

**TALBOTT
NEIGHBORHOOD
PLAN**

Adopted April, 1996

**State of Montana
Flathead County**

TALBOTT NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago the Talbott Road area was mostly farmland. Besides the Veteran's Home, the Hoerner Family owned and farmed much of the land south of Talbott Road. Many residents of Columbia Falls remember hunting and fishing on these lands just south of the City.

Times have changed over the last twenty years. Three subdivisions have developed during this time and with them a sense of community was created. This neighborhood has witnessed intense growing pains recently with new subdivision activity. As development proposals began to surface in the Talbott area, the City Council saw the need for a more specific planning document to address the neighborhood issues. The Council envisioned a process involving the neighborhood and Talbott Neighborhood Plan was developed.

The Talbott Neighborhood Plan covers approximately 700 acres in the southwest portion of Columbia Falls and adjacent properties in the County. The planning area is bordered on the south by the Flathead River; Fourth Ave West on the eastern side; 13th Street to the north with the exception of two jogs; and the western boundary is the top of the bank just west of South Hilltop Road.

The planning area contains several large tracts of vacant land and one largely undeveloped subdivision. These vacant tracts have access to city services such as water, sewer, police and fire. The availability of services and the close proximity to the city makes this area appealing to developers and a logical place for the city to expand.

The community held a series of meetings in the Fall of 1995 to address the issues and define a vision for the future of the neighborhood. The recommendations found in this plan were generated by the citizens of the neighborhood. This document will serve as the guide for future development in the Talbott area.

II. BACKGROUND

The Neighborhood Planning process began in August of 1995. Workshops were held with both the Columbia Falls City Council and Columbia Falls City-County Planning Board. These early meetings identified the study area and the outline of the neighborhood planning process.

In preparation for the first neighborhood meeting, the Flathead Regional Development Office pooled and mapped existing information about the neighborhood. The information included:

- Existing Land Use Inventory
- Current Zoning
- Location of Water, Sewer, and Utility Lines
- Traffic Counts and Roads

The Flathead Regional Development Office (FDRO) mailed invitations to every property owner within the identified plan area. (See figure Talbott Plan Area.) In all, over 300 letters were sent. Over 40 people attended the first meeting, plus property owners out of the area sent in letters with comments.

During the first Talbott Neighborhood meeting, the participants identified likes, dislikes, and wants for the Talbott area. These issues became the backbone of future meetings and this plan. Major issues began to surface, including the inadequacy of Talbott Road, the desire to maintain a rural setting, and the need to address densities under the current zoning.

The second meeting focused on further discussing and refining the issues identified in the first meeting. The neighborhood then defined and created recommendations for addressing the issues. Examples of recommendations included reducing the speed limits; creating a detached pedestrian trail; and placing stop signs and crosswalks at the major intersection of Talbot Road. This second meeting added the essential ingredients for preparing a draft of the Talbott Neighborhood Plan.

Several more neighborhood meetings followed with efforts focusing on rewriting and refining the plan in preparation for public hearings at the Columbia Falls City-County Planning Board, Columbia Falls City Council, and the Flathead County Commissioners.

III. THE SETTING

Over the last couple of years, residents of the Talbott neighborhood have become very involved in planning issues affecting their community. Neighborhood interest, as developed by the Talbott area residents, drives this planning process.

Land Use

Existing land uses in the Talbott Neighborhood are fairly homogenous with single-family residential structures being the dominant use. Other uses include four-plex multi-family dwellings, two schools, four churches, three cemeteries, four community parks, and Montana's only Veteran's Home. (See existing land use map.) The most controversial issue within the neighborhood concerned land use and the potential development of the large vacant tracts.

Zoning

Currently there is approximately 120 acres of undeveloped land within the neighborhood planning area. Using the current zoning densities and subtracting 25% of the area out for roads and open space, the vacant lands within the Talbott Neighborhood could support a potential build-out of 1141 dwelling units. Currently the neighborhood supports 314 dwelling units. (See Table I and Build-out Map.)

TABLE I
BUILD-OUT UNDER CURRENT ZONING

	SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
APPROVED FINAL PLAT	134 LOTS	23 LOTS (92 UNITS)
APPROVED PRELIMINARY PLAT	39 LOTS	0
VACANT - POTENTIAL BUILD-OUT	508 LOTS	367 LOTS
TOTAL	682 LOTS	459 LOTS

The zoning associated with the vacant properties allows for a more dense development pattern than the existing neighborhood subdivisions. Most of the existing lots range in size from 10,000 square feet up to one and a half (1.5) acre. The current zoning of CR-4 allows minimum lots size of 7,000 square feet.

Public Services

The Talbott Neighborhood is split between the City and the County. Services are divided between the City

and the County. IN the first meetings, County residents expressed concerns about annexation into the City of Columbia Falls and resulting increased taxes.

Road Maintenance: The Columbia Falls Public Works provides maintenance of City streets. The County Road Department provides maintenance of roads in the County. At present the County has limited funding available for maintenance and upgrading. According to the Road Department, Talbott Road very low on the priority list for maintenance due to its proximity with the City.

Fire: The Columbia Falls Rural Volunteer Fire Department provides service to County residents and the Columbia Falls Volunteer Fire Department serves the City. However, through an informal agreement, both departments work together, share equipment and provide personnel.

Police: Some services such as policing Talbott Road can be done more efficiently by the City than the County under present conditions. The County Sheriff's Office currently has one deputy on patrol at any one time for the north half of the County. This deputy is responsible for patrolling from Glacier International Airport to the Canadian border and from Lincoln to Glacier County lines. Through a mutual aid agreement the City does provide emergency response to these outlying areas. Under present conditions, Talbott and other County Roads within the neighborhood receive little or no patrolling from the sheriff's office.

Schools: School District #6 (Columbia Falls) provides educational service to the Talbott Neighborhood. Ruder Elementary and the Columbia Falls High School lie within the Talbott boundaries. At present, the Columbia Falls School District is approaching capacity with the middle school exceeding capacity. The Columbia Falls School District is looking into long range planning for additional school capacity. Impacts to schools should be a significant issue as new subdivisions develop within School District #6.

Sewer/water: The City provides its residents with municipal sewer services and water services that provide fire flows. Most county residents use on-site septic systems and on-site wells.

Other services: County residents living close to the city receive the benefits provided by the City such as convenient access to parks, pool, and maintenance of the county library. As new subdivisions develop in the planning area, it makes sense for the city to annex to help cover the costs of increased services.

Talbott Road

Talbott Road is the primary collector for the neighborhood. The current average daily trips are approximately 1,400. Talbott Road was originally designed as a rural county road with small shoulders and drainage swales along both sides. Because of the historic use of farming, pedestrian paths were not part of the original design. However, with schools and the potential for more than 1,000 residential units,

pedestrian paths are now important infrastructure considerations. Because Talbott Road lacks pedestrian paths and crosswalks, very few parents let their children walk to the near-by schools or parks. Other roads, such as 13th Street, 12th Ave West, and South Hilltop, also need to address future impacts resulting from development. (See infrastructure maps.)

Natural Environment

The natural environment is one of the most overlooked aspects of the Talbott Neighborhood. The Flathead River runs along the southern boundary of the Talbott Neighborhood planning area. The river provides a wildlife corridor around the City. Because of the river's steep banks, much of the vegetation has remained in place. The thick growth of trees and shrubs along the river also protects the river bank and the properties above from erosion which has occurred along other less protected areas of the river.

The ground water aquifer provides water for both the City and private well users. Protection of the aquifer is necessary to provide a long term source of drinking water to the residents of the Talbott Neighborhood. Currently Flathead County, Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation are all working together to map the aquifer in the Flathead valley. This information will help maintain the water quality residents of the Flathead have come to expect.

IV. ISSUES

Issues were identified in the first neighborhood meeting on the Talbott area (Issues Map). The issues were broken into three groups: Likes, Problems, and Wants. Participants ranked the issues in order of importance. A highlight of the top four or five issues in each group is listed below:

Likes/Positive Aspects

- Like the rural setting.
- Maintain the single-family neighborhood setting.
- Densities allowed with the current zoning are excessive.
- Commercial uses at the corner of Talbott and S. Hilltop are not needed.
- County residents fear annexation and increased taxes.
- Densities of proposed subdivisions.

Want/Expectations

- Need to reduce planned densities in areas of the neighborhoods.
- Talbott Road needs pedestrian/bike paths.
- The Neighborhood Plan should be approved prior to new subdivision applications.
- Creation of cul-de-sac road design, avoid through streets in quiet neighborhoods.
- Planned growth within the neighborhood.

V. GOALS AND POLICIES

Goal #1: Retain the rural setting.

Open Space: The neighborhood identifies open space as a component of rural character. Open space can take the form of agricultural fields, public and private parks, conservation easements, etc. One way of creating open space is through the clustering of single family home sites and setting aside open areas in exchange. The open area can remain fallow or be developed into parks.

Policy:

1. Develop the cluster provision in the Columbia Falls Area Zoning Ordinance to encourage the creation of open space.

Reduce densities to 3 or 4 units per acre (CR-3) which equals a 25% to 30% reduction in units. In return the developer has the option of creating smaller lots while maintaining the 4 units per acre density, provided the area saved using the smaller lots be placed in permanent open space. Berming, landscaping, and maintained open space can be used to mitigate the impacts of smaller lots.

2. Create minimum open space requirements for multi-family development.

Street Design: Retaining and maintaining a rural setting is many things to many people. Through the neighborhood workshops people defined rural character as: larger lots, open space, single family residential units, trees, and rural road standards.

Policy:

1. In multi-family developments, develop street side landscape requirements to soften the impact of development. Example: a minimum of one tree every 30-feet shall be planted along streets. The trees shall be located no more than 5-feet from the edge of pavement. The remainder of the landscaping shall be maintained in live ground cover.
2. No requirement for curbs and gutters while sidewalks should be replaced with surfaced paths and trails on interior subdivision roads outside of the City limits. However, collectors such as Talbott, need detached, adequately sized walking/biking paths to provide pedestrian travel.

Multi-Family Housing Design (3-plex or larger):

Single-family residential dwellings are predominant in the plan area. Currently, however, the zoning ordinance does allow multi-family residential zoning in the areas north of Ruder School and in the southeast portion of South Hilltop subdivision. The zoning

ordinance excludes multi-family uses from all other areas of the Talbott Neighborhood Plan.

Policy:

1. Use design guidelines for multi-family residential approval. All portions of a multi-family development fronting single family land use must be single story and may step up to multi stories as the development progresses into the lot.
2. A minimum 5-foot landscape screen shall be planted between multi-family structures and single family uses. The planting strip shall create a dense visual screen.
3. Long facades of multi-family structures should be divided into shorter segments, using building mass, such as entrance porches, notches, bay windows, etc. The maximum span between building mass changes should be less than 40 feet.
4. Architectural elements are recommended in multi-family developments to create outdoor space and human scale. Features such as courtyards, porches, balconies, and trellises create the illusion of smaller more comfortable space.
5. Roofs and roofline of multi-family structures should contribute to a residential image: sloped roofs, dormer windows, and other features associated with traditional forms of residential development. Long expanses of uninterrupted roofline should not occur.

Zoning/Master Plan: Make the zoning designations consistent with the Columbia Falls City-County Master Plan.

Policy:

1. Rezone the school properties and the Veterans Home using the P (Public) designation.
2. Delete the Commercial Zoning and Master Plan Designation at the intersection of South Hilltop and Talbott Road from the Zoning Map and the Columbia Falls City-County Master Plan Map.

Goal #2: Protect wildlife corridors and natural resources.

River Bank Protection: The Flathead River and its banks serve many purposes for the Talbott area residents. The Flathead River provides scenic and recreational amenities for the whole valley and beyond. The river and its banks provide habitat for fish and the wildlife that visit the near-by homes on occasion. The vegetation along the river protects the banks and filters run-off before it enters the river.

Policy:

1. Existing development along the river is sensitive to the unique functions of the river. Most construction has taken place above the bank and this preserves the native vegetation. It is important to continue these practices to protect this resource.
2. As properties west of the BPA transmission line subdivide, implement a minimum 50-foot setback landward from the top of the river bank for any structure. As properties east of the BPA transmission lines develop, implement a 20-foot setback from the 100-year floodplain. Ground mounted decks, gazebos, picnic tables, etc. may be placed within the setback areas.
3. Encourage subdivisions to development of a green belt or linear park along the edge of the Flathead River.
4. Establish a well head protection program to provide a pro-active approach in protecting both public and private wells from contamination by hazardous liquid spills. The Flathead City-County Health Department will work with the City to develop a well head protection area and program.

Goal 3: Address density conflicts between the existing zoning and established subdivisions.

Density Transition: At present, most of the undeveloped properties in the Talbott Neighborhood are zoned CR-4 (Urban Residential). The minimum lot size under the CR-4 zone designation is 7,200 square feet. At the same time most of existing lots var in size from 10,000 square feet to 80,000 square feet. The existing zoning designation lacks a transition are from the more dense development of the city to the less dense rural properties.

Policy:

1. The neighborhood meetings identified a transition area to buffer less dense developments as a way to address density issues in the Talbott planning area. The transition area would call for larger lots or open space and allow the greater densities closer to urban type development such as Scenic View and South Hilltop. This recommendation would not change the underlying zoning but would be used on a case by case basis in subdivision review. (See Figure 1)
2. Density changes should occur at the rear property lines. Densities should never change along streets or between facing buildings of different densities. (See Figure 1)
3. A maintained green space or park may be used to separate facing buildings of different densities. Storage facilities can not be used as a green space or buffer area.
4. Contact large acreage land owners and explain the benefits of reducing their densities through zone changes. A zone change to a CR-5 designation could potentially reduce densities by 25%.

Goal 4: Improve pedestrian travel along to the Neighborhood.

Talbott Bike/Pedestrian Path: Talbott Road currently makes no allowance for pedestrian usage. A detached pedestrian path along the north side of Talbott Road with crosswalk at the major intersections is needed for existing and future residents.

1. Create specific designs for the path so new subdivisions can include this feature in their design.

2. Require all future subdivisions along Talbott to incorporate the pedestrian path as a part of their design.
3. The City and the County should pool ISTEA funding for engineering and construction of the path.
4. Place Crosswalks at the intersection of 12th Ave. West and Talbott and place crosswalks and stop signs at Veterans Drive and Talbott. Crosswalks should also occur at each subdivision entrance.
5. Reduce speed on Talbott Road during school hours with a special speed zone along Talbott. This is limited to areas 500 feet from the school property.
6. As development occurs along Talbott Road, the subdivider should place 2 feet of gravel shoulder along the pavement.

BPA Easement: A pedestrian path could be placed along the BPA easement. This path could potentially connect the baseball fields near the veterans home with subdivisions to the east.

1. Create pedestrian paths along the BPA easement. This provides an alternate east-west pedestrian corridor.

13th Street: As 13th Street develops, the City needs to address pedestrian paths. A pedestrian crossing is needed to get people safely across the railroad tracts to Veterans Drive and neighboring schools.

1. When the remaining portion of 13th Street is constructed, the City or Developer shall also place the pedestrian crossing.
2. The City may implement a SID to pay for a sidewalk along 13th Street in the South Hilltop subdivision.

Goal 5: Improve vehicular safety along Talbott Road.

Transportation Study: The Talbott Neighborhood planning process identified high vehicle travel speeds as a major contributor to Talbott's safety problem. To address speed limits and intersection design, the Montana Department of Transportation will conduct a transportation study of Talbott Road and establish recommendations for the governing bodies. On January 8, 1996 the Flathead County Commissioners approved a request for the Department of Transportation to place Talbott Road on its study list.

In the study, the Department can analyze speed limits, dangerous intersection, school crossing and speed zones. According to the State, the study is typically provided at no cost to the City or County, but there is approximately a once year waiting list in the state. In addition, the State provides recommendations only. The City or County must decide to implement the recommendations.

The governing body may impose an arbitrary speed limit on Talbott Road as an interim measure while waiting for the traffic study. However, for the new speed limit to be effective, the Sheriff Office or the Columbia Falls Police Department must enforce the new speed control measures.

Policy:

1. The City and/or County should approve the request for the Talbott Road study.
2. The City and/or County should implement the recommendations to make Talbott Road a safer travel way.

Enforcing Speed Limits: Currently the Flathead County Sheriff's Office does not have the officers available to patrol Talbott Road. There is only once Sheriff's Deputy on duty for the area between Glacier International Airport and the Canadian border and between Lincoln and Glacier County Lines. The City should annex Talbott Road to provide enforcement of driving speeds.

VI. ADOPTION

The impetus behind developing the Talbott Neighborhood Plan is to provide local guidance to the overall pattern of growth in the Neighborhood. Neighborhood plans become official public policy under the umbrella of the Columbia Falls City-County Master Plan. The Talbott Neighborhood Plan is adopted as an addendum. The adopting ordinance amends the Master Plan and this takes precedent in subdivision and zoning review within the Talbott boundaries.

Prior to adoption of a neighborhood plan, at least one public hearing is required before the Columbia Falls City-County Planning Board. The Board forwards a recommendation to the Columbia Falls City Council and County Commissioners who take final action.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION:

A plan is effective only if it is used. The neighborhood plan should be consulted whenever a public or private action affects land use within the neighborhood. For example, all subdivision development should be reviewed based on the criteria of this plan. Zoning actions should be based on the principles of this plan.

VIII. AMENDMENT PROCESS:

From time to time the Neighborhood Plan will require amendments, review and updating. The amendment process is identical to the initial adoption process and requires local input, at least one public hearing before the Columbia Falls City-County Planning Board followed by the City Council and County Commissioners final consideration.

IX. MANDATORY REVIEW:

The Neighborhood Plan and Development Standards should be reviewed every fifth (5th) year from the date of adoption. At that time, the Neighborhood should hold a meeting to create written findings to the Planning Board that summarizes the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Plan and regulations to date and any suggested amendments, as noted, for consideration and action by the Planning Board, City Council, and County Commissioners.

