



Chapter 4

AREA AND ISSUE BASED PLANNING

Missoula County is made up of unique neighborhoods, communities, and rural areas. Because this growth policy is countywide in scale, it cannot adequately address every important land use and community issue in detail. Also, because residents of one area of the county may have different land use, conservation and development priorities from residents in another part of the county, different approaches to planning are warranted. During the development of this growth policy citizens made it clear they prefer “locally driven” planning efforts instead of “top down” ones.

There are several ways local communities and citizens can address local planning issues. This chapter provides guidance on two different types of plans that Missoula County will employ to address land use and development issues in the coming years - area plans and issue plans. In either case, more specific planning efforts must be consistent with the Missoula County Growth Policy.

Traditionally, Missoula County has worked with community groups to develop comprehensive area plans, such as the Lolo and Seeley Lake plans. Such plans have typically contained considerable detail and provided strong guidance on approaches to local challenges. However, some of these plans have taken years to produce and contain overwhelming detail. While comprehensive area plans are appropriate in some cases, at other

Policy Guidance:

- **Guiding Principle. Partnerships** - Efforts by non-governmental groups, private individuals, tribal government, and state and federal agencies to achieve community goals are as vital to community development as local government actions. Partnerships among these groups, individuals, and local government are essential.
- **Guiding Principle. Public involvement** - Communities and individuals should continue to be involved in the planning and decision-making processes that affect them.
- **Guiding Principle. Diversity of communities and citizenry** - The diversity, integrity and unique values of neighborhoods, communities and rural areas are important and should be protected. Diversity among the county’s population is also valued. A wide variety of housing and transportation choices is necessary to serve all communities and all of the population.

times such an effort is neither practical nor necessary. A more streamlined area plan or an issue specific plan or strategy may better suit the needs of a community.



Area Plans

An area plan is a land use plan for a geographic region within the county that covers one or more of the elements of the growth policy in more detail. These plans are sometimes called neighborhood plans, but the term “area plan” is used in this growth policy to indicate a geographic area larger than a traditional neighborhood. An area plan is more specific than the countywide growth policy because it focuses on a smaller and less diverse area than the entire county. An area plan may also focus on fewer subject areas than the growth policy. While the growth policy provides a general view of the entire county, an area plan can look at a smaller geographic region and its land use and other community issues from a closer vantage and with a sharper focus.

Area plans are adopted under the statutory authority for growth policies. As such, the plan must be consistent with the growth policy. (See Chapter 7.)

Area Plan Content

The content and detail in an area plan may vary depending on the issues the community seeks to address. Missoula County is moving toward plans that are much more targeted or discrete than in the past.

A streamlined 10 to 20 page plan including text and maps might be sufficient to address a community’s land use and development goals, depending on the circumstances.

All area plans should be implementable, with a focus on specific actions that community partners, including Missoula County, can take to help achieve the goals of the plan. All plans should be focused enough to be developed in a reasonable timeframe. If an area plan is to contain elements addressing the subjects in the table below, it should

meet the corresponding requirements.

Area Plan Public Involvement

Planning is successful when it involves members of the public and stakeholders. Opportunities for public involvement should be provided throughout the planning process through means appropriate to the community, to issues at hand, and to the scale of the plan. Advertised open houses, design workshops, presentations to civic

Table 1 - Elements and Requirements for Area Plans

Subject	Requirement
Future Land Use and Development	Include general designations on future land use maps – not fine grained, parcel by parcel detail and not to the level of detail of a zoning map
Housing	Provide for an adequate supply and variety of housing types
Commercial and/or industrial development	Provide opportunities for commercial and/or industrial development designed to serve the local community and result in additional employment and a reliable tax base
Public services and infrastructure	Address how appropriate types of public services, infrastructure and transportation options will be provided, and set out goals and actions to achieve an appropriate level of service delivery
Natural resources	Prioritize and provide protection strategies for key resources and resource rich areas and/or demonstrate the plan does not unduly compromise critical natural resources or natural functions
Community character	Include measures to maintain or enhance the character of the area



groups, neighborhood and landowner association meetings, surveys, and solicitation of public comment are among the tools that are typically utilized. All area plan meetings must be open to the public. Ultimately, public review and a recommendation from a community council (if applicable) and the Planning Board are necessary, followed by possible adoption by the county commissioners. During the review and adoption process amendments are to be expected.

Support from CAPS Staff

When directed by the county commissioners, CAPS staff will facilitate development of an area plan in cooperation with local volunteers and consultants. The determination of which area planning efforts are undertaken will be determined by the county commissioners, based on staff's assessment of growth and development pressure, urgency of need, state or federal requirements, and community interest and readiness. Planning priorities for area plans will be evaluated during CAPS' annual work plan and budget development.

Existing Area Plans

The area plans included in this growth policy are listed in Appendix A and shown on Map 6. Some of these are

relatively recent and some have been in effect for decades. Several area plans cover areas both inside and outside the city limits and have been adopted by both the City of Missoula and Missoula County. These plans remain as adopted policy.

Area plans should be reviewed periodically to assess their relevancy to current conditions, projected needs and modern planning practice. When a plan is no longer relevant or able to be used effectively to accomplish its goals, it should be either updated or retired.

During review for update or retirement of a plan, CAPS staff will assess an area plan using the following considerations:

- The area plan does/does not substantially comply with the goals, objectives and land use designations of the growth policy or other applicable policies and state law
- The issues the plan was developed to address are no longer significant and/or relevant
- The jurisdictional boundaries have substantially changed (i.e. an area that was predominantly in the county when the plan was adopted is now predominantly in the city)
- The plan lacks sufficient guidance or

relevant policy statements to meet emerging needs

- The plan includes inaccurate or outdated information
- The goals and objectives or land use recommendations do not support today's desired development
- There have been substantial changes in land ownership or land use since plan adoption.

If retirement is proposed for a plan, public outreach will be conducted prior to a final decision by the county commissioners. The county commissioners will determine whether it is in the public interest to pursue a plan update and how and when it fits into the annual work plan.

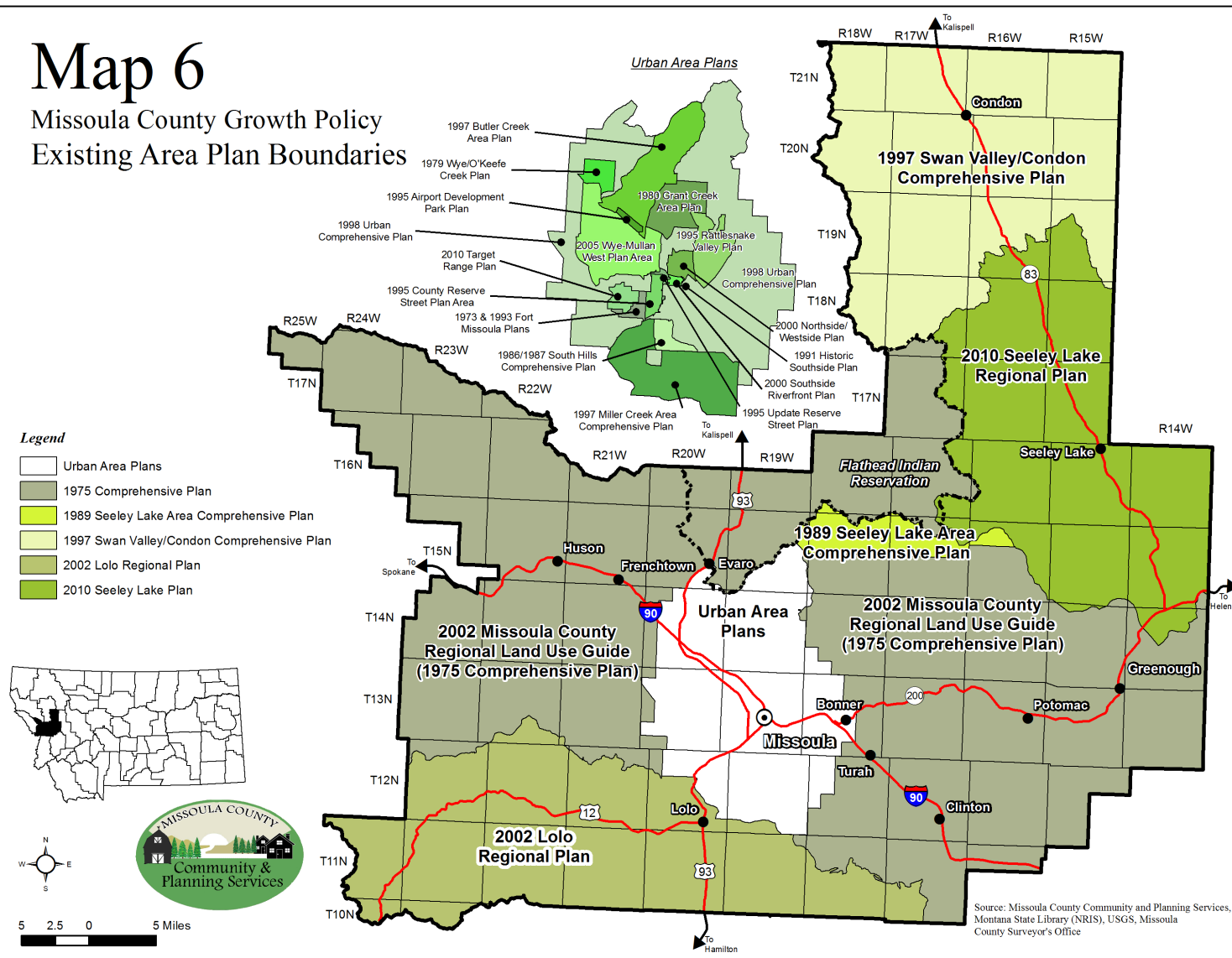
When a joint city-county plan is reviewed, county planners will work with city staff to develop a common assessment of the plan and its relevancy using the above considerations as well as those that are applicable to the review and amendment or retirement of city plans, which is called "sunsetting" in the city growth policy.

Area plan amendments may be made at the direction of the county commissioners or as a joint effort of the city and county. Plan amendments, such as to area plans or regional plans,



Map 6

Missoula County Growth Policy Existing Area Plan Boundaries





may also be proposed by private parties to support development proposals or for other purposes. In such cases, an application and public review is required following the growth policy adoption procedure in MCA 76-1-602 through 76-1-604. Private party amendments require an application fee and will be reviewed using the following criteria:

- The amendment substantially complies with the applicable guiding principles, goals, and objectives of the overall growth policy and accompanying future land use maps. (If the amendment does not meet this criterion, an amendment to the growth policy could also be proposed.)
- The amendment substantially complies with the applicable goals, objectives and future land use designations of the area plan, except as specifically addressed in the amendment request.
- The amendment is designed to meet a need that is otherwise not being met in the plan area.
- The amendment will provide substantial public benefit to the surrounding community.
- The change proposed is the best means of providing the public benefit.

Issue Plans

Unlike area plans, issue plans are focused on specific subjects or issues rather than land use planning across a larger region. Examples include the Flathead Reservation Comprehensive Resources Plan (CSKT – 1996), the airport master plan, the Long Range Transportation Plan, the Industrial Lands Study, trails plans, plans for redevelopment of a former industrial site, a targeted economic development strategy for a community, and design guidelines for a commercial corridor. These plans are not necessarily adopted under the authority of the growth policy, but are stand-alone plans that can be implemented, updated, and retired as necessary. Like area plans, issue plans are advisory documents that should be considered during development review.

Issue plans should provide specific direction and a level of detail appropriate for users to understand how the issue is to be addressed. As with area plans, the focus should be on implementation and brevity, with actions that are intended to be carried out in order to achieve the plan's goals.

Like the process to develop area plans, issue plans should be developed using an open public process appropriate to the community, the issues being addressed, and the scale of the plan.

Conclusion

Multiple approaches to community planning are warranted in Missoula County. This is due to the diversity of geography, natural features, and economic circumstances throughout Missoula County and its discrete local communities. It is also supported by the public's preference that issues be addressed in the context of local communities. This chapter offers two ways to address locally driven land use planning and community development: area plans that focus on a geographic area and issue plans that focus on a particular topic. These two approaches are not the only ways Missoula County might help facilitate locally driven planning, as other approaches may be needed for unique circumstances in the future. However, they offer clear paths for community leaders to pursue conservation and development efforts.

