

Missoula City Council Land Use and Planning Committee Minutes - DRAFT

January 7, 2026

3:10 pm

Council Chambers (in person) or TEAMS (virtually)

Attend in person: City Council Chambers, 140 W Pine, Missoula MT

Members present: Stacie Anderson, Mirtha Becerra, Betsy Craske, Gwen Jones, Kristen Jordan, Sean McCoy, Eric Melson, Mike Nugent, Justin Ponton, Jennifer Savage, Amber Sherrill

Members absent: Bob Campbell

1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

The meeting was called to order at 3:10 p.m.

1.1 Roll Call

Amanda Vermace called the roll.

1.2 Approval of the Minutes

There were no minutes to be approved.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Residents from East Missoula expressed concerns about proposed zoning changes under the new land use plan. Bruce Baxter highlighted that East Missoula's core was historically zoned for low-density single-family homes and argued against UR-3 high-density designations without supporting infrastructure. Linda Ensen emphasized zoning as a "contract" between landowners and government, warning that radical density increases would erode neighborhood integrity and burden infrastructure. Both requested reverting zoning to LUR-2 to match existing development patterns.

3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

3.1 Amendments to the Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan

Informational item only.

Staff presented information on the Unified Development Code (UDC) project, explaining its purpose: modernizing outdated zoning regulations, addressing housing shortages, and complying with Montana's new land use law. Data shared showed Missoula's population growth has doubled since 2020, requiring nearly twice the annual housing production to meet demand. The UDC consolidates seven titles into one, introduces 22 new zoning districts, and simplifies processes to encourage housing diversity and affordability.

Key Features Discussed:

- Residential Zoning: Seven districts ranging from rural to urban high-density; reduced setbacks; height limits generally 35 ft, with some districts allowing up to 50–60 ft.
- Mixed-Use Zoning: Encourages walkability and housing near services; eliminates density caps; introduces “Build-to Zone” standards.
- Special Use & Civic Districts: Debate over CD-1 vs CD-2 designations for civic lands, particularly Fort Missoula. Staff recommended maintaining CD-1 for historic and environmental reasons, while Planning Board suggested consolidating into CD-2 for flexibility.
- Parking & Landscaping: Parking requirements removed for small residential units; commercial parking reduced; landscaping and activity area standards revised to balance cost and livability.
- Subdivision Regulations: Parkland dedication based on dwelling units, with options for land, cash-in-lieu, or improvements.

Council members raised concerns about fairness in civic land restrictions, particularly at Fort Missoula, questioning why residential use is prohibited there but allowed near the university. Questions also focused on parkland dedication equity, neighborhood commercial setbacks, and the adequacy of pedestrian infrastructure. Members debated activity area requirements and landscaping standards, with suggestions to reduce thresholds for infill projects.

There was a range of public comments. Some urged bold action to address housing shortages. A few commenters advocated for eliminating CD-1 and adopting CD-2 citywide to allow residential and mixed-use development on civic lands. Others stressed preserving community gardens and open space, citing quality-of-life concerns. Developers requested reducing landscaping and buffering requirements for infill projects and opposed adding new density caps or complex floor area ratio rules.

Council members were encouraged to submit specific amendments with clear language and maps before the next meeting. The public hearing has been scheduled to open at the next City Council meeting for Monday, January 12, 2026.

3.2 Our Missoula Project – Adoption of the Unified Development Code & Zoning Map

Informational item only.

This item was presented simultaneously with item 3.1.

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:23 p.m.