial Space Inventory
- Impaired Driving Prevention Grant
- Commercial space inventory
- Local Investment Cooperative
- Urban Wildlife Management Plan
- Historic Preservation Survey
- Gateway Treatments
- Update Architectural Design Guidelines
- Dig Once/Open Trench Policies
- Update BNSF response plan
- Sustainable/smart parking designs
- County zoning – proposed amendments
- Homeless prevention
- Broadband Task Force
- Coordinate with public health on air quality

I. PLANNING OVERVIEW

"Maintain a happy local strong diverse community that retains its roots, culture, and diverse nature. Water quality and preservation."   Survey Comment

A. PURPOSE

Peak summer season tourism growth in Whitefish has resulted in challenges related to housing, transportation, infrastructure, and quality of life. Shared commitments and continuous attention are necessary to protect community character and maintain the lifestyle that residents enjoy. The purpose of this Plan is to promote community-based tourism development that is beneficial to community members, employees, and visitors. Businesses, public officials, and civic organizations can rely on this document to guide them toward responsible product and service development. This Plan provides a strategic, long-term vision and framework for the sustainable future of the Whitefish tourism economy.

B. PROCESS

In 2018, the Whitefish City Council adopted Resolution #18-05 to create a Sustainable Tourism Management Plan Steering Committee. The Committee was tasked with developing a "joint tourism master plan between the City and the WCVB, integrating extensive public input and providing a strategic long-term vision and framework for the sustainable future of the Whitefish tourism economy." Figure 1.1 shows the process the Committee followed to draft this planning document.

Appoint Steering Committee

Open House

Community Survey

Data Collection - Identify Best Practices

Focus Groups/Interviews

Community Stategy Workshop

Sustainable Tourism Management Plan

Figure 1.1: Planning Process

C. KEY PILLARS

An analysis of public feedback indicated that there were certain themes or statements that community members routinely used to describe their concerns and desires for Whitefish. To summarize the fundamental values expressed through this input, the Plan identifies key pillars, that apply to each focus area in this Plan. Each of the Plan's five focus areas incorporates elements of the three principles as described below. Additionally, the key pillars provide the basis for evaluating goals and strategies. Figure 1.2 illustrates the concept of overlapping values and the "sweet spot" that occurs at the intersection of all three key pillars. Recommendations that fall in these overlapping areas are given higher priority.

Figure 1.2: Key Pillars

Community Engagement

Engage and empower residents to plan for and manage the tourism economy. Solicit resident opinions throughout the planning process. Coordinate and partner with multiple stakeholders regarding tourism planning issues. Conduct outreach to residents and visitors regarding the benefits of tourism.

Livability

Strive toward a community for all income levels through affordable housing and affordable cost of living. Encourage businesses to incorporate sustainable tourism practices. Strengthen the quality of life through improved local services and adequate and sustainable infrastructure. Identify opportunities and services from tourism that will benefit lower income households.

Community Character

Respect, preserve and celebrate the heritage, authentic culture, arts, traditions, and distinctiveness of the community. Promote a vibrant, creative, diverse, and friendly community with emphasis on unique local businesses. Discourage sprawl and development that is not in character with the community.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER – DEFINED

"The most popular reason to visit Whitefish is that it is a 'real' community and not a cookie cutter resort town--and that attraction comes from local people and families that can thrive here to provide Whitefish its popular character."   Survey Comment

Whitefish is a vibrant mountain town neighboring Glacier National Park. It is a welcoming community with boundless opportunities for adventure all day, every day – bookended with world-class dining, cultural attractions, and distinctive accommodations.   Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau

The City of Whitefish is a unique and wonderful place. Beginning as a blue-collar railroad and logging town, it has achieved an additional identity as a resort destination with world-class skiing, fishing, golf, and proximity to Glacier National Park. It is a town with a rich character and heritage in its historic buildings, neighborhoods, its people and stories.   Whitefish Architectural Standards Vision Statement

D. FOCUS AREAS

The Plan identifies five focus areas that are part of an interrelated system. Each individual focus area must be healthy for the system to thrive. Strategies in each focus area should integrate concepts from the three "key pillars" to create a foundation for success. Understanding the connections of these various system components will result in more effective decision making. (See Figure 1.3)

Figure 1.3: Focus Areas

E. COMMUNITY PROFILE

1. Geography

Whitefish is in northwest Montana, in Flathead County, 60 miles south of the Canadian border. The county seat of Kalispell is approximately 12 miles south of Whitefish on U.S. Highway 93. Glacier National Park is 25 miles to the east of town. The Flathead National Forest and Stillwater State Forest comprise much of the land surrounding Whitefish. Recently, private timber lands protecting the watershed around Whitefish have been placed under conservation easements.

Approximately 76% percent of Flathead County is mountainous public land, providing abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, scenic vistas, pristine wildlife habitat, and rugged terrain. The incorporated communities of Whitefish, Kalispell, and Columbia Falls are located on the valley floor, surrounded by agricultural lands, open space, and scattered development. The natural beauty, national park, forests, and mountains are main attractions for visitors. (Figure 1.4)

Figure 1.4: Aerial View of Whitefish and Surrounding Area

2. History

Whitefish has a four-season climate consisting of winter from December through March and mild summers with occasional hot spells. The town was founded when the railroad routed the rail line 12 miles north of Kalispell and established a rail yard and station. The town of Whitefish was platted soon thereafter with railroad, logging, and agriculture becoming main economic drivers.

After World War II, veterans of the Army's 10th Mountain Division developed Big Mountain ski area on leased United States Forest Service land, with base lodge facilities owned by community shareholders. In the early 2000s, the ski resort transitioned to private ownership and changed its name to Whitefish Mountain Resort. The resort offers alpine and cross-country skiing in winter, and mountain biking and adventure sports in summer.

Key Facts

- City of Whitefish Elevation – 3,308 ft. Whitefish Mountain Resort Elevation – Base (4,464 ft.) Summit (6,817 ft.)

- Water Features – Whitefish Lake & Whitefish River

- Average High/Low Temperatures
  January – 31/15 Degrees Fahrenheit
  July – 81/48 Degrees Fahrenheit

- Average Snowfall – In-town (73 inches) Whitefish Mountain Resort (333 inches)

- Major Employers – Hospital, schools, government, resort, Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad

3. Population Growth

The City of Whitefish has experienced a faster rate of growth than the rest of the state and Flathead County. While historic growth is 3% a year, the City's facility plans for water and wastewater use a 2% growth rate. Recent state population projections for the county use a 1.3% growth rate through 2030. At this slower rate of growth, the county population in 2030 is projected to be 118,263 people. Depending on the actual rate of growth ranging from 1.3% annually and 2% annually, Whitefish population in 2030 would range from 9,106 to 9,981. With an average household size of 2.15, this equates to an average of 100 new households per year. Although the annual average for new residential building permits in Whitefish from 2015 to 2019 was 150 units, census data indicate the City has a vacancy rate of 30%. This includes seasonal/vacation homes. Accounting for this vacancy rate, there was an increase of 104 new occupied units, which is comparable to the expected number of new households.

Population	2000	2010	2018	2000-2018 # increase	2000-2018 % Increase	Average Annual Growth
Whitefish	5,032	6,357	7,870	2,838	56.4%	3.1%
59937	11,526	12,588	13,356*	1,830*	15.9%	0.9%
Flathead County	74,471	90,928	102,106	27,635	37.1%	2.1%
Montana	902,195	989,415	1,062,305	160,110	17.7%	1.0%

*Table 1.1: Population Trends   Source: U.S. Census *Note 59937 population estimate is for 2017*

4. Amenities and Attractions

Whitefish Mountain Resort, the town, Glacier National Park, and surrounding areas offer
a variety of amenities that provide year-round outdoor recreation and entertainment options.

Whitefish Mountain Resort
- Lodging, dining, retail, entertainment
- Alpine Skiing
- Nordic Trails
- Mountain Biking
- Alpine Slide
- Zip Line – Aerial Adventure Park

Downtown
- Specialty retail shops
- Bars & restaurants
- Art galleries
- Walkability

Performing Arts
- O'Schaughnessy Center
- Whitefish Performing Arts Center
- Mountain Cinema (4 screens)

Trails
- City of Whitefish – Bike & Pedestrian trails
- Whitefish Legacy Partners – Trail system on state forest/private land/USFS
- Glacier Nordic Club Cross Country Ski Trails (Golf Course & Haskill Basin)

City Parks (Not listed in other categories)
- Memorial Park (Baseball stadium, pickleball, playground)
- Armory Park (Skate park, WAG dog park, softball, Community Center)
- Kiddie Park/Riverside Park (Baker Tennis courts, playground, river access)
- Depot Park (Pavilion)
- Soroptimist Park (Playground, picnic)
- Kay Beller Park (River Access)
- Mountain Trails Park (Volleyball, playground, adjacent to ice rink)
- Crestwood Park (Picnic, open space)

Whitefish Lake and Whitefish River
- City Beach – Boat ramp, dock, swimming, picnic, concessions
- Les Mason State Park
- Whitefish State Park
- The Lodge at Whitefish Lake – Marina
- River trail with various access points for non-motorized watercraft

Sports Complexes and Athletics
- Whitefish Lakes Golf Course (36-holes)
- Indoor Ice Rink (Year-round operation)
- Smith Fields (Soccer, baseball & softball fields)
- Grouse Mountain Park (Tennis Courts & Soccer)
- Wave (Indoor gyms, swimming pool, workout rooms)
- Bowling alley
- High School athletic facilities

Conference Space
- Grouse Mountain Lodge
- The Lodge at Whitefish Lake
- Firebrand Hotel
- Hampton Inn

Adventure – Nearby activities
- Horseback Riding
- River Trips
- Sky Diving

Museums and Historic Places
- Depot Museum
- Ski Heritage Museum
- National Historic Register (First Presbyterian Church, Train Depot, 900 S. Baker Ave.)

Public Lands and Conservation Areas
- Flathead National Forest
- Stillwater Forest
- Haskill Basin Conservation Easement (3,020 acres)
- Battin Nature Conservancy - Conservation Easement (215 acres)
- Viking Creek Wetland Preserve (29 acres)
- Baake Nature Reserve (12 acres)

Other
- Whitefish Municipal Airport (Grass runway next to Armory Park)

Table 1.2: Amenities – Attractions

5. Community Events

Whitefish is a destination for events that celebrate local culture, attract visitors in off-peak seasons, and add to a vibrant community. The events represent partnerships between various nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and private businesses, and enhance the quality of life year-round.

Major Events

- Ski Joring
- Winter Carnival
- Special Olympics
- Snow bus Brewfest & Wine Festival
- Dummy Derby/Pond Skimming
- Feast Whitefish

- Gallery Art Walks
- Two Bear Marathon
- Farmer's Market
- Woody Boat Weekend
- 4th of July Fireworks
- Whitefish Arts Festival
- Festival Amadeus
- Huckleberry Days

- Summer Brewfest
- Whitefish Trails Hootenanny
- Huckleberry Hill Climb
- Oktoberfest
- Halloween Celebration
- Turkey Trot
- Christmas Stroll
- Torchlight Parade

II. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

"Let's make smart decisions to inhibit overcrowding, so that Whitefish can be the hometown community we want it to be."

"We need to stay connected to our roots, know the stories of our community and help us connect with our community and our identity. Maintain our sense of place and sense of community."
Survey Comments

A. STAKEHOLDERS

It is important to identify stakeholder groups, describe their roles, and assess the contribution that each group can make toward sustainable tourism. Achieving the goals of the Plan will require communication, coordination, and partnerships among the stakeholders shown in Table 2.1.

Tourism – Hospitality Industry			
Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau	Montana Office of Tourism	Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission	Whitefish Chamber of Commerce
• Partnerships, visitor center • Tourism strategy, policy development, and coordination on implementation strategies • Branding, marketing, promotion, research, and communications			
Public Sector			
City of Whitefish (Departments, Whitefish Housing Authority)	Flathead County (Planning, DES, FCEDA, Roads, Parks & Rec.)	State of Montana (DNRC, MDT, DOC, FWP, DEQ,)	Federal (USFS, NPS, EDA)
• Planning, growth policy, development regulations, economic development, budgeting, grant administration, housing initiatives, public safety, sustainability • Infrastructure, transportation, parks, trails, law enforcement • Community engagement, communications, partnerships, coordination			
Private Sector			
Large Employers	Small Business	Employees	Developers
• Tourism and recreation services, hospitality, marketing, sustainable business practices, taxpayers • Job creation, worker recruitment, financing, business investment, coordinate with public sector • Housing development, downtown and commercial development, coordination with public sector			
Civic			
Education	Nonprofit	Health	Community
• Capacity building, training, fundraising, community outreach, promote sustainability and equity • Provide community and social services, coordination with public and private sector			
Residents			
Year-Round	Second Home		Future
• Consumers, responsible citizenship, taxpayers • Public participation, volunteer, charitable contributions, community ambassadors			
Visitors			
In-State	Out-of-State	Leisure	Business
• Consumers, sustainable travel practices • Communications through travel reviews, consumer surveys, feedback to hosts			

DES = Dept. of Emergency Services, FCEDA = Flathead County Economic Development, DNRC= Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, MDT = Montana Dept. of Transportation, FWP = Fish, Wildlife and Parks, DEQ = Dept. of Environmental Quality, USFS = United States Forest Service, NPS = National Park Service, EDA = Economic Development Administration

Table 2.1: Stakeholders

B. SURVEY

From May through June in 2018, the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan Committee conducted an online survey that garnered over 600 responses. Of the people who took the survey, 90% were year-round residents and 71% had lived in Whitefish over 5 years. An analysis of the survey responses indicated that almost two-thirds of respondents acknowledged that tourism benefits do outweigh the negative impacts. A wide majority of respondents, however, believe Whitefish is becoming overcrowded due to visitors and only 19% felt that an increase in tourism would result in an improved quality of life. (Figure 2.1)
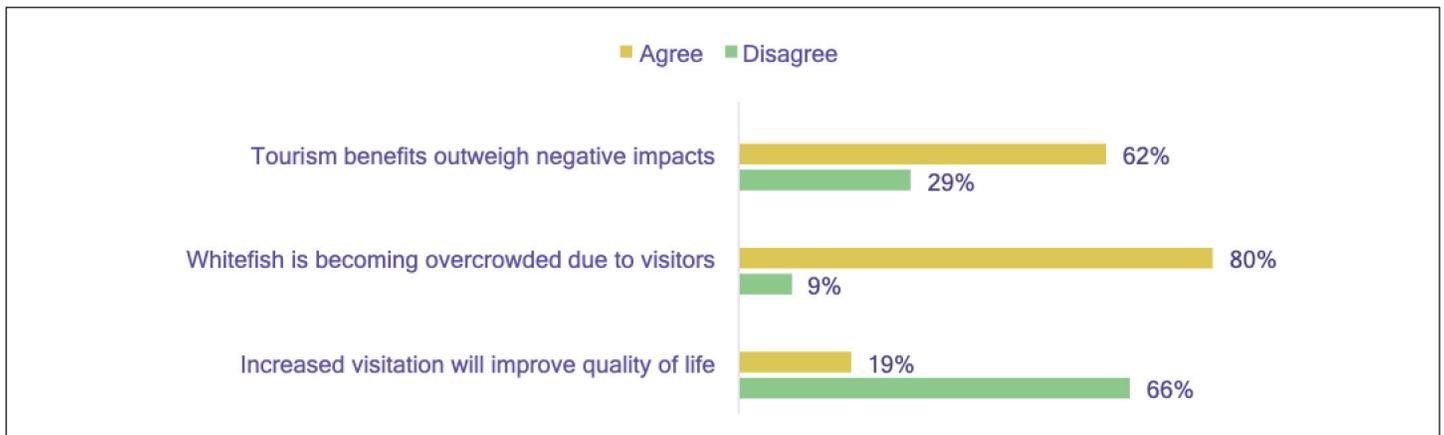

Figure 2.1: Community Tourism Survey Responses

Survey respondents also indicated that when friends and family members visit, they typically come during the peak visitation months of July and August (Figure 2.2). About 75% of respondents indicated family members stayed with them, while 20% indicated they stayed in homes or a vacation rental.
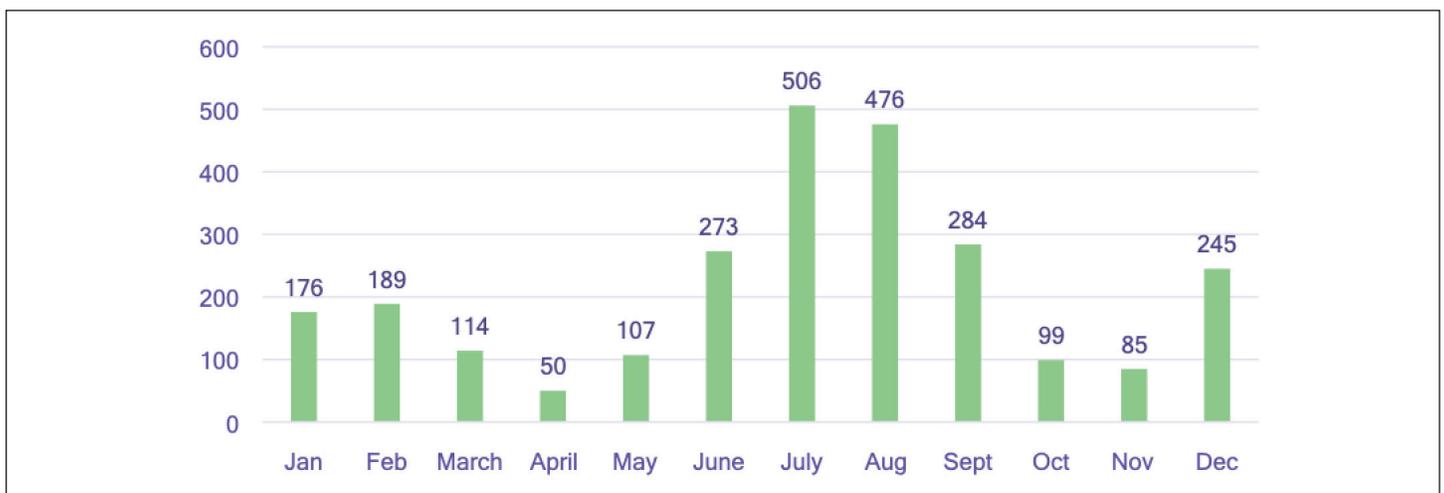

Figure 2.2: Visitation by month for friends and family members of survey respondents

Answers to survey questions about benefits, issues, and recommended strategies were coded and the top categories are represented in the following pages. Tourism as an economic driver was by far the most common response to the questions about benefits. Infrastructure upgrades funded by the resort tax, as well as amenities such as good restaurants and entertainment, were perceived as a benefit. Traffic congestion and parking were among the top concerns identified in the survey. Affordable housing, overcrowding, and community character also were frequently cited. Recommendations for transportation strategies were most often mentioned to address these concerns. Housing and conservation issues were the next most frequent recommendations for strategies.

Benefits of Tourism	
Jobs, economic driver	411
Infrastructure funded by resort taxes and increased tax base	99
Good restaurants, bars, music, entertainment, lodging choices	94
Amenities related to tourism · outdoor recreation, thriving downtown	54
Vibrant community, creative, diversity, cultural scene, "Uber Cool"	32
Concerns Related to Tourism	**#**
Traffic · Congestion and traffic safety in the downtown during peak seasons	191
Affordable Housing. Workforce housing is primary need	116
Downtown Parking. Parking garage helps but need more parking	91
Overcrowding at stores, restaurants, golf course, city beach, boat launch, Farmer's Market	79
Losing small town character. Turning into a tourist trap	65
Cost of Living · Housing, retail, entertainment, hotels	51
Too much growth & development contributes to overcrowding, sprawl on US 93 is an issue	45
Environmental impacts · Natural resources are stressed, water quality, climate change, green space, habitat loss, pollution, wildfire, waste	41
Too many condos & short-term rentals	38
Low wages and lack of good paying jobs	36
Infrastructure and city services at capacity	30
Strategies for Sustainable Tourism	**#**
Traffic management to improve traffic flow. Stop lights, truck routes, pedestrian safety, improve grid north of tracks, turn lanes, bypass	82
Build affordable housing units (rentals & for sale) · Workforce Housing	57
Conservation·Protect open space/lake & public land access, water quality and environment	33
Public transit, trolleys, park-n-ride, ride share	30
Use bed tax dollars to offset tourist impacts, less marketing	29
Improve infrastructure (water, sewer, emergency services) to handle crowds	27
Limit short-term rentals, better enforcement	26
Diversify economic base	25
Plan for sustainability, managing tourist impacts, recycling	24

Table 2.2: STMP Survey Responses

C. OPEN HOUSE

In May 2018, the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan Committee conducted an open house to solicit community input. Approximately 50 people attended the workshop. Following presentations, participants were asked to break into small groups and discuss the following questions:

- Do we agree that we need to balance the needs of residents with appealing to and serving visitors?

- How is Whitefish doing with achieving or maintaining that balance?

- What are the rubs that Whitefish feels most from tourism?

- What are the most essential questions or difficulties to resolve related to tourism? Why?

- What are some possible solutions to these issues?
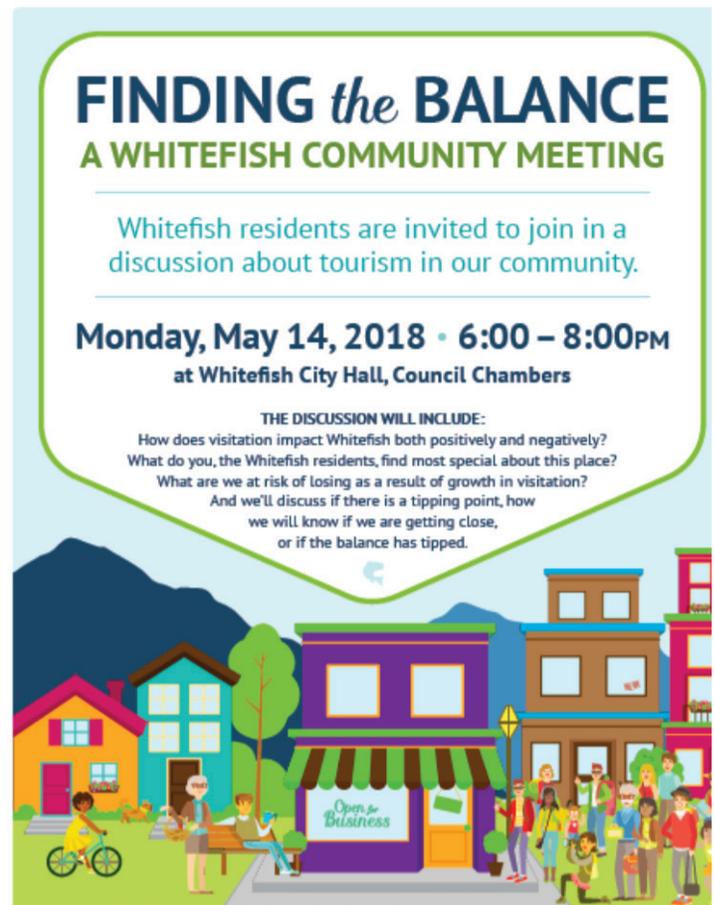
Based on input from the meeting, the Committee identified the following ''buckets'' as a starting point for discussion.

Composition of Whitefish at different times of the Year. Who comprises the bump? What are the traffic patterns? How to manage residents' expectations and perceptions?

Relationship of Short-Term Rentals vs. Affordable Housing. Understanding different kinds of rentals and gaps in current City policies. Evaluating the effect of long-term rentals on home purchase price. Are we losing community cohesiveness? What are the implications, policy recommendations and opportunities around this topic?

Jobs and a Resilient Economy. What does the economic pie look like? From a resident perspective, is a diversified economy part of the answer to the sustainability of tourism? Are affordable housing and a diversified economy/workforce symbiotic and need to be in balance? Are tourism jobs a good ladder to other jobs? Is Whitefish using tourism jobs to feed other jobs? Are we thinking about this as an opportunity?

Access and Connectivity (Transportation). Alternatives for bike and pedestrian. Parking. Seasonal traffic impacts. Airline expansion – the need to at least maintain access. Public transit.

Foreseeable Future Rubs. Climate change (wildfire impacts, snow). Resource management (i.e. use of public lands and increased use/degradation). Demographic and socioeconomic trends. Components of the economy.

D. Focus Groups – Key Informant Interviews

While survey respondents were primarily Whitefish residents, key informant interviews and focus groups provided an added perspective from businesses, public officials, and civic organizations. The following is a list of the groups that were included in this process.

- Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau Board
- Whitefish City Departments
- Whitefish Pilot
- Whitefish Chamber of Commerce
- Outdoor Recreation Focus Group
- Small Business Focus Group
- Whitefish School District
- Whitefish Climate Action Committee
- Flathead County Economic Development Authority/Montana West Economic Development

- Whitefish Housing Authority
- Flathead County Planning Department
- Northwest Montana Realtor's Association
- Eagle Transit
- Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission
- Montana Department of Commerce
- University of Montana Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research

Many top issues in the survey, such as housing, parking, and community character, overlap with concerns expressed in the focus groups. Businesses noted that while there was a perception of overcrowding, relative to other areas with high visitation, the Whitefish crowds are manageable. The crowds are only an issue for a short period during the year and businesses rely on this visitation to be profitable. Focus groups noted that it is important to remain welcoming to visitors and still address community concerns. Figure 2.3 summarizes the key topics discussed in the focus groups/interviews.

Employment	Visitors	Community	Resources	Coordination

• Staff shortages
• Workforce housing
• Transit
• Day care
• Skills/Training
• Wages
• Non-monetary benefits
• Create higher paying jobs (i.e. tech)

• Visitor experience
• Educational activities
• Small town brand
• Increase use of public lands
• Non-traditional recreation
• Recycling
• Conservation
• Parking

• Buy local
• Housing
• Shoulder season promotion
• Water/Sewer rate increases
• Communication
• Social Issues
• Emergency housing
• Broadband
• Wildfire Threats

• Resort tax
• TIF
• State funding
• Fundraising
• Philanthrophy
• Volunteerism
• Grants
• User fees
• Lodging tax

• Public land issues
• Partnerships
• Advocacy
• Growth Policy updates
• Ongoing outreach
• Streamline development processes
• Emergency preparedness

Figure 2.3: Focus Group Input

E. WORLD CAFÉ

On October 22, 2019, the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan Committee conducted a "World Café" workshop. Over 100 community members attended the event and responded to a series of questions regarding challenges and action items to incorporate into the Plan.

Overall comments about the workshop and planning process included:

• Would be helpful to hear solutions from other cities facing similar growth and tourism.

• All information very relevant. Making decisions without being informed is a bad idea

• Distribute the data often, far, and wide, so residents clearly understand the Whitefish economy.

• Need a summary or conclusion to explain how all the findings fit together.

• Would like to see forecasted numbers based on available models — view potential outcomes.

• People need to see how tourism makes our way of life possible

• Let residents answer whether we should continue to spend time/money to draw more tourists.

• Consensus-building workshops should not influence policy that much.

Table 2.3 includes the top ten major themes that were identified. The top themes in both the survey and World Café' were issues related to transportation and affordable housing. While overcrowding ranked high as an issue in the survey, it ranked lower in the World Café comments.

World Café

The "World Café" is a technique to foster a collaborative dialogue around a series of questions related to the project at hand. Participants break into small groups and move from one conversation to another to discuss different topics. The process encourages people to join new groups and share ideas. The result is:

• Build community by networking with new people

• Engage in mutual learning

• Discover insights about topics

• Find common goals

• Realize the "collective genius" of the crowd

• Provide ideas / guidance for STMP Committee
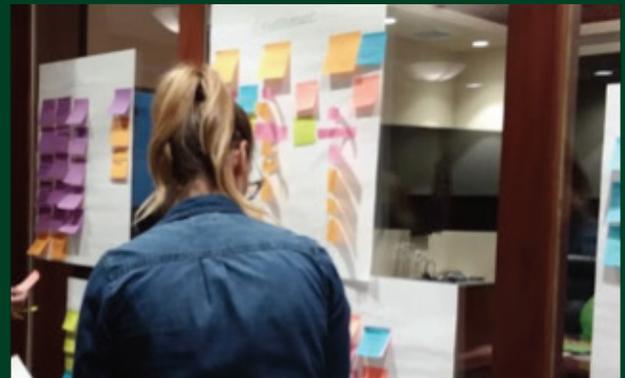
Economic, environmental concerns and bike/pedestrian trails ranked higher in the café. The issue of cutting back on promotion was mentioned but was not a top concern in either the survey or café.

Transportation
- **Challenges:** Parking, travel through downtown, lack of east-west corridor, bottleneck at viaduct, summer traffic, school pick-up/drop-off, trucks downtown, regional transit, airport shuttle
- **Ideas:** Bypass, improve east-west grid, regional transit, transit app, green vehicles, park & ride, funding

Economy – Business
- **Challenges:** Profits only during peak season, need more business diversity, oversupply of hotels, need more trade jobs, need façade improvements, lack of small affordable workspaces, coordination between agencies, lack of childcare, employee shortage, lack of skilled employees, workforce housing
- **Ideas:** Hold annual economic summit, emphasis on staycations, shoulder season specials, more entrepreneurs, business-nonprofit partnerships, work-study options

Affordable Housing
- **Challenges:** Protect single family housing, need more affordable rentals, housing costs exacerbate worker shortage, neighborhood opposition to new developments, illegal short-term rentals, disallowing pets
- **Ideas:** Education, boarding houses, inclusionary zoning, incent long-term rentals, accessory dwellings, short term rental enforcement, disincentivize large homes, small homes/trailers, pet-friendly

Green Living, Climate, Open Space
- **Challenges:** Wildlife, emergency evacuation, invasive species, oil spill, public access, open space
- **Ideas:** Green corridors, education, reduce waste, energy conservation/renewable, implement Climate Plan

Garbage – Pollution
- **Challenges:** Visitor impacts, landfill nearing capacity, bears, limited recycling, dumping, BNSF/vehicle emissions, water pollution from boats, dog poop, wildfire smoke, light pollution, tourist travel footprint
- **Ideas:** Composting, recycle plastic, more recycling options, waste diversion, education

Bike, Pedestrian, Trails
- **Challenges:** Connectivity, safe routes to schools, incentives to bike/walk, pedestrian crossings, county
- **Ideas:** More bike paths & trails, bike/scooter share program, enhance safety, Whitefish Trail permits

Infrastructure, Water, Maintenance
- **Challenges:** Tourism impacts on infrastructure, park maintenance, trail management, old septic systems, unsightly viaduct, water quality, leaf vacuum, road infrastructure congested due to tourist, high water costs
- **Ideas:** Impact fees, tourism grants for maintenance, require sewer hook-ups, map groundwater

Community Amenities
- **Challenges:** Preserve historic character, community character
- **Ideas:** Need downtown historic district, promote local museums

Promotion-Funding
- **Challenges:** Overpromotion, refine targets, financial support for the Whitefish Trail, impacts from tourists
- **Ideas:** More funding, mountain bike marketing, promotions vs. climate impacts, target locals in off-season

Crowding, Overuse, Behavior
- **Challenges:** Farmers Market overcrowded, Glacier National Park congestion, crowding in restaurants, tourism impacts on quality of life, crowding at trailheads, overuse of public recreation resources, environmental impacts
- **Ideas:** Education, responsible tourist behaviors, policy regarding capacity

Table 2.3: Summary of World Café Comments

III. Tourism

"How much tourism is enough?" "Crowding is awful, need to reduce the # of visitors."

"People need to be shown more that tourism makes our way of life in Whitefish possible."

"Whitefish has been marketed too effectively by state and local entities."

"Ask locals to stop posting pics of their precious places on social media, if they truly do not want to wreck these sacred places."

"The more people share their opinions, the more it becomes apparent that they don't know a lot of things the city is already doing, what resort tax funds, what kind of businesses/infrastructure tourism provides, etc."

"There are a lot of people that discovered a beautiful place and moved here, but are now mad that other people discovered a beautiful place and moved here after them. Hypocrisy at its finest." Survey and Workshop Participant Comments

A. GOALS

Livability – Manage nonresident visitation and local resident use patterns effectively to preserve quality of life in Whitefish. Identify, measure, and monitor Whitefish's tourism capacity.

Community Engagement – Build awareness among residents about the origins and impacts of visitors versus impacts of population growth in Flathead County. Continue to engage locals in planning processes and actions to reduce impacts while enjoying the economic benefits of tourism.

Community Character – Work with tourism-related businesses, developers, and realtors to preserve and enhance the character of Whitefish, and to support sustainability values.

B. OVERVIEW

Overcrowding during peak summer tourist season is an issue for many Whitefish residents, concerned about their quality of life and effects on infrastructure and the environment. This chapter seeks to provide insights about existing tourism, recent trends, the impact of Flathead County population growth, and strategies to address tourism management.

The impact from tourism is highest in July and August, and to a lesser degree June and September. During these months, lodging is at its peak occupancy, seasonal employees live in or commute to Whitefish, vacation homeowners are enjoying the summer in Whitefish, friends and

family come to visit and contractors work overtime on new construction. The daily population of Whitefish doubles in July through August. All these factors create traffic delays, parking problems, and crowding at favorite recreation spots and hangouts.

Key questions are, "What is the capacity for tourism in Whitefish, and how do we measure it?" In response, the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Committee has attempted to document trends, economic factors, and social indicators as they relate to tourism. Along with an evaluation of existing efforts by the City, such examination will indicate where further action

C. TOURISM ASSETS

Whitefish boasts so many attractions and amenities that residents rightfully claim to have "big city culture and cuisine in a charming small town" — and within 15 minutes of a major airport. Its significant appeal is also its challenge. Increasingly, Whitefish attracts outdoor recreationists who relocate to Flathead County, investors in vacation homes and rental properties, and visitors from across Montana and around the globe. Highlights that attract both residents and visitors include the following:

- **Outdoor Attractions:** Glacier National Park, Whitefish Mountain Resort, Whitefish Lake (and other nearby lakes), Whitefish River, Whitefish Lake State Park, Whitefish Trail system, City Beach and parks, Kootenai, and Flathead National Forests

- **Recreation Activities:** Hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, skiing, boating, rafting, golf, guided adventures, zip-lining, alpine slides, team sports, skating, climbing, dog sledding, etc.

- **Sense of Place and Community Character:** Mountain setting, historic charm, walkable downtown with high quality retail, dining, libations, entertainment, and no big box or chain stores

- **Culture:** Performing arts, events, music, museums, historic sites, farmers market, cinema

D. RESORT TOWN DEFINED

Many Whitefish residents bristle when people describe Whitefish as a "resort town." It is true that Whitefish has many characteristics of a "resort town" such as a ski resort, mountains, lakes, rivers, a national park, state parks, national forests, excellent dining, expensive vacation housing, and tourist-oriented retail shops. However, a "resort town" is defined as follows:

"A 'resort town' is an urban area where tourism or vacationing is the primary component of the local culture and economy. A typical resort town has one or more actual resorts in the surrounding area. Sometimes the term 'resort town' is used simply for a locale popular among tourists. The term can also refer to either an incorporated or unincorporated contiguous area where the ratio of transient rooms, measured in bed units, is greater than 60% of the permanent population. Generally, tourism is the main export in a resort town economy, with most residents of the area working in the tourism or resort industry."

Using this definition, Whitefish is not a "resort town," for two key reasons:

a. The estimated population within the Whitefish zip code in 2018 was 14,000 (U.S. Census), and the number of bed units available in July was approximately 4,224, which is 30% of the population, only half the 60% threshold for a resort town.

b. Less than half of area residents work in the tourism or resort industry (see Chapter IV).

Also, as noted in Figures 3.19 and 3.20 in this chapter, restaurant, bar, and retail sales indicate a substantial year-round economy in Whitefish, as do the mix of businesses and employment data (Chapter IV). In Montana, Big Sky and West Yellowstone qualify as "resort towns," with tourism as the majority of their economies. A key objective of this Sustainable Tourism Management Plan is to provide strategies that help maintain the integrity and character of Whitefish as a year-round economy, with resort town amenities.

E. TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Key Findings:

• Whitefish has capacity to host 6,400+ guests per night in commercial lodging (1,700 beds in hotels and inns, 2,500+ beds in short-term rentals, and 242 RV/campground sites). In July and August, overall lodging occupancy is 77%-82% full, so the actual number of commercial lodging guests is about 5,200 per night.

• The above numbers do not include 500 family members and friends staying in the homes of Whitefish residents, 3,000 second homeowners, or day trip and pass-through visitors.

• For 8 months (October-May), the occupancy of commercial lodging drops to less than 60% (as low as 40% in January) -- hotels are less than half full. In January, the number of people staying in commercial lodging drops to less than 2,300 per night, and in April, less than 1,900 per night.

• Whitefish offers meeting space for more than 3,800 people, plus event/performance venues.

• Whitefish is accessible by plane, train, and automobile, with excellent air service, daily Amtrak service, and major north-south and east-west highways.

Wikipedia, https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/ftp/Mountain_Resorts/external/!publish/Web/transition_report.pdf

2. Lodging and Visitor Capacity: Recent Growth in Hotels and Short-Term Rentals

In 2019, Whitefish offered about 4,224 guest beds for visitors in hotels, B&Bs, short-term rentals (STRs) like Airbnb/VRBO, a hostel, and a bike retreat, plus 240+ RV/campground spaces (see Table 3.1). About 94% of the hotel rooms are in the City limits and 6% in the unincorporated area of the 59937 zip code. Only 22% of the short-term rental properties are in the City and 78% are in the unincorporated area of the zip code. The city is the location of 28% of the RV/campsites.

Property Type	# Properties	# Rooms	# Beds
Hotels and Inns	26	1,035	1,700
Short-Term Rentals	1,148	2,524	2,524+
RV / Campgrounds	5	242 sites	n/a
Totals	**1,179**	**3,559**	**4,224**

Table 3.1: 2019 Whitefish Lodging Facilities (59937)

At maximum occupancy, the number of visitors staying overnight in commercial lodging (hotels, STRs, and RV ·campgrounds) could range from 6,400 to 7,000. The average travel party size is 2.22-3.02 people. (ITRR, July-September Nonresident Travelers, 2018, see section F.7.). That figure does not include another 500 visiting family and friends staying in the homes of Whitefish residents, or 3,000 seasonal/second homeowners.

However, according to Smith Travel Research, Whitefish hotels operated at about 82% occupancy in July and August 2019, which drops the estimated number of nightly visitors in lodging facilities to about 5,200 in the two peak months (2017 was slightly higher due to record Glacier National Park visitation).

Hotel occupancy rates have dropped slightly in recent years because of development of new hotels and short-term rentals such as Airbnb and VRBO, both in Whitefish and elsewhere in the county (Kalispell, Columbia Falls). Both Whitefish and Flathead County require licensing of STRs, and the City of Whitefish restricts STRs to certain zones within the City limits (see Chapter V). As of September 2019, there were 174 permitted STR units in the City of Whitefish, and another 24 licensed by the county (within 59937 zip code), for a total of 198 permitted units. However, according to AirDNA, there were actually 1,148 listed STR properties in Whitefish in July 2019, approximately 258 in the City, and 890 in the County (59937).

3. Meeting and Event Venues

Nine Whitefish lodging facilities offer a total of nearly 46,000 square feet of meeting space. The three largest are Grouse Mountain Lodge (11,000 s.f.), The Lodge at Whitefish Lake (13,735 s.f.), and White-fish Mountain Resort (12,341 s.f.). Additionally, meeting rooms are available at City Hall. Based on an average of 12 square feet per person, these facilities can accommodate 3,800+ attendees.

Other event venues are the 453-seat Whitefish Performing Arts Center and the 328-seat O'Shaughnessy Cultural Arts Center, both located downtown. Several food and beverage establishments also have live music venues, and a private ranch near Whitefish sponsors an outdoor summer music festival.

City parks, including City Beach, have facilities for rent. Sports venues include Stumptown Ice Den, Smith Fields Sports Complex, soccer fields, tennis and pickleball courts, the Armory, and two golf courses. Depot Park hosts the Farmers Market from May to September, and other events. Additional event venues located at Flathead Valley Community College and in Kalispell attract visitors to Whitefish.

4. Visitor Services

The Whitefish CVB and Chamber of Commerce cooperatively operate a year-round visitor center on Second Street. The CVB provides Visitor Information kiosks and wayfinding signs at strategic locations to aid visitors. Both the CVB and Chamber provide informative web sites and printed guides.
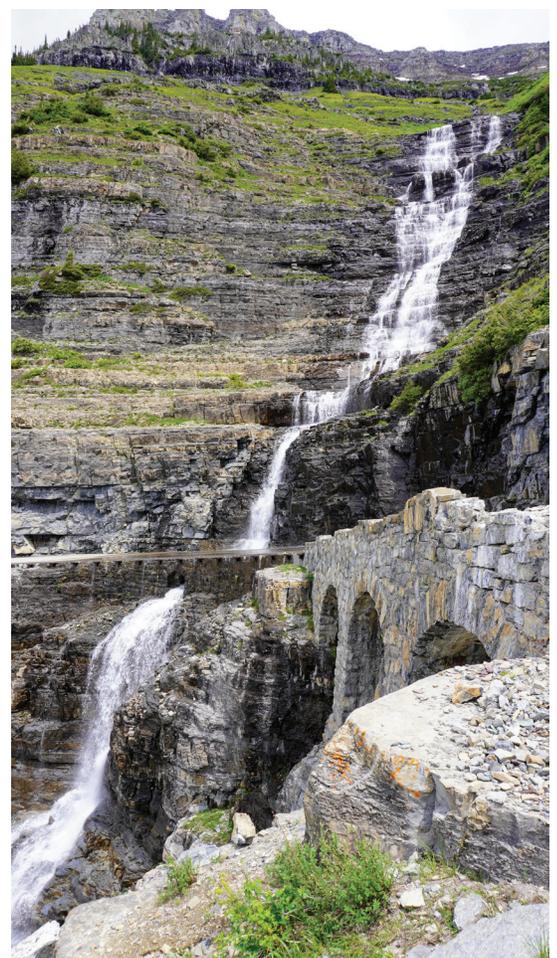
5. Adventure Expertises

Adventure opportunities surround Whitefish, from hiking to wildlife viewing, fishing to whitewater rafting, ziplining to horseback riding, mountain climbing, and backcountry skiing. Licensed guides are available to help visitors experience these activities safely and with informative interpretation. The Whitefish Mountain Resort Ski School is highly rated for its quality instructors and programs.

6. Transportation

Five airlines serve Glacier Park International Airport, connecting to five major hubs year-round, and another nine hubs seasonally. Amtrak's Empire Builder line provides daily service from Chicago, Seattle, and points in-between. U.S. 93 (north-south) and U.S. 2 (east-west) provide highway access. Local transportation is provided by three car rental companies, Eagle Transit, SNOW Bus, local taxi and limo services, and Uber. Bike/pedestrian paths provide multi-modal transportation opportunities to get around town, and an extensive network of recreation trails in and around Whitefish provides opportunities for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, etc., with more trails in development.

7. Resources Related to Tourism Infrastructure

• **Tourism Carrying Capacity** – https://www.biodiversity.ru/coastlearn/tourism-eng/tools_acc.html, https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-3-319-01669-6_24-1, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_carrying_capacity, https://ivypanda.com/essays/carrying-capacity-in-relation-to-a-tourist-destination/

• **City of Whitefish Resort Tax** – Provides funds for infrastructure, including street, sidewalk, park, trail and other improvements. http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/city-hall/resort-tax.php

• **Whitefish Convention & Visitor Bureau** – Provides a web site and visitor guide with information about things to see and do, lodging, dining, activities, events, etc. The CVB also tracks lodging occupancy, average daily rate, group bookings, events, etc., and provides grants for programs/projects/events for economic benefit, especially in off-peak seasons. https://explorewhitefish.com/

• **Whitefish Chamber of Commerce** – Also provides a web site and community guide with information about things to see and do, lodging, activities, events, etc., along with a member directory, business development, and relocation information. https://www.whitefishchamber.org/

• **State of Montana Grant Programs** – State lodging tax provides funds for arts, culture, and/or heritage projects; visitor facilities; and niche products. https://marketmt.com/Grants
Montana State Parks provides funds for projects to support recreation trails, OHV/snowmobile trails, accessible playgrounds, and land and water conservation for open spaces and healthy recreation places.

F. VISITOR PROFILE

1. Definition of a "Visitor"

The University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) defines nonresident travelers as "all nonresident travelers in Montana, including all international travelers, as well as domestic, out-of-state travelers." Resident travelers are "Montanans who travel 50 miles or more away from home." Seasonal (2nd) homeowners can be in either group, depending on their primary residence.

2. Key Findings:

• A significant portion of Whitefish visitors are Montanans, from Flathead and nearby counties, or overnight visitors from elsewhere in Montana (61,000+ annual overnight stays).

• Flathead County population increased by nearly 11,000 people from 2010 to 2018. The #1 reason people move to or stay in Whitefish is outdoor recreation (Headwaters Economics).

• 70% of users on the Whitefish Trail are Flathead County residents.

• More than three-quarters of Farmers Market visitors are Whitefish residents (76%), and another 13% are Montanans from outside Whitefish (nearly all from Flathead County). Fifteen percent of local Whitefish participants bring guests from out of state with them to the Market.

• In 2018, more than 661,000 nonresident visitors spent at least one night in Whitefish. (See Figure 3.1) Another 589,000 nonresident visitors drove through Whitefish without spending the night in 2018. (See Figure 3.2)

• About half of all nonresident visitors came in the three months of July, August, and September (49%).

• In July 2019, approximately 5,200 visitors per night stayed in Whitefish lodging properties (including short-term rentals and RV/campgrounds). They represented about 2,200 motor vehicles.

• In town (Whitefish summer traffic counts are 15,000-20,000 vehicles per day).

• Seasonal (second) homeowners represent an estimated 3,600 residents, and they also host guests in peak summer months.

• 3,300+ employees commute into Whitefish daily to work.

• In July-September, local Whitefish residents host an estimated 500 nonresident guests each night (family and friends).

• 92% of peak season nonresident overnight travelers visit Glacier National Park; more than one-third also visit Yellowstone (37%).
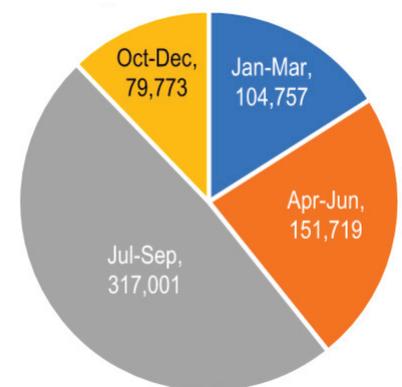

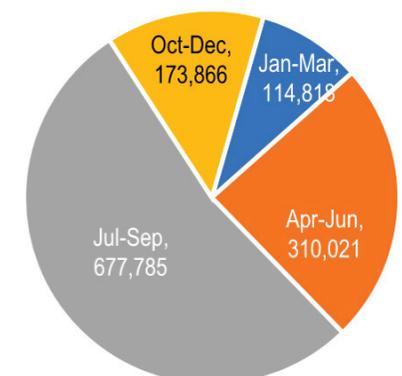*Figure 3.1: 2018 Nonresident Overnight Visitors in Whitefish Source: ITTRR*

Figure 3.2: Nonresident Drive-Through Visitors in Whitefish Source: ITTRR

- 92% of peak season nonresident overnight travelers visit Glacier National Park; more than one-third also visit Yellowstone (37%).

- The average nonresident travel party is 2.38 people, age 55+, and only 1-in-5 include children under 18.

- Top origins of visitors are California and Alberta, followed by Florida and Washington state.

- In 2018, nonresident visitors to Flathead County spent more than $614 million; their top summer activities were scenic driving, hiking, photography, wildlife viewing, and shopping.

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[2] University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR)

3. Travel by Montanans

In 2017, Montana residents took 13.6 million day trips and 4 million overnight trips, spending $2.9 billion on travel in Montana. The Glacier Country travel region – which includes Whitefish – was the #1 destination among Montana residents, receiving 3.8 million day trips and 1.2 million overnight trips – more than one quarter of all resident overnights (27%).

Flathead County received 30% of the overnight trips to the Glacier Country region, and more than 10% of all recreational overnight trips taken by Montana residents, with expenditures of more than $250 million. Therefore, Flathead County received 470,000 day trips and 322,400 overnight stays from Montanans visiting from other parts of the state. Of the overnight stays, 61,256 (19%) were in Whitefish.

Since 2010, Flathead County's population has grown 15% (by nearly 14,000, from 90,853 in 2010 to a projected 104,674 in 2020, according to the Montana Census and Information Center), and is projected to grow another 13% (+13,500) by 2030. People moving to Flathead County are outdoor enthusiasts, and many of them enjoy the recreation amenities, dining, libations, and entertainment in Whitefish.

4. Whitefish Farmers Market Visitors

In Summer 2019, a survey of Whitefish Farmers Market participants found that three quarters of them were Montanans: 63% live in Whitefish (15% are 2nd homeowners), and 13% are from elsewhere in Montana – nearly all from Flathead County. Of the Whitefish residents, 15% brought guests from outside the area. In combination with the Farmers Market, participants also engaged in dining (22%), entertainment (12%), and shopping (9%). More than two thirds drove to the Market (68%), most parked within 3 blocks, 20% walked, and 10% bicycled. Less than one quarter of Farmers Market participants (24%) were from out of state, with California and Alberta the top points of origin. Nearly one-third of those (31%) were first time visitors in Whitefish. The nonresident participants spent an average of 3.44 nights in Whitefish, and spent more than $1,443 per group on lodging, dining, groceries, car rental, fuel, retail, entertainment, and recreation.

5. Seasonal Homeowners

In the 2010 Census, nearly 1,687 homes in the Whitefish zip code (59937) were designated as Seasonal homes. Based on housing construction since then, the estimated number in 2019 was about 1,879. If all seasonal homes were occupied at the same time (which they are not), with an average of 2 people each, they represent an additional 4,000 residents.

ITRR data indicates that second homeowners stay in Montana an average of 12 nights per trip, with nearly half of those in their seasonal home, and the other half visiting family/friends or traveling in other parts of the state. About one-third of seasonal homeowners are from Alberta (36%), and another 20% from Washington and Colorado. The median age of second homeowners is 62, the average group size is about 2.10 (half are couples, one-quarter are singles, one quarter are families), and nearly two-thirds have household incomes of $100,000+. Their favorite activities are hiking, skiing/snowboarding, scenic driving, visiting breweries, and shopping (including the Farmers Market).

6. Short-Term Rental (STR) Guests

The increased lodging capacity in Whitefish is due more to growth in short-term rentals (STRs) than from new hotels. The number of STR properties in Whitefish grew from 624 to 1,148 in just two years (June 2017-July 2019) – an 84% increase. The 1,148 properties represent 2,524 guest rooms, which can accommodate more than 3,500 guests. Properties range from studios to 6+ bedroom houses.

Most short-term rentals are booked through Airbnb and VRBO. In July 2019, STRs in Whitefish booked 2,454 guests for 18,886 room nights (609 bookings per day) and brought in nearly $6.8 million in revenue for the month (see Figure 3.3). The average daily rate (ADR) paid by guests was $310 (the ADR drops to $213 in May).
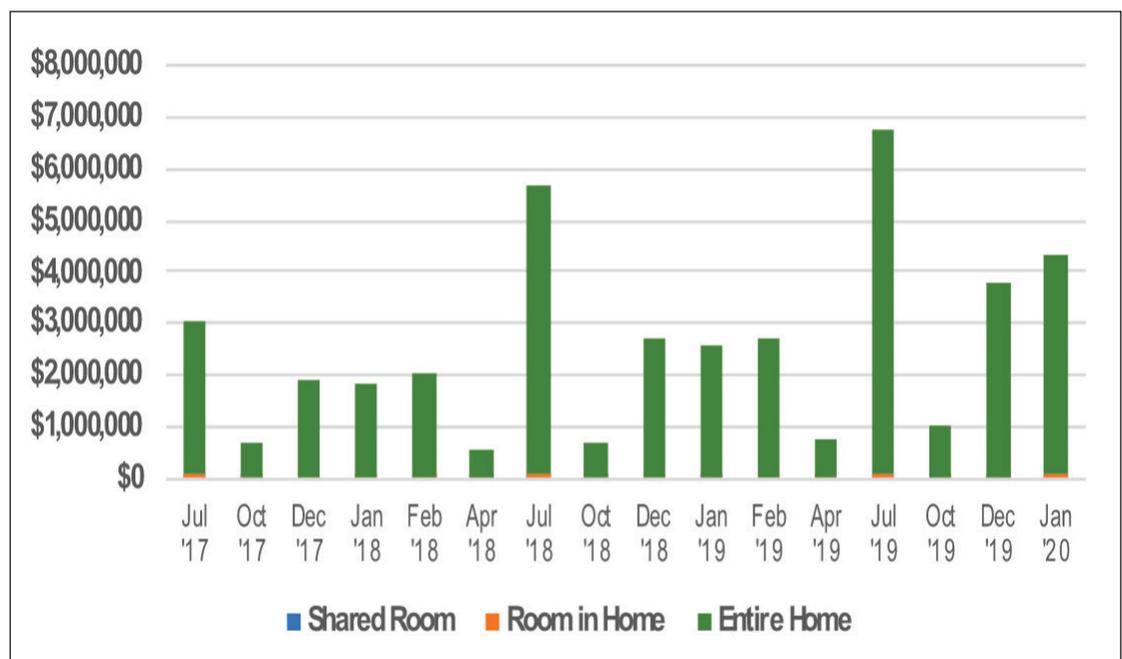

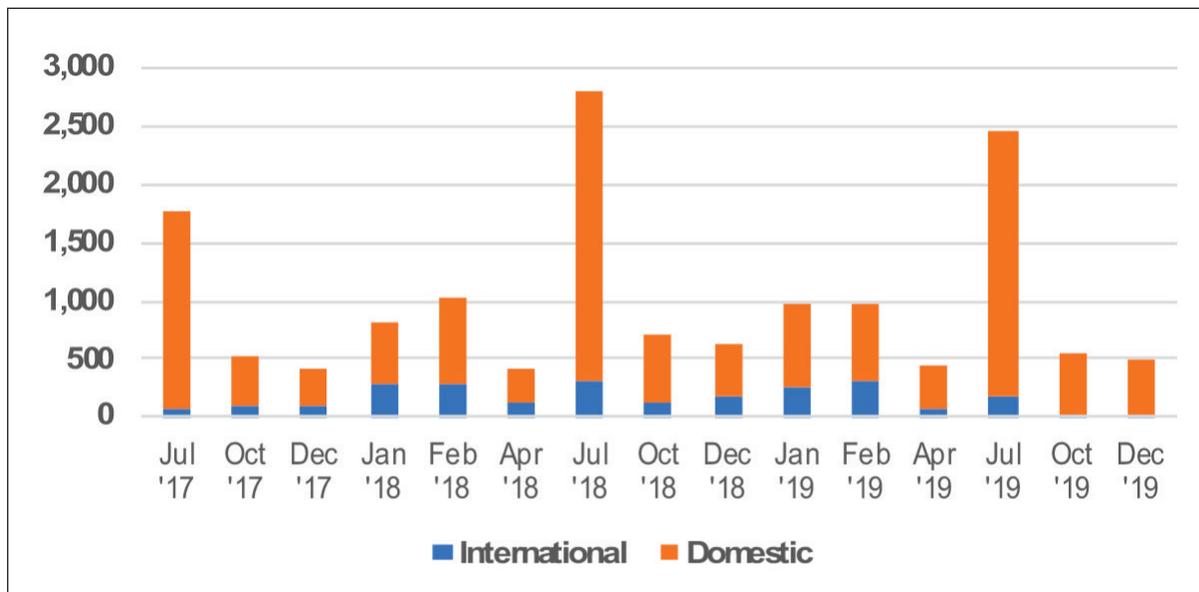*Figure 3.3: Whitefish STR Revenue Trends   Source: AirDNA*

Figure 3.4: Whitefish STR Guests by Month   Source: AirDNA

Some of the larger properties generate $175,000 to $200,000+ annually.

Vacation rental booking trends in Whitefish are similar to overall tourism trends, except for winter season when STR bookings show a bump in January and February for ski season.

The year-round trend shows the peak season spike in July, with low dips in October-December and April-May (see Figure 3.4 for guests booked in selected months). The greatest number of STR guests in 2019 were from Alberta, Washington, and Montana. (Table 3.2)

7. Composition of Summer Population in Whitefish

As noted in the following graph, the daily population of Whitefish in July and August is nearly 32,000 people–more than double its base population of year-round residents (14,000). However, visitors ("tourists") are less than half of the peak season population: day trip and overnight visitors, including seasonal

Origin		Total
Alberta		1075
	Calgary	785
	Edmonton	181
	Lethbridge	83
	Medicine Hat	26
Washington		711
	Seattle	469
	Spokane	242
Montana		580
	Missoula	368
	Bozeman	212
New York, NY		288
Chicago, IL		246
Portland, OR		238
Minneapolis, MN		231
San Francisco, CA		217
Denver, CO		173

Table 3.2: Top Origins of STR Guests 2019
Source: https://www.airdna.co/

homeowners, are 46% of the daily population, while 54% of the daily population is Whitefish residents and workers commuting to jobs from other parts of the county. The percent of the non-base population in town during peak season includes commercial lodging/short-term rental occupants (16%), day trippers/drive through visitors (19%), seasonal/2nd homeowners (9%), and people visiting friends and relatives (2%).

Daily Population of Whitefish in July 2019
TOTAL: 31900
500 VFR*
500 RV / Campground
1,200 MT Day trip residents/visitors
2,000 Hotel / Motel / B&B / Inn guests
2,700 Short-term rentals (Airbnb / VRBO)
4,700 Drive-through nonresident visitors
3,000 Seasonal / 2nd homeowners
3,300 Whitefish working commuters
14,000 Whitefish year-round residents

*VFR = Visiting Friends & Relatives

Figure 3.5: Daily Population of Whitefish – July
***Seasonal homeowners plus guests*

Notes:

1. VFR = Visiting friends and relatives (people staying with Whitefish residents), based on 2019 ITRR & Farmer's Market Survey data.

2. RV / Campground: 242 sites, 2.36 people per group average (ITRR) @ 82% occupancy = 500/day.

3. Montana Day trip visitors: Residents of Flathead County and Montana that are spending time in Whitefish on any given day during July. Numbers were derived from credit card spending, ITRR Montana Resident Travel Study, Whitefish Trail Economic Impact Study, Whitefish Mountain Resort day use data. Day Trippers = 1,200.

4. Hotel / Motel / B&B / Inn guests: 1,035 rooms x 2.32 per group @ 82% occupancy = ~2,000.

5. Short-term rentals: 1,148 units in July, 3.02 per group @ 77% occupancy = 2,700, based on AirDNA, ITRR data.

6. Drive through nonresident visitors: People who visited Whitefish but did not spend the night in Whitefish. This number only accounts for out-of-state visitors, based on ITRR, VisaVue data. Total = 4,700.

7. Seasonal Homeowners in 59937 Zip Code: 2010 Census = 1,687 seasonal homes (4% of all housing). New housing starts in Flathead county housing stock from 2010 to 2019 = 4,800. New seasonal homes = 4% of new starts or 192 for a total of 1,879. @ 77% occupancy and average HH size of 2.1 = 3,000.

8. Commuters: Estimate from Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment (year-round average, peak season is higher). Total = 3,300.

9. 2010 Population for 59937 zip code: 12,588 (13.8% of Flathead County). Using proportional allocation, 2018 population for zip code = 14,000 (U.S. Census of Population & ACS Data).

NOTE: Several estimates rely on 2010 Census data for baseline data. These numbers should be updated once 2020 Census information is available.

8. Characteristics of Peak Season Nonresident Visitors to Whitefish

In 2018, more than 661,000 nonresident visitors spent at least one night in Whitefish. The previous year (2017), the number was higher—nearly 678,000 visitors. Another 589,000 nonresident visitors drove through Whitefish without spending the night in 2018 (an increase over 2017). The consulting team for this Sustainable Tourism Management Plan undertook an analysis of ITRR Nonresident Visitor Study data from the 2014-2018 peak seasons (3rd Quarter, July-September):

- Nearly all nonresident visitors (92%) visit Glacier National Park, 37% also visit Yellowstone

- Primary Trip Purpose: 76% Vacation, 14% Visit Friends/Family, 6% Business, 2% Just Passing Through, 2% Other (including Medical)

- Top visitor activities include Scenic Driving, Day Hiking, Nature Photography, Wildlife Watching, and Recreational Shopping

- Travel Group Type: more than half are couples, 1-in-5 are families, and 11% are single travelers (Figure 3.6)

- Group Size: the average group size is 2.2 people, nearly two-thirds are 2 people, only 11% are 4 people (Figure 3.7)

- Nearly three-quarters of nonresident visitor households earn $75,000+ annually (Table 3.3)

- The top sources of nonresident visitors are California and Alberta, followed by Florida and Washington state (Table 3.4)

- Nearly two-thirds are repeat visitors, while one-in-five travel parties are all first-time visitors (Figure 3.8)

- One-third of visitors arrive by air, 7% own a second home in Montana

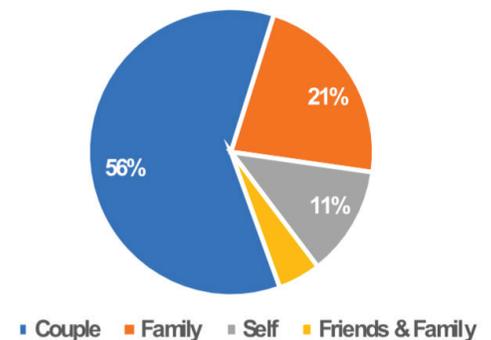- 80% of travel parties include people age 55+, but less than one quarter include children under 18

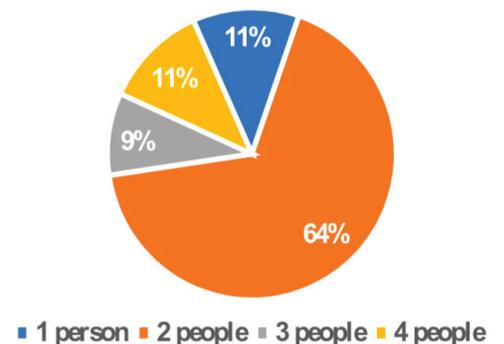

Figure 3.6: Travel Group Type
Source: ITTR

Figure 3.7: Travel Group Size
Source: ITTR

• Nearly 90% of travelers reported using commercial lodging at some point during their trip in Montana. 43% of peak season nonresident visitors reported stay in a hotel/motel, 9% in a vacation rental, 7% in a resort or condo, 3% in a bed and breakfast, 21% in private or public campgrounds, and 13% stay with friends/family. (Figure 3.10)

• In 2018, nonresident visitors to Flathead County spent $614 million, though more than half of spending happens in July-Sept. They spend the most money on dining and shopping. (Table 3.5)

9. Resident vs. Nonresident Spending: Restaurants and Sporting Goods

A look at actual credit card transaction trends in Whitefish shows that monthly restaurant spending by Montanans from outside the Whitefish zip code is consistent year-round, with higher amounts in July-August, and dips in October-November, indicating that much of it comes from day visitors who regularly enjoy dining and libations in Whitefish. Visiting Montanans spend more in Whitefish restaurants than nonresident visitors six months of the year (Oct-Jan and Apr-May). In July and August, nonresidents spend nearly three times that of Montanans. On a year-round basis, spending on sporting goods in Whitefish is nearly the same between Montanans outside the 59937 zip code and nonresident visitors.
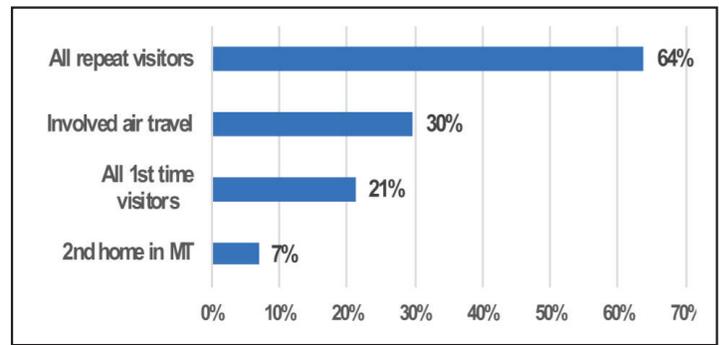

Figure 3.8: Group Characteristics   Source: ITTR

Household Income of Nonresident Visitors	
<$75,000	26%
$75k-$150,000	47%
$150,000+	27%

Table 3.3   Source: ITRR

Home Residency	
CA	9%
ALB	8%
FL, WA (ea)	7%
CO, MN (ea)	5%
WI	4%
OR, TX, MO, ND, ID (ea)	3%
WY, MA, MD, NV, AL, IL (ea)	2%
TN, Italy, NZ (ea)	1%

Table 3.4   Source: ITRR
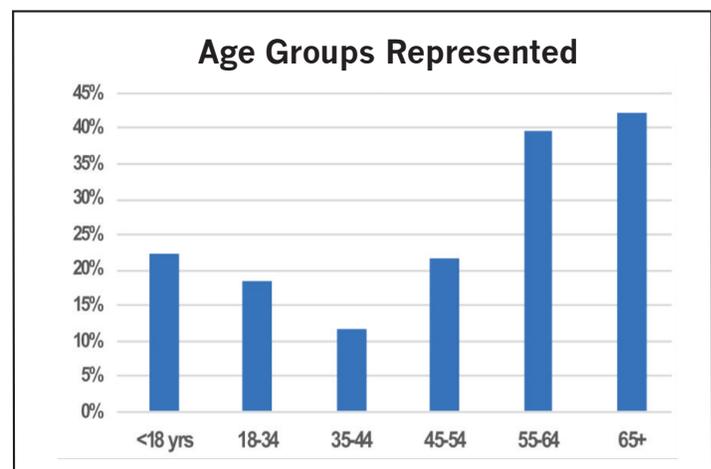
Figure 3.9: Age Groups Represented   Source: ITTR
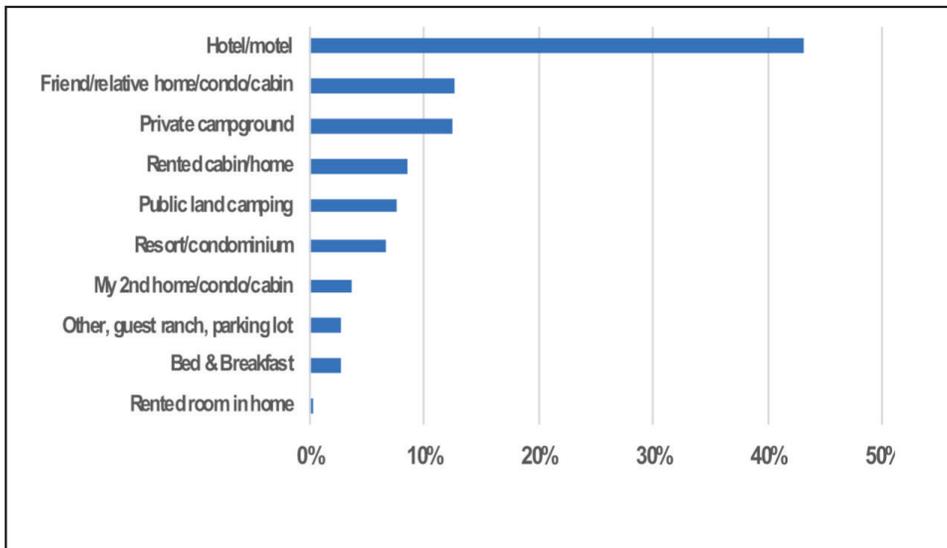
Figure 3.10: Types of Lodging Used During Trip to Montana
Source: ITTR
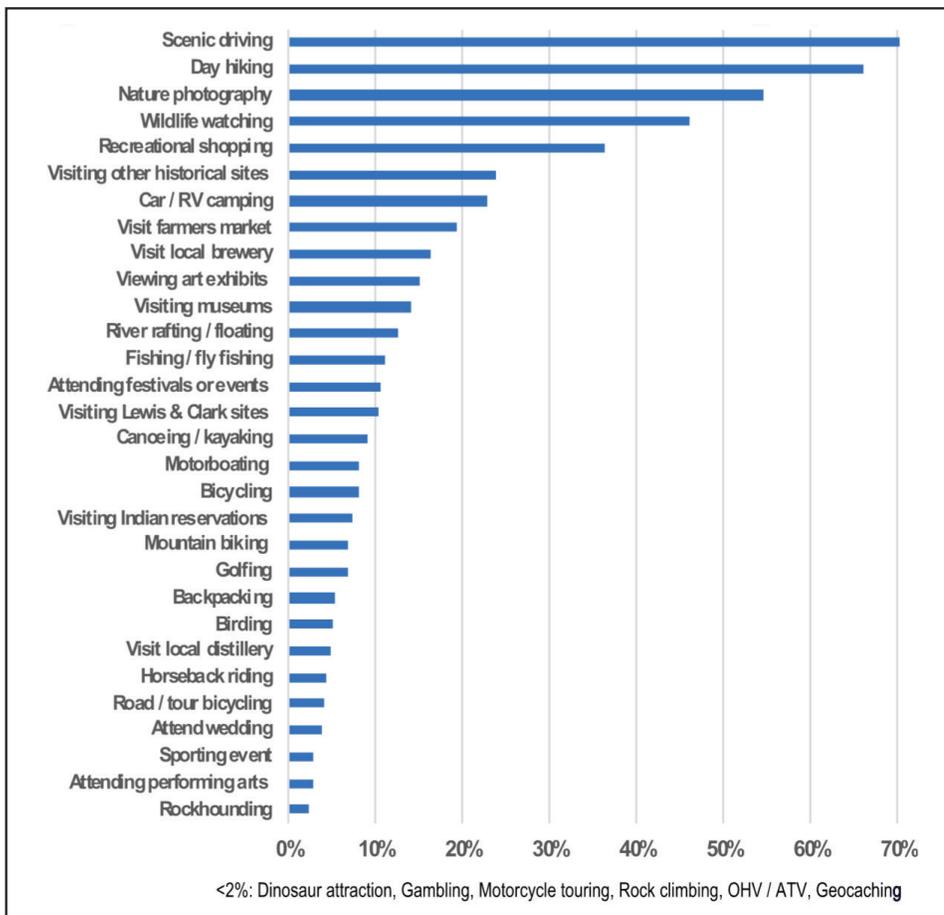
Figure 3.11: Activities of Non-Resident Travelers During Trip
Source: ITTR

Category	Expenditures	% of County
Restaurant, Bar	$134,455,000	
Retail	80,343,000	21.9%
Outfitter, Guide	75,525,000	13.1%
Hotel, Motel, B&B	67,502,000	12.3%
Grocery, Snacks	52,958,000	11.0%
License, Fees	52,248,000	8.6%
Gas, Diesel	49,741,000	8.5%
Rental Cabin	33,284,000	8.1%
Made in Montana	24,010,000	5.4%
Auto Rental, Repair	23,088,000	3.9%
Campground	9,572,000	3.8%
Service	8,110,000	1.6%
Gambling	1,870,000	1.3%
Farmers Market	1,304,000	0.3%
Transportation Fares	150,000	0.2%
Total	$614,160,000	0.0%
		100.0%

Table 3.5: 2018 Nonresident Expenditures in Flathead County
Source: ITRR, categories are rounded numbers,
may differ slightly from other reports

G. RECREATION VISITOR TRENDS

1. Key Findings:

• The number of Glacier Park recreation visitors increased 27% (+626,000) from 2014 to 2018

• Whitefish Mountain Resort has grown, attracting more destination skiers and summer visitors, selling 11,500 season passes for the 2019-2020 season—mainly to residents within 35 miles

• In 2017, the Whitefish Trail received 73,000 annual trail uses at just four trailheads, of which 70% were locals and 30% (22,000) were visitors (live outside Flathead County); by 2019, trail use across all 12 trailheads was estimated to be 140,000+

• Outdoor recreation is the primary reason that people visit, move to, and stay in Whitefish

Most outdoor recreation visitors come to Whitefish in peak summer season (June-September); however, Whitefish also attracts many winter recreationists who enjoy Whitefish Mountain Resort, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, dog sledding, and other activities. Others come to take advantage of quieter times of year. The following sections summarize key indicators of recreation visitor use in Whitefish.

2. Summer and Winter Recreation Visitors

Glacier National Park – Figures 3.18-3.23 (page 39) demonstrate the close linkage between Glacier National Park visits and visitation/traffic in Whitefish. Figure 3.12 below demonstrates how GNP recreation visitation has grown from 4,000 visitors in 1911 to a peak (so far) of 3,305,512 visitors in 2017. Publicity surrounding the National Park Service Centennial in 2016 likely drove the 2017 record. The number of visitors dropped by about 340,000 in 2018 but was still up 27% (+626,000) from 2014.
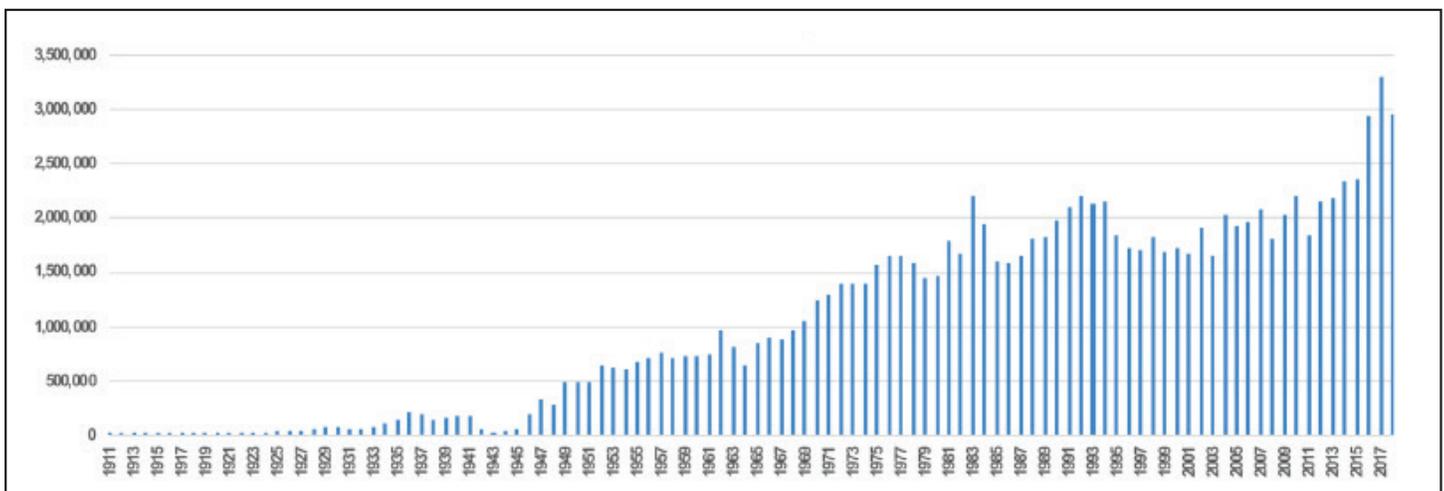

Figure 3.12: GNP Recreation Visitors 1911-2018   Source: National Park Service

At the Glacier Park West Entrance, more than 80% of the traffic is in the peak summer months (June-September), with June counts often determined by the opening date of Going to the Sun Highway. July and August alone account for more than half of the West Entrance traffic annually (53%).

Winter can be a magical time in the Park, with many opportunities for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and wildlife viewing, including Ranger-guided trips. West Entrance traffic in winter months (December-March) is about 4% of the annual total, and spring months (April-May) account for 9%-10% of annual traffic. December and January are the lowest traffic months, followed by February and November.

Whitefish Mountain Resort (WMR) – The Resort has grown their summer business with the addition of guided zipline tours, alpine slides, an aerial adventure park, kids' activities, a Summit Nature Center, and an extensive network of hiking/mountain biking trails, in addition to scenic chairlift rides and dining.

The 2018-2019 ski season was the best on record in the Rocky Mountains, with 24 million visits. Montana ski areas had an overall increase of 8.3% compared to 2017-2018.

Whitefish Mountain sold 11,500 season passes for the 2019-2020 season:

- 80% of season passholders live within 35 miles of Whitefish, 2% live 36-135 miles

- 4% are from Canada, and 11% from other U.S. states (vacation homeowners)

- Season passholders comprise nearly half of the total skier days (45%), while day pass and multi-day passholders comprise 55%

In the 2009-2010 ski season, residents were 54% of the skiers at WMR.
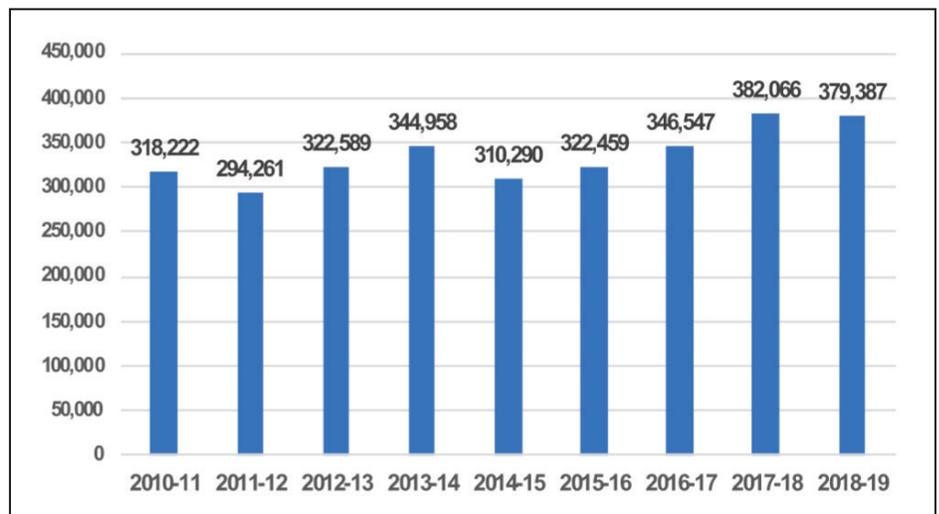

Figure 3.13: Whitefish Mountain Resort Skier Visits
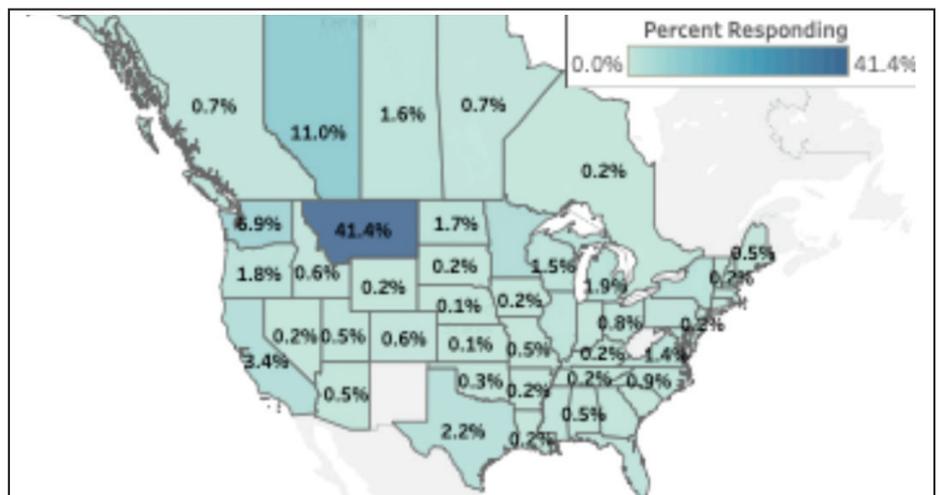*Source: U.S. Forest Service & Whitefish Mountain Resort*

Figure 3.14: 2018/19 year-to-Date Visitation by State/Province
Source: RRC Associates, Whitefish Mountain Resort

By the 2018-2019 season, residents were 62% of the skiers. According to a 2019 ITRR study, the average age of skiers is 41, 75-77% are skiers, 13-16% are boarders, 7-12% are both. WMR research shows more visitors used day passes in 2018-19, a sign of some new visitors. There also were more destination skiers arriving by air, train, and bus, particularly from Washington, California, and Alberta (Figure 3.14).

According to ITRR, half of nonresident skiers arrived by air, 6% by train. They stayed an average of 6.5 nights and skied 4.3 days. Nearly two-thirds used commercial lodging (64%), while 20% stayed in their own condo or 2nd home, and 19% stayed with a friend or relative.

Montana skiers who stayed overnight in Whitefish spent 2 or fewer nights, and skied one day; 68% used commercial lodging, 21% stayed with a friend/relative, 16% stayed in their own condo. Figure 3.18 (page 39) shows only a slight increase in lodging sales and occupancy in the City of Whitefish over Christmas, confirming that many destination skiers stay on the mountain.

WMR was ranked 2020 No. 3 Best Resort in the West by SKI Magazine. Readers chose WMR because of affordability, previous experience at WMR, lack of crowding, and the town of Whitefish. WMR gets high ratings for its facilities, customer service, food, and overall quality of skiing experience. WMR has experienced significant growth in its programs for kids, juniors, and teens, which include lessons for ages 3-18, a Kids Center with on-snow play, a terrain park, freestyle teams, and a racing team.

The Whitefish Trail – The Whitefish Trail is planned to be a 55+ mile trail encircling Whitefish Lake and linking to state, federal, and private lands that have been conserved for public recreation access and sustainable forest management. From 2006 to 2016, project partners led by the Whitefish Legacy Partners protected 6,100 acres of local land, built, and maintained 42 miles of Trail accessed by 12 trailheads, and developed an outdoor education program. Further development is ongoing.
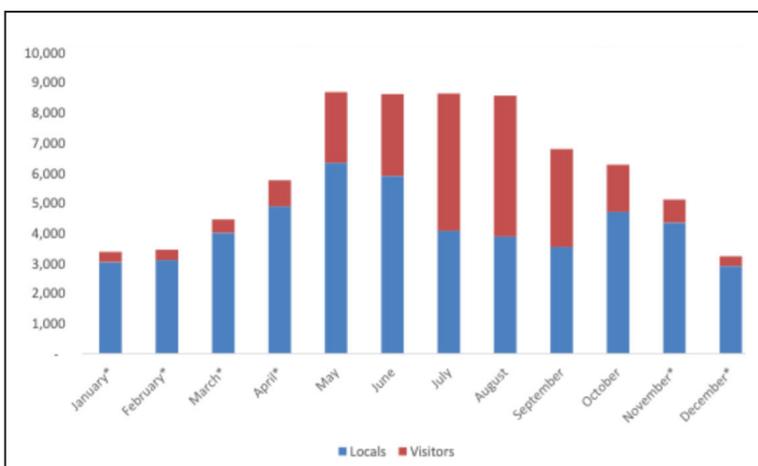

Figure 3.15: 2017 Monthly Trail Use at Four Primary Trailheads
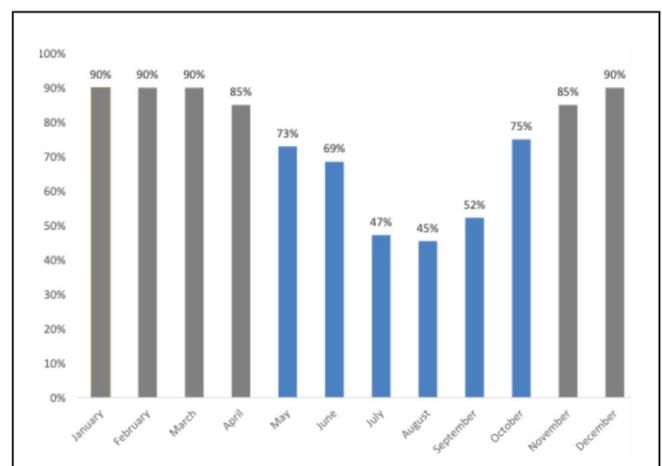Source: Headwaters Economics

Figure 3.16: Trail Users = Locals (2017)
Source: Headwaters Economics

A 2017 study estimated 72,966 total annual Trail uses, of which 30% (22,188) were visitors (defined as people living outside Flathead County). Counts and interviews conducted at the four most popular trailheads revealed that 41,000 uses (56%) were in the summer season, but even in winter, the Trail averaged 100 uses daily. July and August are the only months when visitor use exceeds local use (Figures 3.15 and 3.16). Overall use in July-August doesn't increase compared to May-June, but many locals move to other summer activities or high country trails that are inaccessible in off-peak times.

Residents use the Trail an average of 1.8 times per week, due to its proximity to town and well-maintained trails. Of the local Trail users, 77% live in Whitefish, 11% in Kalispell, 9% in Columbia Falls, and 3% in Bigfork and other Flathead communities. Many residents report exercising more—and buying more gear, especially for mountain biking. Locals also report that outdoor recreation was a primary reason they moved to or stay in Whitefish. This finding is consistent with the Tapestry data about Whitefish and Flathead County residents.

The 2017 Whitefish Trail study included interviews of visitors at trailheads and four locations in town. Their findings about recreation visitors were the following:

• Visitors whose primary trip purpose is outdoor recreation spend significantly more than non-recreationists ($278 pe day vs. $227 per day).

• Visiting recreationists also tend to stay longer than non-recreationists (5.8 days/trip vs. 4.2 days), resulting in roughly $670 more spent per trip by recreationists.

• Most visitors to Whitefish participate in outdoor recreation, shopping, and dining; not as many attend cultural activities and events. (Figure 3.17)
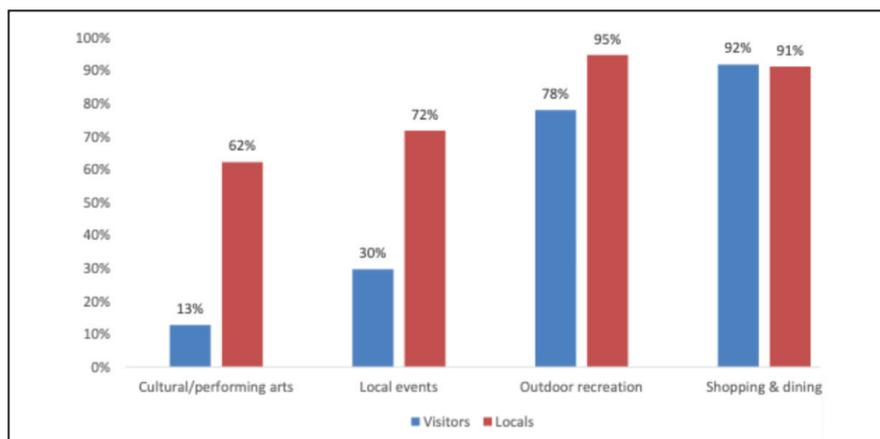

Fig. 3.17: Share of Visitors/Locals Participating in Whitefish Activities
Source: Headwaters Economics

H. PEAK SEASON VS. OFF-PEAK SEASON

1. Peak Season for Overnight Visitors is July-August

Seasonality is a significant challenge for both residents and businesses in Whitefish. The "peak tourist season" is **June-JULY-AUGUST-September**, with July and August significantly higher in overnight visitation than June and September. Those four months (Jun-Sept) generate 69% of all annual lodging sales, and the other eight months of the year combined generate only 31% of annual lodging sales. As Figures 3.18 through 3.23 illustrate, eight months of the year is "off-peak" season, and of the four "peak" months, only July and August are high peaks, paralleling Glacier National Park visitation (Figure 3.21). These figures also show the impact of local resident and Montana day
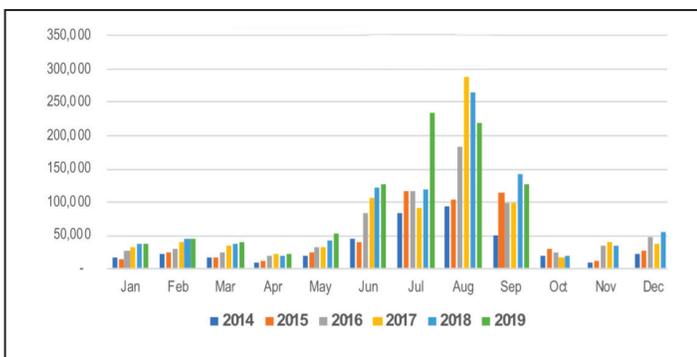
Figure 3.18: Whitefish Lodging Sales Trends
Source: City of Whitefish Resort Tax
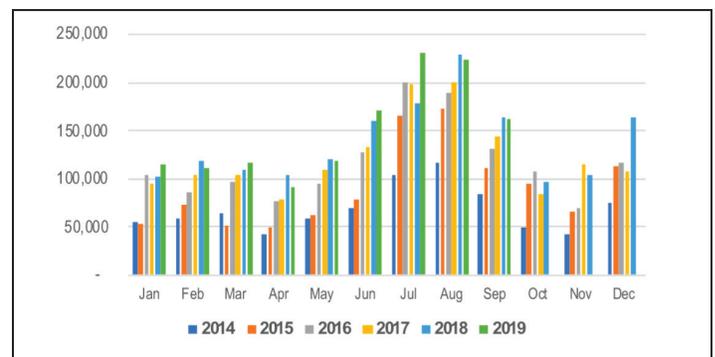
Figure 3.19: Whitefish Food and Beverage Sales Trends
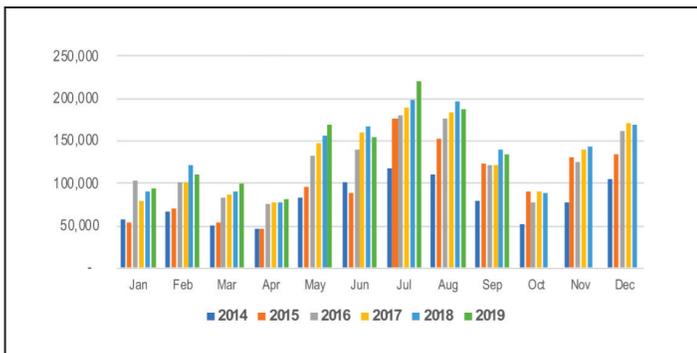*Source: City of Whitefish Resort Tax*

Figure 3.20: Whitefish Retail Sales Trends
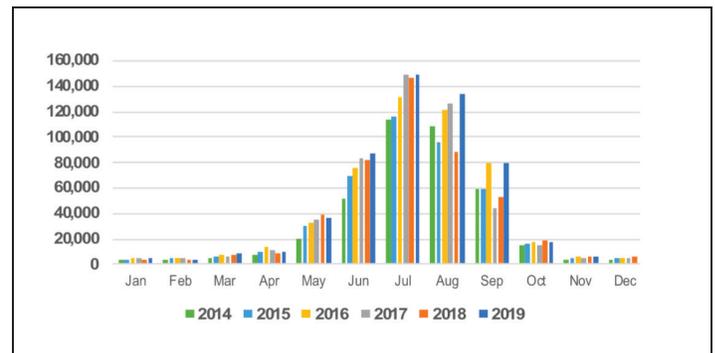*Source: City of Whitefish Resort Tax*

Figure 3.21: GNP Traffic Counts at West Entrance
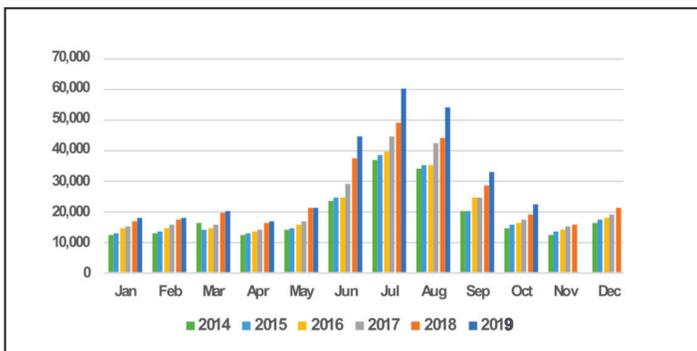*Source: National Park Service*

Figure 3.22: Glacier Park International Airport Deboardings
Source: MT Dept of Transportation Aeronautics Div.
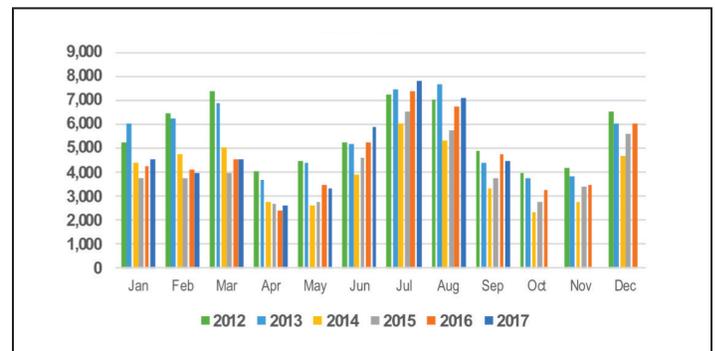

Figure 3.23: Amtrak Ridership at Whitefish Station
Source: Amtrak

visitor spending on dining, beverage, and retail sales, especially in November-December (holidays) and ski season. Unlike lodging, peak season generates less than half (only 44%) of annual food and beverage sales, and 43% of annual retail sales, while the other eight months generate 56% and 57% respectively. (Note: Resort tax increased from 2% to 3% on July 1, 2015).

2. Peak Season vs. Off-Peak Season

The previous page stated that seasonality is a challenge for both residents and businesses: in peak season—especially July and August—the number of people in town impacts the quality of life for residents in the areas of traffic, parking, restaurant and bar crowds, recreation, noise, and housing.

The data supports the concern that nonresident visitors contribute to these challenges; however, other factors are at play, including population growth, locals who invite their friends and family to visit in peak months, Montanans visiting Whitefish (including day visitors), and seasonal residents and workers (see box). Other chapters in this document discuss actions the City and others are taking to address challenges in peak season.

Contributors to Peak Season Crowding

Montanans from Flathead/Other counties (day, overnight)

Nonresident (out-of-state) visitors–vacation, business

Friends and family visiting Whitefish residents

Population growth in Whitefish and Flathead County

Second/seasonal homeowners staying in Whitefish

Seasonal workers commuting into Whitefish to work

Summer construction traffic (residential, commercial)

Pass-through traffic on US93

On the flip side, is the off-peak season (October through May). During the off-peak months, hotels are half empty (as low as 40% occupied in November through January, Figure 3.24). Short-term rentals average 48% occupancy in January. This lack of visitors also affects other businesses (restaurants, bars, retailers, entertainment, etc., and their vendors/suppliers). Without peak season sales, many Whitefish businesses would not survive year-round, or would not be in Whitefish in the first place. Their sponsorships and product/service donations would not be available to support local nonprofits, youth organizations, and events.

In the hotel industry, 60%-70% occupancy is considered break-even. Therefore, for eight months of the year, many hotels and inns are losing money, and are able to survive only because of the June-September peak season. This is reflected in average room rates, which are high in peak season, then drop by half—in some cases as much as 75%--in off-peak season, due to supply and demand (Figure 3.25). **These data confirm that Whitefish is overbuilt in commercial lodging and STRs**, and also that there are opportunities for low impact off-peak activities to support tourism-oriented businesses.

Figure 3.24: Whitefish Lodging Occupancy
Source: Smith Travel Research
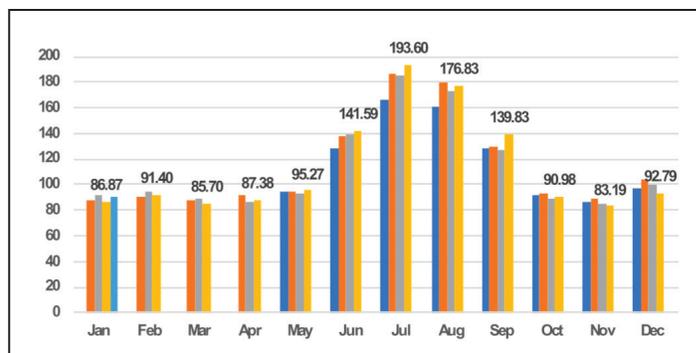
Figure 3.25: Whitefish Average Daily Rate
Source: Smith Travel Research

3. Off-Peak Season – Potential Opportunities

One way to reduce the pressure to maximize peak season occupancy is to generate more off-peak season indoor low impact business, such as conferences, retreats, education- and arts-based events, preferably in mid-week. An example is the new annual Winterland Film + Tech Festival planned to begin in 2021. Other examples are culinary events and competitions, music and other performance events, and educational events like TED Talks and institutes on recreation development/management, climate response, farm-to-table product development, green design/construction, green living, home remodeling, health/fitness, outdoor/nature/ sportsmen's writing, western literature/art, etc. A key is to match educational events with the interests and passions of residents (see Chapter IV).

I. ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TOURISM

Tourism is a main economic driver for the Whitefish economy and contributor to local amenities. Those positive outcomes, however, should balance sustainability with peak season tourism. The needs of residents, protection of the environment, and compatibility with the cultural setting are key factors in managing tourism to benefit the local population and to provide a memorable visitor experience. Identifying measures of tourism capacity, and documenting the benefits of tourism, will provide a foundation to evaluate programs, measure change, and increase awareness about how residents and visitors can contribute to a thriving community. Below are some measures of economic benefits from tourism.

Direct Benefits of Visitor Spending

• Montana Residents took 470,000 day trips to Flathead County in 2017, and 322,400 overnight trips. The day trip visitors spent $112.4 million, and the overnight visitors spent $98.4 million. (Resident Travel in Montana in 2017, University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Travel Research), https://scholarworks.umt.edu/itrr_pubs/369/

• Nonresident visitors contributed $824.5 million to the regional economy in Flathead County in 2018. (2018 Economic Contribution of Nonresident Travel Spending in Montana Regions and Counties, ITRR), https://scholarworks.umt.edu/itrr_pubs/391/

• Visitors to Glacier National Park spent $344 million in local economies in 2018, including Whitefish. Of that total, 94.2% was spent by non-local visitors. The result was 5,225 jobs in the communities surrounding the Park, $163 million in wages, another $188 million in value-added economic impact, for a total economic benefit to communities of $484 million. (2018 National Park Visitor Spending Effects: Economic Contributions to Local Communities, States, and the Nation, National Park Service), https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm

• Nonresidents skiing at Whitefish Mountain Resort during the 2018-2019 ski season contributed $12.1 million to the Montana economy. Of the overnight skiers who stayed at Whitefish Mountain Resort, one-third spent 7+ nights. On average, overnight skiers spent 3.9 days skiing at the Resort. 20% of WMR nonresident visitors purchased a travel/ski package at an average value of $4,228. Nonresidents spent more on accommodations than any other expenditure ($440 per group per trip), followed by restaurant and bar ($323) and lift tickets ($277). Average group expenditures for nonresidents while in Montana was $1,456.

Montana Residents skiing at Whitefish during the 2018-2019 ski season spent $13 million in aggregate. Across all resident groups, the most money was spent on restaurants and bars ($95 per group per trip), followed by lift tickets ($73 per group per trip) and accommodations ($51). (Whitefish Mountain Resort 2018/19 End of Season Report, RRC Associates; and Economics and Characteristics of Alpine Skiing in Montana—2018-2019 Ski Season, ITRR), https://scholarworks.umt.edu/itrr_pubs/394/

- The Whitefish Trail contributes annually to $6.4 million in consumer spending in the area: $2.7 million from residents spending on outdoor gear, and $3.6 million by visitors. Spending from visitors alone translates to 68 additional jobs and $1.9 million in labor income in the community. Spending by people visiting Whitefish mainly for outdoor recreation amounts to approximately $101 million in spending, 1,460 jobs, and $41.1 million in labor income annually. (Economic Impact of the Whitefish Trail, Whitefish Legacy Partners and Headwaters Economics), www.whitefishlegacy.org/news/economic-impact-of-the-whitefish-trail/

- Outfitted clients spend much more than non-outfitted visitors: groups who took a guided trip spent $3,501 per trip, while the average visiting group spends $606. Statewide, guides hosted 283,600 clients for water-based activities (rafting/floating/canoeing/kayaking), and 160,400 clients on fishing trips, representing the largest guided trip sectors when ranked by volume of clients. (Montana's Outfitting Industry - 2017 Economic Contribution and Industry-Client Analysis), https://scholarworks.umt.edu/itrr_pubs/376/

- Montana's outdoor recreation economy generates $7.1 billion in consumer spending and more than 71,000 jobs. Montana residents account for 51% of outdoor recreation spending. Recent Bureau of Economic Analysis data indicates 5.1% of Montana's Gross Domestic Product comes from outdoor recreation, which has created more than 28,000 jobs. Deer, elk, and antelope hunters spent an estimated $324 million in Montana (Montana FWP, 2016). Anglers spent $919.3 million in more than 3.3 million angling days in 2017. A survey of Montana's high-tech industries, which pays twice the median wage, shows that Montana's quality of life – its lifestyle, the work/life balance available, the recreation opportunities, and the beauty of the landscape provide a significant advantage in business. (Outdoor Recreation & Montana's Economy, Montana Office of Outdoor Recreation, http://business.mt.gov/Office-of-Outdoor-Recreation, BEA Outdoor Recreation Report) https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation

- "For entrepreneurs who value outdoor lifestyles, Montana's wide open public lands provide opportunities that can transform aspirations and goals into reality. Diverse communities with distinct personalities, a highly skilled workforce and convenient amenities and services allow businesses to develop their own brand identify while determining their workplace culture." http://business.mt.gov/Office-of-Outdoor-Recreation

J. MARKETING AND SUSTAINABILITY

1. Existing Marketing Efforts

Communication and awareness-building among both residents and visitors is key to enhancing everyone's experiences. Residents consistently claim that Whitefish is "over-marketed" by tourism entities, when in fact neither the Whitefish CVB nor Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission promote summer travel to Whitefish—though other entities do. The Whitefish CVB and Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission focus on off-peak season marketing. Before visitors' arrival, and during their stay, communication can help minimize impacts and encourage sustainable behaviors (see next section). The responsibility for this communication is shared among all local organizations, businesses, and residents.

There are many entities promoting Whitefish, Flathead County, Glacier Country, the State of Montana, and the Rocky Mountain region for tourism, economic development, relocation, and investment. In addition, most of the entities have social media accounts, and many residents of Whitefish post pictures of their life experiences on social media. For this reason, even without the City of Whitefish, Chamber, and CVB efforts, there still are millions of eyeballs viewing messaging about Whitefish, Glacier National Park, etc. Organizations that promote and provide information about Whitefish and the Glacier Country travel region include:

- **Whitefish:** Whitefish CVB (ExploreWhitefish.com), Whitefish Chamber of Commerce (WhitefishChamber.org), City of Whitefish (CityofWhitefish.org), Whitefish Mountain Resort (SkiWhitefish.com), Whitefish Arts Festival (WhitefishArtsFestival.org), Whitefish Pilot (WhitefishPilot.com), Whitefish Farmers Market (WhitefishFarmersMarket.org), realtors (Realtor.com), hotels, outfitters, other businesses, and events.

- **Flathead County:** Kalispell Chamber/CVB (KalispellChamber.com), Flathead County (Flathead.mt.gov), Montana West Economic Development (DoBusinessinMontana.com), City of Kalispell (Kalispell.com), Columbia Falls Chamber (ColumbiaFallsChamber.com), City of Columbia Falls (CityofColumbiaFalls.org), Flathead CVB (FCVB.org), Bigfork Chamber of Commerce (Bigfork.org), Lakeside Somers Chamber of Commerce (LakesideSomers.org), Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC.edu), Flathead Living (FlatheadLiving.com), Daily Interlake, Flathead Beacon, hotels, outfitters, realtors, other businesses, and events.

- **Glacier Country, Glacier National Park:** Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission (GlacierMT.com), Glacier National Park (NPS.gov/Glac/index.htm), Go Northwest (GoNorthwest.com), Pursuit Collection (GlacierParkCollection.com), and others.

- **State of Montana, Rocky Mountain Region:** State of Montana (VisitMT.com), Visit the USA (VisittheUSA.com/state/Montana), Rocky Mountain International (RMIMarketing.com).

- **Other:** Trip Advisor (TripAdvisor.com), Airbnb (Airbnb.com), Vacation Rental by Owner (VRBO.com), Bed and Breakfast (BedandBreakfast.com, BBOnline.com, BnBFinder.com), Skiing (Ski.com, Snow.com, OntheSnow.com, SkiCentral.com, SnowPak.com), Trips to Discover (TripstoDiscover.com), AAA (AAA.com), Lonely Planet (LonelyPlanet.com), etc.

One of the most powerful marketing tools is social media, used by both residents and visitors who post their experiences. A challenge for Whitefish is consistent branding and messaging–particularly sustainability messaging–with so many disparate entities marketing images over the air and in cyberspace.

2. Marketing Resources

Lodging Tax Funds – The State of Montana has a 4% lodging tax paid by guests of hotels, motels, B&Bs, short-term rentals, guest ranches, resorts, and campgrounds. In 2018, the total collected was about $33.4 million. Figure 3.26 shows how the funds are spent. Of the 61.7% to the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development, about $750,000 is used annually for a tourism grant program, which funds projects for arts/culture/heritage preservation, visitor facility upgrades or construction, and niche product development, including promotion.
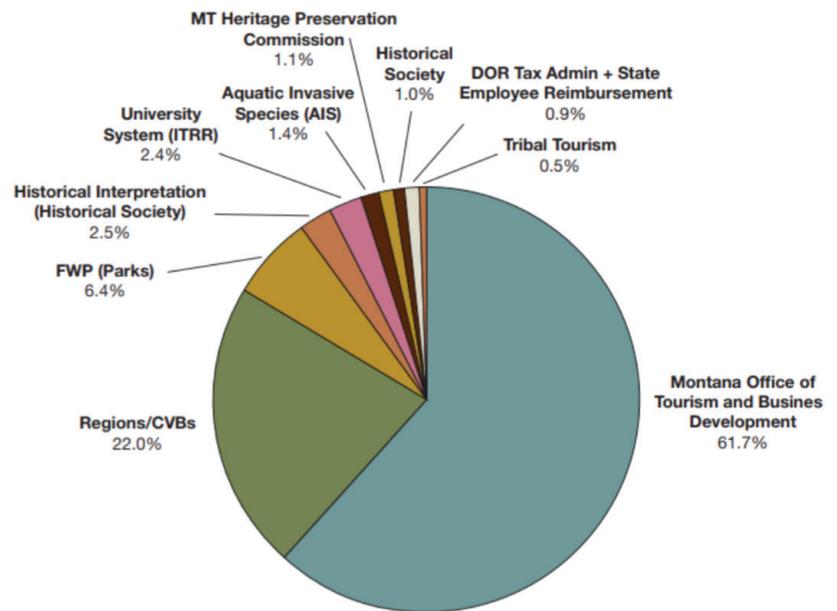
Figure 3.26: Distribution of 4% Lodging Facility Use Tax

Both Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission and the Whitefish CVB receive a share of state lodging tax funds, and the CVB collects a 1% fee from participating lodging properties and restaurants. Both entities have cooperative marketing and grant programs that can be accessed by local businesses and nonprofits for tourism-related services and events.

- **Whitefish CVB** – Branding Guidelines and Marketing, Guide/Map/Web Listings, Public Relations, Trade Shows, e-News, Airport Display, Smith Travel Research (STAR) reports on hotel occupancy, rates, etc., VisaVue reports, etc., https://explorewhitefish.com/members

- **Marketing and Events in Shoulder Season** – CVB, Chamber

- **Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission and Montana Tourism office** – listings, cooperative advertising, leads for small market meetings, group, and international travel, etc., https://partners.glaciermt.com/benefits-for-partners, https://marketmt.com/

3. Sustainable Travel

Sustainability is the goal of this Sustainable Tourism Management Plan, in the level of tourism in Whitefish, and behaviors by visitors, businesses, and residents. To achieve it, Whitefish visitors, businesses, and residents must determine the "tourism capacity" of Whitefish, support and participate in strategies to reduce the impact of travel and recreation, and travel marketers must incorporate sustainability principals and messaging in their efforts. The following resources support sustainability actions.

• **"Leave No Trace",** https://LNT.org

• **Travalyst** is a global initiative founded by the Duke of Sussex, Booking.com, Skyscanner, Trip.com, TripAdvisor, and Visa, to change the impact of travel. www.travalyst.org

• **Skyscanner** – Travel booking site for sustainable travel. www.skyscanner.net/about-us/sustainability

Sustainable Travel: The time is now

• By 2030, 1.8 billion people will travel internationally

• In 2018, $8.8 trillion to the global economy

• Today, 1-in-10 jobs globally are travel related

• 71% of global travelers think travel companies should offer more sustainable travel choices

• 10 million travelers using Skyscanner selected the lowest CO_2 emission flight option in last 12 months

• 68% said it was important the money they spent on travel went back into the local community

Source: Travalyst.com

K. STRATEGIES – ACTION ITEM

1. Develop a 5-year strategy for ongoing research and monitoring of visitor capacity, numbers and behavior, resident attitudes and behavior, business actions toward sustainability goals.

- Identify methods to determine visitor capacity at key sites, then track, monitor, and report visitor numbers, economic impact, demographics, behaviors, and impacts by season.
- Track changes in STR inventory, report to policy makers as context to regulatory discussions.
- Evaluate ways to reduce duplicative efforts and visitor confusion between the Whitefish CVB and Chamber of Commerce to use resources more efficiently and effectively.
- Implement methods to track, monitor, and report resident behaviors and impressions.
- Identify and implement methods to track and report actions taken by businesses to reduce waste, lower energy, and water use, increase local sourcing, increase employee compensation and give-back programs, etc., on a quarterly basis.
- Implement a "Sustainable Whitefish Future" Awards program for businesses, organizations, youth, and individuals who have outstanding measurable impact on sustainable progress.
- Whitefish CVB Tourism Data/Resources: https://explorewhitefish.com/entries/whitefish-tourism-data-resources/a29cb475-e880-4386-a66f-e0b41b401d1c
- Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission Annual Report: https://partners.glaciermt.com/annual-report

2. Build awareness among residents about actual impacts from visitors vs. local county residents and manage expectations in view of population growth and peak season visitation.

- Create online and printed materials to educate residents about the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan document, and information highlights from it.
- Coordinate with local media on awareness-building series re. tourism, population growth.
- Create information to explain how residents can help reduce impacts of tourism.
- Work with local employers and FVCC to develop employee training for hospitality workers regarding communications with local customers and visitors about tourism impacts.
- Resources: https://www.fvcc.edu/what-we-offer/academic-programs/, https://www.gadventures.com/about-us/responsible-travel/travel-better/

3. Host off-peak season educational events with topics of interest to residents and visitors.

- Focus on educational events that match passions of residents and visitors and support sustainability goals, recruit locals to assist in planning and implementation.
- Strategically recruit groups that are consistent with values of Whitefish residents.
- Resources: TEDx Events - https://www.ted.com/tedx/events?autocomplete_filter=michigan&month=Month&when=upcoming&year=Year, Voluntourism – www.visit.org, Experiential Travel www.airbnb.com/s/experiences, Bleisure https://www.travelweekly.com/Strategic-Content/Growing-Bleisure

4. Include sustainable travel and recreation practices as part of the "Whitefish Brand."

- Build awareness about traveling sustainably as part of marketing, advance trip planning, and on-site messaging to customers.
- Update "Whitefish Brand Guidelines" to emphasize sustainability message.
- Resource: Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) www.gstcouncil.org

5. Coordinate with Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission and Montana Office of Tourism on sustainable tourism messaging and resources for travelers.

- Encourage GCRTC to adopt sustainable tourism practices and messaging, both for members and travelers, e.g., request sustainable messaging in GCRTC online and printed materials.
- Encourage MOTBD to include sustainable travel information in all messaging and materials.
- Resource: https://partners.glaciermt.com/benefits-for-partners, https://marketmt.com/

6. Advocate for investment in tourism infrastructure.

- Support continued funding from state and federal agencies for tourism infrastructure.
- Promote the US Travel Association guiding principles for tourism infrastructure investment.
- Resource: https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/media_root/document/InfrastructureRecommendations_2018.pdf

IV. ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

"There are really not many jobs outside of the service and retail sectors, and we need more clean industry; right now it feels like low paying tourism oriented workers, retail owners and workers, and retirees dominate our population." Survey Comment

A. GOALS

Livability – Achieve economic diversity through an increase in year-round employment in non-tourism sectors, to complement existing businesses.

Community Engagement – Partner with business and community leaders, Whitefish Chamber of Commerce, Montana West Economic Development, financial institutions, and others to target and encourage high priority clean and green businesses.

Community Character – Inspire new entrepreneurship and business development that is consistent with Whitefish community character and will support Whitefish values of sustainability and livability.

B. THE CURRENT WHITEFISH ECONOMY

In Whitefish, a more sustainable economy means more businesses and/or jobs in higher paying, year-round sectors to balance the high number of tourism-oriented businesses.

**1. Employment Base
Key Findings:**

- The community of Whitefish (the area within the 59937 zip code) contains nearly 1,000 businesses and 7,500 employees (Table 4.1).

- Tourism-related businesses (lodging, dining, beverage, retail, recreation, arts, entertainment) make up nearly one-quarter of businesses (24%), and more than one-third of jobs (38%).

	Business	Whitefish % of Ttl	National % of Ttl	Employees	Empty Rank
Retail	109	11%	11%	628	3
Prof'l, Science, Tech	97	10%	13%	431	6
Lodging & Food	95	10%	5%	1,833	1
Other Services	93	10%	11%	494	5
Unclassified Estab.	90	9%		29	
Construction	80	8%	9%	273	
Real Estate, Leasing	73	8%	5%	540	4
Health Care, Social Svc	72	8%	10%	946	2
Finance & Insurance	56	6%	5%	326	10
Admin, Support, Clean Svc	35	4%	11%	124	
Manufacturing	29	3%	4%	208	
Arts, Enter, Recreation	29	3%	2%	348	9
Education	22	2%	2%	381	7
Information	18	2%	2%	90	
Public Administration	15	2%	1%	252	
Wholesale Trade	14	1%	4%	63	
Transp, Warehouse	13	1%	3%	360	8
Ag, Forestry, Fish/Hunt	10	1%	2%	28	
Utilities	4	0%	0%	105	
Mgmt of Companies	1	0%	0%	3	
Mining	0	0%	0%	0	
Total	**955**	100%	100%	**7,462**	

*Table 4.1: Whitefish (59937) Economic Base
Source: Esri Data for 59937 Zip Code, 9/5/19*

- Additionally, another 196 service businesses (883 jobs) may be tourism-related: Transportation, Other Services, Unclassified. Not all of them are tourism-related, but if they were, the total number of tourism-related jobs would be just under half of all Whitefish jobs (49.5%).

- Sectors with opportunity to create higher-paying year-round jobs include professional, scientific, and technical services, manufacturing, and technology.

- Broadband availability and reliability are a significant challenge in Flathead County, limiting the growth of higher-paying sectors.

Industry	Location Quotient*
Leisure and Hospitality	1.56
Construction	1.44
Education/Health Services	1.17
Other Services	1.15
Financial Activities	1.06
Natural Resources / Mining	1.05
Services-Providing	1.04
Trade, Transprotation, Utilities	1.00
Manufacturing	.75
Professional / Business Services	.63
Information	.41

Table 4.2: Flathead Co. Location Quotient (LQ)
*Source: Flathead County CEDS, 2017   *1 = Nat'l Avg*

For a city its size compared to the national average, Whitefish has a higher percentage of businesses in the following sectors (green figures in the Table 4.1 "Whitefish" column): Lodging and Food; Real Estate, Leasing/ Property Management; Finance and Insurance; Arts, Entertainment, Recreation; and Public Administration. None of these are surprising given the number of second/vacation homeowners, retirees, and public lands.

Whitefish has fewer businesses than the national average in nine sectors (red figures in the Table 4.1 "Whitefish" column): Professional, Scientific, Technical; Other Services; Construction; Health Care and Social Assistance; Administrative, Support, and Cleaning Services; Manufacturing; Wholesale Trade; Transportation and Warehousing; and Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing/Hunting. The Construction sector may sound surprising, but many contractors who work in Whitefish are based in Kalispell and Columbia Falls.

Some of these sectors, and clusters of similar

businesses, may represent opportunities for business development in sectors with higher-paying year-round jobs. For example, of the 97 Professional, Scientific, and Technical businesses, 22 are Legal services (75 jobs), and the remaining 75 businesses (356 jobs) represent other types of businesses (this category includes Legal, Accounting/Tax/ Payroll, Architecture, Management/Scientific/ Technical Consulting, Engineering, Design, Computer Systems/ Programming, Scientific Research and Development, Advertising and PR, Market Research, Photography, Translation and Interpretation, and Veterinary Services).

Further investigation could reveal opportunities for collaboration, expansion, complementary businesses, and supporting businesses. Other key business sectors are Health Care and Social Assistance (72 businesses); Administrative/ Support, Waste Management and

(29 businesses); Educational Services (22 businesses); Information (18 businesses); and "Other Services" (93 businesses, of which 14 are Auto Repair/ Maintenance, 149 jobs).

Whitefish is above the national average in Information Services, while Flathead County is below the national average (Table 4.2, where 1.0 = National Average). County-wide, the Construction, Education/ Health, Natural Resources/Mining, and Other Services sectors show figures above the national average.

However, like Whitefish, Flathead County is below the national average in Manufacturing and Professional/Business Services. As stated earlier, about one-in-four businesses, and more than 1-in-3 jobs in Whitefish, are tourism-dependent. Most of these jobs tend to be lower paying jobs, many of them seasonal.

Table 4.3 takes a deeper dive into the Hospitality, Retail, and Financial sectors in Whitefish. There are twice as many restaurants and bars as there are lodging businesses, but the lodging sector has more employees (many of them part-time). Note: these figures do not include 1,100+ short-term rental properties (STRs) in Whitefish. STRs are categorized as residential properties, even though they provide commercial lodging. Businesses that employ workers related to STRs are property management companies (Real Estate/ Leasing category), cleaning, maintenance, and landscaping services.

The largest retail subsector is "Miscellaneous Stores," with 26 businesses (112 employees), followed by Clothing and Accessories, Grocery/

Liquor (119 employees), Hobby, Building Materials and Garden Supply (86 employees), Auto related (79 employees), and Furnishings. There is one Nonstore (Internet) Retailer.

The Financial sector has 21 Securities/ Investment businesses (77 employees), closely followed by 19 Insurance/Funds/Trusts (59 employees), and 16 Banks and Credit-related businesses with the most employees (190). This is driven in part by the number of retirees in Whitefish.

Lodging & Food Services	Businesses	Employees
Food Service and Drinking Places	62	887
Accommodation	33	946
Total	95	1,833
Retail Trade		
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	26	112
Clothing & Clothing Accessories	16	56
Food and Beverage Stores (Grocery, Liquor)	11	119
Sport Goods, Hobby, Book, Music	11	39
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip/Supply	10	86
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	10	79
Furniture & Home Furnishings	8	29
Health & Personal Care Stores	6	38
Gasoline Stations	5	30
General Merchandise	4	38
Electronics & Appliances	1	2
Nonstore Retailers	1	0
Total	109	628
Finance & Insurance		
Securities, Commodities, Investments & Related	21	77
Insurance; Funds, Trusts & Other Financial Vehicles	19	59
Central Bank/Credit Intermediation/ Related Activities	16	190
Total	56	326

Table 4.3: Key Subsector Businesses and Employment Source: Est Tata, 59937 Zip Code, 9/5/19

1. Employment Base
Key Findings:

• Business sectors with the most jobs in Whitefish have the lowest wages (Tables 4.1, 4.3, 4.4).

• The low wage jobs create a need for affordable workforce housing, and without it, workers must commute from other parts of the county, adding to traffic challenges in peak season.

Occupation Title	Annual Mean Wage W. MT Nonmetro	Missoula	Occupation Title	Annual Mean Wage W. MT Nonmetro	Missoula
Management Occupations	85,400	92,290	Property/Real Estate Mgrs	37,830	42,370
Health Care/Technical	81,290	74,590	Production Occupations	36,010	36,330
Computer/Math Occupations	72,300	62,070	Transportation/Moving	34,970	35,570
Architecture/Engineering	63,840	63,310	Arts/Design/Entertainment	34,520	40,150
Advertising Sales Agents	61,640	48,470	Sales & Related Occupations	34,090	34,890
Business/Financial/Operations	59,420	59,630	Office/Admin Support	33,990	34,550
Lodging Managers	n/a	57,590	Meeting/Convention/Event Planners	33,190	43,290
Legal Occupations	53,300	74,560	Health Care Support	30,720	31,470
Life/Physical/Social Sciences	51,120	52,190	Building/Grounds Maint	29,130	26,250
Protective Services (Police, Fire, etc.)	45,480	51,830	Retail Salespersons	27,710	25,670
Real Estate Agents	45,390	48,950	Hotel/Resort Desk Clerks	27,180	21,580
Installation/Maint/Repair	45,200	42,220	Personal Care/Services	26,420	25,550
Construction & Related	43,200	46,340	Amusement/Recreation Workers	24,700	20,190
Community/Social Svcs	42,990	38,580	Food Prep/Service	23,740	22,930
Education/Library	39,200	42,790	Child Care Workers	21,870	21,920
Farming/Fishing/Forestry	38,080	36,090			

Table 4.4: Wages by Occupation   Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2018

Table 4.4 above shows the Annual Mean Wage for various occupations in Nonmetropolitan areas of western Montana (including Flathead County) and in the Missoula Metro area. Note that while Lodging Managers may have an annual mean salary in the mid-$50,000s, Meeting/Event Planners are in the low $30,000-$40,000s, and Desk Clerks low-to-mid $20,000s. Similarly, Retail Salespersons are mid-$20,000s, while Food Service, Personal Care, Cleaning Services, and Recreation Workers are low $20,000s. The lowest wages are for Child Care Workers (a key reason for a shortage of childcare services). These essential service providers cannot afford housing in Whitefish.

Meanwhile, Health Care, Technical, and Computer/Math-related salaries are $70,000 to $80,000+, and other Professional and Business Services range from $50,000 to $60,000+. Education and Community/Social Services professionals have a mean wage of less than $40,000, so many of these workers also live outside the community in which they serve.

C. EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

1. Whitefish Competitive Advantage and Niche

Whitefish has a competitive advantage for certain types of businesses and workers because of its aesthetic appeal and high quality of life, coupled with easy access to key urban hubs from Glacier Park International Airport. The outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities, combined with the appeal of quality dining and cultural offerings, is very attractive to outdoor-oriented Lone Eagles (entrepreneurs, freelancers, professionals, and knowledge workers who can theoretically work and live anywhere), health care professionals, remote/tech workers, and other professionals, as well as for upscale retirees who enjoy the casual, active lifestyle that Whitefish offers.

2. Target Business Sectors

Whitefish provides a ready "outdoor lab" for companies involved in sports/recreation and health/ wellness products and services, environment-related services (water quality, forest and wildlife management, climate change, waste remediation, etc.), and applied technology. Whitefish is an attractive "home base" for professionals in engineering, architecture, environmental sciences, and technology. Existing businesses present potential opportunities for collaboration, expansion, complementary or supporting businesses, particularly in the professional, scientific, technical, and health care-related sectors.

3. Products Made from Recyclables

Downturns in domestic and international demand for recyclables have been a challenge for the Whitefish recycling program. One way to create demand is to encourage local development of products made from recyclables that can be sold both locally and elsewhere. Examples are artistic lighting and other decorative interior products, landscaping material, countertops, golf course bunker sand, insulation products, etc. (see VivaTerra.com and GetNaturalUSA.com for end product examples, BuildingGreen.com, BudgetDumpster.com/blog and NorCalCompactors.net/ blog for recycling business ideas, processes, and equipment, along with examples of ways for businesses to save money by recycling).

4. The Broadband Challenge

High-speed fixed Internet options for Whitefish include CenturyTel DSL and Spectrum Cable. There are limited fiber optic service options. Internet speeds vary depending on the location of the home or business. In town, download speeds of 200 mbps or more are common. Issues with broadband service include the following:

- Upload speeds with cable and DSL are low. Only fiber optic service offers symmetrical speeds that technology-dependent businesses require. There is limited fiber-to-the-premises service.

- Internet service outside the City limits can be an issue. Cable service is unavailable outside the City of Whitefish. CenturyTel has DSL lines outside the City, but due to capacity issues, there are long wait times for new service hook-ups (including new customers when a home or business sells).

- Reliability is an issue. Service outages are disruptive to businesses, and there is lack of redundancy in the county-wide network.

- Cost for services are typically higher than urban markets.

> *According to local realtors, buyers who purchase a home outside the City limits often find themselves on waiting lists for months to receive Internet service.*

5. Availability and Cost of Commercial Space and Land

In late 2019, listings of commercial space and land in Whitefish ranged from 500 to 4,000 square feet and were priced from $170 to $360 per square foot to purchase, or $1.50 to $2.50 per square foot to lease. Properties listed in Columbia Falls ranged from $62 to $180 per square foot to purchase. Only one property was listed for lease.

Professional and technology businesses with high paying jobs are typically looking for Class A office space. Such space is described as follows:

> *"These buildings represent the newest and highest quality buildings in their market. They are generally the best-looking buildings with the best construction and possess high-quality building infrastructure. Class A buildings also are well located, have good access, and are professionally managed."*   www.areadevelopment.com

There is little available space that meets this definition in Whitefish. Most new buildings have been constructed for specific users, or for short-term vacations rentals with no office space. From 2010 to 2018, the number of permits for new commercial buildings fluctuated between two and five per year. In 2016, a record 11 commercial building permits were issued, but 2017-2019 have been more typical of past building trends.

6. Financing

New start-up businesses often have challenges with financing. Commercial lenders may not risk capital on new ventures, so alternative forms of financing are necessary. SBA loans, micro-loans, and local investment co-ops are possible alternatives for business financing.

7. Labor Shortage

In 2019, Unemployment rates were at historic lows, creating a workforce shortage in Whitefish and the County. Figure 4.1 shows the annual average unemployment trend in Flathead County (seasonally adjusted). During peak seasons, the rates of unemployment are even lower.

The workforce shortage for jobs in the hospitality sector in Whitefish is exacerbated by a shortage of affordable housing. In fall 2019, the Whitefish Chamber of Commerce conducted a Workforce Summit that identified the following additional concerns and trends:

• Businesses are relying on more international hires to fill positions during summer months

• Hospitality businesses must compete for employees with higher paying jobs in the construction industry

• Lack of affordable childcare is an issue, keeping some parents from entering the labor pool

• Lack of transportation for workers that do not own vehicles is an issue

• Businesses are becoming more creative with use of bonuses and non-monetary benefits for employees

• Workforce training may be needed for some types of jobs—there are opportunities to partner with Flathead Valley Community College on internships/apprenticeships
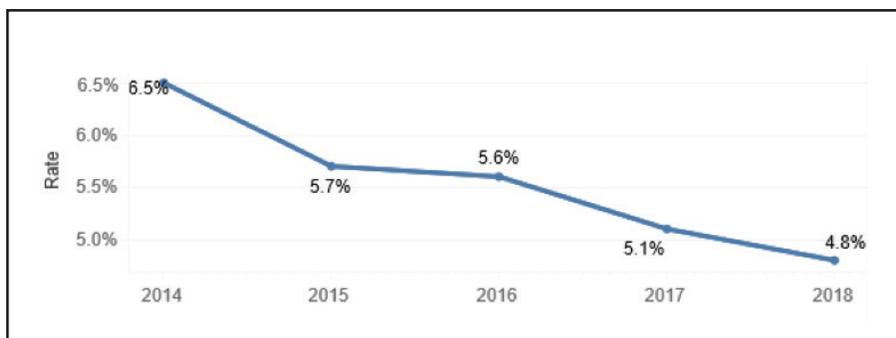

Figure 4.1: Flathead County Annual Unemployment Rate
Source: Montana Dept. of Labor and Industry,
http://lmi.mt.gov/Local-Area-Profiles

C. WHITEFISH RETAIL SECTOR AND TRENDS

1. Whitefish Retail Sales, Surplus, and Leakage

Key Findings:

• Without tourism, many Whitefish retail businesses would not survive.

• Whitefish retailers selling food and beverage services, off-road vehicles, health and personal care products, shoes, and used merchandise are a draw for shoppers.

• Whitefish has significant retail leakage in the areas of electronics, general merchandise, books and music, specialty foods, and furniture.

• Big box and chain stores are closing across Montana and nationwide—Whitefish has a niche in specialty and experiential retail, which can help its businesses thrive.

The City of Whitefish collects a 3% Resort Tax on sales at restaurants, bars, lodging, and selected retail products. Figures 3.19 and 3.20 show Restaurant and Bar and Retail Sales trends respectively, from 2014 to 2019. Note that the Resort Tax increased from 2% to 3% on 7/1/2015, explaining the jump in 2015-2016 figures.

In 2017, Esri data revealed the largest retail sectors by sales volume in Whitefish were auto dealers and restaurants, followed by gas and groceries, then health/personal care, hobby, and other motor vehicles (ORVs, boats, etc.). The next tier was electronics/appliances and building materials. Note that the top retail categories primarily target residents (with visitors contributing a significant share to restaurants and gas stations).

Figure 4.4 below shows retail Leakage and Surplus Factors by industry subsector. Leakage (right side) indicates the gap between actual spending in each category by Whitefish consumers, and the local retail sales in each category. Surplus (left side) are areas of net draw (spending by both local and nonlocal consumers in Whitefish). Whitefish is a significant draw for Restaurants, Bars, and other food services—not surprising given the number of visitors and residents from nearby communities who enjoy Whitefish's restaurants and bars. The categories of Other Motor Vehicle Dealers (ORVs, boats, etc.), Health and Personal Care Stores, Shoe Stores, Used Merchandise (2nd hand, consignment), and Other Miscellaneous also show net draws.

The sectors showing leakage (right side of graph) are largely explained by the competition 11 miles away in Kalispell: 6 furniture/furnishings stores, 6 auto dealers, 11 electronics/appliances stores, 8+ building materials/garden centers, 6 gas stations, 3 general merchandise stores (Walmart, Target, Costco), and 15+ clothing retailers. With those stores nearby, Whitefish is unlikely to recapture significant leakage in big box and chain store product lines similar to those offered in Kalispell but could expand in niche lines.
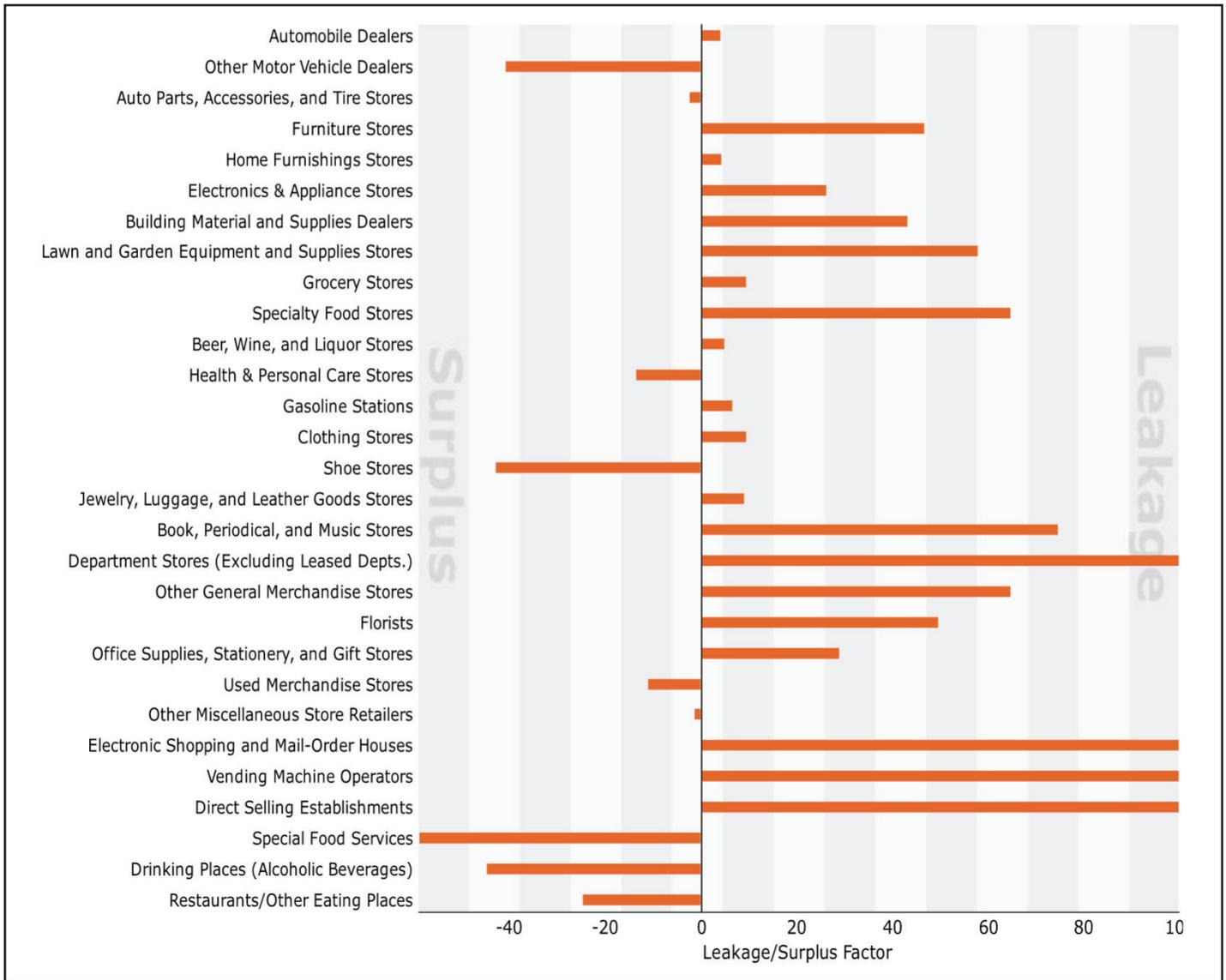
Figure 4.4: Retail Leakage/Surplus in Key Sectors, 2017   Source: Esri

The landscape of retailing has been changing for decades, becoming increasingly challenging for locally owned stores. Downtown retailers first were impacted by shopping malls (which simulated downtowns, but with a roof and lots of parking), then factory outlet stores, then big box stores, and now Amazon and other online retailers (see next section).
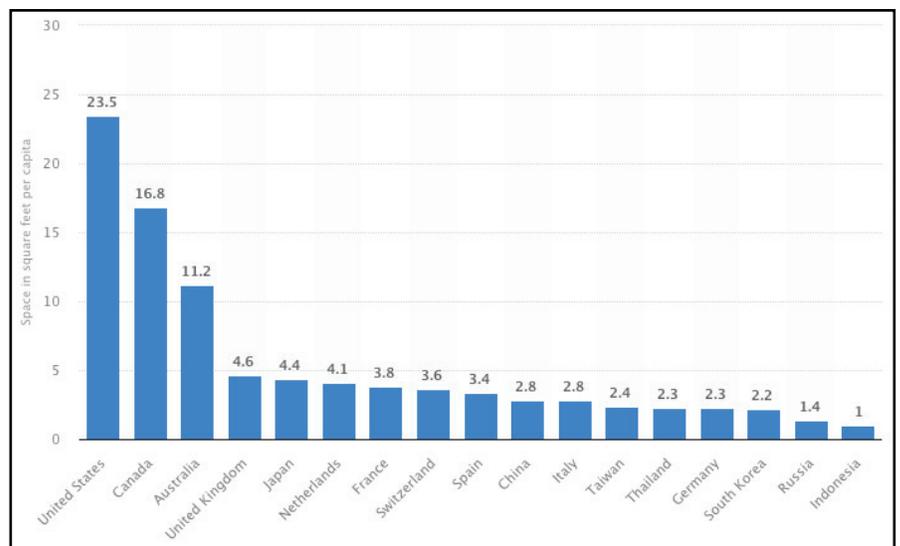
Figure 4.5: Retail Space Per Capita in Selected Countries Worldwide in 2018 (in square feet) Source: Statista 2020

To remain competitive, locally owned stores must continue to focus on personalized experiences for their customers, special events, niche markets, and effective multi-channel targeted marketing, social media, online purchasing, delivery, and email.

2. National Retail Trends

- U.S. retail sales continued to increase in 2019 due to rising wages, low unemployment, and high consumer confidence.

- However, the U.S. retail sector is overbuilt by 50%, with 23.5 square feet per capita, compared to 16.8 sq. ft. in Canada, and 11.2 sq. ft. in Australia (Figure 4.5).

- Big box and chain stores are closing: 5,800 stores closed in 2018, 9,300+ closed in 2019, and at least another 2,500 closures were projected in 2020.

- Meanwhile, e-commerce and online/in-store combinations are growing, offering convenience and quick delivery.

- Consumer analytics are crucial to retailers as they respond to changing trends and consumer tastes.

- Retail trends like experiential retail and "recommerce" are attracting new customers (see sidebars).

The fourth quarter of each year (Oct-Dec) represents two-thirds of annual sales for most retailers, due to holiday shopping. In 2019, holiday retail sales in November-December grew 4.1% over 2018; however, non-store sales (including e-commerce) grew by 14.6% in the same period. U.S. retailers closed a record 102 million square feet of store space in 2017, then closed another 155 million square feet in 2018, according to CoStar Group, which predicted more of the same in 2019.

The Fall of the Mall and How to Make Them Rise Again

Back in the day, and it wasn't really that long ago, when you needed or wanted something, you had to go to the store to find it. Yes, there were other alternatives, like catalogs, but basically retail stores had a lock on shoppers.

Not anymore. Now the decision to go to the store is a decision to go shopping, because buying something – anything – is faster, easier, and infinitely more convenient done online.

Online shopping's greater convenience is the tailwind that will enable it to capture more and more dollars, which Cowen estimates to reach 30-40% of retail spending in the foreseeable future. The result is retailers will face "persistently negative mall traffic."

As Ken Nisch, chairman of the retail design firm JGA says, **"Retailers have to give people something to do, then they will shop. But shopping can't be the thing to do."**

That has turned the decision to go shopping into a conscious one where you actually want the experience of shopping. Thus all the talk about experiential retail, which many pay lip service to, but too few have really thought through how stores must change in light of it.

Forbes, October 14, 2018

A report by Credit Suisse in 2017 estimated that 20% to 25% of malls would shutter between 2017 and 2022. National retailers filing for bankruptcy or downsizing, with closures of 40 to 2,500 stores each (including stores in Montana), include Payless, Gymboree, Shopko, Kmart, Sears, JCPenney, Dress Barn, Family Dollar, Chico's, The Gap, Walgreen's, GameStop, Forever 21, Performance Bicycle, CVS Health, Bed Bath & Beyond, Pier 1 Imports, Party City, Victoria's Secret, Office Depot/Office Max, Christopher & Banks, GNC, and more.

In 2020, e-commerce sales were projected to grow 14%-18%, driven by consumer preferences to shop from home, or use a combination of online and in-store experiences. Consumer expectations for fast delivery and personalized, fun, and easy online experiences continue to drive artificial intelligence, advanced analytics, augmented reality, and social interaction in cyber shopping, which bred the term "entertainmerce"–the union of eCommerce and entertainment.

The primary function of brick and mortar stores will be customer experience, including special events, classes, activities, and "retailtainment"–a term intended to emphasize experiential marketing (see sidebar).

Consumers' Appetite for Resale and Recommerce will be Voracious in 2020

Described by Galloway as "retail's new disruptor" and "the new gangster that's going to create hundreds of billions of shareholder value," **the resale market is expected to nearly double in size in less than five years.**

Figures from online store ThredUp and retail analytics firm Global Data show the U.S. secondhand apparel market was worth $24 billion in 2018 and is likely to reach $41 billion by 2022. By 2028 the used-fashion market could climb in value to $64 billion in the United States.

Fueling the success of this once-fringe business are frugal, value-conscious millennials (and, increasingly, the generations outside those boundaries). **Consumer attitudes toward ownership have evolved from stockpiling fashion to a more circular notion, with the desire for greater sustainability at the forefront.**

Look for more retailers to dabble in rentals, targeting a piece of Rent the Runway's sweet success to win favor with shoppers who will forever be seduced by what's new and now, but are refusing to compromise their environmental ethos.

STORES 2020 Consumer Trends, National Retail Federation, 12/2/19

An online shopping site for browsing and buy/pick-up is vital. Customer data management and analytics tools are critical for insights into customer buying behavior and changing trends. Social media sites and direct email marketing enhance customer relationships, exposure, and sales. The resale, or re-commerce, segment also will continue to grow, with consumers who are brand, cost, and environmentally conscious (see sidebar).

2020 Consumer Trends

Success in 2020 is grounded in offering an incredible retail experience: How retailers tell a story, how shoppers experience it, and the emotional connection that's left behind will allow vigilant businesses to raise the bar.

The retail industry has been talking about experiences for decades. Today it's imperative– regardless of whether a company is selling apparel, personal care products or tires. Customers can buy just about anything online; snag their attention with storytelling and hands-on interaction and your "audience" will remember the experience.

The concept of experiential retailing is speeding headlong toward a mainstream business practice. The newest crop of retail businesses were early adopters. Now, shopping malls are embracing the idea, infusing entertainment options into the mix and beckoning mallgoers with the promise of environments that will transform periodically–not just at the holidays.

But therein lie a few challenges: It's imperative that the experiences are regularly refreshed. And, while experience matters most these days, the **retailers who remain the most vulnerable will be those who refuse to change.** Rushing headlong into creating an experience when your business strategy is tired is not a panacea. The key to success when it comes to creating a store experience that shoppers want to return to again and again is grounded in engaged associates; investing in human capital is vital.

STORES, National Retail Federation, 12/2/19

E. WHITEFISH CONSUMERS AND LIFESTYLE SEGMENTS

1. Income Distribution and Net Worth

Key Findings:

- From 2019 to 2024, the proportion of households in Whitefish with incomes of $100,000+ will grow, while the proportion of those earning less than $100,000 will decline.

- More than 1,700 households in Whitefish earn less than $35,000 annually.

- The average net worth of Whitefish residents is nearly $900,000 (including their home), but the median net worth is $164,113, due to the large number of households with a net worth of less than $15,000 (most under the age of 25).

In 2018, the estimated population of Whitefish zip code was approximately 14,000, representing around 6,500 households. The average per capita income was $38,196, and average household income was $86,710, but the median household income (mid-point between high and low) was $63,787. The median household disposable income was $52,338. Of the 6,871 households, more than one-third earned less than $50,000 (38%), one-third earned $50,000-$99,000, and nearly one-third earned $100,000+ (30%).

Translated to real numbers, 1,731 households earn less than $35,000, 857 earn $35-$50,000, 1,316 earn $50-$75,000, 925 earn $75-$100,000, and 2,042 households earn $100,000+. By 2024, Whitefish is projected to have 7,424 households, with most of the growth in the $100,000+ income category (Figure 4.6). This is likely due to lack of affordable housing, which creates a

gentrification of the community. Many of the lower income households are retirees who own their homes and are able to stay in them if property taxes do not rise significantly.

In 2019, the median net worth (mid-point between high and low of all households) was $164,113, but the average net worth was $887,332 (total net worth divided by number of households), indicating a considerable number of households on the upper end of the scale (Figure 4.7). Not surprisingly, households with the lowest net worth were under age 25. Median net worth doubled by age 25-34, then tripled by age 35-44, nearly doubled again by age 45-54, and grew another 65% by age 55-64. The highest net worth was in households age 65+.
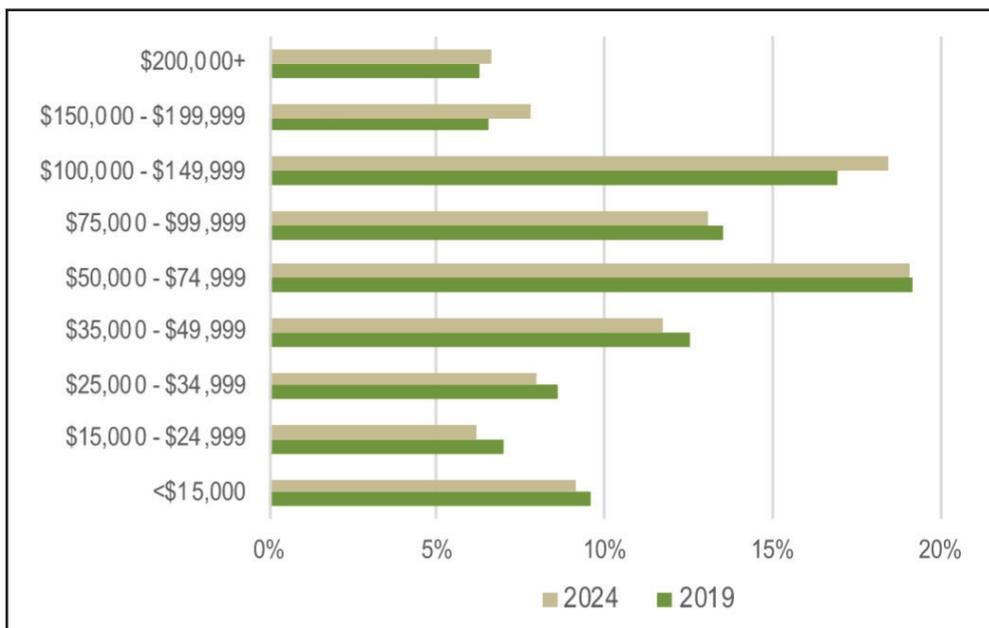

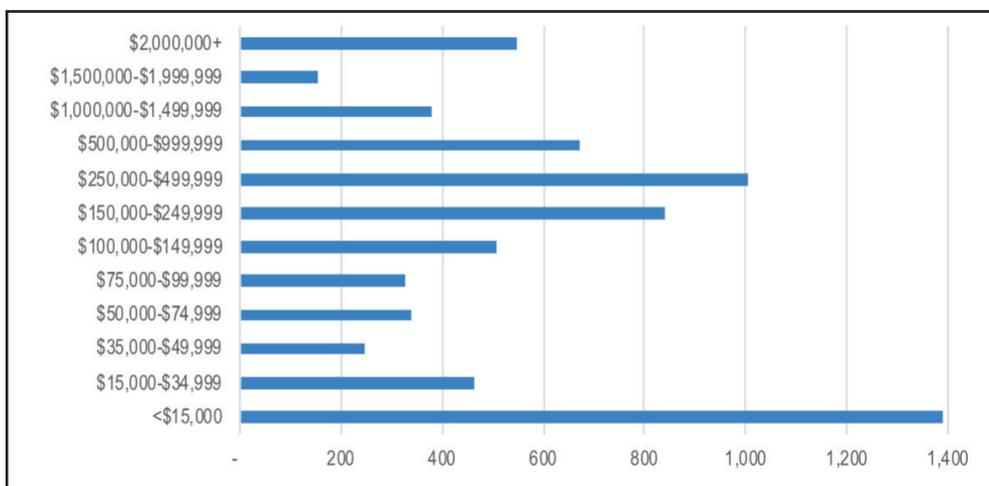*Figure 4.6: Whitefish Households by Income 2019-2024   Source: Esri*

Figure 4.7: 2019 Whitefish Households by Net Worth (59937)   Source: Esri

2. Tapestry Lifestyle Segments

Key Findings:

- Residents of the 59937 zip code have widely varying lifestyle segments and buying behaviors.

- Local businesses can effectively serve different customers by understanding the psychographics behind their choices.

Figure 4.8: Tapestry Lifestyle Segments in Whitefish vs. U.S.   Source: Esri

Esri is a global company that developed ArcGIS, a mapping and spatial analytics software using demographic data from 137 countries. Esri also developed Tapestry Segmentation, which classifies neighborhoods into 67 unique segments based on demographics and socio-economic characteristics. It describes U.S. neighborhoods in easy-to-visualize terms, ranging from Soccer Moms to Heartland Communities (Esri.com).

Figure 4.8 above shows the seven Tapestry segments that describe Whitefish residents, and the percentage of households in each, compared to the U.S. population in those same segments. Tapestry segments also are categorized into 14 "LifeMode" and 6 "Urbanization" groups.

Table 4.5 shows the number of Whitefish households and adults age 18+ in each of the Lifestyle segments, along with the LifeMode

Lifestyle Segment	Households	Adults	Index*	LifeMode Group	Urbanization Group
Total Whitefish	**6,871**	**12,780**			
The Great Outdoors (6C)	2,889	5,561	2,685	Cozy Country Living	Rural
In Style (5B)	1,614	2,952	1,046	GenXurban	Metro Cities
Set to Impress (11D)	824	1,285	868	Midtown Singles	Metro Cities
Rural Resort Dwellers (6E)	656	1,247	946	Cozy Country Living	Rural
Southern Satellites (10A)	534	1,044	247	Rustic Outposts	Rural
Parks and Rec (5C)	288	549	213	GenXurban	Suburban Periphery
Green Acres (6A)	66	142	30	Cozy Country Living	Rural

Table 4.5: Whitefish Tapestry Segment Numbers and Group Categories
Source: Esri Tapestry Segmentation Area Profile   * 100 = National Average

and Urbanization group each belongs. The largest share of residents is in "The Great Outdoors" segment (42%), followed by "In Style" (24%). These are two very different lifestyle groups, with implications in terms of their habits and buying behaviors.
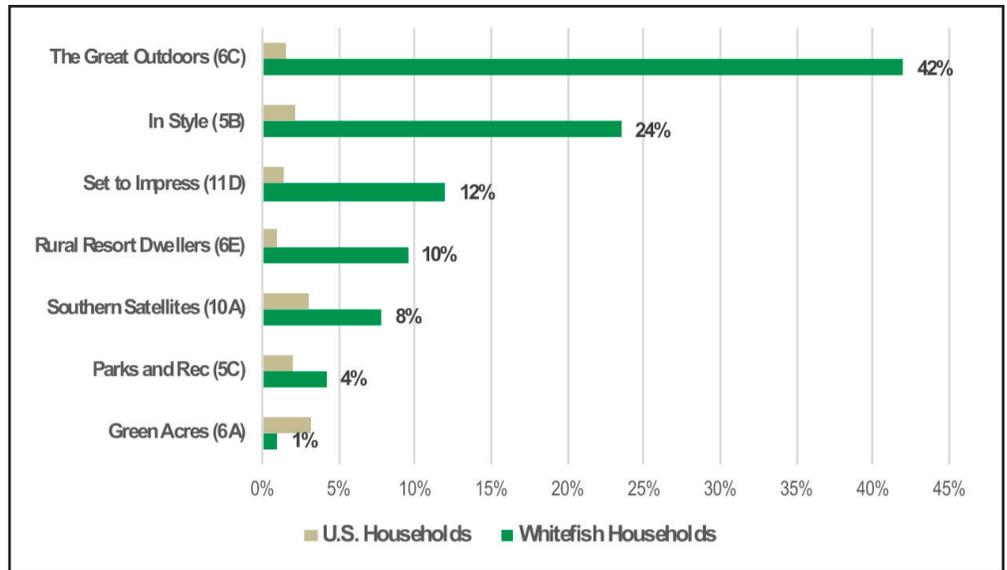
Table 4.6 shows the Household Budget Index for each segment compared to the national average. An Index score of 100 is national average, so 100+ means individuals spend more than the national average on certain items, and an Index score of <100 means they spend less.

An overview of key characteristics for each of the seven Tapestry segments represented in Whitefish is provided in Table 4.7 on the following pages. These descriptions are based on national data analytics, and the demographics of Whitefish residents. While they provide useful insights, they are based on a small sample size in Whitefish, and the data reflects general trends.

Lifestyle Segment	% WF HHs	Housing	Food	Apparel & Svcs	Transp	Health Care	Enter't & Rec'n	Eductn	Pensn & SocSec	Other
The Great Outdoors	42%	90	93	83	91	93	115	91	143	96
In Style	24%	117	115	111	118	125	121	118	114	123
Set to Impress	12%	62	61	80	59	53	43	55	36	47
Rural Resort Dwellers	10%	74	90	60	83	63	118	80	216	68
Southern Satellites	8%	70	80	63	77	69	86	76	94	68
Parks and Rec	4%	95	87	82	100	95	89	92	78	95
Green Acres	1%	111	112	96	121	124	132	117	133	122

Scale:	* 100 = National Average, 80 = 80% of National Avg, 120 = 120% of National Avg, etc.									
<50	50+	60+	70+	80+	90-110	111+	120+	130+	140+	150+

Table 4.6: Whitefish Household Budget Index by Lifestyle Segment*

The Great Outdoors (6C)

- 42% of households in 59937
- Educated empty nesters living an active but modest lifestyle (focus is land)
- Median Age: 47.4; Median Household Income (HHI): $56,400
- Majority are married couples
- Invest in land, vacation homes, support civic causes
- Active gardeners, prefer cooking at home
- DIY oriented, cost conscious, maintain own autos, yards, home remodels
- Own 1-2 vehicles, 4WD trucks popular
- Many work from home; light use of technology
- Most have dogs or cats
- Prefer domestic travel; watch CMT, History, Fox News
- Enjoy hiking, hunting, fishing, boating

In Style (5B)

- 23.5% of households in 59937
- Embrace urbane lifestyle, support of the arts, travel, and extensive reading
- Median Age: 42; Median HHI: $73,000
- Connected, take advantage of mobile devices
- Professional couples or single households, no kids
- Already planning for retirement; attentive to price–use coupons (esp. mobile coupons)
- Partial to late model SUVs, increasingly compact SUVs
- Invest in home remodel/maintenance, DIY, or contractors, hire housekeeping
- Financially active: own investments, use financial planners
- Meticulous planners: well insured, retirement funds
- Prefer organic foods, including grown in own garden
- Generous support of charities, the arts, theater, concerts, museums

Set to Impress (11D)

- 12% of households in 59937
- Live in medium to large multi-unit apartments with lower than average rents
- Better educated and mobile, quick meals on the run (many work and attend college)
- Median Age: 33.9 (one-third are 20-34 years old); Median HHI: $32,800
- Single or nonfamily homes, close connections with family
- Low income levels—many work in food service while attending college
- Very conscious of image, seek to bolster status with latest fashion—prefer brands, but generic OK; always looking for a deal, shop sales, impulse buys
- Like Walmart, Kmart, Big Lots, local dollar store
- Download popular music, into local music scene, concerts, night clubs, the zoo
- Heavy Internet users: social media, video games, TV; majority use only cell phones
- Own used import vehicles

Rural Resort Dwellers (6E)

- 9.5% of households in 59937
- Blue collar, older householders postponing retirement or returning to skilled work to maintain current lifestyles; characterized by simple tastes and modesty
- Median Age: 54.1; Median HHI: $50,400
- 42% are married couples, no kids; 28% are single
- Passionate about hobbies: fishing, hunting, motorcycling, gardening; gear, hardware
- Prefer timeless, comfortable clothing; little attention to advertising, like known brands
- Own two vehicles, prefer older domestic models
- Accumulated wealth, shifted portfolios to low-risk assets
- Satellite dishes, infrequent Internet use except shopping
- Watch National Geographic, Discovery, Weather Channel
- Spend time with spouses, maintain a social calendar
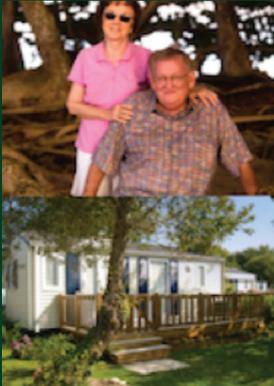
Southern Satellites (10A)	• 7.8% of households in 59937 • Slightly older, settled empty nest married couples, homeowners (1/3 mobile homes) • 45% have college education, 40% high school only • Employed in health care, retail, construction, agriculture, mining, manufacturing • Median Age: 40.3; Median HHI: $47,800 • Enjoy country living, outdoor activities, DIY home projects, pets (usually a dog) • Partial to low-cost family restaurants and drive-ins • Late technology adapters; obtain higher than average amount of information from satellite TV, watch CMT; listen to country music • Own 2+ vehicles (3+ is common), incl. a truck; frequent convenience stores (buy gas) • Enjoy fishing, hunting, reading sportsmen's and home service magazines • Use Walmart for shopping needs (groceries, clothing, pharmacy); more concerned with cost than brand or quality
Parks and Rec (5C)	• 4.2% of households in 59937 • Practical, 2-income married couples nearing retirement, comfortable in jobs/homes, budget wisely, don't plan to retire or move from kid-friendly neighborhood • 50%+ are college educated, financially shrewd; older households draw SS/retirement incomes, 70% own their homes/townhomes, kids are grown • Diverse work force: management, health care professionals, retail sales, education, skilled trades in manufacturing and construction • Median age: 40.9; Median HHI: $60,000 • Enjoy local parks, recreation, home-based/gym exercise, jogging, swimming • Research big-ticket purchases carefully (prefer SUVs/trucks over compact cars), find airfare/hotel discounts for trips, vacation in U.S.; use cell phones for calls/texts only • Stock up on staples at warehouse clubs (Costco); value kitchen convenience (frozen/packaged main course meals, pre-ground coffee vs. beans) • Watch documentaries on Animal Planet, Discovery, History channels • Dine at family-style restaurants, enjoy movies, casinos, lottery tickets, online poker
Green Acres (6A)	• 1% of households in 59937 • Married couples without kids, enjoy country living, self-reliance. 60%+ college, income from wages, salaries, self-employment (13%), investments (27%), retirement • 86% are homeowners, comfortable with debt for home/auto loans, investments • Avid do-it-yourselfers, maintaining/remodeling home with necessary power tools • Enjoy gardening (esp. vegetables), have tillers, tractors, riding mowers • Variety of outdoor sports: fishing, hunting, motorcycling, hiking, golf, camping • Occupations incl. management, office/admin support, sales, health care, production • Median age: 43.9; Median HHI: $76,800 • Cautious consumers: focus on quality, durability; satellite TV/radio (country, home) • Comfortable with technology—as tool vs. trend (e.g., banking, not entertainment) • Self-described conservatives, pessimistic about near future, but heavily invested in it • Prefer late model SUVs, trucks, ATVs, motorcycles • Vigorous pursuers of physical fitness: home gyms, variety of sports • Active in community and social organizations, from charitable to veterans' clubs

Table 4.7: Whitefish Lifestyle Segments (59937)

Further insights about Whitefish residents can be gleaned from descriptions of the LifeMode categories in the Appendix. contains summaries of the four LifeMode groups, and the Urbanization Groups, under which the seven Whitefish Lifestyle Segments are listed. The Urbanization Groups are another way of looking at the segments, based on data analytics.

F. BEST PRACTICES IN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Best Practices in Economic Diversification begins with two key questions:

   a. What are the best ways to support new business start-ups and expansions?

   b. What means can be used to finance business development?

1. Entrepreneurship Development

> *"Collaboration is key: Entrepreneurs face many common challenges as they seek to transform their ideas into high-growth companies. Business incubators, accelerators, coworking spaces, and other entrepreneurship support organizations are critical to their success because they provide connections to the right mentors, education, partners, community influencers, and investors that are essential to their growth."* – International Business Incubation Association

Entrepreneurship centers include incubators, accelerators, small business development centers (SBDCs), and other organizations. These centers support startup companies in rural, urban, and developing countries around the world.

Business incubators are facilities that provide shared resources for young businesses, such as office space, consultants, and personnel. They may also provide access to financing and technical support. For new businesses, these services provide a more protected environment in which to grow before they become self-sustaining. The goal of any business incubator is to produce viable businesses, called "graduates" of the incubator.

The International Business Innovation Association (INBIA), www.inbia.org, is a global nonprofit organization supporting entrepreneurship centers, program managers, directors, and policymakers for 30+ years, with 2,200 members in 62 countries. They guide, mentor, and develop sustainable entrepreneur support programs in every industry and demographic around the globe, with a goal to enrich the entire ecosystem by providing industry resources, education, events, and global programming to help members better serve the needs of their unique communities and regions. INBIA's mission is to help communities enable their entrepreneurs to transform their dreams into innovative businesses that make global prosperity a reality. INBIA offers a variety of free resources for development and management of entrepreneurship centers, available here: https://inbia.org/building-blocks/

The explosion of coworking and makerspaces has created a renaissance era in shared workspaces. Shared spaces enable diverse groups of entrepreneurs, remote workers, and other independent professionals to share resources, knowledge, and networks. One such facility is Basecamp Coworking in downtown Whitefish, www.basecampcoworking.com. Basecamp offers

"a shared place where freelancers, teams, and remote workers come together to plan, strategize, and execute their current and upcoming ventures." It is open 7 days a week, offering desks, private offices, a conference room, kitchen, storage space, mailbox/address, private phone booths, and printing.

Small Business Development Center (SBDC), www.sbdc.mt.gov: The mission of the SBDC is to provide tools and guidance to help small businesses succeed. An SBDC office is in Kalispell, 406-756-3836. For an individual looking to start a new business or expand their existing business, the SBDC network is a good place to start. The SBDC network supports ten regional centers across the state, focusing on free one-on-one counseling and low-cost training in areas such as financial analysis, business planning, strategic planning, loan packaging, financial projections and market research to help small businesses achieve their goals of growth, innovation and success.

2. Local Investment Financing
The Next Egg, www.thenextegg.org

> *"The Next Egg creates resources, builds communities, and shares tools necessary so that millions of us can move our retirement savings out of Wall Street and into our local communities. These tools include self-directed IRAs, solo 401ks, and employer retirement plans."*

The Next Egg offers resources, mentoring, webinars, and discussion groups to assist members in developing local investment funds.

> *"America's retirement investment system is broken. Locally-owned businesses represent 60% - 80% of the U.S. economy and are highly profitable and competitive, yet they are disconnected from the trillions of dollars invested in Wall Street mutual funds, pension funds, and insurance funds that control your long-term retirement savings…We want to tap into the incredible potential of retirement savings to help you invest in locally-owned and socially-just enterprises!"*

The core team includes LIFT Economy, www.lifteconomy.com, the Sustainable Economies Law Center, www.theselc.org, and author Michael H. Shuman, www.michaelshuman.com and https://comcapcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Community-Investment-Funds-Final.pdf

A similar model in Montana is the Musselshell Rural Investment Cooperative, https://mcdc.coop/2019/05/31/musselshell-rural-investment-cooperative/

"The Musselshell Rural Investment Cooperative (RIC) provides financial support from local community members for projects that will enhance the economic stability, historic heritage, and rural lifestyle of the region along the Musselshell River in Montana. Their first investment will be in re-purposing the historic Central School in Roundup for commercial and residential uses."

G. PROGRAMS & RESOURCES FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Several technical assistance and funding programs are available to support business development in Montana:

1. Public Sector: City, County, State, National

City of Whitefish, www.cityofwhitefish.org

Flathead County Economic Development Authority, www.flatheadcountyeda.com

Flathead Valley Community College, www.fvcc.edu and www.fvcc.edu/workforcetraining

Montana Small Business Development Center (SBDC), www.sbdc.mt.gov

Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC), MSU, www.montana.edu/mmec

Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund, https://marketmt.com/bstf

Montana Office of Trade & International Relations, https://marketmt.com/TRADE

Export Montana, https://marketmt.com/Export

Montana State Trade Expansion Program, https://marketmt.com/STEP

Montana Finance Information Center, https://mtfinanceonline.com/

Montana MicroBusiness Finance Program, https://marketmt.com/MBFP

Made in Montana, https://madeinmontanausa.com/

Montana Board of Research & Commercialization Technology, https://marketmt.com/MBRCT

Montana SBIR/STTR Matching Funds Program, https://marketmt.com/MSMFP

Montana Workforce Training Grant, https://marketmt.com/WTG

Montana Registered Apprenticeship Program, https://apprenticeship.mt.gov/

Montana Wood Products Revolving Loan Fund, https://marketmt.com/WPRLF

Montana Historic Preservation Grant Program, https://comdev.mt.gov/Programs-and-Boards/Montana-Historic-Preservation-Grant

Montana Film Office, https://www.montanafilm.com/

Montana Joint Venture Marketing Program, https://marketmt.com/JointVenture

Montana Press Room, https://www.visitmt.com/montana-stories/montana-pressroom/montana-pressroom.html

Montana Main Street Grant Program, https://comdev.mt.gov/Programs/MainStreet/RoadMap/GuidelinesForms

USDA Rural Business Programs, https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs/business-programs

2. Private Sector

Basecamp Coworking, Whitefish, www.basecampcoworking.com

Northwest Montana Association of Realtors, www.nmar.com

3. Nonprofit Sector

Whitefish Chamber of Commerce, www.whitefishchamber.org

Montana High Tech Business Alliance (MHTBA), www.mthightech.org

Montana Manufacturing Association (MMA), www.montanachamber.com/manufacturing

Montana Economic Developers Association (MEDA), www.medamembers.org

International Business Innovation Association (INBIA), www.inbia.org

Main Street America, www.mainstreet.org

National Retail Federation, www.nrf.com

H. STRATEGIES – ACTION ITEMS

1. Implement Business Retention and Development programs

- Survey existing business owners in target sectors, and reach out to STMP Focus Groups, expansion, complementary businesses, and supporting businesses.
- Recruit target business sectors for business expansion or new business development.
- Coordinate with Montana West Economic Development and SBDC on entrepreneurship development, workforce training and business development issues.
- Evaluate the feasibility of a business incubator in Whitefish.
- Encourage development of recycling business ideas and businesses.

2. Address workforce shortage and training programs

- Work with Flathead Valley Community College on internship/apprentice programs.
- Promote expanded day care opportunities through cooperatives and technical support.
  http://www.missoulachamber.com/childcare
- Encourage businesses to use Montana workforce training/apprenticeship programs.

3. Broaden the availability of financing options for business development

- Investigate options and evaluate interest in a Local Investment Co-op.
- Coordinate with MWED on Revolving Loan Funds and/or Rural Business Opportunity Grants as appropriate.
- Encourage businesses to apply for Big Sky Trust Funds for expansion/facilities.
- Advocate with legislature for continued funding of business development programs.

4. Support and enhance retail sector strength and targeting to local/county consumers

- Share Whitefish market data and Tapestry segment information with local retailers.
- Plan and implement retail inspiration sessions to discuss leakage re-capture opportunities, marketing intelligence,
- Enhance consumer experience through "experiential retail", and promoting local foods, breweries, distilleries.
  https://www.distillerytrail.com/directory-distillery/locations/montana/
- Survey businesses to inventory existing marketing strategies to encourage "Buy Local" behavior and determine actions to supplement these activities.

5. Increase availability of commercial space in Whitefish

- Identify existing zoned land for development or redevelopment of an office park.
- Conduct an inventory of commercial space for businesses and office.
- Support development of additional co-working spaces in Whitefish.

6. Improve broadband infrastructure in Whitefish

- Adopt "dig-once" and "open-trench" policies for broadband deployment.
- Work with local, county, and state elected officials to encourage upgrades by broadband providers.
- Create task force to promote fiber deployment in city and wireless broadband in unincorporated areas around Whitefish.
- Best Practice: https://www.columbiafallschamber.org/event/community-broadband-initiative/

V. HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT

"The impact from having a vibrant and growing economy produces both good and bad. The challenge is to promote the positive benefits and to plan for negative impacts by improving infrastructure, i.e. roads, water and sewer capacity, judicial, police and fire services, healthcare opportunities, transportation services, etc."   Survey Comment

A. GOALS

Livability – Expand the supply of affordable housing units to meet workforce housing needs.

Community Engagement – Partner with various stakeholders and partners to offer a variety of approaches to meet local housing needs.

Community Character – Encourage development and businesses that are compatible with community character and do not stress city infrastructure.

B. HOUSING PROFILE

When newcomers invest in a home, and interact with their neighbors, they become vested in the community. Rising property values, however, make it difficult for families to purchase or rent homes in what were once affordable neighborhoods where residents worked together to solve problems and looked out after one another. While such cohesive neighborhoods contribute to a sense of well-being, a proliferation of second homes and short-term rentals can disrupt this social pattern and create conflict.

1. Housing Inventory

Rental units are typically more affordable as workforce housing. From 2010 to 2017, however, construction of the multi-family units lagged construction for single family homes. Mobile homes, another affordable housing stock, decreased significantly during this period. The inventory of single family units increased at more than double the rate of other types of housing. (See Table 5.1)

	2010	2017	# Change	% Change
% Renter Occupied	48%	42%		
Single Family	2233	3013	780	34.9%
Townhouse/Duplex	549	623	74	13.5%
Multi-Family (3+ units)	905	1010	105	11.6%
Mobile Home	170	72	-98	-57.6%

Table 5.1: City of Whitefish Housing by Tenure & Type
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

2. Housing Starts

The *Whitefish Area Workforce Housing Needs Assessment*, completed in 2016, estimated that 980 housing units would be required by 2020 to meet the workforce housing needs in Whitefish. Of these units, 60%, or 580 units, should be rental units. This amounts to an average of 245 total

new housing units per year with 147 units being rental units. As noted in the Figure 5.1, there has been an increase in building activity and in the number of multi-family building permits. The increase in multi-family units in 2019, however, was still less than the projected demand for workforce housing.

3. Affordability

Housing affordability was a top issue in the community survey. Rents and home values are among the highest in the state. (See Figures 5.2 and 5.3) New construction is expensive due to rising land values, labor costs, and cost for construction materials. Infrastructure for new development also adds to the cost of housing. Service industry workers typically have lower wages and can't afford rents in Whitefish. Many workers commute from Kalispell or Columbia Falls, while most first-time home buyers require at least two incomes to qualify for a loan with the necessary down payment. Employers indicate that lack of affordable housing is a major impediment to recruiting staff. According to the Whitefish Housing Needs Assessment, 56% of employees commute to Whitefish and 34% (1,095) of those employees would prefer to live in Whitefish if affordable housing were available.

4. Seasonal Homes

The percentage of vacant homes in the City of Whitefish and surrounding area is higher than in Flathead County and Montana. Census data from 2010 indicated the majority of vacant
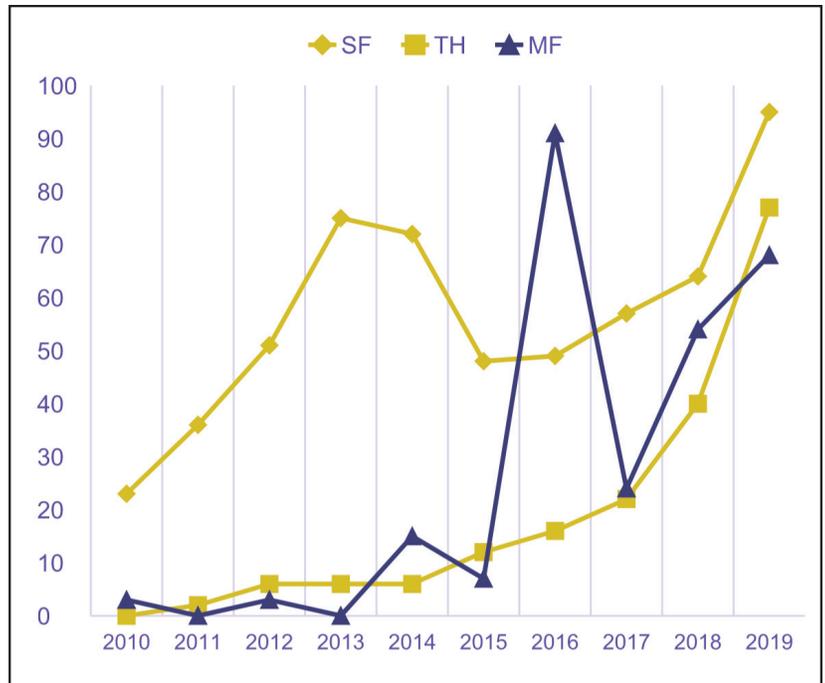

Figure 5.1: Whitefish Building Permit Data
Source: Whitefish Planning & Building Dept. Annual Report
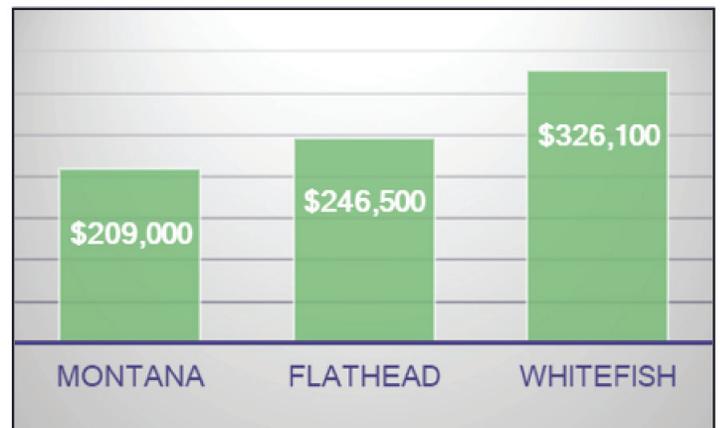*SF = Single Family   TH = Townhome   MF = Multi-Family*

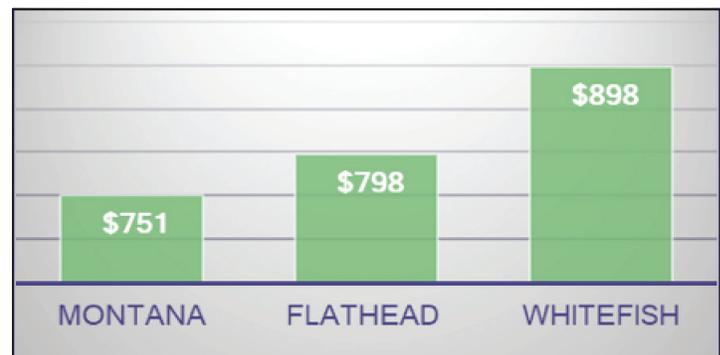*Figure 5.2: Home Values - 2017*

Figure 5.3: Average Rent - 2017
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS

vacant homes in and around Whitefish are classified as second homes. There was a slight increase in the overall vacancy rate from 2010 to 2017 which may be due in part to an increase in short-term rentals. (See Table 5.2)

5. Short-Term Rentals

Privately-owned housing units for stays of less than 30 days are considered short-term rentals (STR). Such units reduce the affordable housing inventory, compete with lodging facilities, and impact neighborhoods. In 2019, a City database listed 218 STRs located within the City limits with 163 of these being licensed by the City. The Planning Department is using new software to enforce regulations for non-licensed units.

The County Planning Department conducts an administrative review for short term rentals located in the Agricultural, Suburban and Residential districts outside the City limits. In 2019, the County listed 24 STRs in the zip code unincorporated area. Many short-term rental operators, however, do not register with the County and the number of actual short-term rentals is much higher. According to data from, www.airdna.co, there were 1,148 units in the Whitefish zip code with large clusters of short term rentals on Big Mountain Road outside the City limits. As shown on Figure 5.4, the number of overall units in the Whitefish zip code has increased since 2017. Average occupancy of short-term rentals is higher than lodging rooms which often creates parking issues.

	2017 Vacancy Rate	2010 Vacancy Rate	2010 Seasonal Vacant #	2010% Vacant= Seasonal
Whitefish	30.1%	27.0%	773	70%
59937	28.8%	28.8%	1,687	74.4%
Flathead Co.	20.1%	20.1%	6,542	69.2%
Montana	15.2%	15.2%	–	52.6%

Table 5.2: Whitefish Vacancy Rate
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Census of Population & ACS

In the City limits, short-term rental housing units are allowed in the following zoning districts with the issuance of a business license:

• WB-3 (General Business District)

• WRR-1 (Low-Density Resort Residential District)

• WRR-2 (Medium-Density Resort Residential District)

• WRB-1 (Limited Resort Business District)

• WRB-2 (General Resort Business District)

Short-term rentals must pay the resort tax and state bed tax. Units must be licensed by the county health department and be inspected by the fire marshal. Short-term rentals are illegal in any zoning district not listed above.
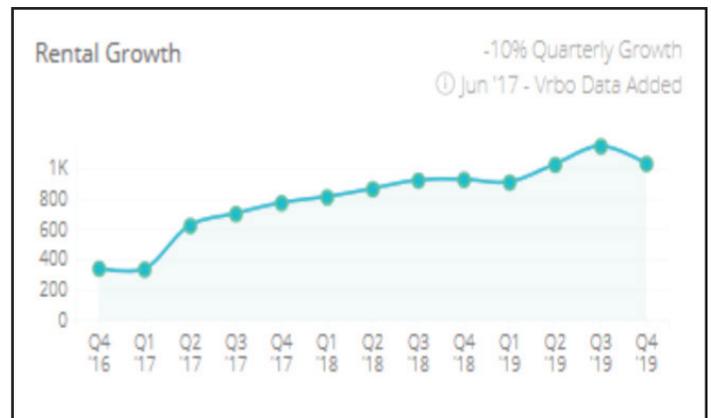
Figure 5.4: Short-Term Rental Trends
Source: https://www.airdna.co/vacation-rental-data/app/ us/montana/whitefish/overview
(Note: VRBO Data added in 2017 - 2nd quarter)
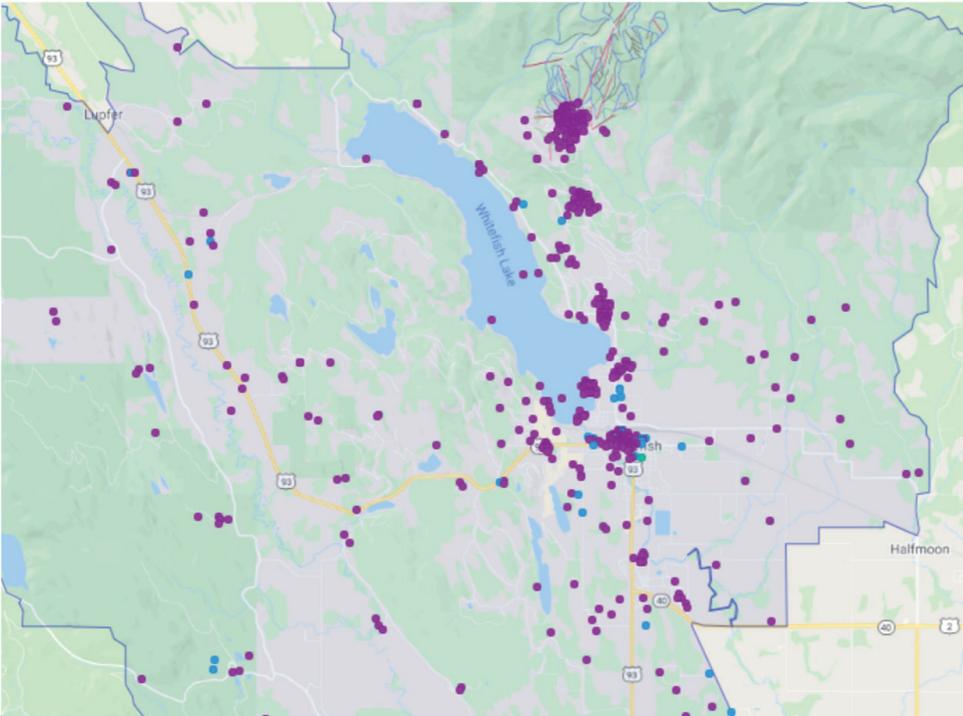
Figure 5.5: Short-Term rental in Whitefish Zip Code
https://www.airdna.co/vacation-rental-data/app/us/montana/whitefish/overview

Figure 5.6: Short-Term Rentals zoning
http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/planning-and-building/planning-and-zoning.php

6. Strategic Housing Plan

The City completed a housing needs assessment in 2016 and subsequently adopted a "Strategic Housing Plan" in 2017. The purpose of the Plan was to address workforce housing needs. The Plan identified the following strategies to be implemented by the City.

The Strategic Housing Plan Steering Committee was established to review, revise, and update the Plan as housing strategies are developed and to establish responsibilities and procedures for enacting the recommendations. The Plan identifies 19 potential "Tier 3" strategies that should be evaluated for implementation. Based on public input, there was interest in consideration of the following strategies:

• Short term rentals (Better enforcement, licensing, limit number, education)

• Housing Education (Landlord/Tenant, maintenance, pet friendly policies, good neighbor guides, complaints, homebuyer education, renter education)

• Promote non-traditional housing (Tiny home, boarding houses, cooperatives, hostels)

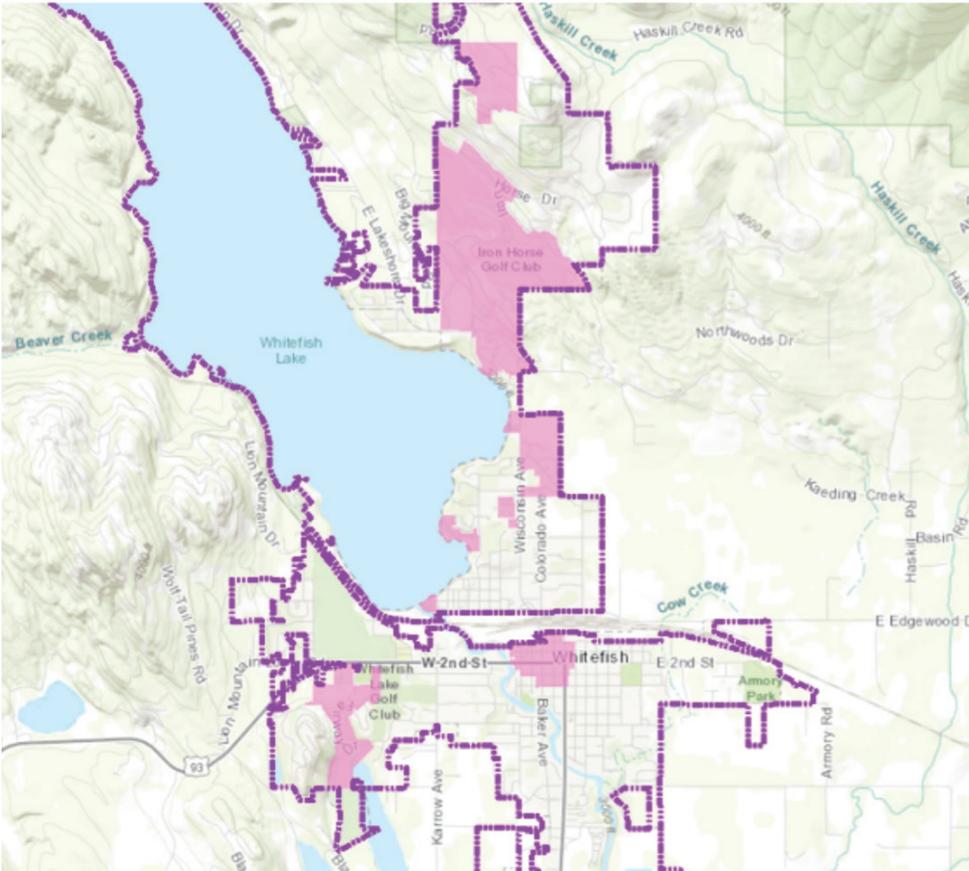| TIER 1 (Complete by 2020)	TIER 2 (Complete by 2025)
• Snow Lot Partnership* • Inclusionary Zoning* • Annexation Policy* • Zoning for Affordability* • Homebuyer Assist. & Rehab • Voluntary Assessment • Resort Tax (Increase/Reallocate) • Develop LIHT Apartments*	• Accessory Dwelling Units • Land Bank • Short Term Rental – Convert • Employer Assist. Housing • Community Land Trust • PUD Open Space Reduction (In exchange for affordable units) • Commercial Linkage – Link new business to affordable housing • Residential Linkage – Link new homes in existing subdivisions to affordable housing

Table 5.3: Whitefish Strategic Housing Plan – Strategies
*Notes: * = Underway or completed   LIHTC = Low-Income Housing Tax Credit*

7. Homelessness

Several focus groups discussed homelessness, housing instability and its link to the tourism economy. Due to housing shortages, seasonal workers may live in campers and cars. Public land agencies noted a trend of employees camping at trailheads, parks, and public campgrounds during the summer season. Families that can't afford local housing may live in hotels or

campgrounds. The Montana Office of Public Instruction reports that 12.2% of high school students in Flathead County qualify as homeless. The Whitefish Police noted that transients riding rails is a lifestyle for some people, and Whitefish is a popular destination. This can be a problem downtown businesses. The local police work with BNSF railroad on the issue and monitor social media sites to track potential problems. The police will refer homeless individuals to shelter/social service agencies located in Kalispell. The Whitefish Community Foundation has several funds to assist the schools with this issue. The United Way and Community Action Partnership host an annual event to connect homeless individuals with local services.
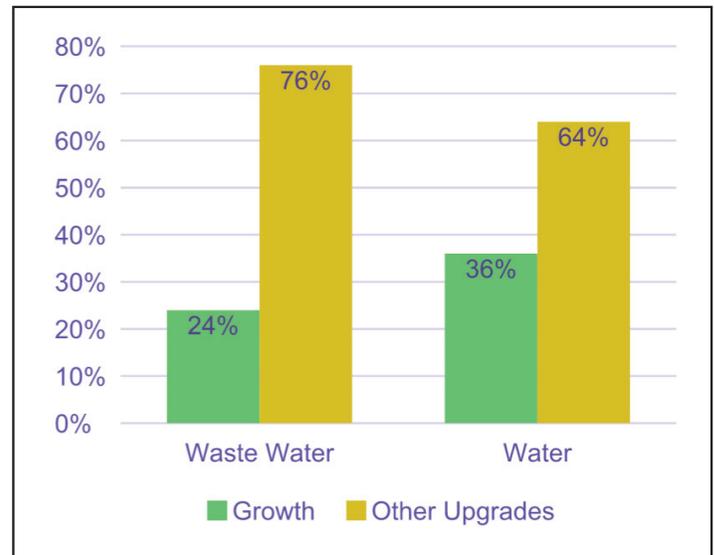
Figure 5.7: % Cost of Water & Sewer Capital Improvements Attributed to Growth
Source: City of Whitefish Impact Fee Update Final Report, June 28, 2018, FCS Group

C. INFRASTRUCTURE – CITY SERVICES

Underlying factors for water and wastewater system designs include current condition of infrastructure components, regulatory requirements, projected growth, and geographic/natural features. Although public sentiment often attributes the high cost of infrastructure improvements to an influx of tourists in the summer season, other factors contribute to the expensive upgrades of the water and wastewater systems. As noted in the City's impact fee analysis, only 24% of capital improvements for wastewater cost and 35% of capital improvements for water costs can be attributed to growth. Much of this growth is related to residential uses. (See Figure 5.7)

1. Drinking Water

The water system provides drinking water for domestic, institutional, industrial, and commercial uses, and provides adequate pressure and flow to meet irrigation and firefighting needs. Following are factors that contribute to the cost of the water system:

• **Physical Factors** – The water treatment plant and one of the storage tanks are located on the north side of the City on Reservoir Road. The primary source water for the City is from creeks in Haskill Basin with water being pumped from Whitefish Lake during peak use in the summer. The City has a storage tank at Grouse Mountain and is planning to install a new storage tank south of town. The railroad, Whitefish Lake, and topography at Grouse Mountain are physical features that require expensive design components such as booster pumping stations and auxiliary storage tanks.

• **System Components** – The distribution system consists of 72 miles of water mains and booster pumps. Parts of the distribution system are aging, resulting in a significant source of waste due to leakage. Planned repair and replacement of system components accounts for 64% of the cost of water system improvements.

• **Water Use** – The primary reason for the need to increase water system capacity is to accommodate population growth. As new residential development occurs, there are more domestic water users on the system. Currently in Whitefish, a single family home uses an average of 200 gallons per day. The largest use of water in the peak months is for lawn irrigation. A new fee schedule has been instituted to account for high volume irrigation users. Seasonal/second homes are another contributor to higher water use in the summer. Finally,

Figure 5.8: Whitefish Water Treatment Plant - Monthly Average Flow (MGD) 2020-2015
Source: Whitefish Wastewater System Improvement Project Preliminary Engineering Report - 2016

there is an increase in water use due to visitation trends. This is accounted for through water rates and impact fees for commercial uses that are based on the size of the service mains and the number of fixtures.

• **Regulatory** – Drinking water must meet the standards established by the Federal Safe Water Drinking Act. Since water supplies from surface water are highly sensitive to contamination, treatment is typically more costly than from ground water sources. In 2019, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) required the City to provide a Water System Capacity Evaluation. Expanding treatment capacity, smart meters, water conservation, and controlling water loss are addressing DEQ's concerns.

2. Wastewater Treatment Plant

The City currently operates an aerated lagoon wastewater treatment plant located on Monegan Road. Treated effluent is discharged into the Whitefish River. To accommodate future growth and to comply with new Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MPDES) permit standards, the City is proposing to replace the existing lagoon system with a mechanical treatment process at an estimated cost of $18.5 million. Most construction costs will be covered by state loans and grants. Impact fees and rate increases will retire the loan. Cost factors for the new system include:

Figure 5.9: Wastewater Users
Source: Whitefish Wastewater System Improvement Project Preliminary Engineering Report - 2016

• **Physical Factors** – In Whitefish, high groundwater and storm runoff inflow have a significant negative impact on the City's collection and treatment systems. The months with the highest flow rates are March, April, and June, reflecting infiltration from snow melt and rainy weather. Topography is another factor in design. Where grades are insufficient to provide gravity flow, expensive pressurized sewer collection systems become necessary. (See Figure 5.8)

- **System Components** – The system includes 79 miles of sewer mains and 17 lift stations. Portions of sewer main have been lined and repaired to reduce the transport of groundwater and storm water to the treatment plant during wet weather events. The City also has instituted best management practices to reduce inflow due to storm runoff. However, aging sewer lines and basement sump pumps that remain illegally connected to City sewer are on-going issues.
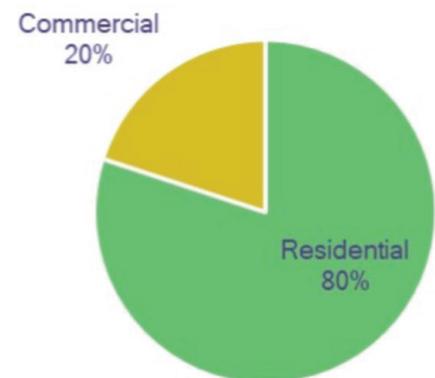
- **Use** – The City's wastewater treatment plant currently serves 3,855 customers. Based on historical growth trends, the treatment plant design assumes a population growth rate in the service area of 1.9% a year. The wastewater facility plan calculated that 80% of the plant capacity services residential uses and 20% services commercial/institutional uses. Due to the tourism trade, the commercial users include a relatively higher number of hotels and restaurants than would otherwise be typical for a town of similar size. The regional hospital and schools are also significant contributors to the nonresidential loads. (See Figure 5.9)

- **Regulatory** – The existing facilities cannot consistently meet standards for ammonia and nitrogen. Additionally, DEQ has adopted new nutrient standards that require different treatment technologies. The composition of the wastewater is an important consideration in designing a system to meet these standards. The organic loading in the wastewater has increased in recent years due partly to the reduction in infiltration and partly to higher concentrations of waste from the mix of commercial and institutional users as described above. The new plant will be capable of meeting anticipated more restrictive nutrient standards for nutrients.

3. Public Safety

At certain times of the year, the number of people in Whitefish is much larger than 7,700 year-round residents. An additional 6,000 people live in the nearby unincorporated area and many of these residents commute to town for school, work, shopping, and entertainment. During the summer months, visitors inflate the population. Events that attract big crowds are an additional concern for public safety personnel and emergency services. As the City population and visitation grows, it will be necessary to increase public safety staff to provide the same level of service.

- **Police** – The City currently has 16 sworn police officers. The FY 2020 Budget provides funding for another officer. The City has a mutual aid agreement with Flathead County that covers the 5-mile area around the City. According to the Montana Board of Crime Patrol, the number of full-time sworn officers per 1,000 for the City of Whitefish is 1.84. This is comparable to the average number of 1.88 for cities of comparable size (5,000 - 9,999). Since the actual number of crime incidents fluctuates from year-to-year, a 10-year average is more descriptive of the incidents that are common in Whitefish. The following table indicates that the most frequent type of reported crime in Whitefish is driving under the influence (DUI). Whitefish is ranked 8th in the state for this category. The higher rate of DUIs is likely due to higher numbers of visitors attracted to eating and drinking establishments. While the actual number of DUIs fluctuate from year to year, the month of February typically has the lowest rate of DUIs for the year, and the month of July typically has the highest rate of DUIs for the year. The City ranks significantly lower compared to state averages in the categories of burglary and aggravated assault. (See Table 5.4)

Offenses	Crime Rate Average Annual from 2007-2017		
	Whitefish	Montana	Kalispell
Driving Under the Influence	16.202	5.486	11.981
Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter	0.462	0.025	0.047
Burglary/Breaking & Entering	2.757	3.352	4.783
Motor Vehicle Theft	1.477	1.846	2.340
Simple Assault	7.792	7.408	11.126
Rape	0.486	0.384	0.552
Weapon Law Violations	0.474	0.258	0.483
Robbery	0.129	0.210	0.338
Aggravated Assault	1.500	2.231	2.301

Table 5.4: Average Annual Crime Rate by Type of Offenses
Source: Montana Board of Crime Controls, http://mbcc.mt.gov/Data/Crime-Data
Note: Crime Rate = # of incidents per 1000 population

- In addition to crimes reported to the Montana Incident Based Reporting Service, the Police Department responds to numerous service calls that do not result in a crime report. As the City's population and visitation has increased, so has the number of service calls. The Police Department reported that in 2011 it received about 9,200 requests for service calls and those calls spiked at a high of 14,000 calls in 2016. Calls for the last two years have leveled at about 13,000 calls per year.

- **Fire** – The Whitefish Fire Department (WFD) is responsible for structural firefighting, hazardous materials response, wildland firefighting, and rescue services. It has a service area larger than 100 square miles that includes the City of Whitefish and, through an interlocal agreement, the surrounding Whitefish Fire Service Area (WFSA). Whitefish provides ambulance service (advanced life support) to a larger area that goes north and west to the county line. As indicated in Figure 5.10, the number

Figure 5.10: Whitefish Fire Department Calls for Service
Source: http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/fire-and-ambulance/fire-and-ambulance.php

of service calls have shown a slow, steady increased since 2010. Of these calls for service, 59% of fire service calls and 75% of emergency service calls are in the City limits with the remainder of calls being in the rural fire service area. Medicare/Medicaid only pays half the cost of ambulance service. The budget is allocated to 30% fire protection and 70% emergency services.

- The WFD has two fire stations and a training facility. Station 21 is in the Emergency Services Center and houses 15 career firefighters and paramedics and administrative offices. Station 22 is located outside of city limits at 1400 Hodgson Road and has training facilities. Big Mountain Fire Department serves the

resort area and has two full-time fire fighters. Along with the career firefighters, there are 10 volunteer firefighters/medics. In recent years, Whitefish and communities around the state have experienced a decline in volunteer firefighters. This can create problems with adequate staffing and reasonable response times.

• While most, of the area within the City is within 5 road miles from a fire station, most of the 100+ square mile area WFD protects is not. Insurance Services Organization (ISO) is a company that conducts risk analysis and rates each department based on several factors, with 1 being the best rating and 10 indicating no fire protection. Insurance rates are often based on these ratings. Property located more than 5 road miles from a fire station have a PPC rating of 10. The WFD is considering construction of additional satellite fire stations which would improve emergency services, decrease the ISO rating, and save thousands of dollars for homeowners within a 5-mile radius of the station.

4. Health Services

North Valley Hospital, an affiliate of Kalispell Regional Healthcare, is a state-designated Community Trauma Hospital and is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. With 464 employees, the hospital and outreach clinics are one of the largest full-time employers in the Whitefish area. The hospital has 25 patient rooms, four operating rooms, and eight emergency bays. It is located on a 45-acre medical campus near Highway 93 & Highway 40. It also operates a seasonal clinic on Big Mountain and West Glacier.

From 2004 until 2008, the number of emergency department visits increased from 7,663 to 9,156, reflecting rapid population growth in the area. With the adoption of the Affordable Care Act, which resulted in an increased number of insured individuals as well as changes in reimbursements, the number of emergency visits dropped significantly. Since 2010, the number of emergency department visits fluctuated between 7,738 and 7,012. In fiscal year 2017/2018, however, there was a notable increase in visits. (See Figure 5.11)

5. Infrastructure Funding

Financing infrastructure improvements was one of the top issues that emerged from the public input. There was general agreement that new development and increased visitation should pay an equitable share of the cost for capital improvements. The city relies on several financing mechanisms to fund major infrastructure upgrades. The City must comply with state law to structure the various fees and taxes.

Figure 5.11: North Valley Hospital Emergency Room Visits Source: North Valley Medical Hospital – Annual Reports, https://www.krh.org/nvh/

- **Impact Fees** – Impact fees are assessed in accordance with the Montana Code Annotated. Current impact fee rates are based on formulas and data that are explained in the "Impact Fee Update" dated August 2018. Currently, a developer pays $9,944 total fees compared $9,466 in Kalispell. Neither the County nor Columbia Falls have impact fees. If the City reduces the impact fee, all rate payers would then bear the cost of capital improvements that is partially driven by new development. The City already charges the maximum allowable fees on new development for water, wastewater, storm water, city hall, emergency services center, and the parks maintenance building. The City could charge about $1,900 for paved trails but has elected to keep the rate as is in order to keep the fees competitive.

- **Resort Tax** – The resort tax is authorized by Section 7-6-1501 of the MCA and allows a maximum rate of 3%. Whitefish voters originally approved a 2% resort tax on lodging, retail, bars, and restaurants in 1995. The tax was extended in 2004 until the year 2025. In 2015, the voters approved an additional 1% for purposes of purchasing the conservation easement in Haskill Basin to protect the City's water supply. Figure 5.12 indicates how the original resort tax was allocated.

  From 1996 to 2019, the Whitefish Resort Tax resulted in $10,141,971 in property tax relief, $20,334,518 in street improvements, and $1,609,543 in park improvements. In 2021 Whitefish voters will have an opportunity to reauthorize the resort tax for the next 20 years. At that time, it will be possible to review the allocations and determine if modifications are necessary to better meet infrastructure needs.

Figure 5.12: Resort Tax Allocation

- **Tax Increment Finance** – The City created an urban renewal district for the core area of Whitefish in 1987. The tax increment captured from the district has funded projects such as street reconstruction, paved trails, purchase of land for redevelopment (old gravel pit and land for O'Shaughnessy Center and library), emergency services center, new city hall/parking garage, as well as provide economic development assistance. The district expires in 2020. The City is evaluating the creation of a new district to redevelop the Idaho Timber site and US 93 South.

- **Utility Rates** – Utility rates primarily cover operation and maintenance. Residents have seen a recent increase in rates to fund a small portion of the water and wastewater facility upgrades.

- **Grants** – The City has been successful in receiving state and federal grants that provided funding for planning efforts, most of the new wastewater treatment plant, the purchase of conservation easements, trails, and other projects.

6. Existing Programs & Best Practices

• Water Conservation & Education

In 2019, the City of Whitefish enacted a water conservation ordinance to reduce the peak summer demand, reduce the costs of supplying water, and extend the life of the City's water infrastructure. The ordinance limits the hours for watering lawns, requires lodging establishments to offer options of foregoing daily linen changes, and discourages excess run-off from watering on pavement areas. During periods of drought, the ordinance includes additional restrictions on watering depending on the severity of the drought.

While the water conservation ordinance focuses on reducing waste during peak summer months, being water and energy efficient year-round means moving and treating less water, which helps reduce the strain on water supplies, drinking water, and wastewater infrastructure. High population growth and high-water usage can cause water shortages not related to drought. According to the EPA, Montana is in the top quartile of states in regards to per capita water use. Fortunately, there are many ways to decrease water use through simple daily tasks or the installation of water- and energy-efficient products.

Education is another component of water management. Community members and businesses are more likely to engage in conservation practices if they understand the operations and cost associated with expensive facility upgrades. (See also Environment chapter for more conservation practices.)

- **Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Communications**
Summer crowds, and an influx of people attending special events such as the winter carnival, create a need for crowd management to ensure the safety of visitors and residents alike. The Flathead County Office of Emergency Services is an umbrella organization that coordinates efforts between local police, fire, and other first responders. The County has an adopted Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan that was adopted in 2014 and is in the process of being updated. The City of Whitefish adopted an "Emergency Operations Plan" in 2019 to provide a framework for coordination among agencies, pre-planning, training, and communication. Public outreach is an important component. More communities are relying on web-enabled data and "apps" as part of a robust hazard notification systems and to link into the wide array communication devices used by citizens and visitors.

Best Practices

- EPA Water Sense - Information on actions that homeowners, commercial establishments and communities can take to conserve water. Includes information on "Water Sense" certified products such as showerheads, toilets, and other products. https://www.epa.gov/watersense

- Livingston, MT began operation at the new "Wastewater Reclamation Facility" that is similar in design and cost to the new facility that is under construction in Whitefish. Throughout the design and construction process, the City engaged the community through a website updates, tours, open houses, and communication tools. http://livingstonwrf.com/

- The National Institute of Health has an online clearinghouse with links to various types of Emergency Management Apps. https://disasterinfo.nlm.nih.gov/apps

In 2019, a SKI Magazine voter poll ranked Whitefish Mountain Resort as #1 in "local flavor" for North American resorts. The area ranked # 4 in the categories of Scenery and charm. It also ranked in the top 10 for family friendly, down day activities, nightlife, and dining.

D. COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Residents and visitors alike value the Whitefish community. Development that ignores the local culture or the distinctive natural and built environments can alter the "sense of place" that defines a community. Increased visitation that results in more traffic, noise, litter, and crowds can diminish the enjoyment of local amenities. Recognizing specific features that contribute to the "local flavor" is necessary to develop strategies that protect and enhance the attributes that comprise community character.

1. Neighborhoods & Heritage

Whitefish has several distinctive neighborhoods that help define community character. Conversion of existing housing units to short-term rentals creates issues regarding traffic, parking, and noise. Vacation homes that are empty most of the year can result in the disruption of a cohesive network of individuals that are caring and watching out for their neighbors. All of this contributes to a sentiment that there is a decline in sense of community, volunteerism, and small-town friendly atmosphere. Higher density developments, if they are out of scale or do not reflect the existing character/heritage of the neighborhood, can also disrupt the sense of community. Urban design that emphasizes compatible developments can address these concerns. Buildings may include historic or modern elements while density and scale establish an urban, suburban, estate or rural atmosphere. Walkability, open spaces, and activity nodes

Figure 5.13: Design Charette Illustration for Snow Lot to Promote Compatible In-Fill

are also important elements. Zoning, historic preservation and architectural design standards are tools that communities use to regulate for compatible urban development. Design charettes, such as the recent housing project for the City's snow lot, is another way to engage neighbors in the design process (Figure 5.13). Landlord and tenant education may alleviate concerns of neighbors about maintenance issues and other impacts.

2. Downtown

Downtowns are the activity hub for most communities. They are typically the center of government and a have a critical mass of retail, restaurants, and nightlife to attract customers. Historic buildings are often located downtown. The experience visitors and residents have in a locality's downtown can form positive perceptions on the vitality of businesses, local charm, and friendliness. Communities such as Whitefish that make a conscience effort to plan and invest in downtown are most successful in creating a thriving central business district. The Heart of Whitefish is a downtown organization of businesses that works closely with the City to implement the downtown plan.

3. Gateways

Gateways are focal points that demark the main entryways into the community or business district. Good gateway designs represent community heritage and values, preserve views, and counteract visual blight that results from sprawl. Gateway elements typically include landscaping, distinctive signage, and public art. Development surrounding gateways should also include design elements to enhance the community's entryways. In Whitefish, the gateways at US 93 south and north are undefined. The downtown and Wisconsin Avenue business corridor also lack defining features.
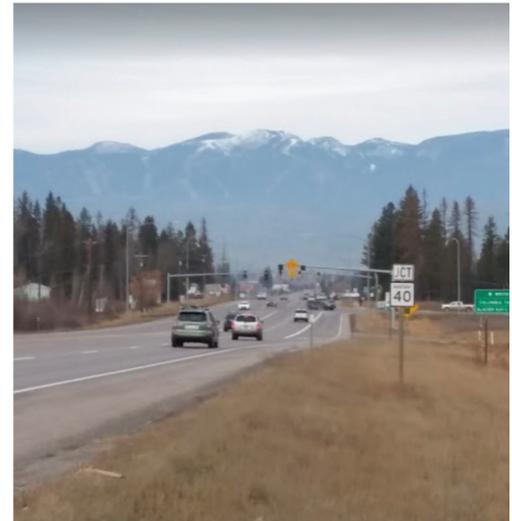
4. Landscapes – Scenic Vistas

Development that integrates natural features and scenic vistas contribute to community character. Successful designs include building materials and form that reflect local landscapes, protect views, include native plants, and preserve natural features. In Whitefish, mountain views, Whitefish Lake, and surrounding forest and agricultural lands are indicative of the outdoor and rural lifestyles.

Neighborhoods	Architectural Design Review Standards recognize two old town residential districts immediately adjacent to downtown (Railroad District & Old Town South district). The Growth Policy does recommend consideration of neighborhood conservation districts. The area east and south of downtown with concentrations of craftsman style homes is a potential candidate for special design considerations. The Downtown Business District Master Plan also recommends addressing historic single family neighborhoods.
Heritage	The Railway Depot, the First Presbyterian Church, and the Ray E. Taylor house at 900 South Baker are on the National Historic Register. The Historical Society has identified landmarks and placed plaques on buildings for a walking tour. There is no comprehensive survey of historic buildings for the City.
Downtown	Downtown Business District Master Plan recommends gateway landscaping, signage, and lighting at Wisconsin/Baker Ave., US 93 Bridge, and 14th Street. The Plan includes specific design schemes for streetscapes and connecting designs to natural environments. It also recommends updating the architectural review standards. Zoning prohibits franchise businesses in downtown and requires first floor retail/restaurant on Central Avenue.
Landscapes – Scenic Vistas	Architectural Review Standards have provisions that development should not obstruct views of mountains, river, and lake. Flathead County has a Scenic Overlay Zoning District. The District, however, only regulates off-premise signs. (Billboards)
Community Gateways	US 93 South Corridor Plan – Planning is in progress and projected to be completed in spring 2020. Draft documents include a gateway segment. Study area includes unincorporated area south to Blanchard Lake Road. The area directly south of US 93 is zoned with a Highway Overlay District in the County to limit billboards. US 93 West Corridor Plan identifies a gateway area from Karrow Avenue to the Whitefish River Bridge. It recommends a neighborhood transitional mixed-use district for this area but no specific gateway treatments. Wisconsin Ave. Corridor Plan – Includes action item for developing gateway treatments at Edgewood Drive and Big Mountain Road. Recommends updating architectural review standards. Highway 40 – There is no gateway signage or recommendations for this corridor.

Ennis, MT

Flagstaff AZ

Cedar City UT

Table 5.5: Components of Community Character – Analysis

5. Architectural Review Standards & Zoning

The Architectural Review Standards and Zoning Regulations are the primary tools for ensuring compatible development that reflects local community character. The Whitefish zoning ordinance controls for density, bulk, and scale of development. It includes landscaping requirements and requires that any commercial use over 10,000 square feet, a gas station, or hotel will require a conditional use to address design, transportation, stormwater, and other issues. Additionally, zoning does not allow formula businesses in downtown or in B-2 District.

The County has a Highway Overlay District. Perimeter landscaping requirements are similar, but the county only requires dust free surfaces while the city requires paving of parking lots. The county does not have a design review board or adopted guidelines. Enforcement of screening standards in the county has been an issue. The County also has a Scenic Overlay District that controls for billboards.

The Architectural Review Standards were adopted in 2009 and recognize five districts (Old Town Central, Old Town Railroad, Old Town South, Resort Commercial Business, Highway District). All multifamily projects in other parts of the City must also go through design review. The design standards include guidelines for site design, parking, landscaping, and lighting. Building standards address materials, shape, and form. Projects are reviewed by the Architectural Review Committee.
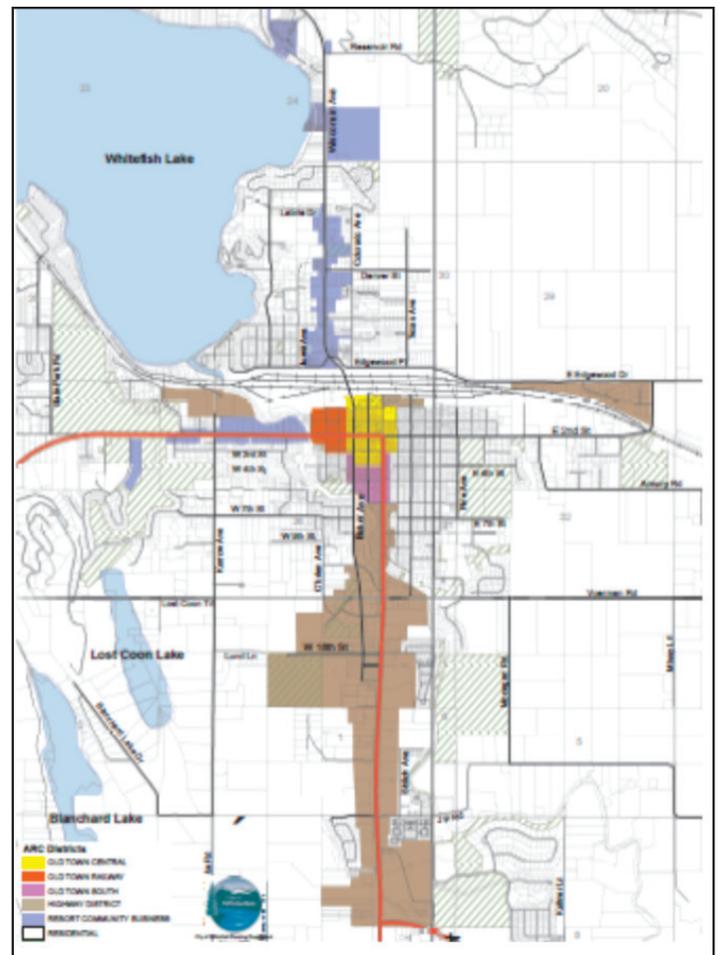
Figure 5.14: Architectural Review Districts

The standards do not include any graphics or photos to illustrate the various design concepts. Such visual aids are typical of most design standards to assist in the review process and to provide some consistency from project to project. Both the Downtown Business District Master Plan and Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan recommend an update of the standards. Focus group attendees also commented on expense of the design review process.

Best Practices

- American Planning Association, "PAS Report 591 – Design Review: Guiding Better Development", 2018
https://www.planning.org/publications/report/9154841/

- City of Boise, Design Review Documents
https://www.cityofboise.org/departments/planning-and-development-services/planning-and-zoning/
design-review/design-review-documents/

- Coeur D'Alene Design Review Documents https://www.cdaid.org/1109/departments/planning/design-
guidelines-standards-regulations

E. EXISTING PROGRAMS & BEST PRACTICES

As noted previously, the City has undertaken various planning initiatives to address land use and development issues. STMP recommendations should be coordinated with the following plans:

Growth Policy

- **Whitefish Growth Policy** – City Planning Department will be updating its Growth Policy within the next few years. The Growth Policy is a policy document that provides a framework for managing growth and development through land use, capital improvement investments, economic development, transportation systems, and protection of the natural resources. The recommendations of the STMP should be incorporated into the update.

- **Flathead County Growth Policy** – Flathead County is scheduled to update its Growth Policy following the 2020 Census. The update will provide an opportunity for the City to suggest policies regarding adjacent land use, transportation, and environmental concerns.

Special Area Plans

- **Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan** – Adopted in 2006 & updated in 2015. Includes recommendations for business development, transportation public facilities, environment, and growth management. There are also recommendations for housing, bike/ped facilities, gateways, zoning overlay district and architectural review standards. Recent planning initiatives regarding transit, parking, and the US 93 – Urban Core transportation plan have implications for downtown planning.

- **US 93 West** – Adopted in 2015. Includes recommendations for land use, zoning, and public-private partnership to redevelop the Idaho Timber site. Incorporates MDT transportation improvements for US-93 West.

- **Wisconsin Ave.** – Adopted in 2018. Includes recommendations for environmental quality, neighborhoods, transportation, urban design, and economic performance.

- **US 93 South** – Anticipated completion in 2020. Draft goals and objectives address land use, transportation, aesthetics, and business development in different segments of corridor.

Other planning initiatives

- **Historic preservation** – The Whitefish Growth Policy contains an action item to conduct a historic survey of the older residential neighborhoods. Montana's Community Preservation program, also known as the Certified Local Government (CLG) works with communities to document historic patterns, architectural styles, influential architects and builders, significant people and events, and historic and prehistoric archeology. In partnership with the National Park Service, certified local governments with historic preservation programs may receive technical preservation assistance grants from $1,000 to $5,000 to spend in ways that best assist their community's local preservation needs. Montana State Historic Preservation Office – https://mhs.mt.gov/Shpo

F. STRATEGIES – ACTION ITEMS

1. Implement housing strategic plan and advocate for more funding for housing programs.

- Phase 3 implementation should prioritize strategies for non-traditional housing (tiny homes, co-housing)
- Conduct workshops on topics such as short-term rentals, landlord/renter responsibilities, home ownership
- Lead – Whitefish Housing Strategic Plan Committee
- Partners – Chamber of Commerce, Northwest Association of Realtors, Flathead Landlord Association, Whitefish Housing Authority, Homeword, NeighborWorks MT, Montana Housing Coalition
- Montana Department of Commerce, Housing Division – https://housing.mt.gov/

2. Coordinate Downtown Business District Master Plan with other planning initiatives.

- Update plan to reflect recent planning initiatives regarding transit, parking, trails, housing, and the US 93 initiatives – urban core transportation plan
- Leads – City of Whitefish, Heart of Whitefish
- Montana Main Street Program – https://comdev.mt.gov/Programs/MainStreet

3. Coordinate with non-profits as well as state and county agencies on homelessness issues.

- Partners – Community Action Partnership, United Way, Whitefish Community Foundation, emergency shelters, Food Bank
- Participate in events – Help raise funds for programs such as emergency grants to prevent homelessness
- Montana Continuum of Care Coalition – https://montanacoc.org/

4. Promote year-round water conservation practices to reduce cost of future water/wastewater upgrades.

- Create and implement education programs, demonstration projects, incentives
- Lead – Climate Action Plan Committee
- Resources – EPA, DEQ, Water Conservation District, grants

5. Conduct community outreach efforts regarding resort tax, tourism benefits, infrastructure improvements.

- Lead – City departments & CVB. Reach out to Chamber of Commerce & civic groups
- Outreach – Webpage, promotional materials, social media, open houses, city newsletter

6. Ongoing communication and pre-planning for crisis situations, emergency preparedness and crowd management during peak tourist season and special events.

- Lead – City administration, Fire Dept., Police Dept., Public works
- Partners – City officials, CVB, Chamber, Schools, Civic groups, neighborhood associations, County Dept. of Emergency Services
- Emergency Operations Plan – http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/Whitefish-EOP-062519.pdf

7. Incorporate STMP goals into the City and County Growth Policy updates, zoning regulations and annexation policies.

- City Planning Dept. – Design standards as part of annexation, limit new areas for short-term rentals, parking for STR's, design standards for US 93 South Corridor study, zoning for affordable housing
- County Planning Dept.– Propose zoning changes for highway overlay and scenic overlay zoning, limits on STRs

8. Update Architectural Review Standards and conduct historic preservation survey to preserve community character.

- Lead – Planning Dept. and Design Review Committee with assistance from consultant
- See recommendations in Downtown Business District Plan, Growth Policy and Wisconsin Ave. Corridor Plans, include graphics in architectural standards to clarify standards
- Montana Rural Historic Preservation Grants – https://mhs.mt.gov/Shpo/RMRH

9. Identify locations for gateway treatments and work with community groups on designs and fundraising.

- Partners – CVB, Chamber, Heart of Whitefish, civic groups
- Funding – Resort Tax, grants, donations
- Montana Arts Council – Grants for public arts, http://art.mt.gov/ca

VI. ENVIRONMENT & LAND MANAGMENT

"Most importantly is making sure residents are receiving the resources they need. The next important is taking care of our outdoor opportunities. That means doing more to protect the landscape, not just the park but all public lands. The more people who come here to visit because of our outdoor amenities, the more impact that will have on them. Conservation needs to be a focus for the city, the CVB and for those businesses who rely on the outdoors for their tourism draw."   Survey Comment

A. GOALS

Livability – Protect environmental resources such as clean air, clean water, forest, and wildlife habitat to allow visitors and future generations to enjoy the exceptional natural attributes of the area.

Community Engagement – Educate and engage businesses, residents and visitors on sustainability initiatives and encourage visitors to be sensitive guests while in our community.

Community Character – Protect open space and public lands access and promote sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities.

B. WATER QUALITY

A watershed describes an area of land that drains to streams, rivers, or other bodies of water. Whitefish Lake watershed encompasses an area that goes north to the Swift Creek headwaters and south to the outfall of the Whitefish River. The Upper Whitefish River Watershed includes the areas below Whitefish Mountain Resort and lands surrounding the City south to Highway 40.

A healthy watershed improves the quality of life and protects the environment. Many defining features of the watershed, such as lakes, rivers, streams, and forested areas, have significant ecological, recreational, and scenic value. Natural systems within the watershed filter pollutants, replenish groundwater resources, provide wildlife habitat, contribute to healthy fisheries, minimize flooding, provide carbon storage, and prevent erosion.

Other benefits from healthy watersheds include more efficient stormwater control and reduced costs to treat drinking water. Businesses benefit from increased tourism and logging companies benefit from more a sustainable timber resource. The Montana Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research report indicates a top reason for vacationers is access to Montana's lakes and rivers.

Figure 6.1: Whitefish Lake Watershed Overview

A variety of threats can compromise water quality within the watershed. These include the following:

• **Non-Point Pollution** – Urban development increases the potential for stormwater impacts to water quality. As stormwater flows over roadways, sidewalks, driveways, parking lots, and other impervious surfaces, it can pick up soil, debris, chemicals, and other pollutants or pathogens and convey them to receiving waterbodies. Education, reducing impervious areas and improvements to the stormwater infrastructure can mitigate these issues.

• **Septic Leachate** – Threats from septic systems include leaks in septic tanks, leaks in collection lines, or system failure that causes untreated effluent to infiltrate shallow ground water or surface water. Unincorporated areas with older septic systems pose the highest risk. In summer, when friends and family are often visiting, septic systems that were not designed for heavy use can be overtaxed. Several areas on Whitefish Lake have been identified as having a potential for septic contamination.

• **Loss of riparian area** – Lack of established riparian vegetation can increase streambank erosion and sedimentation. In urban areas, residential development usually leads to riparian degradation, which reduces the ability of riparian areas to effectively filter nutrients from upland runoff. Shoreline areas with the highest level of development and are subject to activities that contribute to phosphorous loading such as fertilizer runoff. Loss of riparian areas also causes lack of shade and higher temperatures that impair aquatic life. The City has lakeshore protection regulations to address development within 25 feet of the lakeshore while the Flathead County Conservation District has adopted a watershed restoration plan which includes strategies for revegetation along water waterways. www.flatheadcd.org

- **Railroad** – Spills, leaks, and oily discharge to wastewater lagoons at the rail yard facility have caused soil and shallow groundwater contamination from petroleum products. This sometimes create an oily sheen on the Whitefish River. BNSF has been required to undertake clean-up operations and continues to monitor the situation. In July 1989, there was a train derailment which resulted in an oil spill in the lake. The lake was closed to the public during clean-up operations resulting in a significant drop in visitation. In 2012, additional contaminated sediment was removed. BNSF has a spill response plan in place in the eventuality of another derailment.

- **Boating** – Water recreation is popular with visitors. Public boat launches are located at Whitefish State Park and City Beach. The Lodge at Whitefish Lake operates a commercial marina. Marinas and docks can be a threat to water quality due to chemicals, fuel spills and run-off. Motorized watercraft can cause erosion. The City restricts motorized watercraft on the Whitefish River to protect the shoreline. Education and posting of rules are other strategies to promote responsible boating practices.

- **Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)** – According to the Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI), "A zebra mussel colonization of Whitefish Lake has many plausible economic and environmental consequences to both individuals and the public at large. These include damage to the City of Whitefish Public Water Supply or to the Water Treatment Plant, individual water intake systems, boats and boat motors, and docks. It also includes reduced recreational opportunities for visitors and locals which would impact local businesses." To address the issue, the City, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and WLI have undertaken activities such as watercraft inspections, early detection monitoring for AIS.

Existing Programs and Best Practices

- **Whitefish Lake Institute** – "Whitefish Area Water Resources Report: A Status of the Whitefish Lake Watershed and Surrounding Area", www.whitefishlake.org/publications.php

- **Whitefish Lake Institute, Montana Lake Book** – Best practices for property owners with waterfront areas to reduce erosion, protect riparian areas, manage stormwater run-off, and limit septic leaks. www.whitefishlake.org/publications.php

- **City of Whitefish, Engineering Standards for Stormwater Control** – www.cityofwhitefish.org/public-works/city-development-plans.php & Whitefish City Code, Title 13: Lake and Lakeshore Protection regulations

- **Montana Department of Environmental Quality** – Guidelines for communities to minimize non-point pollution. http://deq.mt.gov/Water/WPB/Nonpoint-Source-Program/Guidance-Documents-and-Resources

- **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks** – "Protect Our Waters", AIS Bureau, https://cleandraindry.mt.gov/Aquatic-Invasive-Species

- **DNRC** – Private Water Grant Program (Replacement of small septic systems) - http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/cardd/resource-development/renewable-resource-grant-program/renewable-resource-grants-to-private-entities

C. CLIMATE

The Whitefish travel and recreation industry has recognized that the area's greatest assets are the exceptional outdoors amenities and pristine environment. Glacier National Park, 25 miles from Whitefish, attracts visitors from all around the globe. Yet, the glaciers, forests, wildlife, lakes, and streams, are threatened by climate change.

Sources have estimated that tourism is responsible for roughly 8% of the world's carbon emissions. Consequently, more people are making travel decisions based on sustainable options for lodging, traveling, and recreating. (sustainabletravel.org/)

In 2018, the City of Whitefish, in partnership with the Whitefish School District, adopted a Climate Action Plan to address the challenges related to climate change and to protect the qualities that residents and visitors value about the community. The Plan noted the following climate trends from 1950 – 2015:

- Average annual temperature increased by 2.5 degrees
- 12 more frost-free days per year
- 3.77 inches decrease in annual precipitation (nearly all in winter season)
- Longer fire seasons
- Earlier snow melt – roughly 2-weeks earlier
- Lower summer stream flows

In response to these trends, the Climate Action Plan includes goals and strategies to reduce emissions and to prepare for climate change. The Plan identified priority actions in the following areas.

"In places where tourism and recreation are economically important, climate influences Montana's snowpack, pristine streams, native forests, and iconic wildlife, which are important for sustained prosperity."

Montana Climate Assessment
http://montanaclimate.org

"Our national parks are a testament to the reality of climate change. Disappearing glaciers, shifting migration patterns for alpine birds,...these are many ways that we see the effects of climate change...National parks teach us how climate change worked in the past and how it affects us today and can give us insight into ways to protect these special places in the future."

National Park Service
www.nps.gov/subjects/climatechange/
effectsinparks.htm

"Guard, protect and cherish your land, for there is no after life for a place that started out as Heaven"

Charles M. Russell

1. Building and Energy

Two main strategies for reducing emissions for buildings are energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. Working with lodging facilities and local businesses to reduce energy use can result in cost savings and be beneficial for the environment. Local businesses can participate in energy audits and retrofit older buildings to become more energy efficient. The City has sponsored workshops in green building techniques and solar energy. Educational materials with tips for reducing energy use are available through the state and from Flathead Electric Cooperative.

2. Transportation and Land use

Traveling is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. While most visitors travel by car or plane, once they have arrived at the destination, they can reduce their carbon footprint by choosing more sustainable travel options. Whitefish has a walkable downtown and has invested in bike trails around the City. Transit options include the Snow Bus and Eagle Transit. Promoting these options can make it easier for visitors to use of these alternative transportation modes.

3. Water and Wastewater

The water and wastewater treatment plant consume more energy than any other City operation. While the City passed a water conservation ordinance that required lodging establishments to undertake certain measures during periods of drought, expanding these practices year-round can conserve energy. During summer months, water for lawn irrigation represents the highest use of water. While the water conservation ordinance restricts watering to evening/early morning hours, use of native plants and xeriscaping can also reduce water demand.

4. Forests and Wildfire

Whitefish is surrounded by federal, state, and private forest land. The entire City is located within the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and is at heighten risk of wildfire. With hotter, drier summers, wildfires are more frequent and wildfire seasons are longer. The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) states that the fire season is 60 days longer than it was 30 years ago. A recent Forest Service study predicts that the

"Tourism business owners in Glacier Country were in agreement that the 2018 wildfire season caused cancellations to their business, and slightly over half said they lost customer volume as well."

number of acres susceptible to fires could double by 2050. Becoming a fire adaptive community is a priority for the City. Health impacts of wildfire smoke is a concern for visitors recreating outdoors.

5. Consumption, Food, and Waste

Encouraging greater production and use of local foods will reduce emissions and will also improve food quality. Recycling helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing energy consumption. Using recycled materials reduces demand for natural resources. Additionally, recycling saves landfill space and reduces methane gas from decomposing trash. During the public input phase, community members repeatedly mentioned the need for more robust recycling programs. Businesses noted that out-of-state customers routinely inquire about recycling options. While the City has a recycling drop-off site, due to shipping costs and recent changes in the market for recyclables, waste diversion lags other areas of the country.

6. Existing Programs and Best Practices

- **Fire Adapted Montana** – "A fire adapted community consists of informed and prepared residents collaboratively planning and taking action to safely co-exist with wildland fire."
  https://www.fireadaptedmontana.org/

- **Whitefish Center for Sustainability and Entrepreneurship (CSE)** – CSE is a net-zero educational center at Whitefish Schools. https://www.wsd44.org/

- **Flathead Electric Cooperatives** – Programs to assist with energy efficiency upgrades.
  https://www.flatheadelectric.com/commercial/business-energy-savings/

- **Recycling** – Non-profit providing technical assistance for local governments and businesses.
  https://recyclemontana.org/

- **EPA Toolbox** to reduce health impacts from wildfire smoke.
  https://www.epa.gov/smoke-ready-toolbox-wildfires

- **Sustainable Travel International** – Education, travel industry standards, carbon off-sets.
  https://sustainabletravel.org/

D. PUBLIC LANDS – CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

1. Public Lands

The Whitefish community, and visitors, enjoy convenient access to public lands throughout the county. These lands attract outdoor enthusiasts and provide valuable connectivity between ecosystems. Nearby public lands have benefits such as supporting timber harvests, increasing tourism, and offering a lifestyle that attracts entrepreneurs and retirees. In Flathead County, a 74% of the land area is classified as public land. (See Figure 6.2)

Rural counties in the west with the highest share of public lands perform better on key economic measures. A recent analysis by Headwaters Economics compared indicators on economic performance of rural counties from 1970 to 2015. As Figure 6.3 indicates, rural counties in the top 25th percentile of the proportion of Federal lands performed markedly better on key economic indicators than rural counties in the bottom 25th percentile of land area in federal ownership.
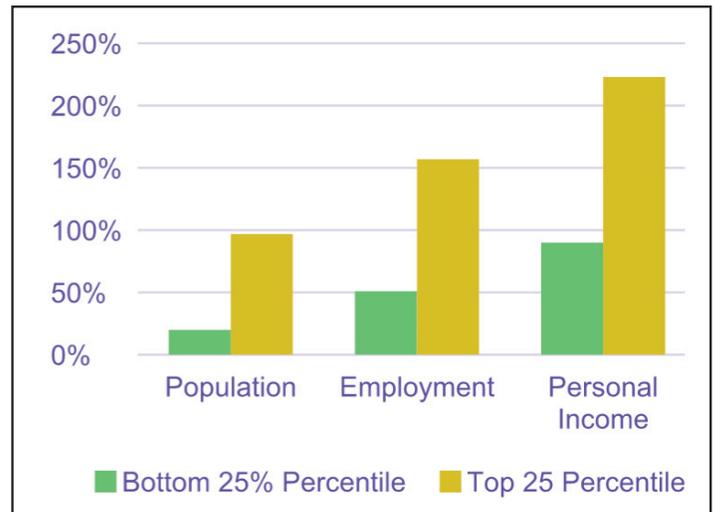

Figure 6.2: % Land Area in Flathead County
Source: Montana Natural Heritage Program

Figure 6.3: Indicators of Economic Performance for Counties with High % of Public Land
Source: https://headwaterseconomics.org

Public lands in Flathead County include the following:

- **Flathead National Forest**

  The National Forest Management Act directs the development of land management plans to provide for multiple uses including outdoor recreation, rangeland, logging, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness. The Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan addresses the following issues:

  - Growing demand for recreation and the importance in supporting local economies

  - Fire and fuels management including active vegetation management near communities

  - New analyses needed for timber production opportunities

  - Conservation of wildlife and aquatic habitat, including updating grizzly bear habitat management direction and Inland Native Fish direction

  - New policy and public interest in identifying areas for recommended wilderness and wild and scenic rivers

    Source: https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/flathead/home/?cid=stelprdb5422786&width=full

- **Glacier National Park**

  Glacier National Park (GNP) is located 25 miles east of Whitefish. It is bordered by Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada and two forks of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River. Glacier National Park is part of one of the largest, most intact ecosystems in North America and is a world heritage site, and a biosphere reserve. According to the GNP foundational document, "The purpose of Glacier National Park, part of the world's first international peace park, is to preserve the scenic glacially carved landscape, wildlife, natural processes, and cultural heritage at the heart of the Crown of the Continent for the benefit, enjoyment, and understanding of the public." While visitation fluctuates depending on fires, road construction and economic conditions, since 2016, there has been a significant increase in visitors, even during years with fire activity in the park. (Figure 6.4)
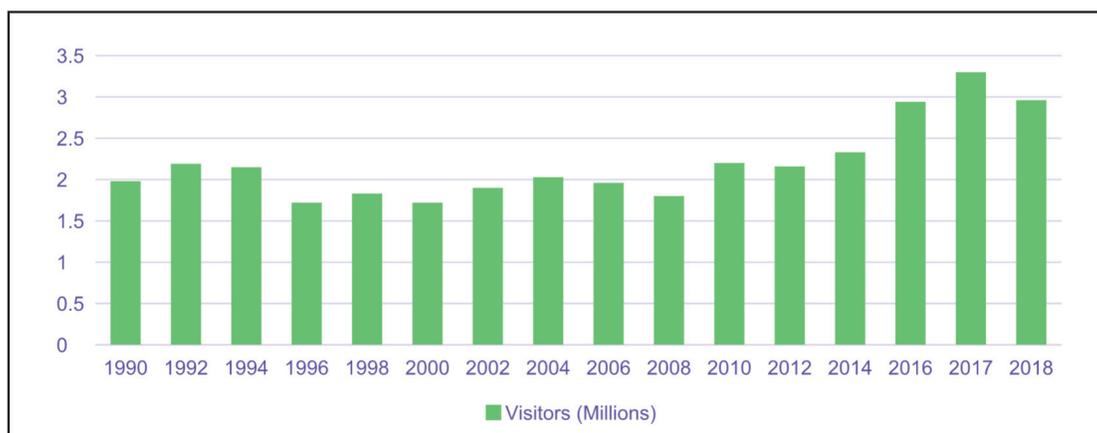

Figure 6.4: Visitation in Glacier National Park
Source: https://www.nps.gov/glac/index.htm

- **State Trust Land**

State School Trust Lands are managed by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) to produce income to support public schools and institutions. Long-term forest health is a key management principle to address issues regarding biodiversity, water quality, silviculture, wildlife/fisheries, road management, weeds, and invasive species. Recreational revenues are generated through a $2 fee assessed on hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses while other recreational activities such as hiking and bird watching require the purchase of a $10 license. Cutting or gathering wood, and commercial/guided recreation activities also require a permit or license. The easement for the Whitefish Trail allows individual recreationists to use the trail without paying a fee. http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/trust/forest-management/forest-management-plan

2. Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are a tool to preserve the ecological, recreational, cultural, or agricultural resource of a property. It is a voluntary legal agreement whereby the landowner maintains ownership and is compensated for limiting the use of the land as negotiated in the agreement. A local government or non-profit agency may hold the easement. There are 38,500 acres of conservation

Figure 6.5: Public Lands Near Whitefish
Source: Flathead County GIS

easements in Flathead County. Easements near Whitefish include:

- **Haskill Basin** – Haskill Basin provides nearly 75 percent of the water supply for Whitefish. To protect this water supply, the City purchased development rights on 3,022 acres in Haskill Basin. The City easement also guarantees recreation access and allows the landowner, Stolze Land and Timber Co. to continued sustainable management of the timber lands.

- **Stillwater Forest Conservation Easement** – Previously called the Whitefish Lake Watershed Project, was completed in 2018. A combination of public and private funding was used to preserve the 13,400 of forestland that will be managed by DNRC.

- **Beaver Lakes Public Recreation Use Easement** – The City of Whitefish, in partnership with Whitefish Legacy partners purchased development rights from 1,520 acres of Montana School Trust Land in Beaver Lakes. The $7.3 millions easement generated revenue for Montana Schools and Universities, secured permanent public access on the Whitefish Trail system, and allowed for long-term sustainable forest management.

3. Existing Resources & Best Practices

- **Whitefish Legacy Partners** – Community non-profit working to secure permanent conservation, education, and recreation opportunities on the lands surrounding Whitefish for future generations. Works to development and maintain the Whitefish Trail system. www.whitefishlegacy.org

- **DNRC** – Grant programs for projects on public lands. http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/trust/mt-plan

- **Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks** – Guidelines for reducing wildlife/human conflicts. http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/buildingWithWildlife/subdivisionRecommendations/documents.html

- **Non-profit Partners** – There are several organizations that work with GNP on fundraising and educational programs. https://www.glacierinstitute.org/ and https://glacier.org/

- **Trust for Public Lands** – Helped established conservation easements in Haskill Basin & Stillwater Forest. https://www.tpl.org/

- **Flathead Land Trust** – Works with partners and private landowners to preserve important landscapes in Flathead County. http://www.flatheadlandtrust.org/

E. OUTDOOR RECREATION

1. Montana Office of Outdoor Recreation

The Montana Office of Outdoor Recreation serves as a centralized point of contact and coordination for the broad outdoor recreation constituency (http://business.mt.gov/Office-of-Outdoor-Recreation). The office reports that 80% of Montana residents participate in outdoor recreation. The outdoor recreation economy generates more jobs than the manufacturing and construction sectors combined. A survey of high-tech industry indicates that the recreation opportunities and beauty of the landscape provides a significant advantage in business, especially in job recruitment. Commercial outfitters, guided tours and other recreation oriented businesses are a growing segment of the economy. World class recreation opportunities in Flathead County include activities shown in Figure 6.6.

Camping	Bicycling	Fishing
Snow Sports	Water Sports	Off-Roading
Hunting	Trails (Hiking/Equestrian...)	Wildlife Viewing

Figure 6.6: Outdoor Recreation in Flathead County

2. Land Management Agencies

With the abundant outdoor recreation opportunities in and around Whitefish come challenges related to funding, crowds, maintenance, safety, and resource degradation. (Table 6.1)

Agency/Organization	Assets Near Whitefish	Challenges
City of Whitefish	City Parks & Trails. Parks include City Beach, playing fields, tennis/pickle ball courts, playgrounds, dog park, skate park	Crowding & parking at city beach. Graffiti. Overnight camping in parks. Funding for trail maintenance.
Flathead County	County Park System Whitefish Lake boat access Trails	A 2019 update to the countywide trail plan was not approved by County Commissioners. Community groups are still working on issue.
Whitefish Legacy Partners (WLP)	Whitefish Trail – Connected network on State Forest, USFS, Private land, & Haskill Conservation Easement	150,000 annual trail users. There is more demand for events on the trails & commercial permits on the trail. Increased use has led to increased maintenance costs. 50% of use in summer is from tourists but most do not donate for trail maintenance.
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)	Whitefish State Park (Camping, beach, boat access) Les Mason State Park – Beach, picnic Lone Pine State Park – Kalispell Fishing Access Sites	Whitefish Lake State Park campground is 95%-100% full most of the time. State Park gets 65,000 – 70,000 visits annually. Les Mason 30,000 visits in summer. With a 40% increase in last 10-years, Les Mason is at capacity. User fees do not cover cost of management from increase use. More use of fishing access sites for recreation use in addition to fishing. While fishing license provides funds for maintenance, recreationist do not pay fees.
Montana Dept. of Natural Resources (DNRC)	Stillwater State Forest Recreation permits for mountain biking, horseback riding, guided activities Boating & fishing	User fees from permits, licenses & easements go to School Trust funds. Although recreational special use permits have increased substantially, there has been no new funding for managing this use. New funding for rec management would require legislative approval. Manage user groups to reduce conflicts
U.S. Forest Service (USFS)	Flathead National Forest – Camping, hiking, mountain biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding	Forest Fire mitigation & Fire fighting Human-wildlife conflict Multiple User Groups – Recreation management Resource Management (Timber, mining, grazing)
U.S. Park Service	Glacier National Park	Visitation = 3 million a year. Parking issues at trailheads. Road congestion. Funding for maintenance needs. Forest Fire, human-wildlife conflict
Whitefish Mountain Resort	Alpine & Cross-Country Skiing, Mountain biking, ziplining, & other summer activities	Coordination with USFS for parts of ski area on forest land

Source: Compiled from focus group notes, public input, web sites & planning documents

3. State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is responsible for developing the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and implementing recommendations. The SCORP is required of every state to be eligible for the Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) Program. The Plan provides guidance for management of state recreation resources, while acknowledging the full range of recreation opportunities including federal public lands and local parks. Of concern is improving access to outdoor recreation opportunities, especially for those persons with disabilities. Partnerships with all recreation agencies, including non-profits, are critical to achieve the following goals in the SCORP:

Goal 1: Promote Outdoor Recreation Opportunities for All Montanans

Goal 2: Enhance Public Access to Outdoor Recreation Resources and Facilities

Goal 3: Support Economic Vitality of Communities and State

Goal 4: Improve Quality of Life through Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Goal 5: Adapt Outdoor Recreation for a Changing Environment

Goal 6: Honor Montana's Outdoor Legacy

Source: http://stateparks.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/board/pn_0021.html

4. Existing Resources & Best Practices

- **City of Whitefish Parks & Recreation Dept.** – Master Plans for Parks and Recreation and plans development plans for specific parks. http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/parks-and-recreation/park-planning-documents.php

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund** – Montana State Parks administers federal funds for land acquisition and park improvements. http://stateparks.mt.gov/recreation/lwcf.html

- **Montana Recreational Trails Program** – Funding for recreational trails. http://stateparks.mt.gov/recreation/rtpGrants.html

- **Montana State Parks Foundation** – Non-profit that raises money for state parks. https://www.montanastateparksfoundation.org/

- **Adventure Cycling Association** – Non-profit in Missoula that provides resources for bicycling travel. Advocates for policies and funds to promote safety, amenities, and infrastructure. https://www.adventurecycling.org/

- **USFS** – Design guidelines for outdoor recreation amenities to comply with the America with Disabilities Act. http://fwp.mt.gov/recreation/ctb/links.html

F. STRATEGIES – ACTION ITEMS

1. Create outreach materials to promote responsible tourism and reduce impact on environment.

- Topics – Leave no trace, recycling, AIS, responsible boating, wildfire mitigation, wildfire smoke, water quality best practices, reduce wildlife conflicts
- Partners – CVB, Chamber, hospitality businesses
- Best Practice – Visitor Sustainability Guide. https://www.seemonterey.com/sustainable/

2. Expand programs and options for recycling and sponsor efforts to reduce overall waste/plastic use.

- Partners – Flathead County Solid Waste Board, waste haulers, non-profits
- Resources – Montana State University Extension, Waste reduction guidelines for hotels (http://www.montana.edu/pollution-prevention/hospfcthousekeeping.html); Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality, Recycling resources/ webinars (http://deq.mt.gov/Land/recycle)

3. Survey businesses to identify and promote "green businesses" sustainable practices.

- Partners – Chamber, Climate Smart Glacier Country
- Best Practice – Green Business Bureau, http://www.gbb.org/montana-green-business-certification/
  Adventure Green Alaska, https://www.adventuregreenalaska.org/
  Trip Advisor Green Leaders, https://www.tripadvisor.ca/GreenLeaders

4. Coordinate with land management agencies on issues related to crowding and conservation efforts.

- Partners – USFS, Glacier National Park, DNRC, Montana FWP, Whitefish Legacy Partners (WLP)
- Resources – Land management plans
- Best Practice – Whitefish Legacy Partners, City of Whitefish & DNRC partnership on Whitefish Trail

5. Protect open space through existing and new conservation easements.

- Partners – Flathead Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, DNRC, Montana FWP, Private Landowners, WLP
- Resources – Grants (i.e. US Fish & Wildlife habitat preservation) https://www.fws.gov/
- Best Practice – Montana Association of Land Trusts, https://montanalandtrusts.org/conservationeasements/

6. Assess options for carbon offset donations for conservation and to manage recreation assets.

- Partners – City of Whitefish Parks & Recreation Dept., Whitefish Community Foundation
- Best Practice – Juneau, AK Carbon Offset fund, https://juneaucarbonoffset.org/

7. Adopt a wildlife management plan or policies to reduce potential for human-wildlife conflicts.

- Partners – Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, USFS, WLP
- Best Practice – Libby, MT, Wildlife Management Plan; Longmont, CO, Wildlife Management Plan

8. Create guidelines and work with landowners to adopt best management practices for water quality.

- Partners – Whitefish Lake Institute, Flathead Conservation District, MT DEQ & DNRC, BNSF
- Resources – USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Technical/Financial assistance for landowners near rivers & streams and low-impact development in urban areas, https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mt/water/resources/

9. Encourage mitigation to reduce wildfire risk and promote emergency preparedness during wildfire season.

- Partners – Whitefish Fire Department, DNRC, Flathead County Dept. of Emergency Services
- Resources – DNRC fire prevention site assessments, http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/fire-and-aviation/fire-prevention-and-preparedness/home-fire-risk
- Best Practice – Firewise USA, https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA
- Air Quality, https://www.usda.gov/topics/climate-solutions & http://svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair/

10. Advocate for appropriate funding levels for public agencies responsible for land management and outdoor recreation.

- Partners – State Legislators, non-profit advocacy organizations
- Best Practice – Montana Trails Coalition, https://www.montanatrailscoalition.org/

VII. TRANSPORTATION

"Tourists do bring in a lot of money for local businesses, but with all the traffic: foot, vehicle and bike, it creates an increase in traffic and as a local resident you have to give yourself extra minutes to get to your job during the peak season. Also, tourists don't know where things are and drive below the speed limit, cross the streets when they feel like it or bike in the middle of the road like they are a car or walk in the streets when there are sidewalks."

Survey Comment

A. GOALS

Livability – Manage traffic to reduce congestion, promote safety, enhance connectivity, and accommodate all modes of travel.

Community Engagement – Engage with partner agencies to address transportation issues and involve residents in the process to develop solutions.

Community Character – Prioritize walkability and design transportation for people of all abilities and ages.

B. ROAD NETWORK & TRAFFIC TRENDS

US Hwy 93 is the primary route through Whitefish and carries the heaviest volume of traffic. The road is classified as a "Principal Arterial" and is under the jurisdiction of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Baker Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue also have significant traffic volumes and are also under the jurisdiction of MDT. (See Figure 7.1)

LEGEND

Study Area Boundary
City Limits
Urban Boundary

Functional Classification
— Principal Arterial
— Minor Arterial
— Collector (Urban)
— Major Collector (Rural)
— Minor Collector (Rural)
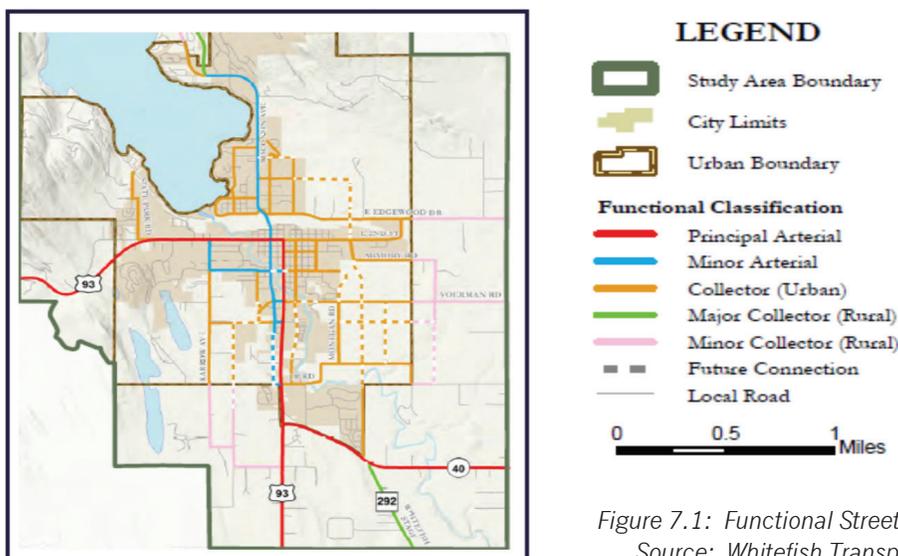- - - Future Connection
— Local Road

0   0.5   1 Miles

Figure 7.1: Functional Street Classification Whitefish
Source: Whitefish Transportation Plan - 2009

Figure 7.2 illustrates traffic volumes for the heaviest traveled road segments in Whitefish. As noted below, US 93 carries the highest volume of traffic in the City. It is a four-lane road from US Hwy 40 to 13th Street and traffic volumes on this segment exceed 20,000 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT). North of 13th Street, the road transitions to a two-lane street and traffic volumes decrease to about 15,000 AADT from 13th Street to 2nd Street. Traffic counts fluctuate from year-to-year depending on factors such as road construction, visitor traffic, and building activity.
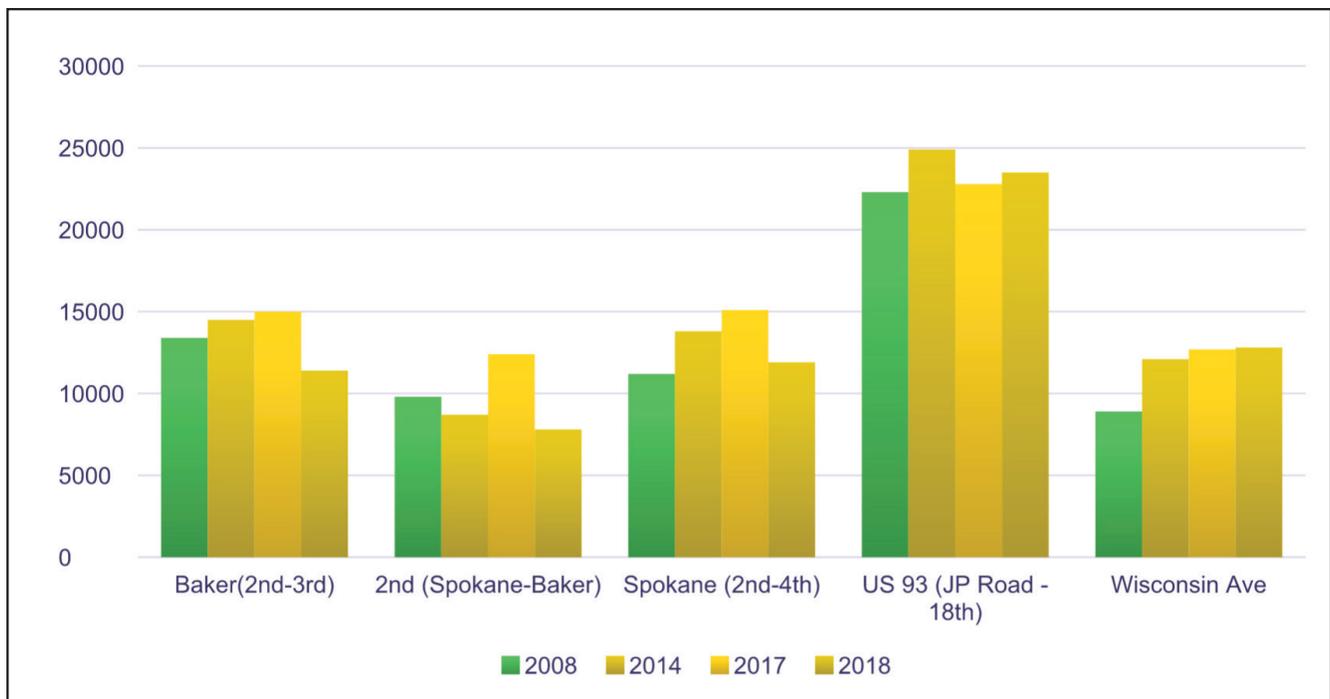
Figure 7.2: Annual Average Daily Traffic – Selected Road Segments in Whitefish, MT
Source: https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/datastats/traffic_maps.shtml
Notes: Traffic counts taken June thru August

1. Traffic trends in Whitefish

- **Level of service (LOS)** – LOS is a measure to indicate how signalized intersections are performing, on a scale of A (Best) to F (Failing). It is a function of traffic volume, intersection capacity, and the delay a vehicle may experience when it arrives at the stop light. Intersections with a rating of LOS "E" or LOS "F" are indicators of severe congestion. According to the 2009 Transportation Plan, the following intersections were experiencing unacceptable delay times:

    Baker/2nd Street *(Has improved since improvements to intersection)*

    Spokane Ave./2nd Street *(Has improved since improvements to intersection)*

    Spokane Ave./13th Street

    US 93/Highway 40

- **Glacier National Park (GNP)** – Traffic volumes in the downtown area are influenced by visitation to Glacier National Park. In 2017, there was record visitation in Glacier National Park and traffic on downtown streets also peaked in the same year.

- **Wisconsin Avenue** – Traffic volumes on Wisconsin Avenue in increased by 40% from 2008-2018. This corresponds to increased residential construction, and summer activities at Whitefish Mountain Resort. Traffic volumes in winter are influenced by peaks in skier visits. The lack of alternative north-south streets north of the railroad tracks presents challenges in traffic circulation.

- **Population Growth** – The City is projected to have an annual population growth rate of 1.5 – 2.5%. This will contribute to increasing traffic volumes.

- **Truck Traffic** – Since US 93 is the only principal arterial in Whitefish, this corridor also carries significant truck traffic. This includes through-traffic and trucks that are making deliveries to down-town businesses. This type of traffic contributes to congestion. There has been discussion of re-routing truck traffic onto Baker Avenue or a by-pass to avoid busy downtown streets.

- **Safety** – The most common type of crash is rear-end collisions, followed by collisions related to turning movements. Another traffic safety concern in Whitefish, related to the high number of drinking establishments, is impaired driving. Pedestrian-bike-vehicle conflicts are an additional safety issue that becomes more pronounced with congested roadways.

- **Grid** – The 2009 Whitefish Transportation Plan notes, "it is believed the community of Whitefish is better served by strengthening the transportation grid system, providing additional east/west connectivity, and requiring corridor development in vacant land if and when land develops." Projects to improve the grid include extending 18th St. between Baker and Karrow, extending 13th St. between Columbia Ave. and Voerman Road and extending Denver Street east and south as vacant land developments.

2. Current Plans & Best Practices

- **Downtown** – The 2015 update to the Downtown Business District Master Plan details design standards for roadways with an emphasis on pedestrian access and recommendations for bicycle lanes and multi-use paths. A pedestrian underpass at the viaduct on Baker Street, a priority project in city planning documents for more than a decade, will be constructed in 2020. The Plan also recognizes the need to improve traffic flow along the US 93 corridor. It designates streets for "Auto Mobility," "Shopping Loop," and "Pedestrian Friendly." The Plan recommends widening Baker Street to improve traffic circulation. (See Figure 7.3)

- **Whitefish Transportation Plan** – The City is updating the Whitefish Transportation Plan to identify improvements to the transportation system. The Plan addresses road network improvements, capacity issues, and alternative modes of transportation.
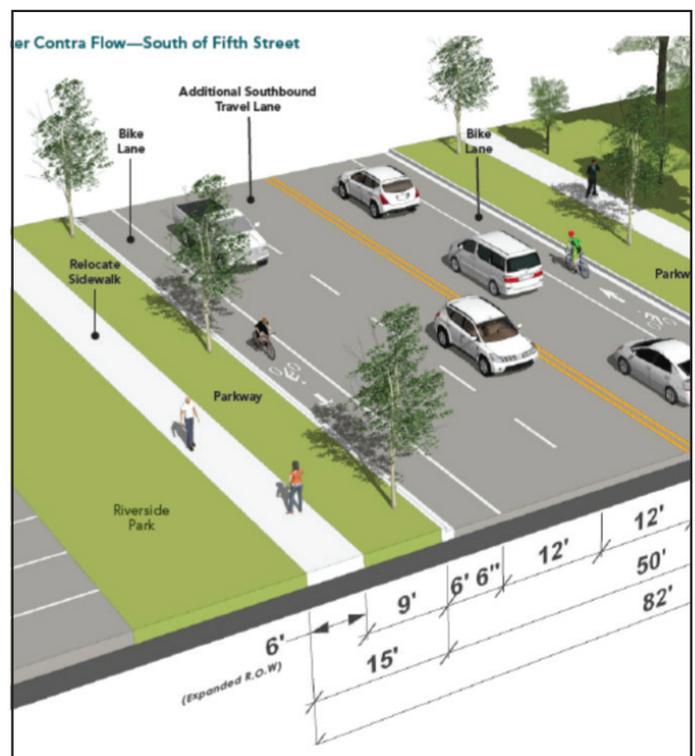

Figure 7.3: Proposed Baker Street Cross Section

- **US 93 Whitefish Urban Corridor Study** – Montana Department of Transportation is updating the US 93 Whitefish Urban Corridor Study. MDT is working with a local committee to develop the Plan. . The purpose of this study is to determine the feasibility, scope and budget associated with improvement options on US-93 and other associated streets such as Baker Ave. and 13th St. Public communication and outreach are essential components of the feasibility study and if a solution is determined to be feasible, the project will advance to the design phase with MDT.

- **Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan** – The Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan was adopted in 2017. Transportation recommendations included reserving right-of-way for future improvements such as turn lanes and intersection improvements. Per the 2009 Whitefish Transportation Plan, the Plan recommends that as new development occurs, the street will include a new north-south collector street east of Denver Street.

C. PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLES

A "walkable" community offers multiple benefits such as promoting wellness, reducing parking needs, reducing vehicle emissions, and contributing to overall livability. Visitors to the community value the ease of walking or biking around a community. Figure 7.4 shows the network of sidewalks, paved trails and striped bike paths for pedestrian and bicycle access in Whitefish. The Whitefish Trail network on States Trust lands is a system of natural trails that are readily accessible from the City. The Connect Whitefish: Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan has a focus on safety, connectivity, and wayfinding:

- **Safety** – Reducing pedestrian–bike-auto conflicts and maintaining trails to prevent falls are key safety issues. The Plan recommends improvements to crosswalks, road markings, signage, and education to establish a safe and comfortable system of trails and pedestrian facilities. Designs should accommodate people of all abilities.

- **Connectivity** – Some neighborhoods lack sidewalks, and there are gaps in the existing trail network. The Plan recommends linking key destinations such as city and parks. A long-term goal is to connect to a county-wide trail network on state and county roads.

- **Wayfinding** – Per the recommendations in the Master Plan, the City installed directional signage along shared use paths in town.

1. Other Trends

- **Bike tourists** often spend time in destination towns and seek bike infrastructure and services. Bicycle tourism is a growing sector. Whitefish State Park bicycle campsites, and the Whitefish Bike Retreat located in the Beaver Lake area, are examples of facilities for this constituency.

Figure 7.4: Bike Trails in Whitefish – Core Area

- **E-Bikes** – Starting in the year 2020, e-bikes will be permitted in Glacier National Park. An outfitter has requested a permit, and it is likely that e-bikes will be expanded to other parts of the county. Private bike share companies are exploring establishing operations in Missoula.

- **Funding** – Sources for construction of new trails include resort tax, impact fees, and state and federal grants. Tax Increment Finance Funds can be used for trail construction. Maintenance funds typically come from city and county general funds. Ongoing operation and maintenance are a challenge as new trails are built. Bozeman is considering a parks and trails special district to establish an ongoing revenue source for maintenance.

Figure 7.5: Wayfinding Sign

2. Existing Resources & Best Practices

- **Whitefish Pedestrian and Bicycle Path Advisory Committee** – http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/boards-and-committees/pedestrian-and-bicycle-path-advisory-committee.php

- **Montana Department of Transportation** – Montana Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan, https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/pedbike/

- **Montana FWP** – Recreational Trails Program, http://stateparks.mt.gov/recreation/rtpGrants.html

- **Institute of Transportation and Development Policy** – Bikeshare Planning Guide, https://www.transformative-mobility.org/assets/publications/The-Bikeshare-Planning-Guide-ITDP-Datei.pdf

- **JeffCo Trails Plan, Jefferson County, CO** – https://www.jeffcotrailsplan.org/

- **Bonner County Trails Plan ID** – https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/Bonner%20County%20Trails%20Plan.pdf

Figure 7.6: E-Bike Docking Station

D. PARKING

The Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan community survey indicated that downtown parking was a primary concern of residents. Respondents commented that there is a severe shortage of parking, and some residents indicated that they avoid downtown during summer months due to the lack of parking. Lack of parking causes drivers to circle the blocks to find available spaces and this contributes to traffic congestion. Traffic movements are further impeded by visitors who are not familiar with the City and drive around looking for parking. In 2019, the City commissioned the Whitefish Parking Management Plan. The Plan notes that employees/business owners are using on-street parking and this reduces the number of available customer parking spots. The multiple strategies in the Plan are most effective when they reinforce and complement each other. (See Figure 7.7) In addition to downtown, other considerations for parking include sustainable parking lot design, parking facilities for new mobility options (electric vehicles, car share, and bike share), and overflow parking at City Beach.

Enforcement & Management	Parking Ambassador and Citation Managment Software Permit parking zones (employees, residential zones) Signage, curb painting, striping
Technology	Software (i.e. license plate recognition) Mobile Apps (i.e. parking guidance system) Smart parking lot - smart lights, smart trash cans,
Code Review	Administrative authority to enact certain parking restrictions Regulate transportation companies/ride share drop off areas Regulate for alley parking/re-parking/bike share docking areas
Alternative Modes	Expand Shuttles - Public Transit Car pool incentives - Park-N-Ride Lots Bike-Pedestrian-Transit Integration
Special Event	Peak Period Shuttles Desginate areas for drop off/pick-up Shared parking agreements with private lots
Future	Dynamic Pricing - Paid Parking Evaluate new parking structure Plan for e-bikes, car sharing, automous vehicles

Figure 7.7: Parking Strategies from 2019 Whitefish Parking Management Plan

Existing Resources & Best Practices

• **Park City, UT** – Mobile parking app. https://www.parkcity.org/departments/parking/mobile-app

• **Sustainable Parking Design** – Charging stations, rainwa¬ter collectors, efficient lighting, reducing impervious areas, shading, and other features are examples of sustainable designs. https://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/9735/Green-Sustainable-Parking-Guide-2_10_2016-Web

• **Car Sharing Laws** – http://www.ncsl.org/research/transportation/car-sharing-state-laws-and-legislation.aspx

E. TRANSIT – MOBILITY

Transit options reduce congestion, decrease emissions, and increase transportation options. Additionally, studies indicate that fewer Millennials have driver's licenses and that international visitors often have expectations for transit services when they travel. Ridership on Eagle Transit is primarily residents. While the Snow Bus provides services for both visitors and local employees.

1. Existing Services

Name	Description
Eagle Transit	Fixed route service is operated by Flathead County and receives funding from the Federal Transit Administration. Service is provided on weekdays 7:00 am-6:00 pm in Kalispell, Whitefish, and Columbia Falls and on Intercity routes. Also operates dial-a-ride paratransit services by appointment for persons with disabilities. In the summer, Eagle Transit has partnered with Glacier National Park to offer shuttle service to the park and within the park boundaries. Flathead County ended this arrangement in 2019 and GNP is evaluating options for services. Eagle Transit is evaluating a new model for providing transit services that would create an integrated public transportation system to manage visitors and benefit the Park and the gateway communities. The system would rely on collaboration from a variety of partners. http://flathead.mt.gov/eagle/
Snow Bus	The S.N.O.W. (Shuttle Network Of Whitefish) Bus is a private bus operated by Whitefish businesses. The routes run from Mountain Mall to the Whitefish Mountain Resort. The S.N.O.W. Bus operates in the summer, as well as during the main winter/ski season. The S.N.O.W bus has a "Snowbus" tracker app to update riders on bus location. https://skiwhitefish.com/snowbus/
Flathead Transit	A service of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) that links Whitefish to Missoula, whereby people can transfer to the Jefferson Lines service, which is part of the larger Greyhound network. http://www.csktdhrd.org/transportation/flathead-transit
Shuttles	Several hotels in Whitefish offer shuttle services for their guests to the airport, ski area, downtown, and other points of interest in Whitefish. Major events such as skijoring and music festival have offered shuttle services.
Private Taxi / Ride Share	Taxi and rideshare (Uber) services are available in Whitefish.
Multi-Modal Center	To coordinate bus services and to integrate with pedestrian and bike traffic, the City has constructed a multi-modal transfer stop north of the library. The project includes a bus shelter, bike racks, and re-striping of the parking lot.

2. Transit Report

The Western Transportation Institute completed a transit study for the City in 2019.
The recommendations in the report included:

• Coordinate scheduling and routes between Eagle Transit and the S.N.O.W Bus. Two places that the buses could meet to transfer passengers include the Mountain Mall or the Multi-Modal Center near Depot Park.

• Promote van pool and carpool programs. This requires coordination or partnerships with employers and was recommended as a mid-term priority. Employee bicycle fleets are another option discussed in the report.

• Identify park-n-ride lots for special events and evaluate future potential as commuter lots. The report identifies potential sites for a park-n-ride lot. All sites are located south of the railroad tracks. The Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan recommends a park-n-ride north of the tracks.

• Improve marketing and outreach to promote transit services, including signage, print materials, and electronic media.

• Integrate biking and bike share facilities with transit such as bike racks located near shelters, crosswalk striping, and appropriate signage. Post bike route maps at shelters and provide buses that can carry bicycles.

• Funding – FTA Section 5311 funding through the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) may help offset some costs associated with transit and park-n-ride lots. MDT safety grants can be used to design bus stops for better pedestrian safety. Resort tax for trail connections to buses.

3. New Mobility

New mobility is a term that refers to ride share, bike share, car share, and transit services. Technology platforms are a critical component of new mobility transportation modes to provide on-demand flexible services, enhance trip planning, and provide incentives for more sustainable and affordable options. Such services are becoming more common and offer innovative solutions to address local transportation issues. Urban areas are integrating these new mobility services into transportation planning for cars, pedestrians, and bikes.

Employers cited the expense, and/or lack of transportation, as an obstacle to hiring employees who live in Kalispell, Columbia Falls, or other towns.
The average annual cost of owning and operating a car in Flathead County is $5623.
(Source: ESRI Business Analysis. Includes car payments, gas, insurance and maintenance.)

4. Resources and Best Practices

• **Enterprise Car Share** – Van Pool Program. https://www.enterprise.com/en/carshare.html

• **Federal Highway Administration** – Transit Stop Safety Audit.
   https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/ped_transit/ped_transguide/

• **Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center** – Resources, examples, and webinars on bike share systems.
   http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/topics/bikeshare.cfm

• **Missoula-Ravalli Transportation Management Association** – Vanpool/carpool. http://www.mrtma.org/

• **Sandpoint Pend Oreille Transit (SPOT)** – Example of marketing through web site. https://spotbus.org/

• **Jackson Hole START Bus** – https://www.jacksonwy.gov/363/START-Bus

F. AIR AND RAIL SERVICE

1. Amtrak

The Empire Builder provides passenger service between Seattle and Chicago. The Whitefish Station has the highest ridership in Montana. Figure 7.8 shows a drop in ridership in 2014/15 due to major maintenance on the rail line. Ridership is also influenced by activity in the oil fields in North Dakota. Amtrak operates under the National Passenger Railroad Corporation. The Empire Builder is part of the "National Network" long distance route and receives an annual appropriation from Congress. It is important to communicate the importance of passenger service in Whitefish to the Congressional delegation to assure continued funding for this service. (Empire Builder Advocates, https://www.ebtrain.net/)
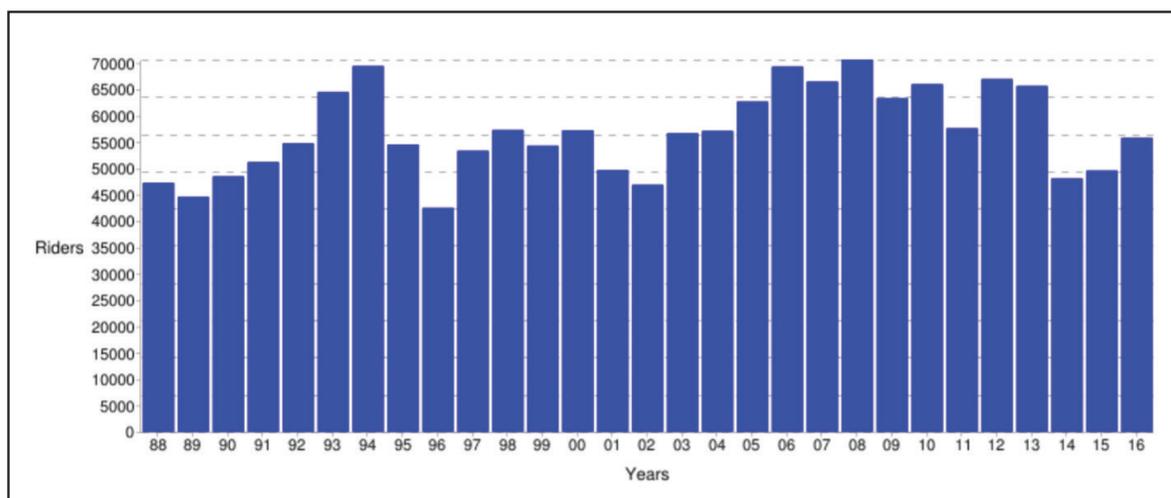
Figure 7.8: Amtrak Ridership in Whitefish, MT, 1988-2016
Source: http://itrr.umt.edu/interactive-data/default.php and https://www.amtrak.com

2. Air Travel

Figure 7.9 illustrates a steady increase in airport deboardings at Glacier Park International Airport. This has corresponded with increase in visitation, population growth, and business development and incentives. The Glacier Airline Enhancement and Retention Outreach (AERO) is a partnership of local organizations and business that partner with Glacier International to attract expanded services through minimum revenue guarantees for direct flights from targeted cities. http://glacier-aero.com/
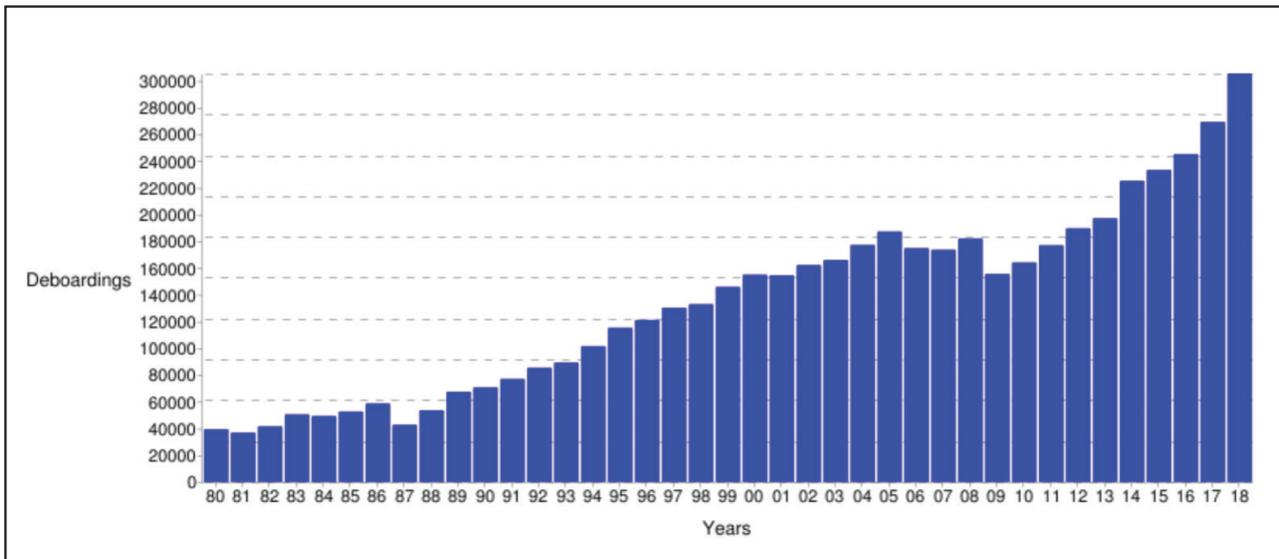
Figure 7.9: Airport Deboardings at Glacier Park International Airport, 1980 - 2018
Source: http://itrr.umt.edu/interactive-data/default.php

G STRATEGIES & ACTION ITEMS

1. Develop outreach materials and on-line apps to promote safety, transit, carpooling, and parking alternatives.

- Montana Dept. of Transportation, Vision Zero resources, https://mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/
- See Parking Management Plan for messaging strategies for parking
- See Whitefish Transit study for messaging strategies for transit. Partner with transit providers.
- https://rideamigos.com/

2. Incorporate recommendations from the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan into updates of transportation planning documents.

- Public Works Department; Montana Department of Transportation
- Coordinate transportation plans with US 93 South Corridor Plan, Wisconsin Avenue Corridor Plan, US 93 West Corridor Plan, Downtown Plan, Eagle Transit Plan, and Parking Management Plan

3. Strengthen the east-west grid system with extension of 18th Street, 13th Street and Denver Avenue and other roadways identified in the upcoming transportation plan update.

- Evaluate priority projects and potential financing alternatives
- Require appropriate building setback so new development doesn't encroach on future rights-of-way

4. Establish special event shuttles and promote best practices in planning for traffic management, reducing impaired driving and parking for special events.

- Whitefish CVB, Whitefish Police, Flathead County Sheriff, Chamber, private businesses
- Federal Highway Administration – Transportation Planning for Planned Special Events https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop11012/fhwahop11012.pdf
- https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/grants/impaired-driving-non-law-enforcement-mini-grant.pdf

5. Adopt guidelines for parking lot design to include sustainability and smart parking technologies.

- Public Works Department, Design Review Standards
- EPA – Green Parking Lot Resource Guide, http://www.streamteamok.net/Doc_link/Green%20Parking%20Lot%20Guide%20(final).PDF

6. Examine the feasibility of establishing a pilot program for car share with major employers.

- Partners – Montana West Economic Development, Eagle Transit, car rentals businesses, local employers https://scta.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SCTA_CarShareFeasibilityStudy.pdf
- Funding – Foundation Grants, Business Contributions

7. Coordinate with partners on planning for a valley wide transit system and integrate bike – transit – pedestrian modes into design of transit stops.

- Eagle Transit, S.N.O.W Bus, Cities of Whitefish, Kalispell, Columbia Falls, Glacier National Park
- Federal Transit Administration, https://www.transit.dot.gov/
- Montana Department of Transportation – Transportation Alternatives Program Grants, Safety Grants https://www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/ta_application.shtml

8. Establish park-n-ride lots, downtown employee parking permit system and parking demand management.

- City of Whitefish Transit Report, Parking Management Report
- Funding for feasibility studies, https://mainstreetmontanaproject.com/resources/

9. Support efforts to fund, construct and maintain a trail system that provides connectivity between city trails, county trails and recreational trails.

- Whitefish Trail Committee, Whitefish Legacy Partners, Montana Department of Transportation, Flathead County, Non-profit biking organizations
- Bozeman Parks and Trails Special District, https://www.bozeman.net/city-projects/parks-and-trails-district

10. Adopt resolution to support passenger rail in the Flathead.

- National Rail Passengers Organization, https://www.railpassengers.org/

11. Continue to work with partners to improve year-round air service in the Flathead Valley

- Glacier AERO, http://glacier-aero.com/

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION

"We can say with confidence that the problem will only get worse unless we as a community choose to take action."

"With the understanding that visitation is bound to increase, we need to proceed with a plan."
<div align="right">Survey Comments</div>

A. SYSTEMS APPROACH

A systems approach recognizes the interrelatedness of different elements and pursues partnerships to accomplish mutual goals. Targeting actions to achieve multiple objectives benefits a variety of stakeholders and builds support for new initiatives. Ongoing communication among stakeholders is essential to respond to new challenges and opportunities. The approach recognizes that community systems are complex and dynamic. These systems continually change to reflect shifting trends and require periodic evaluation to assess the effectiveness of strategic actions.

For instance, changes in one of the STMP focus area can ripple through other parts of the system. A systems approach allows the City, CVB and partner organizations to respond to changing demands caused by tourism growth as well as evolving consumer preferences. Successful implementation plans account for each of the following interdependent factors that contribute to lasting change.

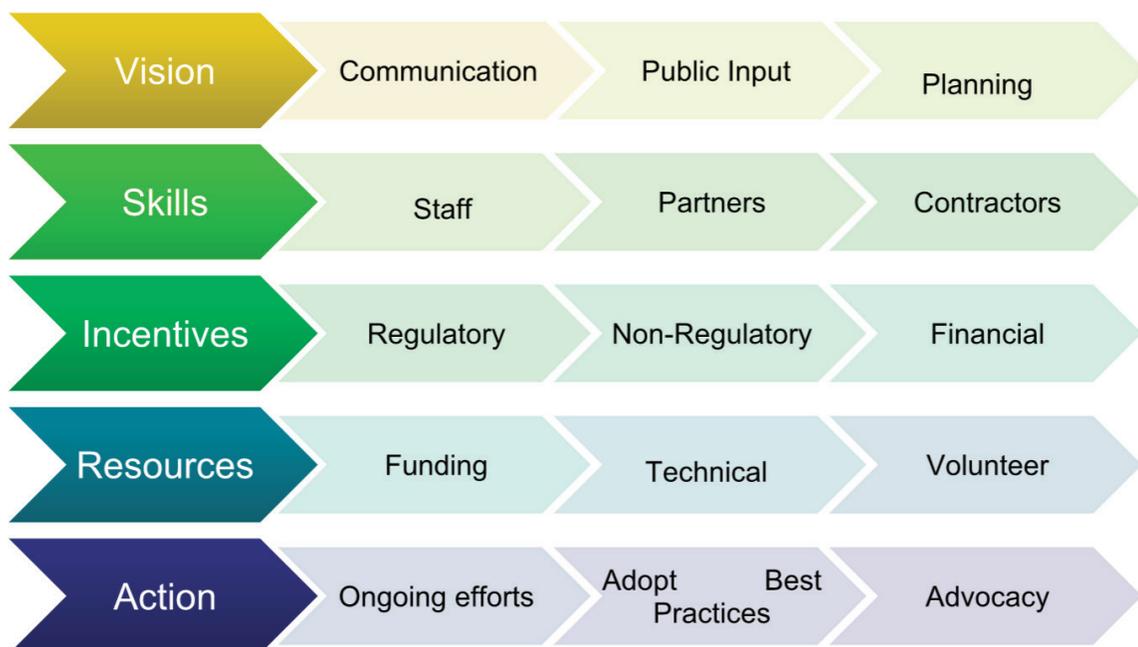| Vision	Communication	Public Input	Planning
Skills	Staff	Partners	Contractors
Incentives	Regulatory	Non-Regulatory	Financial
Resources	Funding	Technical	Volunteer
Action	Ongoing efforts	Adopt Best Practices	Advocacy

Figure 8.1: Managing Complex change

B. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This chapter compiles the implementation recommendations from the five focus areas and groups them by type of activity. High priority action items represent issues that ranked high with community members and stakeholders or are necessary to build capacity for effective change. The remaining action items should be reviewed annually to assign priorities for future timeframes. Several entities will have key roles and responsibility for implementing the Plan. They include:

City of Whitefish – The City of Whitefish initiated the planning process with a resolution in 2018 and formally adopted the Plan in 2020. The Plan will provide the strategic vision that will be incorporated with other planning initiatives. (Growth Policy, Transportation Plan, Downtown Business District Master Plan, Parking Master Plan, Housing Strategic Plan and others) Decisions on utilizing Resort Tax revenues, applying for grants, coordinating with other agencies, and making capital investments will be guided by the Plan recommendations.

The City Council will direct staff on implementation of the Plan and other partner organizations will be able to advocate for policies and programs. The City also has several Boards and Committees that are critical to implementation activities. Outreach to these Committee is an important aspect of engaging them in the strategic vision of the STMP.

Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau (CVB) – The Whitefish CVB is the designated non-profit receiving lodging tax revenues for visitor promotion. (MCA 15-16-212). The STMP provides guidance on messaging for branding, marketing and promotional materials and provides guidance on coordination with partner organizations. The CVB works with the Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau Advisory Board and submits an annual marketing plan to the City Council for approval.

Stakeholder Organizations – Implementation of the Plan relies on working with multiple groups. Collaborations may include such activities as engaging the community, conducting outreach, adopting marketing strategies, establishing policy and initiating new projects. Key stakeholders include:

• Tourism Agencies (MT Office of Tourism, Glacier Country Tourism Regional Commission)

• County (Solid Waste Board, Eagle Transit, Planning, Parks & Rec)

• State Agencies (Dept. of Transportation, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, DNRC, DEQ, Dept. of Commerce, Office of Outdoor Recreation)

• Economic Development Agencies (Chamber of Commerce, Montana West Economic Development)

- Education (Whitefish Schools, Flathead Valley Community College, University of Montana)

- Civic Groups (Whitefish Housing Authority, Whitefish Community Foundation, various non-profit organizations)

- Elected Officials (City council, county commission, state legislators, congressional staff)

C. HIGH PRIORITY "CAPACITY BUILDING" ACTIONS

Initiatives that fail to incorporate all the factors of complex change are often ineffective and result in frustration for project partners. To avoid failed efforts, the following actions build capacity and become a foundation for successful outcomes. These actions should be undertaken in the first year following adoption of the Plan.

1. Education – Outreach

Communication and outreach is critical for the Plan to be effective and to establish priorities. Outreach to tourists can encourage low impact travel practices while outreach to community members can engage them in local solutions. Outreach and educational materials include web pages, social media, displays, tours, events, educational signs, news media campaigns, and promotional materials. The Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau will be the lead on this task and have already allocated funds for this effort. Outreach topics should include the following:

- Local education for habit changing initiatives surrounding encouraging more walking and biking, carpooling, school drop off and pickup habits, any habits that contribute to gridlock or overcrowding, social media habits, and other local solutions

- Resort tax benefits and information on reauthorization of the resort tax

- Sustainable travel practices: Recycling, reducing carbon footprint, supporting local businesses & programs, conservation

- Tourism benefits and City efforts to reduce impacts of increased visitation

- Promote transportation alternatives: Transit, car/van pooling, park and ride

- Pedestrian and bike safety, road safety

- Location of parking spaces, parking rules, employee parking guidelines

- Responsible recreation: Leave no trace principles, responsible boating, reducing wildlife/human conflicts, social media practices

- Guidelines for year-round water conservation practices & updates on water/wastewater infrastructure improvements

- Best practices to protect water quality: Lakeshore-riparian area protection, reduce non-point pollution, protect against aquatic invasive species

- Landlord education: Short term rentals, landlord/renter relationships, property maintenance

- Wildfire topics: Emergency preparedness for wildfire, dealing with wildfire smoke, wildfire mitigation/ prevention

- Green business practices: Reduce waste, energy/water conservation, green building

2. Tourism Standing Committee

The City Council will appoint a standing committee to oversee the recommendations of the Plan with a long-term goal of hiring a "sustainability coordinator" that will function to implement the "Climate Action Plan" as well as the STMP.

3. Business Survey

A survey of business owners will determine the level of support for initiatives and recommendations from the STMP. Results from the survey will be used to inventory existing efforts, identify new opportunities, and facilitate potential partnerships. CVB will take the lead with assistance from the Chamber of Commerce, Montana West Economic Development and Flathead Valley Community College on survey design and administration. Survey topics include:

- "Buy local" campaigns – What types of activities would best support local businesses (directories, advertising, promotions, Whitefish bucks)

- Green certification for businesses – What types of programs are businesses already using

- Work force development. (Day care, car sharing, apprenticeships)

4. Benchmarking & Data Collection

Benchmarking tools, or "community indicators" are used to evaluate planning policies and programs over time. Decision makers can use the tools to measure progress, adjust program priorities and respond to new opportunities. Public participation is essential to ensure that benchmarks reflect community vision and values. The benchmarking effort is also a means to keep stakeholders engaged in the implementation process. Data in the STMP, CVB resources and ITRR can provide baseline data. This effort will include an ongoing plan for data collection. Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau will lead the project by a convening a stakeholder task force to undertake this task. Benchmarking resources include:

- Global Sustainable Tourism Council, https://www.gstcouncil.org/

- http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/indicators

- https://communityindicators.net/

D. HIGH PRIORITY ISSUE ORIENTED ACTIONS

The following tables highlight "High Priority" policy/planning actions. These "high priority" actions either respond to rapidly changing trends that are having a significant impact on the community or require a timely involvement in a policy/legislative actions that will be considered within the upcoming year.

1. **Short-Term Rentals:** The number of short-term rentals has grown dramatically since 2017 when the Whitefish Housing Strategic Plan was adopted. While the City has an active enforcement program, many of the new vacation rentals are legal and are being constructed in areas that are zoned for such units within the City or in the unincorporated areas in the Whitefish zip code.

Task	Timeframe
Enforcement – Continue using STR software, monitoring trends and coordinate with the county on short-term rental enforcement in the zip-code (Planning Dept.).	Ongoing
Education – Realtor/Landlord workshop on short-term rental compliance (Whitefish Strategic Housing Committee).	Fall, 2020
Zoning – Address in Growth Policy to limit new zoning for short term rentals, parking minimums & restrict short term rentals in accessory dwelling units (Planning Dept.).	See Strategic Housing Plan for more detail
Incentives to convert STR to long-term rentals (Whitefish Strategic Housing Committee).	Top-tier priority in workforce housing strategic plan

2. **Recycling:** Changes in recycling market have resulted in a limited market for recyclables. Some waste haulers are no longer accepting plastics and there are limited options for glass recycling. There are issues at drop-off sites with contamination of materials. Businesses report that consumers and visitors frequently comment about the lack of recycling options.

Task	Timeframe
Educate businesses, visitors and residents on proper recycling practices and encourage practices to reduce overall waste (Whitefish Climate Action Plan Committee).	Coordinate with Outreach efforts
Work with partners to research best practices for recycling and host local workshops (Climate Action Committee, Flathead County Solid Waste Board, DEQ, Kalispell, Columbia Falls, solid waste haulers, and recyclers).	2020
Seek grants to incentivize local use of recycled materials (Find non-profit partner to take lead).	Follow-up on research from previous task
Expand opportunities for local use of recycled glass in projects such as landscaping and road construction (Public Works, Climate Action Committee, recycling businesses, and private sector).	Ongoing

3. **Funding:** The Montana Legislature will be in session in 2021 and will be passing a budget that may impact funding for many of the programs discussed in the STMP. Communicating priorities to elected officials is important to secure ongoing funding and support for the following programs:

- Transportation – Transit, passenger rail, trails, roads, safety, bike-pedestrian facilities, and other alternative transportation
- Lodging Tax
- Infrastructure – Water, sewer, public facilities, broadband, and other infrastructure
- Community Development & Main Street grants
- Public land access, trails, state parks, fishing access
- Recreation management on State Trust Land
- Housing Programs

Task	Timeframe
Contact affiliate organizations to determine if matters of interest are being monitored and to coordinate on a response to proposed bills (City, CVB, and other stakeholders).	Fall 2020
Submit testimony in writing or in person on specific legislation of interest. Encourage partners to submit testimony (City, CVB, and other stakeholders).	Jan-March 2021
Engage in ongoing communication and advocacy to increase awareness and build support following the legislative session (City, CVB, and other stakeholders).	Ongoing
Send out periodic updates to stakeholders and include legislative matters as part outreach.	Coordinate with Tourism Summit

4. **Wildfire Preparedness:** The entire City of Whitefish and surrounding area is located within the Wildland – Urban Interface (WUI). There are critical life safety concerns that are exacerbated when peak summer crowds are in town during the height of wildfire season. The County is updating the Community Wildfire Protection Plan and the City is participating in the Firesafe Communities program. This offers an opportunity for the City to be engaged in wildfire preparedness efforts.

Task	Timeframe
Partner with DNRC and Climate Action Plan Committee on Wildfire Prepared workshop.	Spring 2020
Include information on wildfire preparedness in education and outreach materials.	2020
Participate in update of the Flathead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).	TBD
Work with DNRC to promote residential fire audits.	Ongoing

5. **Transportation – Transit – Bike – Pedestrian:** Public participation indicated that transportation issues were a priority with members of the public. Recommendations to address these issues included expanding transit options, promoting alternative transportation, and expanding the bike/pedestrian trail network. Eagle Transit is undertaking a planning effort for providing transit services.

Task	Timeframe
Promote alternative modes of transportation such as walking routes, biking, carpool and transit through outreach, on-line apps and designing integrated pedestrian-bike-transit designs.	2020
Reduce downtown congestion through employee parking permit program and special event shuttle policies per the recommendations in the Master Parking Plan.	2020
Establish a pilot park-n-ride lots for employees per the Whitefish Transit plan recommendations.	2021
Participate in the countywide transit planning process to promote routes that will address needs of employees in Whitefish and provide a direct route to Glacier National Park.	2020-2021

E. MARKETING – STRATEGIES

Marketing strategies include refinement of the Whitefish brand materials (marketing, trip planning) efforts to incorporate messaging about sustainable travel in marketing, trip planning and on-site materials. A key to sustainability is to avoid promotion that will increase visitor numbers in the peak summer months. There was strong support to continue successful marketing strategies to attract low-impact visitors in the off-peak season and to pursue new markets that would target sustainability-oriented travelers to visit Whitefish in non-peak shoulder seasons.

Refine Branding & Messaging (2021) → Develop marketing for high priority travelers (2021) → Implement messaging (Ongoing) → Promote off-Season (Fall-Spring)

Figure 8.2: Example of process for developing marketing strategies

High Priority Marketing Strategies

- Review messaging and branding efforts to make sure they are consistent with sustainable travel and recreation practices.

- Work with employers, FVCC and partners on training workshops/materials for hospitality/seasonal workers regarding communications about sustainability and tourism impacts.

- Strategically target segments of travelers interested in sustainability. Share data and information from Tapestry profiles with local businesses to assist with targeted marketing efforts.

- Work with CVB and other organizations to promote winter and off-season and coordinate with local organizations to continue organizing events in the shoulder seasons.

- Promote "Farm-to-Table" local food and microbrewing/distillery/wine products and businesses.

- Provide grants for activities that will strengthen tourism in the shoulder season.

- Use off-peak seasons to host educational events with topics of interest to residents and visitors who share sustainability values.

- Emphasize "Experiential" retail to promote local businesses (painting, cooking, and other classes hosted by local retailers).

- Strategically market off-season "Bleisure" opportunities (combining business trips with leisure opportunities).

- Market "Voluntourism" opportunities to support local non-profits and increase off-season visitation.

Lead Agency & Partners: The CVB is the lead in marketing efforts. The City of Whitefish Convention and Visitor Tourism Board should share strategies with the Montana Office of Tourism and Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission that market Montana and Whitefish to promote complementary messaging. Coordinate evaluation of branding and messaging with results of business survey.

F. COORDINATION & PLANNING ACTIONS

Implementation often relies on supporting, or expanding, existing plans and programs by the City, county, state, and other agencies. Such support may include increasing awareness, communicating priorities, providing funding, and establishing new programs. The City and CVB should actively engage in planning processes to advance the SMTP goals. Such engagement may involve participating on task forces or committees, attending meetings, reviewing documents, drafting letters of support, or providing public comments. Community engagement is a key pillar of the STMP that underlies all public processes and is a critical component of implementation strategies.

Task	Comments
Coordinate with Whitefish Strategic housing Task Force on implementing "Workforce Housing Strategic Plan."	STMP recommends that the Task Force continue with Tier 1 implementation and give priority to converting short term rentals to workforce housing, landlord education, and homeownership programs.
Coordinate with partners (Eagle Transit, S.N.O.W. Bus, Glacier National Park, and others) to develop solutions on transit and to address following priority needs: 1. Direct route from Whitefish to Glacier National Park 2. Address needs of commuters who work in Whitefish 3. Mobility alternatives (car sharing, park & ride, and van pooling)	A planning process for Eagle Transit is underway. CVB and City representatives should engage in the process and communicate STMP goals and priorities.
Coordinate with Whitefish Parks & Trail Committee, Whitefish Legacy Partners & Flathead County Parks and Recreation on trail connectivity and safety. Update trail user policies to reflect increase use on trails (i.e. dogs, trailhead parking, and general trail etiquette).	City adopted trail plan in 2017. County adopted an update to the Trails Master Plan 2020. Continue to engage with the trail groups through participation on committees, letters of support, partnerships, and public comments on the trail projects.
Support Climate Action Committee implementation of sustainability strategies in the Whitefish Climate Action Plan.	Work with CAP Committee to prioritize recycling and wildfire preparedness efforts. Highlight sustainability strategies at tourism summit. Include questions on green business practices in survey. Include sustainability strategies in outreach efforts. Write letters of support for grants and other programs.
Update as needed and implement Downtown Business District Master Plan to coordinate with other planning processes and the US 93 Urban Core Transportation Plan.	Plan was adopted in 2015. An update as needed to account for the following: • Growing short-term rental properties being developed in downtown • Adoption of Parking Management Plan • Adoption of the "Connect Whitefish Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan" in 2017 • Adoption of "Climate Action Plan" • US 93 Urban Core Planning process underway • Whitefish Transit Plan with recommendations for ride share lots

Task	Comments
Coordinate with Montana West Economic Development Chamber of Commerce, FVCC and businesses on the following issues in the STMP: • Entrepreneurship/small business development • Workforce issues – Day care, car share apprenticeships, and other strategies • AERO – Year-Round flights • Business incubator – Commercial space inventory • Investment cooperative	Solicit assistance with promoting STMP survey. City Council representative on MWED/FCEDA Board can communicate high priority issues. Include economic development partners in tourism summit and business survey efforts. Participate in next update of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to include STMP goals.
Coordinate with public safety agencies and public health officials on crisis communication, special event planning, hazard mitigation, and wildfire preparedness.	Participate in Fire Safe program & mitigate health effects from wildfire smoke. Participate in county update of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan. Coordination between agencies on pre-planning for special events and on crisis communication. Response plan with BNSF for potential spills.
Coordinate with housing providers and social service agencies on homeless issues.	Support efforts by Whitefish Community Foundation, Community Action Partnership, and other non-profits to address issue by letters of support, contributions to programs, and participating in events or forums.
Coordinate with FWP, Office of Outdoor Recreation and conservation organizations on issues such as public land access, aquatic invasive species (AIS), wildlife-human conflicts (i.e. avoid practices that condition wildlife to humans, protect wildlife corridors, reduce vehicle collisions, and avoid wildlife conflicts while recreating).	Support conservation easements and increasing public land access. Coordinate with Whitefish Lake Institute and FWP to continue AIS in inspections and education. Adopt urban wildlife plan. Require bear-proof containers. Education and outreach.
Update development codes and design standards to implement STMP goals including: • Architectural design standards • Historic preservation • Smart Parking – Sustainable Parking Designs • Dig Once – Open Trench policies for broadband • Sustainable infrastructure • Gateway signage and landscaping	Coordinate with updates of city growth policy, land development codes, engineering standards and design guidelines. Conduct historic preservation survey as basis for developing design guides and regulations. Adopt design standard from US 93 South Corridor Plan, Wisconsin Av. Corridor Plan & Downtown Business District Plan.
Coordinate with Montana Department of Transportation, Public Works Department, and County Road Department regarding transportation, parking, and mobility recommendations. Reflect STMP goals and recommendations in the update of the Whitefish Transportation Plan.	Undertake projects for employee parking and enforcement based on the Parking Management Plan. The Whitefish Transportation Plan is being updated in 2020 and will evaluate improvements to the transportation network. Establish park-n-ride lots based on the Whitefish Transit Plan.

G. WORK PROGRAM

	2020		2021				2022
	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	1st Qtr
Education -Outreach Campaign Dev.	■	■	■				
Education – Outreach Implementation		■	■	■	■	■	
Appoint Tourism Standing Committee		■					
Business Survey		■	■				
Recycling Research		■	■				
Fire Preparedness Workshop - Audits	■				■		
Legislative Outreach		■	■	■			
Update Trail User Policies			■	■			
Summer/Special Event Shuttle – Policies		■				■	
Benchmarking – Data Collection Project				■	■	■	
Refine Whitefish Brand Guides				■			
Update STR Zoning-Parking regulations.				■	■		
Incentivize STR conversion to workforce housing				■	■	■	■
Downtown Employee Parking permit	■	■	■				
Pilot Park-N-Ride – Carpool program						■	■
Coordination Activities							
US 93 Urban Core Transportation Plan	▨	▨	▨				
Whitefish Transportation Plan	▨	▨	▨				
County Transit Plan	▨	▨	▨				
Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan	▨	▨	▨	▨			
City Growth Policy Update						▨	▨

To Be Scheduled:

- Landlord – Realtor Education
- Day Care Initiative
- Car share Feasibility Study (If employer interest)
- Worker Apprenticeship Programs thru FVCC
- Business Incubator
- Commercial Space Inventory
- Impaired Driving Prevention Grant
- Commercial space inventory
- Local Investment Cooperative
- Urban Wildlife Management Plan
- Historic Preservation Survey
- Gateway Treatments
- Update Architectural Design Guidelines
- Dig Once/Open Trench Policies
- Update BNSF response plan
- Sustainable/smart parking designs
- County zoning – proposed amendments
- Homeless prevention
- Broadband Task Force
- Coordinate with public health on air quality

APPENDIX A: LIFE MODE CATEGORIES

LifeMode 6 – Cozy Country Living: 52.5% in Whitefish (The Great Outdoors, Rural Resort Dwellers, Green Acres segments)

- Empty nesters in bucolic settings
- Largest Tapestry group, almost half of households located in the Midwest
- Homeowners with pets, residing in single-family dwellings in rural areas; almost 30% have 3 or more vehicles and, therefore, auto loans
- Politically conservative and believe in the importance of buying American
- Own domestic trucks, motorcycles, and ATVs/UTVs
- Prefer to eat at home, shop at discount retail stores (especially Walmart), bank in person, and spend little time online
- Own every tool and piece of equipment imaginable to maintain their homes, vehicles, vegetable gardens, and lawns
- Listen to country music, watch auto racing on TV, and play the lottery; enjoy outdoor activities, such as fishing, hunting, camping, boating, and even bird watching

LifeMode 5 – GenXurban: 27.5% in Whitefish (In Style, Parks and Rec)

- Gen X in middle age; families with fewer kids and a mortgage
- Second largest Tapestry group, comprised of Gen X married couples, and a growing population of retirees
- About a fifth of residents are 65 or older; about a fourth of households have retirement income
- Own older single-family homes in urban areas, with 1 or 2 vehicles
- Live and work in the same county, creating shorter commute times
- Invest wisely, well-insured, comfortable banking online or in person
- News junkies (read a daily newspaper, watch news on TV, and go online for news)
- Enjoy reading, renting movies, playing board games and cards, doing crossword puzzles, going to museums and rock concerts, dining out, and walking for exercise

LifeMode 11 – Midtown Singles: 12% in Whitefish (Set to Impress)

- Millennials on the move—single, diverse, urban
- Millennials seeking affordable rents in apartment buildings
- Work in service and unskilled positions, usually close to home or public transportation
- Single parents depend on their paycheck to buy supplies for their very young children
- Midtown Singles embrace the Internet, for social networking and downloading content
- From music and movies to soaps and sports, radio and television fill their lives
- Brand savvy shoppers select budget friendly stores

LifeMode 10 – Rustic Outposts: 7.8% in Whitefish (Southern Satellites)

- Country life with older families in older homes
- Rustic Outposts depend on manufacturing, retail, and healthcare, with pockets of mining and agricultural jobs
- Low labor force participation in skilled and service occupations
- Own affordable, older single-family or mobile homes; vehicle ownership a must
- Residents live within their means, shop at discount stores, and maintain their own vehicles (purchased used) and homes
- Outdoor enthusiasts, who grow their own vegetables, love their pets, and enjoy hunting and fishing
- Technology is cost prohibitive and complicated. Pay bills in person, use the yellow pages, read newspapers, magazines, and mail-order books

Finally, the following are descriptions of the Urbanization Groups under which the Lifestyle Segments are categorized (another way of looking at the segments, based on data analytics):

Rural: 60% in Whitefish (Great Outdoors, Rural Resort Dwellers, Southern Satellites, Green Acres)

- Country living featuring single-family homes with acreage, farms, and rural resort areas
- Very low population density distinguishes this group—typically less than 50 people per square mile
- Over half of all households are occupied by persons 55 years and older; many are married couples without children at home
- The least diverse group, with over 80% non-Hispanic White
- Mostly homeowners (80%), but rentals are affordable in single-family or mobile homes
- Long trips to the store and to work⋯often drive alone in trucks or SUVs, listening to country radio
- Blue collar jobs dominate the landscape including manufacturing, agriculture, mining, and construction
- Many are self-employed, retired, or receive income from Social Security
- Satellite TV and landline phones are necessary means to connect
- More conservative in their spending practices and beliefs
- Comfortable, established and not likely to move

Metro Cities: 35.5% in Whitefish (In Style, Set to Impress)

- Affordable city life including smaller metropolitan cities or satellite cities that feature a mix of single-family and multiunit housing
- Single householders seeking affordable living in the city: usually multi-unit buildings that range from mid- to high-rise apartments; average monthly rents and home value below the U.S. average
- Consumers include college students, affluent Gen X couples, and retirement communities
- Student loans more common than mortgages; debit cards more popular than credit cards
- Residents share an interest in city life and its amenities, from dancing and clubbing to museums and concerts
- Convenience and mobility favor cell phones over landlines
- Many residents rely upon the Internet for entertainment (download music, play online games) and as a useful resource (job searches)

Suburban Periphery: 4% in Whitefish (Parks and Rec)

- Urban expansion: affluence in the suburbs or city-by-commute
- The most populous and fast-growing among Urbanization groups, Suburban Periphery includes one-third of the nation's population
- Commuters value low density living, but demand proximity to jobs, entertainment, and the amenities of an urban center
- Well-educated, two-income households, accept long commute times to raise their children in these family-friendly neighborhoods; many are heavily mortgaged in newly built, single-family homes
- Older householders have either retired in place, downsized, or purchased a seasonal home
- Suburbanites are the most affluent group, working hard to lead bright, fulfilled lives
- Residents invest for their future, insure themselves against unforeseen circumstances, but also enjoy the fruits of their labor
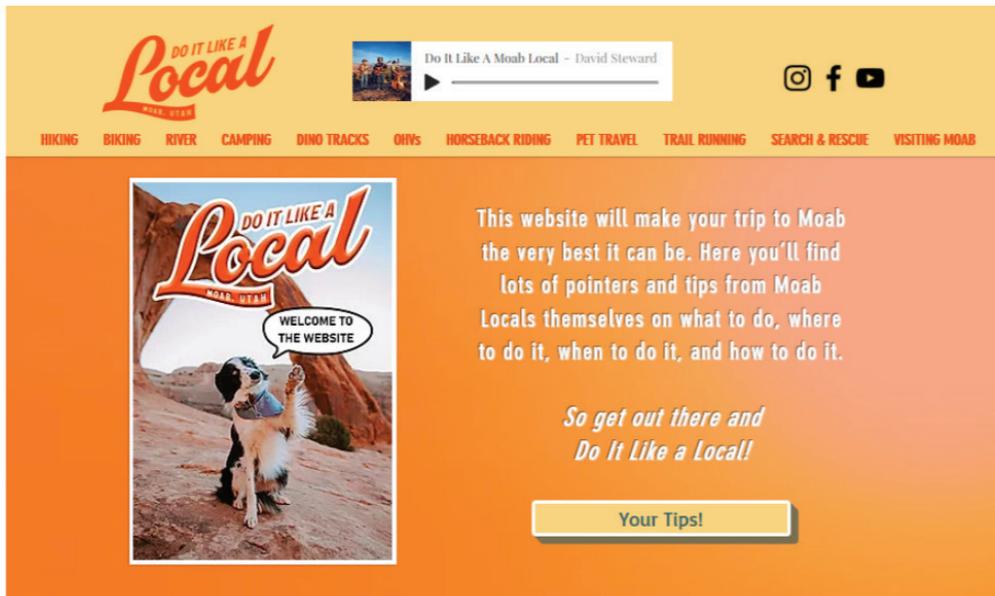
APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF VISITOR EDUCATION MATERIALS

Figure 8.3: Example of Sustainable Tourism Web site, Moab, UT – Do It Like a Local
https://www.doitlikeamoablocal.com/

Take the Bend Pledge

Want to take your love of Bend to the next level? Cross your heart, pinky swear, and make a heartfelt promise you'll leave Bend a little better than you found it. Not only is it the Bend way, we'll sweeten the pot by gifting random oath-takers a free Bend vacation.

The Bend Pledge is our way of creating a code of conduct for everyone who spends time in Central Oregon. We follow "Leave No Trace" practices whether we're picking up trail litter or packing reusable water bottles. We smile at strangers and we practice common courtesy on the road. Sounds pretty sweet, right? It gets better.

Take "The Bend Pledge" today and you could win one of two Bend vacations including lodging, meals, and activities. We draw one random pledge participant every January 1 and again June 1, so you've always got another chance to be a winner.

But even if you don't score the big prize, you're a winner in our book for vowing to do your part to keep Bend special by taking The Bend Pledge below.

1. I VOW TO BE A RESPECTFUL GUEST IN BEND'S INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACES.

2. I'LL MAKE MY OWN MEMORIES, BUT NOT MY OWN TRAILS.

3. I WILL BE RESPONSIBLE WITH FIRE DURING DRY SUMMER MONTHS AND WITH ICE ON SLICK WINTER ROADS.

4. I WON'T RISK LIFE OR LIMB (HUMAN OR SAPLING) FOR MORE LIKES.

5. I'LL BE FRIENDLY AND COURTEOUS, BECAUSE THAT'S THE BEND WAY.

6. IF I CAN'T FIND A PARKING SPOT, I WILL NOT INVENT MY OWN.

7. WHEN PLAYING OUTSIDE, I'LL PREPARE FOR SHIFTS IN WEATHER AND RANDOM EPISODES OF MAGIC.

8. I'LL PACK IN REUSABLE CONTAINERS AND PACK OUT ALL MY TRASH.

9. I WILL USE MY TURN SIGNAL OFTEN AND MY CAR HORN SELDOM.

10. I PROMISE TO LEAVE BEND BETTER THAN I FOUND IT.
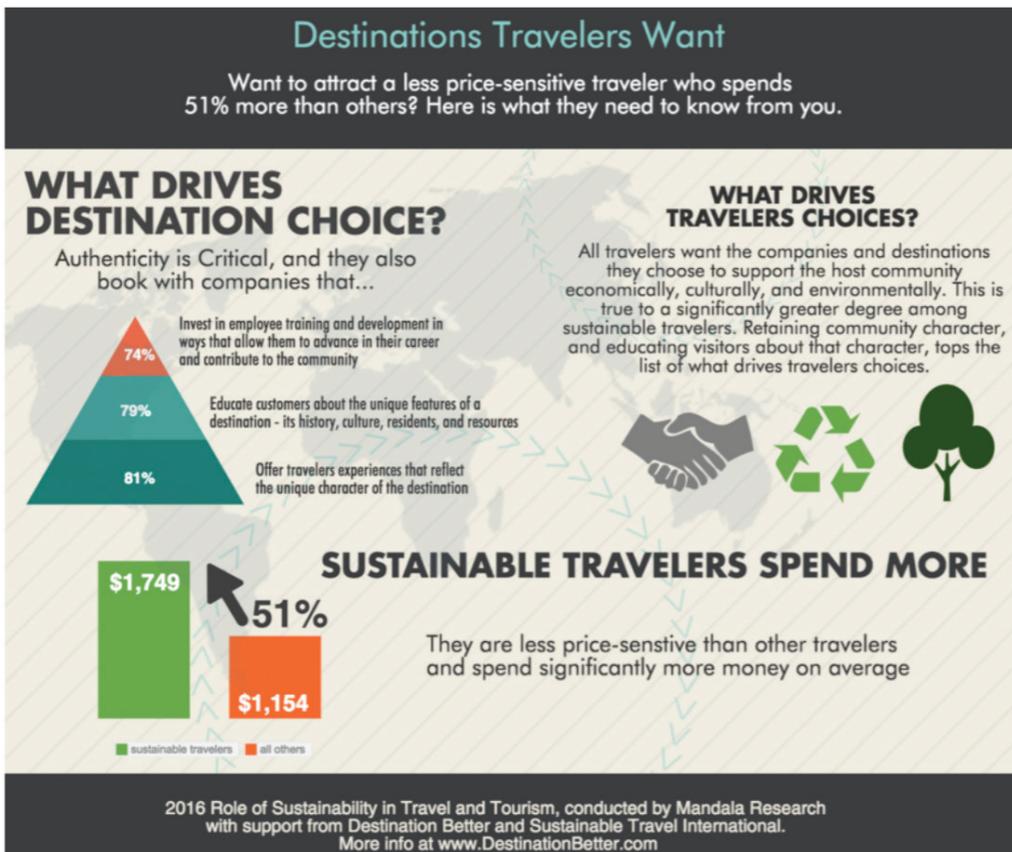
https://www.visitbend.com/the-bend-pledge/

Figure 8.4: Sustainable Travelers Infographics

APPENDIX C: TIPS FOR COALITION BUILDING – ADVOCACY

1. Contact affiliate organizations to determine if matters of interest are being monitored and to coordinate on a response to proposed legislation. Organizations may include:

    - Montana League of Cities

    - Montana Economic Developers Association

    - Montana Association of Planners

    - Montana Housing Coalition

    - Montana Trails Coalition

2. Invite congressional staff and legislators to attend events, workshops, and meetings to learn more about matters of interest.

3. Submit testimony in writing or in person on specific legislation of interest. Encourage partners to submit testimony.

4. Raise awareness of important issues by passing resolutions to support efforts or programs that have been identified in the STMP and send resolutions to legislators and other public officials (i.e. resolution declaring "Empire Builder Days" to show support for rail passenger services).

5. Show appreciation to legislators and public officials for actions they take in support of STMP strategies by a written letter or public award.

6. Attend local events where there is an opportunity to meet with state and federal officials to learn and discuss first had about issues in the STMP.

7. Issue press releases and write letter to the editors to generate broad community support for strategies in the STMP.

Raise Awareness → Build community support → Cultivate Relationships → Promote Issues