Chapter 6 INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

Introduction

Outside the City of Missoula, most of the infrastructure that serves the public is decentralized, with a number of different federal, tribal, state, county and municipal agencies, local taxing districts, and private entities responsible for their own equipment, infrastructure and upkeep. For example, in the Rattlesnake Valley, roads are maintained by the U.S. Forest Service, the City of Missoula, Missoula County, and private landowner associations. In Seeley Lake and Lolo there are individual water and sewer districts.

Missoula County's strategy for development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure is to support increased and efficient infrastructure capacities, services, and amenities in and around existing communities, where appropriate (Objective 9.1). This emphasizes investing in existing communities instead of supporting widespread infrastructure expansion into agricultural and resource lands. Due to the decentralized nature and high costs of infrastructure development and maintenance, it is also important to emphasize developing public/private partnerships to provide adequate infrastructure for local residents, visitors and businesses in the future.

Policy Guidance:

- **Guiding Principle. Infrastructure** - Investing in infrastructure as part of implementing planning is one of the most effective ways to build enduring communities.
- **Goal 9.** As part of planning, support the provision of infrastructure and services to and within rural communities.

Long Term Capital Improvements Planning and Budgeting

County government's limited powers and the numerous taxing entities that develop infrastructure for their own purposes (fire districts, school districts, sewer and water districts) can lead to decentralized infrastructure planning in the county. Furthermore, the scarcity and uncertainty in funding streams causes the county to develop projects around available funding sources targeted to specific types of improvements. The county plans for infrastructure needs and improvements in a manner that allows it to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arise.

The county is responsible primarily for public projects such as bridges, roads, and sewer and water facilities through its Public Works Department. It is also responsible for certain parks and recreation facilities, and public buildings and facilities. The county has a capital improvements plan for administrative facilities such as buildings; however, it does not include public works projects at this time. Currently, the County Public Works Director and Board of County Commissioners evaluate and prioritize capital improvement projects.

Drinking Water Systems

Most residences in unincorporated Missoula County have individual wells. The few exceptions include the El Mar, Lolo and Sunset West water systems, which are managed by the Missoula County Public Works Department. Also, the Seeley Lake Water District serves a portion of the Seeley Lake community and a few private parties maintain several multi-user water systems throughout the county. Mountain Water serves the urban area.

Missoula County supports the creation and expansion of public water supply systems to address public health concerns, support the goals of existing communities, and ensure effective mechanisms for system operation, maintenance and financing. One way the county supports public systems is to provide grant writing and administration services to water and sewer districts and in some instances to provide matching funds for preliminary engineering reports when there is a documented public health and safety threat. The county also looks for legislative options to help fund investment in public infrastructure.

Wastewater Treatment Systems

The individual wastewater treatment system (septic system) is the most common method of wastewater disposal outside of the Missoula urban area. The Missoula County Public Works Department operates the Lolo and Lewis and Clark sewer systems. The Seeley Lake Sewer District is planning a centralized wastewater project that will provide wastewater treatment in the Seeley Lake area. The City of Missoula municipal wastewater treatment system operates in the urban area with planned expansions in the Rattlesnake Valley, the Wye, McCauley Butte, west of Reserve Street, and south of the Clark Fork River. The City-County Health Department has been successful in working with landowners to decommission septic systems and connect properties to urban services, thereby protecting public health and the quality of groundwater.

Missoula County encourages the formation and expansion of public wastewater treatment systems when health, safety and water quality threats are apparent and to accommodate growth and development of existing communities. Missoula County plans to help to provide wastewater treatment by:

- Maintaining and updating (as needed) the City-County Interlocal Agreement that guides coordinated planning and infrastructure development in the urban service area

- Updating the county subdivision regulations to ensure that infrastructure requirements in the urban area are compatible with the city's

- Seeking opportunities for private, federal and state support of infrastructure investment including legislation

- Providing grant writing and administration assistance to water and sewer districts for system development and expansion

- Providing matching funds for preliminary engineering reports in some cases when there is a documented water quality or public health and safety threat

Storm Water Drainage

Storm water drainage is most often addressed by landowners (including Missoula County) attempting to keep runoff on their properties and in drainage swales along public and private roads. Missoula County does not operate a storm sewer system, but manages roadway storm water runoff through roadside ditches, culverts and retention systems. As part of this, the county maintains approximately 528 sumps and more than 100 culverts. Improvements to storm water drainage facilities are planned to be addressed through annual budgeting and operation and maintenance by the Public Works Department, with special projects addressed through a capital improvement plan.

Solid Waste Facilities

Republic Waste Services, a private company, operates and maintains the solid waste landfill that serves the city and county. Missoula County encourages Republic Waste Services to provide effective, environmentally sound solid waste disposal and recycling services. Missoula County also intends to develop internal policies and guidelines for waste reduction and recycling as an implementation measure of this growth policy.

Fire Protection Facilities

Rural fire districts as well as county, city, state, federal, and tribal agencies provide fire protection services in Missoula County. These agencies plan and provide for their own infrastructure needs and generate funds necessary to develop facilities and obtain new equipment. The Missoula County Fire Protection Association is a volunatary non-profit association of city, rural, state and federal fire professionals, emergency responders, and others who work together to address issues in common. The Missoula County Wildfire Protection Plan covers two-thirds of the County and the Seeley Swan Fire Plan covers the remaining area.

Because these entities have their own funding sources, Missoula County plays a minimal role in the provision of fire protection infrastructure. Missoula County plans to assist with fire protection infrastructure by:

- Working with nongovernmental organizations and the private sector to facilitate acquisition of the best available information regarding wildfire risk and likelihood of growth in risk areas

- Providing grant writing and administration assistance to local districts if requested

- Supporting the development and expansion of public water supplies through local water districts

- Requiring new subdivisions to provide sufficient water supplies for firefighting purposes

- Supporting legislation to assist fire protection agencies with acquiring capital improvements

Roads and Bridges

County, city, state, federal, and tribal agencies develop and maintain roads and bridges through limited dedicated road and bridge funds. Missoula County has approximately 1,500 miles of public roadway. The County Road Department is responsible for maintenance activities on approximately 474 miles of roadway. Of these 474 miles, approximately 232 miles are paved and 242 miles are gravel. Road maintenance activities can include road repair, snow removal, right-of-way maintenance, paving, graveling, grading, and dust abatement. The county is also responsible for all bridges in the county that are not part of the state highway system.

The County Public Works Department funds maintenance through annual budgeting with a 10-year capital improvements plan for larger projects like bridge and culvert replacement. Missoula County will continue requiring private developers to build subdivision roads and landowner associations to maintain them in most cases.

Parks and Trails

The Missoula County Parks, Trails, and Open Lands Program works with the Parks and Trails Advisory Board to plan, develop, and manage 90 parks on over 645 acres. The program collaborates with the County Public Works Department to plan, develop, and manage a system of shared-use paved trails and recreational trails. In November 2014, voters passed a $42 million parks and trails bond. The bond funds enable the expansion and improvement of Fort Missoula Regional Park ($38 million), 10 new or enhanced city playgrounds ($1 million), and a county trails funding program ($3 million).

Partnerships with local communities, neighborhood groups, and non-profit organizations are instrumental in developing and maintaining parks and trails. The County Parks and Trails Advisory Board assists these groups with funding for qualifying projects through a matching grants program.

The Missoula Active Transportation Plan and the County Parks and Trails Master Plan guide various projects. The Parks and Trails Plan includes a capital improvements plan that establishes 10-year priorities.

Open Space

As noted in the guiding principles, Missoula County considers infrastructure to be more than water, sewer, transportation and communications systems. It includes libraries, museums, historical landmarks, government buildings, parks, trails, open spaces and schools, as well as health, safety, educational and social services.

The 2006 $10 million open space bond in Missoula County provides funding for the protection of open space, water quality, wildlife habitat, working farms and ranches, river access, and other

public resources. Half of the bond is allocated to the county and half is allocated to the city for use in the urban area. The county portion has been used on 23 projects to conserve over 29,000 acres in conjunction with public, private and non-profit landowners and partners. Parks, Trails and Open Lands staff and an Open Lands Advisory Committee, consisting of 13 citizen volunteers from rural areas of the county, advises the county commissioners on the allocation of these funds.

Digital Communications

Affordable, accessible and reliable broadband is a critical piece of community infrastructure for Missoula County communities to adapt to periods of rapid economic and technological change. Broadband service is provided by several private companies. The city and the county have begun investigating the feasibility of partnerships with the private sector to expand broadband capacity with the goal of making it affordable and accessible. Missoula County will consider the recommendations of feasibility studies and work with the city and the private sector to provide broadband to Missoula County communities. The county will also consider adopting a policy to encourage and facilitate the expansion of broadband infrastructure when projects are being developed.

Other County Facilities and Community Infrastructure

Missoula County owns and maintains the county fairgrounds, public works facilities, the county courthouse, the detention center, and several other public buildings.

Libraries, museums, community centers, historical sites, educational and social services, and even public art are also types of community infrastructure. These are assets that reflect the county's heritage, build community, and make Missoula County special.