

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

September 17, 2019

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<b>STAFF:</b>	Donna Gaukler, Director, City of Missoula Parks and Recreation Kylie Paul, Natural Resource Specialist, Missoula County Parks, Trails and Open Lands
<b>REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY:</b>	Karen Hughes, Missoula County Community and Planning Services Ben Brewer, Missoula City Development Services
<b>PUBLIC HEARING DATES:</b>	Planning Board: September 17, 2019 City Council and Board of County Commissioners Joint Public Hearing: TBD
<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	<b>2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan</b>
<b>APPLICANT:</b>	N/A
<b>LEGAL NOTICE:</b>	The legal ad was published in the <i>Missoulian</i> on September 1, 2019, and September 8, 2019.
<b>OTHER NOTIFICATION:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review and recommendation to support and adopt by the City of Missoula's Open Space Advisory Committee and Missoula County's Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee</li><li>• Updates to City Park Board, County Park Board, and Missoula City Council throughout the planning process</li><li>• Briefings and updates to the Board of County Commissioners</li><li>• Updates at Community Council meetings throughout the planning process</li><li>• E-mail notification of project updates to the Missoula County Community and Planning Services email list</li><li>• Project updates in the monthly Missoula County Community and Planning Services Newsletter</li><li>• City website and County website</li><li>• Multiple opportunities for other public engagement including a formal public comment on final Plan draft from May 10, 2019 to June 3, 2019.</li><li>• Briefings to interested individuals, landowners and organizations</li></ul>

**PROPOSAL 6.2:**

Consider the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan for conformance with the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy and the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Recommend the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan as an Issue Plan of the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy and the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy.

**MISSOULA CONSOLIDATED PLANNING BOARD**  
**2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan**  
**September 17, 2019**

**Agenda Item 6.2**

- Consideration of the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan for conformance with the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy and the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy.
- Recommend adoption of the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan as an Issue Plan of the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy and the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy (Our Missoula).

**I. PROPOSAL**

The proposed 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan is a comprehensive planning document that helps prioritize limited resources available for open space conservation in the Missoula urban area. The plan emphasizes open space as a key element in Missoula's overall urban development patterns and informs open space conservation and land use decision-making by local government, conservation organizations, and citizens. This open space plan, combined with other relevant adopted plans, serves as a continued statement of our community's priorities for parks, trails and open space. As with previous versions of the open space plan, this document is implemented through a variety of tools and helps guide expenditure of public and private funds for open space conservation.

**II. RECOMMENDED MOTIONS**

**THAT** the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan, as shown in Attachment A, is in conformance with the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy and the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy.

**BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan, as shown in Attachment A, be recommended to the Missoula City Council for adoption as an Issue Plan of the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy and to the Missoula Board of County Commissioners for adoption as an Issue Plan of the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy, based on the findings of fact and conclusions of law.

**III. BACKGROUND**

The City of Missoula and Missoula County are proposing including the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan as an Issue Plan of the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy and the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy.

In 1995, the city completed its first formal open space plan, which described then-current efforts and recommended additional actions to achieve an open space system by 2010. In 2006, the city and county's Open Space Plan Update recognized the ongoing and growing need to protect open space as Missoula continued to grow. It reviewed, affirmed and expanded upon the 1995 open space vision, with the intent that subsequent reviews of the plan goals would take place about every 10 years, or sooner if needed.

Today, the vision and need for open space conservation in Missoula endures. The landscape of the Missoula Valley reflects a portfolio of accomplishments from decades of work. Nevertheless, as Missoula continues to grow and change, there are further needs in the form of incomplete connections between

protected areas, five key habitats still in need of protection, and a growing demand for places for the public to recreate. Accordingly, the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan charts the course for the next decade of open space conservation in Missoula.

### **Planning Area Boundary**

The term “Missoula Urban Area” is used throughout the plan and refers to the area identified as the open space planning area or Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails (PROST) planning area. This area includes the city and county lands within the urbanizing fringe around the city limits. The area is similar to the open space planning region boundary in the 2006 Update, with slight adjustments to be more consistent with the boundaries of the county’s Missoula Planning Region.

The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan is especially important for those areas experiencing growth and development pressure, where existing public open spaces exist but are not connected, and where there is significant community interest. The provision of open spaces in the urban area around Missoula is important for the following reasons:

- The Missoula urban area continues to experience the most growth pressure in Missoula County. Eight out of ten new residents to Missoula County will locate within the urban area.
- The unincorporated area around the City of Missoula is home to over 23,000 people and putting pressure on open space values such as connected trails, preserving prime agricultural lands, ensuring space for wildlife, and preservation of clean air and water.
- This area has a long-demonstrated history of success from open space planning, but growth, changing public demographics, the economy, and public desires continue to need be considered, balanced and thoughtfully addressed in public decision regards provision of open spaces.
- The limited land area, growth pressures and competing values have increased public interest in promoting, preserving, connecting, and enhancing public open space and functions within the Missoula Urban Area.

### **Implementation**

The city and county will use a variety of voluntary and regulatory tools to implement this plan. Not every tool will fit every situation, and each property and set of circumstances is unique. The city and county will work with willing landowners who wish to see a conservation outcome for their lands. The city and county will also work in the regulatory capacity to engage in land use planning and regulation. The combination of these efforts creates the opportunity to guide growth and protect open space in a manner consistent with our community’s priorities.

Opportunities to implement this plan may arise when landowners voluntarily seek open space bond funding or other partnerships to protect land as open space. Additionally, the opportunity to acquire open space through the private development process can occur when a landowner proposes a development project for review by the local governing body. The landowner can propose an open space set-aside; the local regulations may require an open space or parkland dedication; or to mitigate impacts, the local government can place conditions on the development to create such areas, consistent with state and local regulations.

### **Growth Policy Land Use Designations**

The plan provides information about open space lands in the Missoula Urban Area and where public and private conservation efforts are appropriate and desired. The plan does not materially affect or change

adopted land use designations or private property rights; however, it may be used to inform updates to growth policy land use designations. The plan identifies a wide range of open space values and generally indicates areas potentially appropriate for investment of public funds and resources to preserve conservation values.

### **City and County Roles**

The scope of the project was framed around the city's and county's respective roles in open space planning, acquisitions, and provision of services for the foreseeable future. These roles entail coordinating with public agencies and partners; pursuing preservation and/or protection measures consistent with adopted public open space values and mapping; and management of open spaces for benefit of residents (trails, wildlife, agriculture, water quality, etc.). More information about these roles can be found in the plan.

### **Public Process**

The 2019 Plan reflects the priorities the Missoula community articulated through several key public outreach endeavors. Numerous public outreach efforts, including the 2018 PROST county-wide survey, helped inform this plan providing a lens into our community's priorities for parks, trails and open space. The plan was written by the citizen advisory working group made up of members from OSAC and OLC, and by county and city staff. The plan has gone through public review comment period in May, review and recommendation by City's Open Space Advisory Committee and Parks and Recreation Board, and County's Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee.

## **IV. AGENCY AND PUBLIC COMMENT**

The public involvement process involved widespread notice and invitation to participate. All comments received were considered and most incorporated. The multiple reviews by city and county advisory boards generally ensure the values of the community are reflected in the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan. No comments have been received that included material objections to the adoption of the proposed plan.

## **V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Findings of Fact:**

1. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan reflects the priorities the Missoula community articulated through several key public outreach endeavors:
  - a. Community focus groups, January 2018 (Appendix I)
  - b. Countywide survey, January 2018 (Appendix H)
  - c. Open space open house and questionnaire, February 2018 (Appendix G)
  - d. City and county websites updated throughout the planning process
  - e. Numerous e-notifications throughout the planning processThese public outreach efforts helped inform this plan providing a lens into the community's priorities for parks, trails and open space.
2. The plan was written by the citizen advisory working group made up of members from OSAC and OLC, and by county and city staff.
3. Prior to the public hearing by the Missoula Consolidated Planning Board, there was a preliminary public review comment period in May-June 2019.
4. The 2019 plan was also reviewed and recommended for consideration by City's Open Space Advisory Committee and Parks and Recreation Board, and County's Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee.

### **2016 Missoula County Growth Policy**

5. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan is intended to be adopted by the county as an issue Plan and a precursor to this is to find conformance with the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy.
6. According to Chapter 4 of the Missoula County Growth Policy, an issue plan focuses on a specific subject or issue rather than land use planning across a larger region. Issue plans are advisory documents. Issue plans are intended to be developed using an open public process appropriate to the community, the issues being addressed, and the scale of the plan.
7. Much has transpired since and because the 2005 plan update was adopted. Passage of the 2018 Open Space bond measure warranted a major review of open space accomplishments to ensure the plan reflected community values, identified priority open space values, identified gaps and missing connections for both trails and wildlife, and identified areas needing better access to open spaces. In addition, it was necessary to review the plan for consistency with the county's adopted general plan, the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy.
8. The public process that resulted in the 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan confirmed there is a public need for the plan update, the changes proposed are appropriate for meeting the needs of the community, and the public will benefit as a result of the plan update.

### **Guiding Principles**

9. The county's growth policy adopted by the Board of County Commissioners of Missoula County, Montana, in 2016 is guided by a number of principles, including that the right to a clean and healthful environment is fundamentally important and the county's natural and cultural resources make this place unique and they should be conserved, enhanced, and enjoyed.

### **Growth Policy Goals, Objectives and Actions**

10. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan embraces and supports a number of the growth policy goals (Goals 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 11). How the proposed plan addresses these goals is evaluated below.

*Goal #1. Conserve vital natural resources including surface and ground water, air quality, agricultural resources, iconic landscapes, fish and wildlife species and their habitats, and native plant communities.*

11. The 2016 County Growth Policy states that to address Goal #1, the county will identify priority resource areas based on agricultural soils, wildlife habitat, water, scenic viewsheds, and the functions of the natural environment; the county will conserve the highest priority lands and waters while allowing other public benefits such as access utilizing land use planning, zoning, open space bond funding and other public funding sources; and the county will cooperate with private land trusts and landowners to facilitate voluntary conservation projects with private funding.
12. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan advances this goal by identifying priority resource areas based on agricultural soils, wildlife habitat, water, scenic viewsheds, and the functions of the natural environment for the Missoula urban area.
13. The plan guides public protection and preservation efforts and resources that may be utilized

but does not, by itself place any additional regulations or restriction on private or public properties.

*Goal #4. Reduce Missoula County's contribution to climate change while promoting resiliency and adapting to its impact on the natural environment and communities.*

14. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan seeks to preserve a wide variety of open space lands, including agricultural lands, riparian lands, potential trail and wildlife corridors and to interconnect those lands for primarily non-motorized uses, where and when public access is desired and appropriate.
15. Protected lands represent significant investments in slowing and reducing the contributions of urbanization to climate change and reducing development pressures on the natural environment and communities.

*Goal #7. Sustain and promote the land- and resource-based industries of agriculture, timber, restoration, and recreation that are part of the local economy and heritage.*

16. The 2016 County Growth Policy states that to address Goal #7, the county will support projects using public and private funding sources to conserve agricultural lands, the county will encourage forest restoration projects that result in economic activity, fuels reduction and improvements to wildlife habitat, the county will work with partners to develop and market a regional parks and trail system.
17. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan is an essential element in the tool kit that advances sustainability, economic diversity, history, public health, environmental quality and quality of life for all residents.

*Goal #8. Proactively plan and provide for the logical growth of communities while protecting rural character and sustaining county resources by guiding development to areas most suited for it.*

18. The 2016 County Growth Policy states the intent to use land use planning and zoning to help guide community growth and protect rural character and resources.
19. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan can provide guidance to future land use planning efforts.

*Goal #9. As part of planning, support the provision of infrastructure and services to and within rural communities.*

20. Public conservation lands are not typically considered an extension of infrastructure and services, especially for rural communities; however, there are numerous examples of how they greatly help to balance the county's role in maintaining rural community character.
21. Open space lands serve as green infrastructure by providing areas for flooding, agriculture, wildlife, and many other values critical to community safety, land values, and character.

*Goal #11. Reduce the safety risks and costs associated with wildland fire, flooding, and other hazards.*

22. Development in the wrong places can lead to public health and safety issues, as well as higher costs to the county to manage and mitigate disasters. Floodways, floodplains, and elevated

wildfire risk are the main hazards in the planning area. Public and private efforts related to open space acquisition, protection and/or enhancement in these areas not only responsibly helps to mitigate risk to public health and safety; they also provide opportunities to reduce and manage risks within these lands for benefit of surrounding landowners.

### **2035 Missoula City Growth Policy– City of Missoula**

23. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan is intended to be adopted by the city as an issue plan and a precursor to this is to find conformance with the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy.
24. According to the city growth policy, “Issue plans provide detailed analyses and policy guidance on specific infrastructure, facilities, development, or conservation issues identified in the Growth Policy. Examples include the Missoula Urban Area Transportation Plan, and the City Master Parks and Recreation Plan for the Greater Missoula Area. Issue plans should conform to the Growth Policy, but Issue Plans are not (necessarily) adopted amendments to the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy.”
25. The previous update to the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan was in 2005. Much has transpired since and because the 2005 plan update was adopted. Passage of the 2018 Open Space bond measure warranted a major review of open space accomplishments to ensure the plan reflected community values, identified priority open space values, identified gaps and missing connections for both trails and wildlife, and identified areas needing better access to open spaces. In addition, it was necessary to review the plan for consistency with the City’s adopted general plan – 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy.
26. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan process confirmed there is a public need for the plan update, the changes proposed are appropriate for meeting the needs of the community, and the public will benefit as a result of the plan update.
27. The 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan supports the goals, recommendations, actions and outcomes found in the city’s adopted general plan (2035 Missoula City Growth Policy). The open space plan specifically addresses the adopted goals of the city growth policy as outlined below.
  - a. Livability  
Goal LV4: Missoula will make thoughtful decisions about land use planning that support the needs and values of residents in regards to neighborhoods and community character, parks, trails, and natural resources.
  - b. Safety and Wellness Goals  
Goal SW1: Encourage healthy lifestyles by having a complete active transportation and transit network for all abilities and recreational opportunities that are safe, clean, beautiful, and navigable.  
Goal SW2: Missoula will grow and sustain parks and open spaces to provide safe and accessible places for outdoor activities and view sheds, each important to health and wellness.  
Goal SW3: Missoula residents of all ages and abilities will have ample opportunities for multi-seasonal recreational activities.  
Goal SW6: Missoula is committed to maintaining a clean and healthy environment for all.
  - c. Community Design



Goal CD7: Recognize and strengthen preservation and responsible access/use of Missoula's outdoor resources.

Goal CD8: Preserve and protect Missoula's natural resources and natural areas for the entire community.

Goal CD9: Improve the community's urban outdoor amenities and prioritize the creation of more public spaces (e.g., more plazas downtown, more neighborhood parks).

d. Environmental Quality

Goal EQ6: Protect and enhance Missoula's open spaces.

Goal EQ7: Protect agricultural land and water.

Goal EQ14: Reduce recreational impacts on the river.

Goal EQ15: Maintain and enhance the general environmental health of the river, including healthy riparian zones and water quality and quantity.

Goal EQ16: Protect and enhance critical wildlife habitat and travel/migration corridors.

Goal EQ17: Protect Missoula's trees and other vegetation in urban spaces.

Goal EQ18: Protect Missoula's viewsheds and scenic vistas.

Goal EQ19: Maintain natural areas for multiple user groups and wildlife habitat.

Goal EQ20: Protect additional lands for Missoula open space, vistas, wildlife habitat, and recreational trails.

Conclusions of Law:

1. The 2019 Missoula Urban Open Space Plan's stated goals, objectives and implementation strategies are consistent with, and conform to, the overarching goals, objectives and actions from the 2016 Missoula County Growth Policy and the 2035 Missoula City Growth Policy.
2. The plan addresses and furthers the city's and county's growth policy goals by preserving natural resources, acknowledging and responding to climate change and other environmental challenges; preserving agriculture; floodplains; carbon sequestering forests; sustaining and enhancing suburban and urban neighborhoods, and helping avoid development in hazardous areas.
3. The plan was developed through a robust, open and transparent public process that was guided by members of the City's Open Space Advisory Committee and Parks and Conservation Board, and County's Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee.
4. The 2019 Missoula Urban Open Space Plan qualifies as an issue plan under the growth policies for both the city and county.

**VII. ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Proposed Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan
- B. Summary of Public Comment