

SOUTH WHITEFISH NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

ADDENDUM TO THE WHITEFISH CITY COUNTY MASTER PLAN

ADOPTED

**City of Whitefish
Resolution #98-24
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AMENDED

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**SOUTH WHITEFISH NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN
ADDENDUM TO THE WHITEFISH CITY COUNTY
MASTER PLAN**

I. PREFACE

The Neighborhood Plan is a tool to coordinate and clarify the development of a specific portion of a community, a neighborhood. The Neighborhood Plan focuses on a specific area in order to provide clear and detailed direction for the future development of that area. The Neighborhood Plan is developed within the overall framework of the City-County Master Plan and is adopted as a sub-element to that plan. While the City-County Master Plan is very broad in its analysis and guidance for the community, the Neighborhood Plan serves to refine this overall plan by expanding on the issues, goals, and policies germane only to the specific area included, and providing guidance at the neighborhood or project level.

II. BACKGROUND

A. INTRODUCTION

The South Whitefish Neighborhood Plan was initiated at the request of the City of Whitefish in response to a request for extension of municipal utilities to serve the subject area. In response to the initial request for municipal services, the City of Whitefish has amended its Extension of Services planning for this area and has annexed the Highway 93 right-of-way corridor to Highway 40.

With the pending completion of the Highway 93 reconstruction and installation of sidewalks and landscaping, it is critical that this area be serviced with municipal water and sewer and a network of arterial and collector streets serving the community to allow this neighborhood to grow and develop orderly.

B. LOCATION

The South Whitefish Neighborhood Plan is located on the southern approaches to the City of Whitefish, and is bisected in a north-south manner by Highway 93. Part of this neighborhood currently lies outside the corporate limits of the City of Whitefish. All of the properties fronting on Highway 93 abut the City Limits. The neighborhood extends northerly with varying widths from the Highway 40 Junction to the Pizza Hut on the west side of Hwy. 93, and to Mountain Mall on the East, excepting therefrom individual businesses which may have already annexed to the City. The easterly boundary extends north from Highway 40 along the quarter-section boundary located approximately 1300 feet east of Highway 93, to the westerly end of the Whitefish River bridge at JP Road, thence continues northerly along the Whitefish River to its intersection with the southerly boundary of Greenwood Terrace Subdivision, thence west to the Mountain Mall property, thence south to the northeasterly corner of Tract II, thence along the easterly boundary of Hwy. 93 back to Highway 40, excluding any properties presently incorporated into the City of Whitefish. The westerly boundary of the neighborhood extends northerly from a line extending west from the Highway 40 Junction, along the quarter-section boundary located approximately 1300 west of Highway 93, until it intersects with the northerly boundary of Tract 3ABM

(Sec. 01 30 22), thence east approximately 300 feet to the west boundary of Tract 3ABC, thence south and east along the boundary of Tract 3ABC to Tract 3ABL, then south and east following the boundary of 3ABL to the point of intersection with Highway 93, thence south along Highway 93 to the point of origin.

C. OVERVIEW

The linear-shaped neighborhood is approximately one mile long, centered along Highway 93. Attached is neighborhood map indicating the area included in the neighborhood plan and the existing land uses (Exhibit A), and a conceptual map indicating the need for north-south streets parallel to and on either side of Highway 93 (Exhibit B). Development is concentrated near the highway and is very sparse on lands more than 600 feet from the highway.

The character of the neighborhood derives primarily from its southwardly developing highway-commercial district. Highway frontage along the entire length of the neighborhood has commercial zoning, typically 400 feet deep; a couple of properties are commercially zoned approximately 1300 feet deep. The neighborhood is an urbanizing fringe area, having a mix of predominantly businesses, housing, churches, farms, and undeveloped land.

The present zoning was adopted for this area in 1982, and the WB-2 portion of this neighborhood was designated suitable for retail sales and services typically characterized by the need for large display or parking areas, large storage areas, and by outdoor commercial amusement or recreational activities, dependent on proximity to a highway or arterial street.

III. ISSUES

A. UTILITIES AND SERVICES

1. Municipal sewer, water, and other city services are generally not available in roughly the south half of the WB-2 district which lies outside of city limits; all properties abutting Highway 93 are, however, adjacent to the city limits.
2. Some owners in the southern part of the district favor immediate extension of sewer and water service to Highway 40 (approximately one mile) to enable development of their properties, as well as to provide sewer service to existing uses and thus better protect water quality. Several existing business properties have failed or failing septic systems, and desire to eliminate these systems in favor of the municipal collection and treatment system.
3. Many of these property owners petitioned the City of Whitefish in 1995 to initiate an SID to fund this extension of utilities; the City refused to consider an SID until a neighborhood plan for the area was adopted.
4. Utilities extension and annexation would improve the level of public services available to this area, which is zoned for urban-density commercial development. All properties fronting on Highway 93 with WB-2 zoning could fully develop without municipal utilities, subject to septic approval, upon receipt of a building permit. It would be beneficial in the long-term to

prevent a proliferation of commercial and/or residential development in this area on individual wells and septic systems.

5. Extension of municipal utilities prior to the completion of the highway reconstruction currently under way would be advantageous and cost effective, benefiting both the City and the property owners.
6. The City amended its extension of services plan in February 1995 to address the south half of the South Whitefish Neighborhood. Among other improvements, the plan proposes extension of sewer and water facilities and other municipal services to Highway 40, to be done either incrementally or in large sections. Improvements would be funded by SID or other owner/developer contribution. Incremental extension of utilities through a series of SIDs rather than a single SID, however, would be prohibitively expensive to establish and administer.
7. In August 1995, the City annexed the Highway 93 right-of-way extending to Highway 40, anticipating future annexation and extension of sewer and water facilities into this area.
8. The amount of existing commercially zoned land would accommodate significant growth in the Whitefish area. Nevertheless, it is widely perceived that the amount of improved commercial land and facilities available for new businesses is lacking, and that this circumstance is due in part to the development regulatory process and the lag time between new development and rapid market growth. Additional constraints on availability of existing zoned commercial land rests with Individual property owner decisions to neither develop nor sell their lands in the foreseeable future.
9. Extension of municipal sewer and water to the Highway 40 intersection would nearly double the amount of commercially zoned land (WB-1, VVB-2, or WB-3) in the Whitefish Zoning Jurisdiction with immediately available sewer and water service. The availability of these utilities and cost of resulting assessments may accelerate commercial development along this corridor, although the market place will have a strong influence. The commercially zoned properties can develop in accordance with existing zoning without municipal utilities.
10. Storm water drainage and collection facilities are lacking in the neighborhood. Those storm drainage facilities located within the Highway 93 right of way as part of the Highway 93 rebuild are not available to private property owners. It is anticipated that storm drainage collection and conveyance facilities will be extended into the neighborhood with the construction of the collector/arterial road system and that such drainage facilities, from a practical standpoint, would extend outward from the city limits. Storm water management currently is limited to on-site detention and disposal in lieu of any public or community system.

11. Whitefish has two major commercial districts, the Central Business District (WB-3), which is predominantly pedestrian oriented, and the Secondary Business District (South Whitefish), which is predominantly automobile oriented. These two districts exist in a tightly knit symbiotic relationship, and the health of each contributes heavily to the success of the other. Appropriate commercial growth in the South Whitefish Neighborhood will compliment Whitefish's downtown business district, and stimulate a positive business climate throughout the community.
12. The downtown and highway commercial districts are interdependent. Stimulating highway commercial growth may have positive and negative impacts on the downtown economy, by both expanding and dispersing commercial development in Whitefish. Like downtown, the highway commercial district is an integral component of the Whitefish economy, and its strength contributes to the vitality of the entire community.

B. CIRCULATION

1. The majority of properties in the neighborhood are accessed by private driveways onto Highway 93. Estimates of summer highway traffic volume range from 19,100 (1994 estimate of 3-month average, Montana Department of Transportation, taken South of JP Road) to 25,500 average daily trips (1993 estimate of 30th busiest hour of the year, Carter & Burgess, Inc., taken south of Greenwood Drive). The highway speed limit is 45 m.p.h. south of the Greenwood Drive, covering most of the district.
2. Highway 93 from the Highway 40 Junction north to the Whitefish River is currently under reconstruction, to a five lane configuration, which should drastically improve the free flow of traffic in the area. As a part of this reconstruction plan, the MDOT has negotiated and fixed curb cut access to adjoining properties, reducing to some degree the proliferation of ingress/egress opportunities previously existing.
3. During peak periods, severe congestion and hazards are created by conflicts between high-speed highway traffic and cross-traffic from multiple uncontrolled driveways. A grid circulation system with additional traffic lights may be needed in locations to be determined by a Major Street Alignment Study to alleviate these potential traffic conflicts.
4. Improvements to upgrade Highway 93 include widening to a five-lane design, storm drainage, and sidewalks, which will significantly improve circulation within the neighborhood. The City has moved forward with its plans for extensive landscaping in the highway right-of-way, extending to Highway 40. The construction of Highway 93 within the neighborhood is scheduled to be completed by mid-summer 1998; completion of the landscaping should follow shortly.

5. The lack of alternative routes on either side of Highway, 93 makes circulation very inconvenient for multiple-stop shopping and service operations such as delivery trucks and recyclable collection which have to mix with highway traffic after each stop.
6. The lack of an expanded street system impedes the development of the commercial district and development of residential neighborhoods behind the commercial corridor, thereby encouraging a linear strip growth pattern along the existing thoroughfare.
7. Highway commercial development in semi-rural areas often lack a traditional grid townscape and pedestrian friendly design. These design features provide important economic advantages for commercial districts: convenient circulation; multiple-stop shopping trips that benefit small businesses located near anchors: a local customer base of nearby employees and residents; broader sharing of infrastructure costs; and appealing urban design.
8. The existing development pattern provides few design features to attract and provide safe access for pedestrians and bicyclists, such as interconnected pathways separated from traffic, variety of shopping destinations with a short walk, windows facing pedestrian areas, landscaping, seating, pedestrian signs, bike racks. and crosswalks. The intent of the WB-2 Zoning District is automobile oriented; however, the design of Highway 93 reconstruction incorporates provisions to accommodate both bicyclists and pedestrians, albeit in a different manner than provided in the WB-3 zoning district.
9. Coordination and interconnection of parking lots would create significant opportunities for improved commercial access to the highway and shared parking.
10. Municipal lack of planned alignments for a grid street system will reduce or preclude options for street construction in the future as development encompasses potential right-of-way locations.

C. APPEARANCE AND DESIGN

1. South Highway 93 is the primary entrance to Whitefish. The appearance and the scenic views of surrounding forest land, farmland, and mountains represent significant values for the community and local tourism.
2. In a community-wide survey conducted in 1993 by the Whitefish Community Development Corporation, "business appearance" ranked third (among 24 choices) as the greatest local concern for the future, behind water quality and road maintenance.
3. Whitefish commercial districts have been criticized by some individuals for aesthetically detracting from the community, citing excessive linear sprawl, overhead utilities and a rather generic architectural appearance, including unattractive parking lots and pole signs.

4. Automobiles dominate the area visually and physically by the size, traffic volume, and noise of the highway; oversized parking lots fronting the highway; scattered, automobile-dependent development; and lack of pedestrian facilities and orientation. However, the intent of the WB-2 Zoning District establishes that this will be the predominant character of this area. Appropriate landscaping can mitigate the impact created by this type of development.
5. Landscaping, including tree planting, offers a relative low-cost method to dramatically improve the attractiveness of the area, but is generally lacking at this time.

D. DEVELOPMENT LIMITATIONS

1. Property owners in the WB-2 zoning district have expressed strong support for allowing a wider range of retail and other commercial uses in the district. Zoning regulations generally limit commercial uses in the WB-2 district to land-intensive types of businesses.
2. The cost of developing a secondary street system and related infrastructure will be burdensome on developers and property owners at the relatively low commercial densities that are anticipated to prevail in the district for many years.
3. Environmental limitations for development in portions of the district include the Whitefish river and adjacent riparian areas, a pond south of the Mountain Mall, a hillside bluff along the southwest part of the district, and wetlands west of this bluff.
4. Disincentives for development of residential neighborhoods, particularly adjacent to the highway, include the area's highway commercial character; lack of residential streets, lack of pedestrian orientation and parks- and highway-associated problems with congestion, noise, and hazards for children.

IV. GOALS

- A. Development and growth of viable commercial, industrial, and residential districts to enhance the entire community.
- B. A comprehensive circulation system providing safe and efficient access to all land uses and avoiding undue congestion on Highway 93.
- C. High quality building and site design to improve the entrance to Whitefish and the economic vitality of the community.
- D. Encourage commercial growth on Highway 93 South which complements downtown and the community as a whole.

- E. Develop and implement a plan to resolve the issues identified.

V. POLICIES

1. As substantial development occurs in the neighborhood, concurrent construction of an expanded street system including bike and pedestrian routes is encouraged, to include parallel north-south collectors, periodic cross-connectors, and local streets as needed. Map Exhibit B proposes a conceptual plan of new major streets, which is intended to neither indicate exact street locations nor a complete street system. Design and construction of local streets should be funded by the property owner or developer. Extension of arterial or collector streets may be partially funded by the community, depending upon city policy at the time of development and availability of funds. A partial funding formula may be structured with the property owner or developer paying for design and the cost of constructing a typical local street with the community paying the cost of upsizing to an appropriate arterial or collector street.
2. The neighborhood street system should include southward extensions of Baker Avenue and Columbia Avenue as back streets parallel to Highway 93, designed to function as continuous collector streets. These proposed collector streets should be fronted on both sides with commercial uses, backed by residential uses on the outer fringes of the neighborhood, improving circulation within the business district without encroaching into residential areas. In specific areas where it is inappropriate to have commercial development on both sides of Baker and Columbia streets, such as when bordering Park Knoll Estates, a landscaped strip, park or buffer should be provided. In appropriate areas, some properties may require rezoning to accomplish the desired objective of broadening the commercial districts or enabling the alignment of the major collector streets. Where feasible, new residential development should front on local streets radiating out from or parallel to Baker and Columbia Avenues, rather than fronting on these collector streets. The street system should also include cross streets and provide for bike and pedestrian routes.
3. As subdivisions and conditional uses occur on lands where new streets are proposed in an adopted Future Major Street Alignment Study, right-of-way for the proposed streets should be reserved. Where necessary to provide safe and efficient access or avoid undue traffic congestion, subdividers and conditional use applicants may be required to dedicate right-of-way and construct or upgrade these streets.
4. Property owners requesting annexation, municipal sewer, municipal water, subdivision approval, or conditional use approval for new development that would benefit from the construction of proposed streets identified in an adopted Future Major Street Alignment Study, may be required to waive protest to the future creation of a special improvements district to construct those streets or local streets directly serving their development or property.
5. Site design of future development should reduce dependence on Highway 93 for circulation within the business district. For example, primary driveway approaches onto side and back streets are encouraged. Driveway approaches onto Highway 93 have been established by MDOT as a part of the highway reconstruction, and few, if

any, additional curbcuts will be approved in the future. Over time, in fact, some existing approved curbcuts may be shifted, combined, or eliminated. Whenever feasible, curbcuts should be shared between properties. Interconnection of parking lots between commercial properties is encouraged. Placement of commercial buildings to front along side or back streets is encouraged.

6. Provide landscaping in accordance with the requirements of the Whitefish Zoning Regulations to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the business district, the entrance to Whitefish, and the visual connection with surrounding lands.
7. Site and building design should serve to minimize visual impacts, while accommodating the automobile oriented aspect of future commercial development. For example, most off-street parking and particularly large parking lots are encouraged to be placed behind buildings, and, if not, should be screened by berms, walls, or hedges. Separation of parking into small lots placed near destinations is preferred of expansive lots. Design pedestrian corridors to be safe, attractive, and linked to the sidewalks of adjacent streets.
8. Signage design should be integrated and in harmony with overall architectural and site design. Ground-mounted and wall signs are preferred over pole signs.
9. Any building served by an on-site septic system shall be required to be connected to municipal sewer upon failure of that on-site system, or when the existing uses or commercial improvements are changed which would require expansion of the onsite system, provided that municipal sewer facilities are available within 200 feet of the building, except where the sewer connection would require crossing the highway or the river.
10. All provisions of the City of Whitefish Zoning Jurisdiction Regulations applicable to properties in the South Whitefish Neighborhood, including landscaping provisions, will be conformed to appropriately, including any future revisions or amendments to those regulations.
11. Storm water will be required to be retained and disposed of on-site for any future development in the absence of any public or community collection and disposal system for the neighborhood.
12. The City of Whitefish should not annex land nor should it extend municipal water and sewer facilities (excluding water storage facilities necessary for the development of the South Whitefish neighborhood) south of Highway 40 and in particular south of the Highway 40 and 93 intersection.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The City of Whitefish should support prompt extension of municipal sewer and water facilities southward on both sides of the highway to the south end of the WB-2 district near the Highway 40 intersection, particularly in the light of their a) amendment to the City's Extension of Services Plan, b) their annexation of the Highway 93 corridor south to Highway 40, and c) the

pending completion of construction on Highway 93, including the extensive landscaping being funded by the City. Improvements may be funded by a Special Improvement District (SID) or some other suitable funding mechanism by those property owners desiring service.

2. Improvements to be included in the SID are presented in the 1992-1997 "Preliminary Plan for Highway 93 South Sewer and Water Extension" by WMW Engineering including a water storage tank. Portions of the required improvements may have a benefit for the community beyond the South Whitefish Neighborhood boundaries, and costs should be pro-rated amongst those benefiting this would include cost of the reservoir and associated infrastructure.
3. All properties to which the extended services are connected shall be required to be annexed to the city, or may be required to sign a Waiver of Protest of Annexation and a signed petition to annex if they are not contiguous to the City's corporate limits.
4. The City has prepared a major street alignment study for the streets and bike and pedestrian ways proposed in Policies 1 and 2, as shown in Exhibit B. Exhibit B is hereby adopted as a policy statement to this plan. Determination of right-of-way locations were premised on minimizing encroachment upon existing buildings, uses, and significant improvements. The exact location of these future major streets or cross connecting streets will be subject to the Major Street Alignment Study and in particular Exhibit B and negotiations with individual property owners as they develop their properties.
5. Establish a design review program to foster high quality design and enhance the south entrance to Whitefish. A program of voluntary compliance is encouraged, achieving design objectives through dialogue, coordination, and education in a timely process.