

**FLATHEAD COUNTY PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE  
ADDENDUM TO THE CANYON PLAN  
WEST GLACIER VISION PLAN  
GROWTH POLICY AMENDMENT REPORT (#FPMA-21-01)  
JULY 27, 2021**

A report to the Flathead County Planning Board and Board of Commissioners regarding an amendment to add the West Glacier Vision Plan as an addendum to the Canyon Plan which is currently included in the Flathead County Growth Policy.

The Flathead County Planning Board will conduct a public hearing on the proposed amendment to the Flathead County Growth Policy on August 11, 2021, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room of the South Campus Building, 40 11<sup>th</sup> Street West, Kalispell. A resolution from the Planning Board will be forwarded to the Board of Commissioners for their consideration. A copy of the current Flathead County Growth Policy as well as the proposed amendment is available for public inspection in the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office, South Campus Building, 40 11<sup>th</sup> Street West, in Kalispell.

**I. APPLICATION REVIEW UPDATES**

**A. Planning Board**

This space will contain an update regarding the August 11, 2021 Flathead County Planning Board review of the proposal.

**B. Commission**

This space will contain an update regarding the Flathead County Commissioners review of the proposal.

**II. GENERAL INFORMATION**

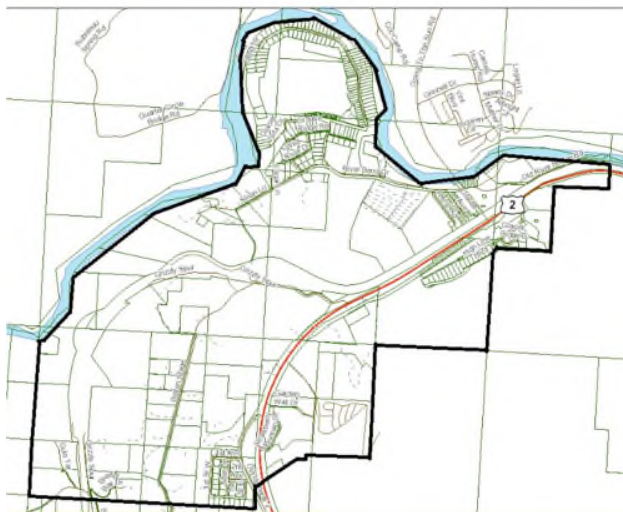
**A. Applicant/Petitioner**

Middle Canyon Land Use Advisory Committee

**B. Subject Property Location and Legal Description (if a map amendment)**

The general area included in the West Glacier Vision plan includes all of West Glacier and the area to the south and east. The legal description is generally portions of Sections 26, 27, 34, 36, and all of Section 35, Township 32 North, Range 19 West; and portions of Sections 2 and 3, Township 31 North, Range 19 West.

**Figure 1:** General area included in the West Glacier Vision Plan highlighted in black



### **C. Proposed Plan Amendment**

The West Glacier Vision Plan is proposed as an addendum to the Canyon Plan, which is an addendum to the Growth Policy most recently updated on October 12, 2012. The plan outlines five major goals:

1. Preserve Community Character and Sense of Place
2. Create a Safe and Resilient Community
3. Enhance Community Communications and Participation
4. Support Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
5. Provide Seamless Transportation Connections

### **D. Background/Purpose for the Plan Amendment**

Before diving into the plan amendment criteria, there is some important background information important to this request. In the Fall of 2018, West Glacier community members contacted the Department regarding the community applying for a Rivers, Trail, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) grant from the National Park Service. The RTCA grant program is a non-monetary grant program that offers planning assistance, in this particular case, to communities that are an integral part to a successful national park experience. RTCA planning grants have been awarded to other areas around the intermountain west that are gateways to other national parks.

One of the primary concerns of the West Glacier community members is the fact that visitation at Glacier National Park has increased dramatically in the last five years. With that dramatic increase in numbers, the concern is that development pressure could potentially and dramatically change the character of the West Glacier area.

After approximately 18 months of internet surveys, community meetings, numerous roundtable discussions with groups that included business interests, full time residents, part time residents, conversations with national, state, and local agencies, individual conversations, the initial draft of the West Glacier Vision Plan (WGVP) was made public. Comments received indicated broad support of the plan.

As the project moved closer to completion, a concern was raised regarding the ability to have the plan formally recognized as an important document in which future regulations would be reviewed and approved under. It was determined that the most effective and efficient way in which the WGVP could be formally recognized would be to request it be adopted as an addendum to the Canyon Plan. The Canyon Plan is a neighborhood plan that includes the area in and around West Glacier. At their June meeting, the Middle Canyon Land Use Advisory Committee unanimously recommended the WGVP be adopted as an addendum to the Canyon Plan.

### **E. Criteria for Amendment Review**

Amendments to the Flathead County Growth Policy and/or amendments to the plans adopted as addendums of the Growth Policy are reviewed for conformance with the amendment criteria found in Part 7 of Chapter 10 of the Flathead County Growth Policy.

**F. Compliance With Public Notice Requirements**

Legal notice of the Planning Board public hearing on this application was published in the **July 25**, 2021 edition of the Daily Interlake.

**G. Agency Referrals**

Agency referrals were not sent for this request.

**III. COMMENTS RECEIVED**

**A. Public Comments**

Five written comments have been submitted regarding the West Glacier Vision Plan. Comments range from making suggestions to include additional items in the plan to supporting the plan and the process. Any written comments received following the completion of this report will be provided to members of the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners and summarized during the public hearing.

**IV. EVALUATION OF PROPOSED NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN**

**A. Primary Plan Amendment Criteria**

Pursuant to Chapter 10, Part 7 of the Flathead County Growth Policy, the following criteria shall be used when amending the Growth Policy. Therefore, the same criteria are used to review an amendment to a plan which has been adopted as an addendum of the Growth Policy per Chapter 11, Part 4 of the Flathead County Growth Policy.

**i. Does the amendment affect overall compliance of the growth policy with 76-1-601, M.C.A.?**

The Montana Code Annotated (M.C.A) 76-1-601 states in subsections “(2), *the extent to which a growth policy addresses the elements listed in subsection (3) is at the full discretion of the governing body.*” Staff evaluated the affect the proposed amendment had on overall compliance of the Growth Policy with M.C.A. 76-1-601. Upon review of 76-1-601 M.C.A. staff determined which sections the proposed amendment would impact. The following subsections of 76-1-601 M.C.A. appear applicable to the requested amendment:

*(3) A growth policy may:*

*(a) include one or more neighborhood plans. A neighborhood plan must be consistent with the growth policy;*

It appears the proposed amendment would not affect the overall compliance of the Flathead County Growth Policy with 76-1-601, M.C.A. which states that the growth policy must include these topics, and the extent to which a growth policy addresses the elements listed in subsection (3) is at the discretion of the governing body. Therefore, the proposed change to adopt the WGVP as an addendum to the Canyon Plan would likely not affect the overall compliance of the Growth Policy with Section 76-1-301 M.C.A.

The Flathead County Growth Policy contains a list of existing neighborhood, local and regional land use plans. These plans were incorporated into the Growth Policy as an addenda. The overall compliance with 76-1-601(3) M.C.A. will not be impacted by the proposal to amend the Canyon Area Plan with the adoption of the WGVP because the Growth Policy is not required to include plans.

**Finding #1:** The proposed Growth Policy amendment appears to not affect the overall compliance of the Growth Policy with 76-1-601 M.C.A. because the scope to which a growth policy addresses the elements listed in subsection (3) of 76-1-601 M.C.A. is at the discretion of the governing body and it is not a requirement to include neighborhood plans.

**ii. Is the amendment based on existing characteristics and/or projected trends that are substantially different from those presented in the most recent update?**

The most recent version of the Canyon Plan is May 17, 1994, 27 years ago as of the writing of this report. During the last 27 years, Flathead County has seen dramatic growth and dramatic increase in visitation to Glacier National Park. As a result of this increase in visitation, development pressure has been experienced in the West Glacier area. This pressure has caused area residents concern on how to retain the historic character and feel of the area while accommodating the required improvements to adequately and safely serve the visitors to Glacier Park. The result of these concerns is the WGVP which would be adopted as an addendum to the Canyon Plan.

**Finding #2:** The proposed amendment to adopt the WGVP as an addendum to the Canyon Plan is based on existing characteristics that are substantially different from the May 17, 1994 adoption of the Canyon Plan and the October 2012 update of the Growth Policy because the visitation numbers to Glacier National Park along with pressure to improve infrastructure to support the visitors has increased dramatically since the 1994 and 2012.

**iii. Does the amendment create inconsistencies within the document?**

Staff evaluated the Growth Policy to determine if the proposed amendment would create inconsistencies within the document. Upon review of the Growth Policy, staff determined which text, goals and objectives the proposed amendment may impact.

Chapter 11 of the Growth Policy outlines a process for reviewing existing plans it states, *“In order to provide for adequate public participation, review of the existing plans listed above should follow the process outlined below.”*

1. *Guidance from Planning Board and Commissioners: The Flathead County Planning Board and Flathead County Board of Commissioners will prioritize and guide the review of existing plans in Flathead County and offer guidance to planning staff accordingly.*
  - The West Glacier Vision Plan is proposed as an addendum to the Canyon Plan. The Canyon Plan itself is not slated for review at this time.
2. *Public Workshops: As the revised draft is being created, interactive workshops will be conducted covering concepts and solutions being considered for incorporation into the plan. Workshops may allow staff, landowners and residents living within the neighborhood plan’s boundaries to discuss and refine ideas before they are presented in the revised draft.*
  - The event of the global COVID-19 pandemic made public workshops in the traditional sense challenging. However, after approximately 18 months of

internet surveys, community meetings, numerous roundtable discussions with groups that included business interests, full time residents, part time residents, conversations with national, state, and local agencies, individual conversations, the initial draft of the West Glacier Vision Plan (WGVP) was made public. Comments received indicated broad support of the plan. The Growth Policy adopted in 2012 is scheduled to be reviewed and rewritten as appropriate. Preliminary work on the rewrite will begin later in 2021 starting with an approved work plan. Workshops and public meetings will take place throughout the rewrite process as well as public hearings before the Planning Board and County Commissioners.

3. *Comment on Draft: After the document is created, a draft version will be released for review and comment. Electronic versions shall be available online and paper versions available at the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office. The public will have an adequate amount of time (no less than 30 days) to read and comment on the plan, prior to formal consideration by the Planning Board.*
  - o A summary of the plan was presented to the Middle Canyon Land Use Advisory Committee on January 28, 2020 with a website where more information could be found, and updates given at the February 25, June 30, July 28, October 27, November 23, 2020, March 15, and April 27, 2021. The draft WGVP was posted on the Flathead County Planning and Zoning website on February 17, 2021 with encouragement of feedback. The Planning Board will have the opportunity to review the staff report prior to the hearing. Further, this staff report will be available for public review approximately two weeks before the hearing.
4. *Planning Board Review and Revision: The Flathead County Planning Board shall hold a public workshop(s) as well as a public hearing on the plan and review and revise the draft plan as the Board deems appropriate.*
  - o Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to hold traditional face to face public workshops was limited. The process for this amendment included internet surveys <http://westglacier.mindmixer.com>, public meetings, round table discussions with business owners in the West Glacier area, full time residents and seasonal residents, one on one conversations with Glacier Park personnel, Department of Transportation and County Road and Bridge personnel, wild land firefighting personnel from the County, the State, and the Park Service, and there were many more informal discussions that helped guide this plan development process. The amount of public process has been limited due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Planning Board will conduct a public hearing on this request on August 11, 2021.
5. *Final Public Review and Comment: A final, revised version of the plan will be forwarded to the Flathead County Commissioners for their consideration. After the commissioners pass a resolution of intent to adopt the plan, the public will have an opportunity to read and comment on the final, revised plan, the timeline for which shall be established by the Commissioners.*

- The Planning Board recommendation will be forwarded to the Flathead County Commissioners for their consideration and a comment period shall follow before a final resolution is adopted.

The following goals and objectives of the Growth Policy appear applicable to the proposed amendment, and generally indicate consistency with the proposal:

- ❖ **G.1 - Maintain communication and coordination on issues of land use planning with Federal, State and Tribal leaders for the benefit of all jurisdictions.**
  - **P.1.1 - Attempt to develop cooperative agreements with Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park on issues including, but not limited to, local economies, adjacent land development, road status changes, access to public lands, land use planning documents, public hearings, and noxious weed alleviation and control.**
  - While no cooperative agreements with Glacier National Park are expected to be developed, the WGVP acknowledged Sarah Lundstrum - National Park Conservation Association, Jeff Mow -Superintendent, Glacier National Park and Patsy McEntee - NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program as being part of the West Glacier Planning Team.
- ❖ **G.23 Maintain safe and efficient traffic flow and mobility on county roadways.**
  - **P.23.7 - Develop a transportation grid system that minimizes environmental impacts to developed and natural areas.**
  - **P.23.8 - Promote coordinated and cooperative transportation planning with Kalispell, Columbia Falls, Whitefish and Montana Departments of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.**
- ❖ **G.24 Develop a quality transportation network to meet the present and future needs of the public.**
  - Within the WGVP, **Goal #5: Provide seamless transportation connections that consider both people and wildlife connectivity**, Action Area 1: Support Regional Transportation Planning, Action Area 2: Support West Glacier Alternative Transportation Planning and Connectivity, Action Area 3: Support Context-Sensitive Parking Solutions and Action Area 4: Support Wildlife-Friendly Transportation Corridors all offer considerations to support the above Goals and Policies concerning transportation.
- ❖ **G.25 - Identify and support alternative modes of transportation**
  - **P.25.1 - Encourage development that provides functional alternative modes of travel such as bicycle and pedestrian paths.**
  - **P.25.2 - Identify and prioritize areas for a predictable regional and interconnected bicycle path network and require pedestrian/bicycle**

*easements on both sides of identified county roads. Encourage developments that aid and/or connect to this network.*

- *P.25.3 - Support the partnership between Eagle Transit, the State of Montana and the National Park Service to develop a joint transit system that services both Glacier National Park and the residents of Flathead County.*
- *P.25.5 - Determine and prioritize areas for bike path easement acquisition and construction, prioritize the use of funds, guide grant applications, identify roads that should have bicycle lanes, determine maintenance funding mechanisms, and set county-wide bicycle path/lane construction standards.*
  - *The WGVP addresses the concern with connectivity and transit in the West Glacier area and its proximity to Glacier National Park. **Goal #4: Support sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities while conserving habitat and natural resources** and the Action Area 1 Local and Regional Trail Connectivity offers several suggestions to assist in possible areas of improvement.*
- ❖ *G.26 - Provide cost effective solid waste collection, transport, and safe, environmentally responsible disposal to all communities.*
- ❖ *G.27 - Safe, efficient and environmentally sound collection and disposal of solid waste.*
- ❖ *G.28 - Efficient and effective wastewater treatment and drinking water delivery.*
- ❖ *G.29 - Improve, protect, and maintain drinking water resources.*
- ❖ *G.30 - Safe and healthy individual wastewater treatment.*
- ❖ *G.35 - Protect and preserve water resources within the Flathead watershed for the benefit of current residents and future generations.*
- ❖ *G.36 - Protect water quality in lakes, rivers, aquifers and streams from existing and potential pollution sources.*
- ❖ *G.37 - Prevent untreated storm water from entering into any surface water, stream, river, or lake.*
- ❖ *G.38 - Preserve and protect floodplains to ensure the safety of residents from flood hazards and to prevent the degradation of water quality and critical wildlife habitat.*
- ❖ *G.39 - Preserve and protect wetlands and riparian areas to prevent degradation of natural resources, including but not limited to water quality and critical wildlife habitat.*
- ❖ *G.41 - Promote the preservation of critical fish and wildlife habitat and preserve the area's unique outdoor amenities and quality of life.*
- ❖ *G.43 - Protect the air quality in Flathead County.*

- The above goals are supported to some extent either directly or indirectly by proposed actions under **Goal #2: Create a safe and resilient community**, Action Area 2: *Establish the Glacier Park Area as a Fire-Adapted Community*, Action Area 3: *Support Forest Health and Conservation through Land Use Planning*, Action Area 4: *Pursue collaboration with other communities to create a climate action plan*. An additional WGVP goal which supports the above goals is **Goal #4: Support sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities while conserving habitat & natural resources**, Action Area 2: *Flathead River Corridor and Access*.
- ❖ **G.46** – *Honor the integrity and purpose of existing neighborhood plans respecting the time and effort of the community involvement that has taken place.*
  - **P.46.1** – *Ensure previously existing neighborhood plans remain in effect until revised by the Flathead County Board of Commissioners by incorporating those existing plans into the Growth Policy as addenda deemed consistent with the existing Growth Policy.*
  - The WGVP would be adopted as an addendum to the Canyon Plan which is an existing addendum to the Flathead County Growth Policy.

**Finding #3:** The proposed amendment appears to generally comply with goals and objectives of the Flathead County Growth Policy because the WGVP supports several of the goals and objectives of the Growth Policy.

**iv. Does the amendment further protect and comply with the seven elements of the public’s vision for the future of Flathead County?**

The seven elements of the public’s vision of Flathead County detailed in the Growth Policy are protect the views, promote a diverse economy, manage transportation, protect access to and interaction with parks and recreation, properly manage and protect the natural and human environment, and preserve the rights of private property owners. This adoption of the WGVP into the Canyon Plan takes into account the seven elements of the public’s vision of Flathead County as detailed in the Growth Policy. The purpose of the community coming together, applying for a Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Grant from the National Park Service and being awarded the grant for the purpose of creating a planning team along with a work plan indicates their dedication to protect and comply with the seven elements of the vision within the Growth Policy.

**Finding #4:** The proposed amendment appears to predominantly protect and comply with the public’s vision for the future of Flathead County because the WGVP addresses a majority of the seven elements detailed in the Growth Policy along with policies supporting the goals for the elements.



v. **Has the proposed amendment undergone a sufficient process of county-wide, public participation and review?**

This particular amendment will take public comments prior to and at the Planning Board meeting on August 11, 2021. In addition, the development of the WGVP solicited, and, indeed required extensive public participation and review. The process included internet surveys, public meetings, round table discussions with business owners in the West Glacier area, full time residents and seasonal residents, one on one conversations with Glacier Park personnel, Department of Transportation and County Road and Bridge personnel, wild land firefighting personnel from the County, the State, and the Park Service, and there were many more informal discussions that helped guide this plan development process.

**Finding #5:** The amendment has undergone a sufficient process of participation and review because the Planning Board will take public comments at their hearing, the process included internet surveys, public meetings, round table discussions with business owners in the West Glacier area, full time residents and seasonal residents, one on one conversations with Glacier Park personnel, Department of Transportation and County Road and Bridge personnel, wild land firefighting personnel from the County, the State, and the Park Service, and there were many more informal discussions that helped guide this plan development process.

**B. Secondary Plan Amendment Criteria**

The Master Plan does anticipate that the plan would require periodic review and revision, because the various recommendations delineated in this report are based upon prevailing and potential needs and emerging trends, as social and economic conditions vary, the needs and desires as well outlined in the goals of the West Glacier Vision Plan establish unique amendment criteria within the document.

**V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

**Finding #1:** The proposed Growth Policy amendment appears to not affect the overall compliance of the Growth Policy with 76-1-601 M.C.A. because the scope to which a growth policy addresses the elements listed in subsection (3) of 76-1-601 M.C.A. is at the discretion of the governing body and it is not a requirement to include neighborhood plans.

**Finding #2:** The proposed amendment to adopt the WGVP as an addendum to the Canyon Plan is based on existing characteristics that are substantially different from the May 17, 1994 adoption of the Canyon Plan and the October 2012 update of the Growth Policy because the visitation numbers to Glacier National Park along with pressure to improve infrastructure to support the visitors has increased dramatically since the 1994 and 2012.

**Finding #3:** The proposed amendment appears to generally comply with goals and objectives of the Flathead County Growth Policy because the WGVP supports several of the goals and objectives of the Growth Policy.

**Finding #4:** The proposed amendment appears to predominantly protect and comply with the public's vision for the future of Flathead County because the WGVP addresses a majority of the seven elements detailed in the Growth Policy along with policies supporting the goals for the elements.

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**VI. SUMMARY**

Per Chapter 11 Part 4 of the Flathead County Growth Policy existing plans previously adopted by Flathead County were incorporated into the Growth Policy as addenda upon adoption of the Flathead County Growth Policy. As such the review and evaluation by the staff of the Planning Board comparing the proposed amendment to add the West Glacier Vision Plan as an addendum to the Canyon Plan, and as such, an addendum to the Flathead County Growth Policy to the criteria for evaluation of amendment requests found in Chapter 10 Part 7 of the Flathead County Growth Policy has found the proposal to generally comply with the review criteria, based upon the Findings of Fact cited above.

Planner: MM/dv