

**FLATHEAD COUNTY PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE  
MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT REPORT #FPMA-10-02  
WEST RESERVE DRIVE – KALISPELL CITY/COUNTY MASTER PLAN MAP AMD.  
OCTOBER 27, 2010**

A report to the Flathead County Planning Board and Board of Commissioners regarding an amendment to the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 land use map. The proposed amendment would change the land use designation for a limited area along West Reserve Drive from “Suburban Residential” to “Commercial”.

The Flathead County Planning Board will conduct a public hearing on the proposed master plan map amendment on November 10, 2010 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room of the Earl Bennett Building, located at 1035 1<sup>st</sup> Ave West in Kalispell. A recommendation from the Planning Board will be forwarded to the County Commissioners for their consideration. In accordance with Montana law, the Commissioners will also hold a public hearing on the proposed master plan map amendment at a date and time yet to be determined. Documents pertaining to the proposed amendment are available for public inspection in the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Earl Bennett Building, at 1035 First Avenue West in Kalispell. Prior to the Commissioner’s public hearing, documents pertaining to the map amendment will also be available for public inspection in the Flathead County Clerk and Records Office, located at 800 South Main Street in Kalispell.

**I. APPLICATION REVIEW UPDATES**

**A. Land Use Advisory Committee/Council**

The proposed master plan map amendment is not within the jurisdiction of any local land use advisory committee or local land use council.

**B. Planning Board**

The Flathead County Planning Board will hold a public hearing on the proposed master plan map amendment at 6:00 PM on November 10, 2010 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room of the Earl Bennett Building, and make a recommendation to the Flathead County Commissioners. This space is reserved for a summary of the Flathead County Planning Board’s discussion and recommendation.

**C. Commission**

The Flathead County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on the proposed master plan map amendment on a date to be determined. This space is reserved for a summary of the Commission’s discussion and decision.

**II. GENERAL INFORMATION**

**A. Applicant:**

Flathead County Planning & Zoning Office  
1035 First Avenue West  
Kalispell, MT 59901

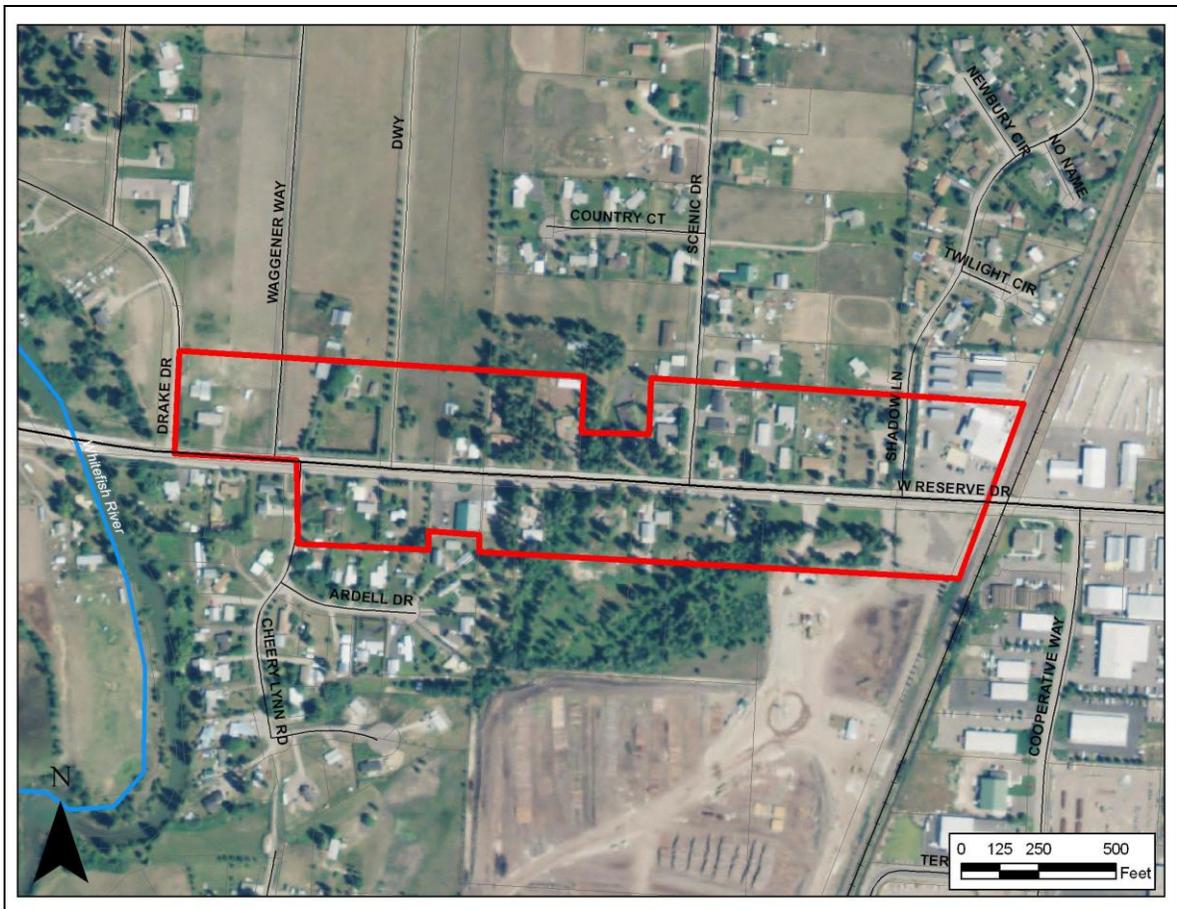
**Technical Assistance:**

N/A

**B. Legal Description and Location of Property**

There are 27 properties that would be affected, either wholly or partially, by the proposed master plan map amendment (see Figure 1 below). The affected properties are located on both the north and south side of West Reserve Drive, generally east of the Whitefish River and west of the railroad tracks owned by Burlington Northern Santa Fe. The land use amendment would apply to an area roughly 32 acres in size, and would affect lots or tract land in Sections 28, 29, 32 and 33 of Township 29 North, Range 21 West, P.M.M., Flathead County, Montana.

**Figure 1:** Proposed master plan map amendment area.



**C. Proposed Amendment**

The proposed amendment to the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 land use map would change the land use designation in the area shown by Figure 1 above to “Commercial”. The existing land use designation for this area is predominantly “Suburban Residential”, although a small portion of the amendment area – on the south side of West Reserve Drive, just west of the railroad tracks – is classified “Park/Open Space” and “Heavy Industrial”.

#### **D. General Character of and Reason for Amendment**

The Kalispell City County Master Plan and associated land use map were adopted in 1986, nearly 25 years ago. While many of the goals, policies and land use designations remain relevant and appropriate today, the Evergreen area has undergone some major changes over the past two decades, prompting a re-evaluation of the West Reserve Drive.

While the general area to the north and south of West Reserve Drive remains residential in character, properties fronting the road have begun transitioning from single family residential to uses more commercial in nature. An established commercial and industrial hub is located to the east of the railroad tracks, at the intersection of West Reserve and U.S. Highway 2. As these uses have continued to expand over the years, they've exerted pressure on the residential character of the area originally proposed by the City County Master Plan. The Planning and Zoning Office has seen a noticeable increase in commercial zone change requests over the past five years, coupled with an increased interest in conditional use permits for uses not typical of residential areas and requiring an added level of review. To date, approximately half of the 27 properties within the proposed amendment area are either zoned for commercial or industrial use, are utilized for residential purposes with ancillary commercial uses such as home occupations, or operate non-residential activities approved by conditional use permits issued by the County Board of Adjustment.

In many ways the changing character of the neighborhood can be attributed to increased traffic volume along the West Reserve corridor. Flathead County identifies West Reserve Drive as an urban principal arterial. This classification is assessed to roadways that serve major activity centers, have the highest traffic volumes and the longest trip lengths within a city. As such, West Reserve Drive is maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and designated a state secondary roadway. West Reserve Drive serves as one of the few direct links for vehicle traffic between U.S. Highway 93 and U.S. Highway 2 East; with the exception of Highway 2 on the south side of Evergreen, the only other direct east/west connection is Montana Highway 40 to the north, linking Whitefish and Columbia Falls. There are currently no signalized intersections along West Reserve Drive between Whitefish Stage and U.S. Highway 2, and vehicle traffic is permitted to travel at 55 miles per hour along this section of the roadway. Upon completion of the Kalispell by-pass project, additional traffic will be funneled along West Reserve Drive, further affecting the character of the area. Should traffic counts indicate that West Reserve be widened in the future to accommodate increased traffic, these improvements will directly impact properties fronting West Reserve Drive.

Based on the evolving character of the area, proximity to an existing commercial hub, increased vehicle traffic and future MDT plans for the West Reserve corridor, the Planning and Zoning Office as well as the Flathead County Planning Board and County Commissioners felt it was appropriate to re-evaluate the land use designation(s) in the proposed amendment area. The proposed amendment was presented conceptually to the Flathead County Commissioners on May 13, 2010, followed by the Flathead County

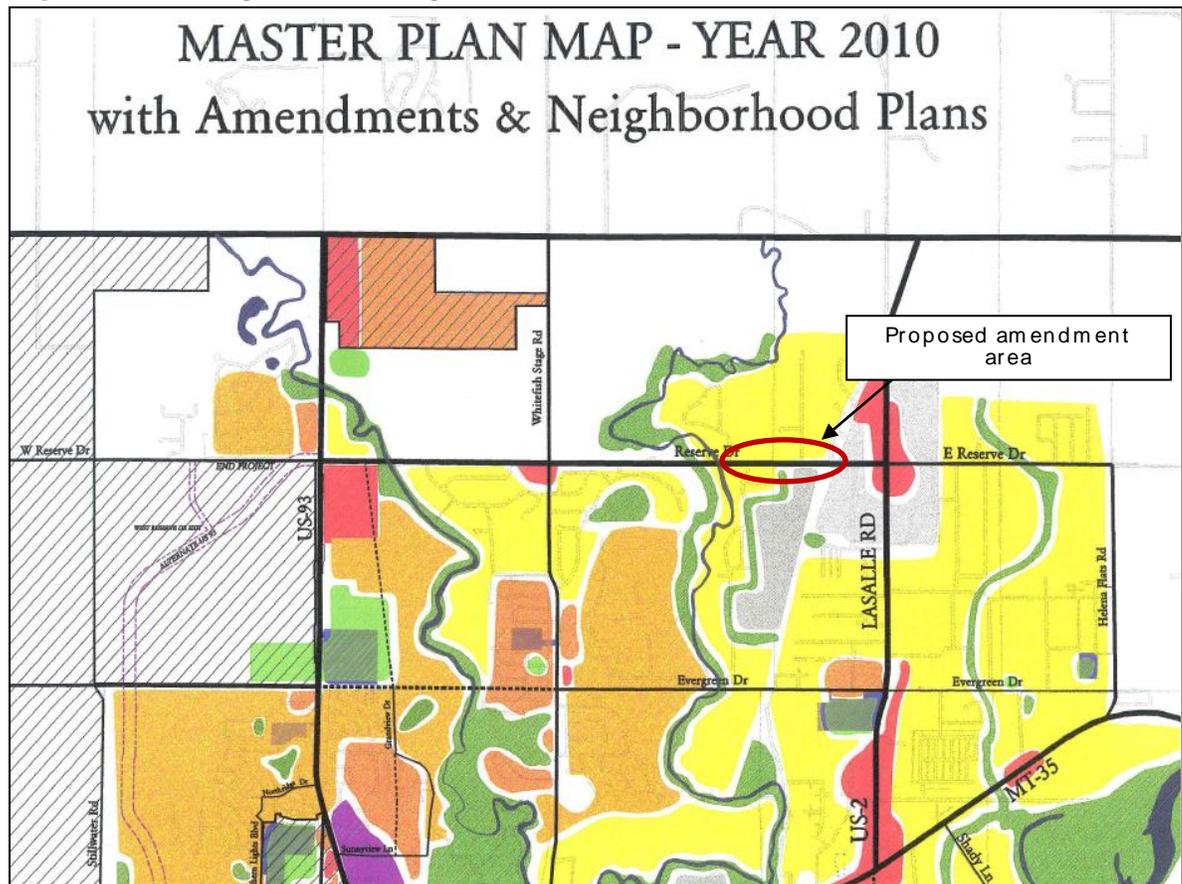
Planning Board on August 11, 2010, to solicit input and formally request the Planning and Zoning Office be permitted to move forward with the proposed amendment. A formal application was made by the Planning & Zoning Office on August 17, 2010, thus initiating the formal Master Plan amendment process to move forward.

**E. Adjacent Land Use Designations, Existing Land Uses and Character of Area**

As previously discussed, the area within and surrounding the proposed map amendment boundary is changing. Pressure has come from both east and west in the form of increased commercial and industrial development at the intersections of West Reserve and U.S. Highway 93, and West Reserve and U.S. Highway 2, respectively. With increased development comes additional traffic, and the construction of a by-pass around the City of Kalispell will only add to the pressures experienced by this area of the County. Current land use designations for property adjacent to the proposed amendment area are shown in Figure 2 below, and described as follows:

- North: Suburban Residential
- South: Suburban Residential; Park/Open Space; Heavy Industrial
- East: Light Industrial; Commercial
- West: Park/Open Space; Suburban Residential

**Figure 2:** Existing land use designation(s); amendment area circled in red.

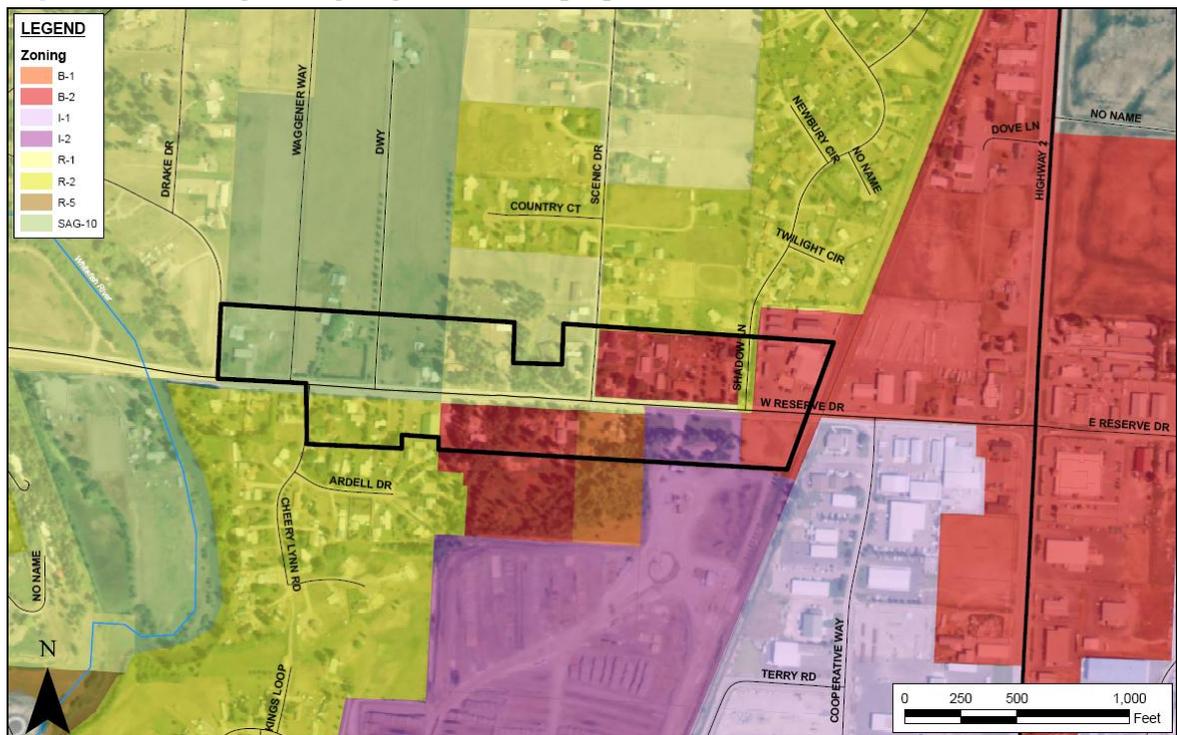


However, land use designation tells only half the story; current zoning has an equally

significant impact on land use within and around the proposed amendment area. As shown by Figure 3 below, the amendment area under consideration is comprised of a wide variety of zoning, from commercial and industrial to residential and even suburban agricultural. Adjacent zoning includes a similar range of zoning use districts, described as follows:

- North: SAG-10 Suburban Agricultural; R-1 Suburban Residential; R-2 One Family Limited Residential
- South: R-2 One Family Limited Residential, B-2 General Business, B-1 Neighborhood/Professional Business, I-2 Heavy Industrial
- East: B-2 General Commercial; I-1 Light Industrial
- West: R-1 Suburban Residential; R-2 Once Family Limited Residential

**Figure 3:** Existing zoning in general area; proposed amendment area outlined in black.



Existing land uses within the proposed map amendment area include single family residential, home-based occupations, a church, a petting zoo/recreational camp, a timber mill, vacant commercial land and a variety of small shop-based businesses. Beyond the amendment area and to the west, uses remain predominantly residential until reaching the intersection of West Reserve Drive and Whitefish Stage. To the east, uses are predominantly commercial or industrial and include an industrial park, car wash, local bank, real estate office, gas station, lighting store, commercial condominiums, a casino/restaurant and car repair shop. A few medium-density residential subdivisions are located in the general area, on both the north and south side of West Reserve Drive off of Shadow Lane and Cheery Lynn Road, respectively. Lots in these areas are generally ½ acre - 1 acre in size and have direct driveway access onto internal subdivision or collector roads instead of a principal arterial like West Reserve Drive.

**F. Public Services & Facilities**

Sewer:	Evergreen Water and Sewer
Water:	Evergreen Water and Sewer
Electricity:	Flathead Electric Cooperative
Gas:	Northwest Energy
Telephone:	CenturyTel
Schools:	Evergreen School District (K-12)
Fire:	Evergreen Fire District
Police:	Flathead County Sheriff’s Office

**G. Criteria Used for Evaluation of Proposed Amendment**

The Kalispell City-County Master Plan 2010 (hereafter referred to as ‘the Plan’) and Designated Land Use Map were adopted by the City of Kalispell (Resolution #3641) and Flathead County (Resolution #578A) in 1986, superseding the Kalispell Planning Area Comprehensive Plan adopted by both jurisdictions in October 1974. The Plan was subsequently incorporated as an addendum to the Flathead County Growth Policy, pursuant to Policy 45.1 regarding existing neighborhood plans. The Growth Policy was formally adopted by Resolution #2015A on March 19, 2007, and upon its adoption the City County Master Plan was deemed consistent with the Growth Policy until such time as a plan update was feasible and/or appropriate.

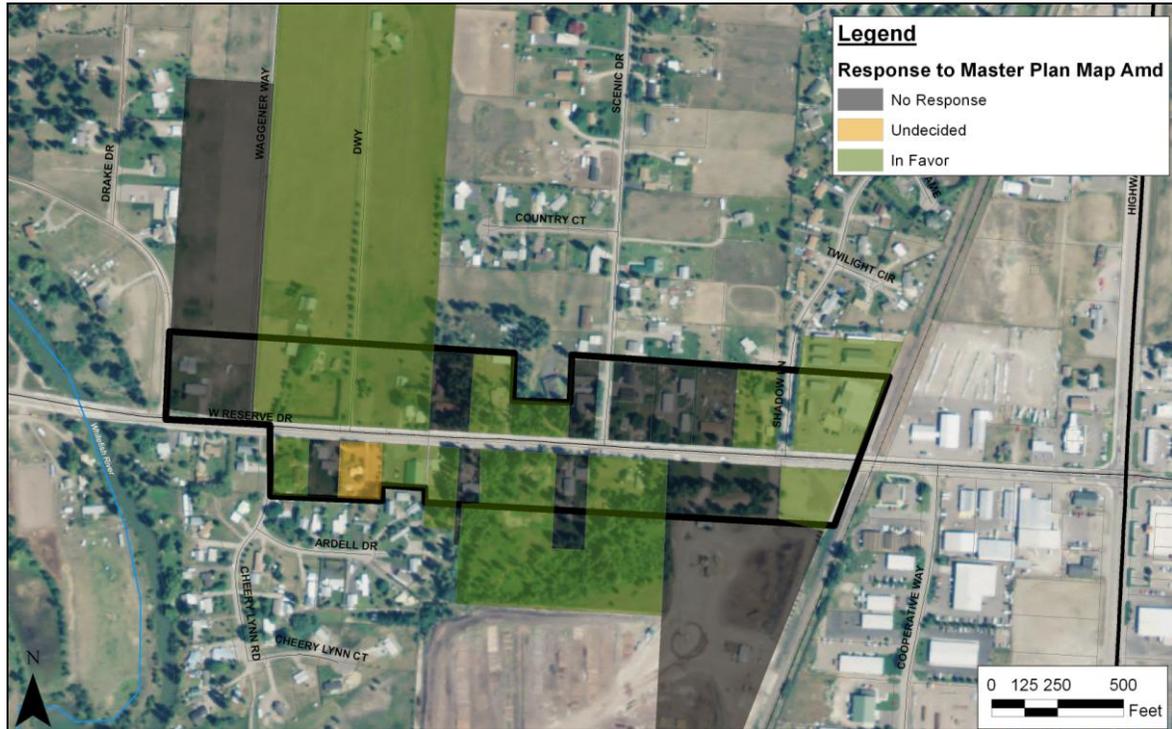
While the Plan does not include amendment provisions, standards or guidelines against which future amendment requests shall be weighed, Chapter 9 regarding “Implementation” refers to the Plan as a document not to be conceived “as an end product, but as (a document) that would require periodic review and revision.” As a result, the proposed master plan map amendment has been evaluated for consistency and compliance with the goals and policies identified within the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010, and as such the evaluation is compliant with the Flathead County Growth Policy. Because the proposed change in land use designation is an amendment to a component of an existing master plan – not an adoption of a new master/neighborhood plan or an update of an existing master/neighborhood plan – the process and review criteria outlined in Title 76, Chapter 1 of M.C.A. regarding the adoption and revision of a County Growth Policy were not appropriate based on the scope of the proposed amendment. Similarly, the process and review criteria identified in Chapter 11 of the Flathead County Growth Policy are appropriate when adopting or updating a master/neighborhood plan, but are inapplicable to a limited master plan map amendment like the one proposed.

**H. Compliance With Public Notice Requirements**

Legal notice of the proposed Master Plan map Amendment and public hearing of the Flathead County Planning Board was published in the October 24, 2010 edition of the Daily Interlake. Property owners within the proposed amendment area, as well as property owners within 150 feet of the proposed amendment boundary, were notified by mail on October 13, 2010.

In addition to the mandatory public notice requirements outlined in state statute, additional public outreach was conducted by the County, in an effort to engage and collect input from all community members – particularly those directly affected by a potential change in land use designation. Prior to the proposed amendment, Flathead County planning staff attended a citizen-initiated meeting to provide information about the Plan and discuss the potential for a map amendment to designated land use in the area. Following this meeting, a brief letter and postcard was sent to property owners within the proposed map amendment area, to formally gauge interest and collect comments on whether enough interest existed to warrant the Planning and Zoning Office moving forward with the proposal. Responses were collected over the course of two months (March and April 2010); a response rate of 55% was recorded, with 92% of respondents in favor of the proposed master plan map amendment, 8% undecided and 0% against. Figure 4 below graphically represents the responses received by the Planning and Zoning Office.

**Figure 4:** Responses received from property owners within proposed amendment area (black).



In addition to this initial scoping, the Planning and Zoning Office held an informational meeting on the proposed master plan map amendment on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The meeting was open to the public and noticed on the County’s website. A letter was mailed to property owners within the proposed amendment area as well as those properties adjacent to the amendment area boundary, inviting them to attend the meeting to learn about and provide input on the proposed amendment.

**I. Agency Referrals**

Referrals were sent to the following agencies on October 7, 2010:

- Jean Crow, Montana Department of Transportation
  - Reason: Amendment has the potential to impact Department of Transportation facilities/infrastructure.
- Dave Prunty, Public Works/Flathead County Road Department
  - Reason: Amendment has the potential to impact County facilities/infrastructure.
- Roberta Struck, Evergreen Water & Sewer District
  - Reason: Amendment area located within the water and sewer district's jurisdiction.
- Sean Conrad, City of Kalispell Planning Department
  - Reason: Amendment is in close proximity to City of Kalispell planning jurisdiction.

### **III. Comments Received**

#### **A. Public Comments**

Public comment received during the public informational meeting held by the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010 is summarized below. Much of the input received during the informational meeting came in the form of questions, which were addressed by planning staff:

- Interest in extending the commercial land use designation all the way to Whitefish River; could the designated floodplain be used as the western boundary?
  - Staff response: potential issues with increased development, impermeable surfaces and stormwater runoff negatively impacting riparian areas and floodplain; would consider alternate boundary (floodplain) during review of proposed amendment and discuss with Planning Board.
- Traffic concerns relating to the general West Reserve area voiced; need for a protected left turn lane at the intersection of Whitefish Stage, due to increased traffic. What are MDT's plans for this, and will Church Drive ever be extended to become a thru-road?
  - Staff response: Kalispell's Transportation Plan identified improvements to Whitefish Stage, but specifics and timeline unclear. The Kalispell Planning Department and Montana Department of Transportation will be contacted during the review process, to provide comment on the proposal. The Church Drive project was part of a City-approved subdivision (Silverbrook Estates); do not have information on proposed future extension.
- Procedural questions relating to how the map amendment was initiated, who (in the community) had a role in initiating it, how many letters were sent, what the responses were, issues with 'spot zoning', etc.
  - Staff response: provided information regarding the initiation of the map amendment, response rates, process to date (summarized in Sections D & H above). The application is not a proposed change in zoning but an amendment to existing land use designations; the question posed appears to confuse master plan amendments and zone change requests. Regardless, 3-part test discussed for clarification, as well as its applicability to the

proposed amendment.

- One individual voiced disagreement with planning staff's statement that a master plan map amendment would not impact property taxes.
- One individual felt the master plan map amendment was an attempt by the church to circumvent the conditions of their conditional use permit.
- Concern there would be problems with the City of Kalispell, wondering if an inter-local agreement similar to that in Whitefish and Columbia Falls existed.
  - Staff response: Flathead County does not maintain an inter-local agreement with the City of Kalispell. The City will be asked to provide comment on the proposal. Unaware of any plans by the City to annex part or all of the Evergreen area; regardless, application will be made while the area is under County jurisdiction, so the long-term potential for annexation is irrelevant to the current proposal.

Planning staff also received two comments/inquiries from property owners unable to attend the information meeting. One property owner located outside the proposed amendment area had an interest in being included and wondered whether the proposed boundaries could be altered to include property not directly fronting West Reserve Drive. The second inquiry came from a representative for Plum Creek who had some general questions about the relationship between land use designations, zoning and property tax.

The Planning and Zoning Office has not yet received any public comment in response to the notification that was mailed to property owners on October 13<sup>th</sup>. It is anticipated any member of the public wishing to provide comment on the proposal will do so during the Planning Board public hearing scheduled for November 10, 2010. Any written comments received following the completion of this report will be provided to the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners and summarized during the public hearing(s).

## **B. Agency Comments**

The following is a summarized list of agency comment received as of the date of the completion of this staff report:

- Dave Prunty, Public Works/Flathead County Road Department
  - West Reserve is a State secondary road. At this time we have no comment on this application.
- Sean Conrad, City of Kalispell Planning Department
  - If the County continues to permit urban scale development without minimal development standards along highways and other major and minor arterial roads, the County stands to create another La Salle corridor characterized by strip commercial development patterns, inconsistent sidewalks and too many access driveways onto the highway.
  - The Kalispell Transportation Plan recommends West Reserve Drive be improved to a three lane principal arterial between Whitefish Stage and U.S. Highway 2. This designation would include bike lanes, curbs, gutters and a landscaped boulevard, as well as turn bays at major intersections or access

- points serving development along the corridor. The right-of-way would require widening from 60 ft. to 80 ft. or more, depending on topography.
- Consideration should be given to amending the county zoning ordinance to provide an overlay zoning district that would include development standards such as building setbacks, limited access, land use restrictions that would limit things like parking lots close to the right of way, etc.
  - Include pedestrian facility requirements in the overlay zoning described above. Contact Eagle Transit to coordinate bus service and shelter locations along West Reserve Drive.
  - Incorporating additional development standards into the County’s zoning ordinance could address potential negative impacts resulting from the proposed master plan map amendment.

#### **IV. EVALUATION OF PROPOSED MASTER PLAN MAP AMENDMENT**

##### **A. Map Amendment Affected Area Boundary**

As shown by Figure 1 on page 2, the proposed amendment area extends approximately 300 feet north from the centerline of West Reserve Drive and 250 feet south, generally following property boundaries. Certain properties included in the proposed map amendment area were exceptionally long, extending beyond a reasonable “commercial corridor”; in these instances the property may be split by land use designation. The amendment area would apply to properties that have existing driveway access onto West Reserve. Drake Drive and Cheery Lynn Road comprise the amendment area’s westerly boundary, to mitigate potential impacts to the riparian areas and floodplain along the Whitefish River. The BNSF rail corridor forms the eastern boundary of the proposed amendment area. As previously discussed, the map amendment would change the designated land use for this area from “Suburban Residential”, “Parks/Open Space” and “Heavy Industrial” to “Commercial”.

##### **B. Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 and Designated Land Use Map**

The Kalispell City County Master Plan is comprised of three major components – the plan text, designated land use map, and goals and objectives. The Plans stresses all three components must be weighed equally when interpreting or amending any part of the document. Evaluation of the proposed master plan map amendment will therefore contemplate all three components when addressing policy recommendations specific to the four major plan elements – land use, housing, transportation and public facilities and utilities.

##### Land Use

The Plan discusses land use in two categories – land as it currently exists within the plan area, and land use as a projected trend for the year 2010. In many ways the designated land use map serves as a marriage of both discussions, identifying areas where established land uses should continue as well as areas most appropriate for future growth. The Plan designates the proposed amendment area as primarily “Suburban Residential”, with a small

portion in “Public” land use as well as “Heavy Industrial”. The predominant land use designation – “Suburban Residential” – is described by the City County Master Plan as:

*“A residential district which provides for two or less units per acre. Such areas typically do not have access to a community sewer or water system, have only limited police and fire protection, may have limited carrying capacity due to site or soil limitations, floodplain or other natural constraints which preclude higher density. Suburban residential districts are typically located in two areas: on the periphery of the urbanizing community where they serve as a transitional development pattern between the urban area and the timber and agricultural areas beyond; and in aesthetically attractive areas such as foothills, lakeshore, or river frontage not suitable for agriculture or timber production. Suburban residential districts provide large lot, estate, ranchette or resort housing opportunities where limited farming/gardening and raising of animals is common and/or privacy, aesthetic consideration and preservation of natural surroundings are paramount. Detached single family houses and manufactured homes on individual lots would constitute the major land use pattern.”*

While West Reserve Drive may have served as the periphery of the urbanized Evergreen area in 1986, continued growth and development along the U.S. Highway 2 corridor has resulted in the Highway 2/West Reserve intersection becoming a major commercial hub. The majority of the proposed amendment area along West Reserve is now served by public water and sewer, with 44% of the lots less than one acre in size and large estates or resort housing uncommon. All properties involved in the amendment area are currently served by the Evergreen Public School and Fire Districts, Flathead County Sheriff and Solid Waste. In light of these changing conditions, the Plan further states that when *“community water and sewer systems are extended into suburban areas and as other community services become available (i.e. access to improved police and fire protection, schools, garbage collection, etc.), these areas should be routinely reviewed and, where appropriate, re-designated to a higher, more appropriate residential district.”*

The land use designation “Park/Open Space” is defined by the Plan as *“areas devoted principally to public recreation and leisure activities. This district may also include environmentally sensitive or critical areas such as floodways, floodplains or steep, erosion-prone hillsides otherwise unsuitable for development which are better left undisturbed in their natural state. Such districts may be publicly or privately owned.”* The small portion of the amendment area identified as “Park/Open Space” is privately owned, currently developed, and not located within floodplain or in an area where topography is an issue for erosion. Hydrographic stream reach (ID #5855849) traverses north to south across the amendment area described; it appears the Plan may have originally designated this general area as “Park/Open Space” because of this hydrological feature. A wooded swale indicates the feature may still be used to collect surface water runoff and as a visual element along West Reserve; however, there is no indication this area has been or would be utilized for “Park/Open Space” land use as defined by the Plan.

The small portion of the amendment area designated “Heavy Industrial” is currently utilized for industrial purposes, with the exception of Tract 5C which is zoned for commercial use and currently vacant land (see Figure 3 above). The change in land use designation from “Heavy Industrial” to “Commercial” would have no impact on the existing industrial uses or current zoning on these properties. This area was included in the proposed master plan map amendment to maintain consistency in land use along the West Reserve Corridor. The Plan states that where possible, *“there should be a transition from heavy industrial land uses to other less intense land use.”* It appears the Plan intended to maintain the “Park/Open Space” land use as a buffer between this heavy industrial area and the suburban residential land use to the immediate west. A “Commercial” land use designation could similarly serve as the transitional area between existing heavy industrial and suburban residential uses.

In 1986 the Plan anticipated roughly 400 additional acres of commercial land would be necessary to accommodate commercial growth anticipated by 2010. While the land use map generalizes all commercial uses into one “Commercial” land use designation, the text of the Plan describes different types of commercial development appropriate for different areas; neighborhood commercial, highway commercial, general commercial and medical/professional. Based on these descriptions, it is anticipated that the “Commercial” land use designation proposed could reasonably accommodate both neighborhood and general commercial uses. Commercial growth was seen as a necessary tool for economic growth in the City of Kalispell and Flathead County, and the Plan states that *“all commercial activity should be directed toward existing commercial areas either as expansion or infill.”* The proposed amendment area could be viewed as an expansion of the existing commercial hub located at the intersection of West Reserve and U.S. Highway 2 (refer to Figure 2). As discussed in Section II (E), some properties within the amendment area have already been zoned for commercial use. The map amendment would serve as a mechanism to bring those properties into conformance with the overall Plan, as well as prepare the area for modest commercial expansion anticipated in the future.

Item 6 in Chapter 1 entitled “Goals and Objectives” identifies the land use goal of the master plan as *“the orderly growth and development of the planning jurisdiction with ample space for future growth while, at the same time, ensuring compatibility of adjacent land uses.”* A list of objectives follows the stated goal, with the following objectives relevant to the proposed master plan map amendment:

*6.a Designate adequate areas for a variety of business and commercial uses such as neighborhood oriented businesses and services, highway-commercial oriented activities and general commercial uses.*

- The proposed master plan map amendment would accommodate both neighborhood and general commercial uses based on the text of the Plan. The appropriate application of these different use districts would be evaluated in future zone change requests.

6.b. *Set standards for the designation or expansion of commercial areas based on a compact development pattern designed to meet the needs of the intended service area and not the desires or speculation of strip developers.*

- There appears to be a desire and need for the expansion of the commercial hub located at the corner of West Reserve Drive and U.S. Highway 2, as evidenced by recent zone change requests and the transitional character of the area. The amendment area has adequate public infrastructure to accommodate this expansion.

6.g *Maintain the character of single family neighborhoods.*

- Regardless of the Plan's intent, the character of the West Reserve area between the Whitefish River and railroad has evolved from a suburban residential neighborhood to an urban commercial corridor. Properties beyond the corridor remain predominantly residential, and commercial land uses could serve as a necessary buffer between the principal arterial roadway and existing residential land uses. With appropriate buffering and mitigation, future commercial development could protect the value and character of single family residential neighborhoods located beyond West Reserve Drive.

### Housing

The Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 discusses the current housing supply and projected need as seen in 1986. In the 25 years since this plan was adopted, developed land has increased considerably in both the City and County jurisdiction. The Plan focuses much of the discussion around the amount, type and location of housing stock available; while the number of developable lots does not directly correlate with the type and amount of housing stock available, it does indicate that there is currently more product on the market than there is demand.

Item 4 in Chapter 1 identifies the goal for housing as “*a housing supply within the planning jurisdiction that meets the needs of present and future residents in terms of supply, choice and location.*” Objectives listed under this section focus on revitalization, mobile and manufactured homes, high density residential development and PUD standards; none of which are applicable to the proposed master plan map amendment. It is anticipated converting 32 acres of land from a residential designation to commercial would have a minimal impact on the overall housing supply within the planning jurisdiction. This is especially true because several of the properties involved are currently utilized for non-residential uses.

### Transportation

Transportation issues along West Reserve Drive are a key factor influencing the proposed master plan map amendment. Chapter 7 of the Plan acts as a summary of the Kalispell Area Transportation Plan adopted in its entirety in October 1993 as a formal element of the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010.

As of 1993, West Reserve Drive was classified by the Plan as a major arterial, with an

average daily traffic count of 6,770 vehicle trips (count taken in 1991 between Whitefish Stage and U.S. Highway 2/LaSalle Road). A major arterial is described in the Plan as “*a major road or highway with moderate to fast speeds and high traffic volumes. Major Arterials provide access to the regional transportation network. They move traffic across the country, between cities and communities and/or from one major part of the Planning Jurisdiction to another.*” The Plan identifies the link between the U.S. Highway 93 bypass and recommends the widening of West Reserve Drive between U.S. Highway 93 and U.S Highway 2 to four lanes plus a center turn lane, as a second tier priority project. This recommendation is based upon the increased vehicle traffic anticipated along this corridor in 1993.

Current traffic counts taken along West Reserve Drive between Whitefish Stage and U.S. Highway 2 number 12,640 vehicle trips per day; an 87% increase in vehicle traffic since 1993. As a designated state secondary roadway, West Reserve Drive is the northernmost direct connector between Highway 93 and Highway 2 until Montana Highway 40 linking the cities of Whitefish and Columbia Falls to the north. This connector is poised to become even more important upon the completion of the Kalispell by-pass project, a factor anticipated in the original Plan. Based on agency comment received from the City of Kalispell Planning Department, the updated Transportation Plan (2006) recommends improvements to West Reserve between Whitefish Stage and U.S. Highway 2, to improve traffic flow and encourage safe and effective multi-modal transportation along this important east/west corridor. While Flathead County did not participate in the update of the City’s Transportation Plan, these recommended improvements to the West Reserve corridor are similar to the original recommendations in the 1986 Plan recognized by the County (discussed in the paragraph above). Although past and present recommendations are not implemented through a change in land use designation from “Suburban Residential” to “Commercial”, they indicate the amount of vehicle traffic has been and will continue to increase along this portion of West Reserve Drive, and that future improvements to infrastructure could support a higher intensity of use – such as commercial - along the corridor.

While the change in land use designation does not result in an immediate change to the zoning in place at this time, it does increase the potential for future zone change requests from residential to commercial. This may contribute to increased traffic volume along the portion of West Reserve included in the map amendment area, which has the potential to impact public health and safety. Future zone change requests would undergo review by the Planning and Zoning Office, during the course of which the Montana Department of Transportation would be contacted to provide comment and recommendations on the proposed type and intensity of use. MDT also requires any property with an existing approach onto a state maintained roadway to undergo review when changing the existing use on that property; therefore a lot currently used for residential purposes would require re-review and approval from MDT to utilize an approach for commercial purposes. This would ensure an approach can be designed and built to state specifications, is able to accommodate the amount of traffic anticipated and has adequate sight, turning and stacking

distances to account for traffic safely and efficiently.

Item 7 in Chapter 1 identifies the goal for transportation as “*a comprehensive circulation system which serves the combined needs of the community, planning jurisdiction and region and provides safe, convenient and economical access to all facilities throughout the area.*” A list of objectives follows the stated goal, with the following objectives relevant to the proposed master plan map amendment:

*7.b Designate arterial streets which will provide for traffic movement within and around the community and provide access to and from the surrounding area.*

- West Reserve Drive within the proposed amendment area is designated a principal arterial and functions as such.

*7.f Provide a highway arterial bypass for traffic which has no destination within Kalispell.*

- Upon completion of the Kalispell by-pass project, West Reserve Drive will become even more integral linking traffic moving east-to-west between U.S. Highway 93, U.S. 2 and beyond.

*7.g Require off-street parking to meet the needs of new construction.*

- The change in land use from ‘Suburban Residential’ to ‘Commercial’ could enable future zone change requests to commercial. However, commercial uses associated with that zoning would be required to meet the minimum off-street parking standards identified in the Flathead County Zoning Regulations.

#### Public Facilities and Utilities

The availability of public services and utilities is an important consideration when determining appropriate land use designations for a planning jurisdiction. At the time the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 was adopted, and based on the “Suburban Residential” land use designation, the proposed amendment area may not have had access to many of the public facilities and services necessary to support a commercial land use designation. While the Evergreen Water and Sewer District was established in 1968, it is unclear whether properties within the proposed amendment area had access to water and sewer services at the time the Plan was adopted. The text of the Plan indicates the existence of the Flathead County Sheriff’s Department, the Evergreen Fire Department, Evergreen School District, Evergreen Disposal services for refuse; however, the Plan does not indicate whether these services were available in the West Reserve Drive area, and the land use designation suggests availability was minimal (see definition of “Suburban Residential” in Section IV.B above).

Currently, all but two properties within the proposed amendment area are located within the Evergreen Water and Sewer District. The amendment area is served by the Flathead County Sheriff’s Department, the Evergreen Fire Department, Evergreen School District (for grades K-12) and Evergreen Disposal for the contract haul of residential, commercial and industrial solid waste. The Plan identifies additional community resources such as Flathead Valley Community College, County parks and recreation facilities as well as public libraries, cemeteries and health facilities that continue to be available to and serve

the proposed amendment area. The presence of these public facilities and utilities indicates a change in land use would have little, if any impact on these services because they are already available to and utilized by the properties within the amendment area.

Item 8 in Chapter 1 identifies the goal for public facilities as “*an economical, balanced distribution of public facilities and services throughout the planning jurisdiction for present and anticipated future residents.*” A list of objectives follows the stated goal, with the following objectives relevant to the proposed master plan map amendment:

*8.a Designate areas of future development which are already serviced or are in areas which can be economically serviced by water and sewer systems, polices and fire protection, etc.*

- The proposed amendment area along West Reserve is currently served by the public facilities and utilities necessary to accommodate limited commercial growth. Future commercial development could be more economically served here than further north along U.S. Highway 2, outside the boundary of a public water and sewer district and beyond the urbanized Evergreen area. Encouraging infill development close to existing population centers reduces the cost of extending utilities in the future; reduces response times (for fire and emergency services); and serves population centers more efficiently by reducing the number and distance of vehicle trips traveled, thereby reducing wear and tear on County infrastructure. This concept is further supported by Policy 6.5 in the Flathead County Growth Policy regarding infill commercial development (see Section C below).

*8.b Coordinate sewer, water and street planning and development with the land development process.*

- These utilities currently exist and are available to serve the properties involved in the amendment request, whether they remain residential in use or change to commercial at some point in the future. As discussed in the transportation section of this review, recommendations are in place at the local and state level to improve the West Reserve transportation corridor in anticipation of, and to accommodate future growth.

### **C. Compliance with the Flathead County Growth Policy**

The adoption of the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 as an addendum to the Flathead County Growth Policy ensured the Plan, as originally adopted, was consistent with the 2007 Growth Policy pursuant to G.45 and P.45.1 found in Chapter 10. However, specific goals and policies related to land use, transportation, public facilities and services, natural resources, demographics, housing and the Flathead economy correspond to goals and objectives identified in the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 and discussed in the preceding section of this report. The following is a list of Growth Policy goals and policies that support the proposed master plan map amendment:

*G.6 Adequate commercial land that is safely accessible and efficiently serviceable.*

*P.6.2 Restrict commercial development in unsafe, inaccessible, remote rural areas.*

*P.6.3 Provide ample commercial land designation to promote affordability.*

*P.6.5 Conserve resources and minimize transportation demand by encouraging redevelopment and infill of existing commercial areas in the County.*

- The proposed map amendment would result in 32 acres of land being re-designated for commercial instead of suburban residential land use in an urbanized area of the County, adjacent to existing commercial and industrial land uses and accessible from West Reserve Drive, a principal arterial road maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation.

*G.7 Consider existing community character in commercial land development.*

*P.7.4 Identify existing areas that are suitable for impact-mitigated commercial uses.*

- The West Reserve corridor has been transitioning from single family residential to uses more commercial in nature. The overall character of the area would support the proposed master plan map amendment as it is limited in scope, in close proximity to existing commercial and industrial development and consistent with the zoning in place and existing non-residential uses.

*P.21.1 Provide adequate land area designated for commercial and industrial use to promote affordability, creating entrepreneurialism and/or businesses relocation to Flathead County.*

- The proposed master plan map amendment would support requests for commercial zoning in this area in the future, which in turn would add to the amount of land available for a variety of commercial uses in Flathead County.

*G.22 Available, accessible and adequate business infrastructure including facilities, utilities, services and transportation networks to facilitate new businesses and relocation of existing businesses to the County.*

*P.22.2 Promote business centers and industrial parks in areas served by sufficient infrastructure with consideration to proximity to population densities.*

- The proposed amendment area is located in an area of the County served by public utilities, an adequate transportation network and is in close proximity to the City of Kalispell and community of Evergreen, areas of high population density.

*G.23 Maintain safe and efficient traffic flow and mobility on county roadways.*

*P.23.1 Manage land use and the transportation system as a unified and coordinated system to ensure that one does not outpace the other.*

*P.23.6 Support land use patterns along transit corridors that reduce vehicle dependency and protect public safety.*

- Future plans for West Evergreen Drive indicate maintenance and improvements will ensure safe and efficient traffic flow, consider future development – be it residential or commercial – and support land use patterns that protect public safety and encourage modes of transportation other than car travel.

*P.34.3 Promote land use patterns that permit logical, predictable and effective extension and integration of utilities.*

*P.40.2 Promote development in areas with public facilities or appropriate depth to groundwater to preserve water quality and water supply.*

- Public facilities and utilities exist in place to serve the amendment area, whether uses continue as residential or commercial in the future.

**V. RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the review of the proposed amendment and its consistency with the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 and subsequently the Flathead County Growth Policy, staff recommends the Flathead County Planning Board forward a recommendation of approval to the County Commission, to pass a Resolution\* supporting an amendment to the Kalispell City County Master Plan 2010 Map, applied to the area described in this report, to a “Commercial” land use designation.

\*Pursuant to M.C.A. 76-1-604(3) (a), amendments to neighborhood plans/growth policies are facilitated through adoption of a Resolution, as opposed to Findings of Fact.