

Engage Missoula Comments Received 12-6-2025 to 1-8-2026

Project: Code Reform

Question Box: Have a comment on the Unified Development Code or Zoning Map? Submit it here.

Contribution	Posted at
<p>I support the comments submitted by Kyle Pease regarding the SE River Road zoning. In addition, I have concerns over the decision to exclude private schools and retirement facilities in the zoning process. Montana does not have public preschool education except through private schools. Retired citizens are a growing population in Missoula and Montana. Children 3-6 years old and retired citizens need protection from dangers posed by ill advised commercial and industrial expansion threatened by zoning changes.</p>	09 Dec 2025, 04:49 PM
<p>My name is Eric Lunde and I am the homeowner and resident of the house located at 1536 Jackson St. This property is currently zoned R5.4 and is proposed UR3 in the zoning map being considered. While generally a proponent of infill to meet housing demands in Missoula I have 2 strong concerns about the proposed zoning changes.</p> <p>First, the lack of any parking requirements in the proposed UR3 zoning areas for new housing construction poses unique problems to the residential city block I am located on. The 1500 block of Jackson St. (east side) has an alley behind it and 7 houses between the alley and Van Buren St. Because of recent sidewalk expansion and bike lane creation there is no parking allowed on Van Buren in front of these houses and only 2 houses have a small driveway without garages. Currently almost all residents park in the alley where parking is extremely limited. My concern is if these current houses are converted to high density housing which could easily triple the number of housing units and residents, the parking would by necessity spill over to our block on Jackson St. I foresee some variation of this issue happening wherever proposed UR3 zoning exists. I strongly urge city officials to reconsider this change.</p> <p>My second strong objection relates to the proposed new height codes for new construction in UR3 areas. This will allow 3 story buildings in residential areas which currently have only 3 foot setbacks for side and rear property lines. Though I am fortunate to live on a fairly good sized lot and thus have a decent buffer between my house and our neighbors, there are seems to be a majority of small lots with houses currently quite close to each other in the lower rattlesnake neighborhood designated UR3. A house could be surrounded on 2 or sides by 3 story new construction/ remodel, eliminating any view and more importantly any sun/ gardening space for that resident. This proposed change would drastically change and degrade the aesthetics of many residential neighborhoods. I strongly urge the city planners to reconsider these 2 changes. Thanks, Eric Lunde</p>	10 Dec 2025, 10:15 AM
<p>Will the new code allow residential housing on Fort Missoula land? Will the new plan include set backs along the river to protect riparian habitat?</p>	11 Dec 2025, 01:17 PM

<p>The southern side of South 2nd St West to the west of Orange St for 3 blocks is proposed to be UR-4 while the northern side is UR-3. I am not happy with that. You propose to allow a 3 story 12 unit apartment building on a street that is not scaled to that at all. This is an established residential street scape and should not be changed to such an extent. The proposed front setbacks to 10 feet is unacceptable. Currently the front setback is 25 feet and all existing buildings except for 1 conform to that. You are proposing to fundamentally change the feel of the street. Additionally, with no parking requirement, you will flood the street with cars where there is little additional room for parking. To allow the developer to determine whether to provide parking or not is to abandon the city oversight protecting quality of life. Every household in Missoula has, at a minimum, 1 car and will most likely continue to own a car. You must provide regulations that provide for that. If you allow a 12 unit building on a residential street, you will get 12 or more cars parking on the street. You must take that into account, not pretend that more walkability and access to public transit will reduce that number.</p>	<p>14 Dec 2025, 04:39 PM</p>
<p>Hi. This seems a little overly prescriptive, and perhaps inane. I mean, if you plant 5 trees on your lot, they would ALL have to be a different species. Most parcels in Missoula will be nonconforming from the get-go:</p> <p>ARTICLE 4.9 – SITE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS</p> <p>When five or more trees are planted on a parcel to meet the requirements this division, a mix of species shall be provided so that no one species may comprise more than 20% of the total trees.</p>	<p>15 Dec 2025, 10:19 AM</p>
<p>When will the new UDC go into effect? How does the new UDC compare/contrast with current codes? I live on the Westside (Cooper St) and want to know specifically what will change. It appears we are to be classified as Urban Residential High. How will our neighborhood change?</p> <p>There is a great deal of confusion in my neighborhood about the proposed codes. More information to property owners would be welcome. I know you have been selling the proposed codes for many months, but the message isn't getting to very many people. And it's confusing. I've been participating in your opportunities, but I am still not sure how it will impact me.</p>	<p>17 Dec 2025, 01:00 PM</p>
<p>How safe will be to evacuate the Rattlesnake area if you increase the traffic density on two very limited streets??</p>	<p>17 Dec 2025, 01:21 PM</p>

Hi. My comments focus on the Lower Rattlesnake (LRS), but also on Missoula's other oldest neighborhoods like the North and West sides.

Up front, I'll say I wish for UR-2 zoning in the Lower Rattlesnake because of its unique historical and green considerations and its already strong sense of community. I'll say more about why, below. But I realize that UR-2 may be too much to hope for. So secondbest, I wish for passage of code amendments that increase the size of the first proposed setbacks and reduce the proposed maximum building height in UR-3. More on those two specific things first:

1) Ten-foot setbacks and trees. I was involved with the State of Montana Arboretum for 8 years. We dealt with setbacks of buildings and tree plantings, since the arboretum is the UM campus.

Ten-foot setbacks (proposed in the first code draft) are too small for many mature trees that are desirable for cooling as climate change worsens. Specifically, the City of Missoula's list of approved street trees (<https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/26551/Approved-Street-Tree-List-updated-72024>) divides species into 3 categories by height: small, medium and large. Canopy diameters for each species are also listed. Imagine half a tree canopy extending over a street, the other half reaching towards a building w/ a ten-foot setback. 20 out of 32 small trees listed would fit, but most of these are more like shrubs (eg, lilac, serviceberry, chokecherry, rocky mountain maple). Of the 73 medium to large-stature species listed (over 30 feet tall), only four would fit in a 10-foot setback. Mature leafy green trees are not only valuable regarding climate, but studies show they enrich communities in the areas of personal safety, car safety, mental health, air cleaning, flood mitigation, increased healing and learning, and a sense of community.

2) Max height—a way to picture it. It's hard for most of us to know what 40 feet high really looks like. That was the maximum building height proposed in the first draft of the zoning code. Please picture the atrium in the University Center on campus. From the ground to the glass ceiling is 40 feet. I support 35 feet instead, the last measurement I heard being proposed for UR-3, to replace 40 feet. [That is, I support it if UR-2 really isn't possible in historic neighborhoods like the Lower Rattlesnake.]

Overall, the new code has many important and admirable aims and changes that will be beneficial. I also realize it's shaped by both local concerns and state mandates. Here are a few more general thoughts and concerns.

1) If we go with the zoning proposed, we will get more housing, but I thought affordable housing was the goal. I testified 20 years ago in favor of infill for more housing, but affordability was not achieved then. Certainly not every landlord is greedy, but most would not rent out apartments for less than the going rate unless that was somehow encoded too or mandated. I'm not sure that's possible. So I worry that, for an unattainable goal or one that will take a long time to get to, we will be changing, forever, neighborhoods valued for their unique, organic, and irreplaceable qualities. To me, it's the same with "Build up, not out." My eyes tell me that building out—into natural and agricultural land—is still happening too much. I hope we can achieve more housing in a dialed back way, so we don't end up actually losing everything.

2) The historic neighborhoods of the W and N sides and Lower Rattlesnake, Missoula's oldest, have evolved organically into neighborhoods that could be seen as models. They're "liveable." They have mature trees. They're economically diverse. They contain Missoula's oldest homes, layouts, parks, and history (eg, workers' homes, Greenough Mansion and Park, Chinese legacy in the LRS, African-American legacy on the North side, socioeconomic history in all of them, eg, the Moon-Randolph and more). Because these neighborhoods are already dense and human-scale, they have rich senses of community. People talk with each other in alleys, from yards where they're working or relaxing, and on the streets and sidewalks. Let's not throw the sweet babies out with the bathwater.

3) Some see the current situation as either-or. That you must sacrifice anything else to solve the current crisis and "prioritize people." Concerns like community, trees/green, connection with history/ancestors/place, and aesthetics are seen as "squishy" and unimportant. But people of all kinds care about those values. If we work hard enough we can find a better balance that includes as much as possible of all of these things in our zoning code. Thanks for extending the time to try to make this happen.

17 Dec 2025, 04:24 PM

<p>4) I wish we could focus on parts of Missoula that are visibly begging for neighbors, innovative design, community, and “15-minute cities” where residents can walk to services, work, home, and transportation. I think for example of West Broadway. I’d love to see communities grow up in these places that inspire the rest of our city.</p> <p>5) About the Lower Rattlesnake specifically and fire danger. Someone recently reminded me that, according to a fire evacuation meeting last year, it will take 6 hours to evacuate the Rattlesnake with our 2 ways in and out. That includes about 500 students and 35 school staff. Unlike in Pattee, there’s no alternative way out. Adding many more people and cars to that equation could really thicken the soup, hence the concern.</p> <p>Thank you, Beth Judy, Lower Rattlesnake</p>	
<p>I cannot understand why the City Council seems intent on growth at any cost in Missoula, why the research on sustainability is not part of the conversation. The City Council needless to say is not a Chamber of Commerce, and expansion, whether through covering the south hills with ranch homes or building Wilmas on the south side of the river, can only deteriorate the quaiity of life Missoula enjoys by virtue of its neighborhood feel and its relatively light congestion. The build baby build mentality, championed by a board with connections to real estate and development concerns, and cemented by the recent sand-bagging of one of the only sustainability advocates through carpetbagging (the Carlino take-down), will in my view "kill the thing we love" or put differently "pave paradise and put up a parking lot." Is this kind of congestion what the people of Missoula want? Can't we maintain and nurture--conserve--what we have instead of knee-jerking a growth model that has turned the university into a technical school and is turning Missoula into a sprawling and crowded Reserve Street nightmare? Let's take care of our homeless without rubber-stamping a thousand tax-break ticky tack homes?</p>	22 Dec 2025, 03:31 PM
<p>Does the new planning code supersede previous covenant?</p>	22 Dec 2025, 03:57 PM

I write in regard to the redistricting of our Westside neighborhood. I respect the Amenities Based Zoning strategy. I do not, however, believe our neighborhood has been accurately defined for its application here. I'm deeply concerned that our block, and those surrounding, will be rezoned from RT2.7 to UR4. I currently own a small, 95 year-old house (c. 700 sq. ft. footprint) on two lots. I would love to see another house or duplex on this property. That could be achieved while sustaining a sense of proportion. (There are only a few dwellings on this block, and those nearby, that are two stories.) I would like to see new development with inclusion of off-street parking, as we routinely find our streets fully lined with cars now. What I would hate to see is a four-story apartment silo in my back yard, plus four, six, eight more cars jockeying for parking along the adjacent streets. With no maximum on units in UR4, it is hard to guess how many new residents will occupy this block in the future. (This "no maximum units" feature of UR4 is ridiculous. Surely, there is some calculus by which we can determine a wholesome limit.) I walk and bicycle almost everywhere year round. Like most of my neighbors, young and old, I walk in the streets here. Our sidewalks are discontinuous, so buckled they are hazardous, and routinely blocked by cars -obstructing easy passage for anyone with a stroller, mobility challenges or pedaling a tricycle. We really don't have adequate infrastructure throughout the neighborhood to accommodate as many new residents as proposed. People will continue to drive, and they will all be filtering through our streets to reach main corridors. This endangers pedestrians and bicyclists, whether commuting or recreating. I've noticed more and more reckless auto traffic on Defoe. Some may be residential, but most is certainly due to activity at Freestone Climbing Gym, Montana Fit and Westside Theater up the street. I welcome this sort of mixed use, but it does mean that people with no stake in the neighborhood race through it, coming and going. We could use more traffic controls now, and such interventions should be in place before density increases. One of our "amenities" is Westside Park, a rather small park adjacent to Lowell School, which limits use of facilities during school hours. This green space won't even be visible to most residents, and it certainly isn't within a 15-minute walk for all. We all benefit from a vital environment around us at home. With five foot set-backs around these new towering structures, there will be more hard-scaping than greenery. The shade cast by a four-story apartment building is nothing like the shade cast by a maple, elm or oak. We can expect the proposed zoning changes to make our neighborhood hotter, less alive, less wholesome, especially for those backed up against the rail yard.

27 Dec 2025, 10:11 PM

<p>Even I, a fit and frequent walker, cannot reach the grocery store in less than 20 minutes. To assert that Yokes, another of our “amenities”, is a 15-minute walk from all points on the Westside is nothing but wishful thinking on the part of those hoping to pack more poor people into one of Missoula’s “low-wealth” neighborhoods. We deserve honesty about what changes we are asked to bear in light of what we truly have access to.</p> <p>I believe the Westside can accommodate greater density, starting with infill that honors the scale of existing housing and businesses. Even UR3 would be a more fitting designation than UR4. The establishment of the Trinity complex has already demonstrated what increased density means for us, functionally and aesthetically. It is one thing to devote a city block to multi-level building. It is another thing to have no-maximum apartment complexes springing up wherever among modest houses or smaller, multi-family housing units.</p> <p>I encourage you to visit the Velde family’s new apartment complex on Burton and Defoe, Westside Village. With garden beds, off-street parking and storage sheds for each of the 14 units, this is precisely what we need to augment density and keep our neighborhood livable and lively.</p>	
<p>What seems to get lost frequently in planning for multimodal transport in Missoula and/or promoting biking and walking is that the population is aging. Older people, as well as people of all ages with disabilities and health challenges (whether permanent or temporary), need to be able to get downtown, do their grocery shopping, etc. Reducing or removing the requirements that builders create parking spaces harms these residents. Reducing road space and parking means many of us cannot safely get downtown and get home again, so we cannot enjoy the restaurants and businesses there. A bus line that runs once an hour or doesn't reach many neighborhoods is not a reliable way to get to work, get kids to and from school, get to medical appointments. The changes simple do not seem to consider how real people, at all stages of life and in all health and physical conditions, actually LIVE day to day.</p>	31 Dec 2025, 11:50 AM
<p>Why keep expanding our city when it's not able to tend to its citizens? The city council is composed of real estate dealers who cannot say no to any development, no matter the cost to our quality of life.</p>	03 Jan 2026, 12:29 PM
<p>I am concerned about the push to "in fill" in some areas of the city. This concentration will make traffic and parking worse. Especially the development of the Missoulia building. South East 4th Street is narrow and a dead end. It will not be able to handle the traffic that will come with the development. I don't see how it can be expanded as the Bear Tracks Bridge and the river trails are there. Rezoning to allow this development was a mistake that I hope can be corrected!</p>	05 Jan 2026, 02:22 PM

Dear Missoula City Council:

For 30 years I have lived on Missoula's historic Westside, a community of mostly modest, smaller homes set close together, mobile home parks, numerous smaller apartment buildings, condominiums and, in more recent years, medium and one very large apartment complex: a true mix of housing opportunities and styles mostly built for lower to modest income folks.

The Westside has already seen and continues to accommodate dramatic infill, so it was a relief to read in the Land Use Plan (LUP) that housing development and infill will be based on these six principals:

1. Distribute opportunities for affordable housing types broadly throughout the city.
2. Enable density levels that open the possibility for smaller units, which tend to be more affordable to moderate- and low-income households.
3. Avoid concentrated upzoning in vulnerable neighborhoods.
4. Provide zoning incentives for income restricted affordable housing that are feasible and attractive for private developers to use.
5. Focus regulations more on the form of buildings, less on the number of units in the building.
6. Design reforms that increase opportunities for adding amenities and services within a walkable distance of all households.

Given these principles which guide the LUP, it was surprising and confusing to see the proposed new zoning map. The map does not: distribute opportunities for affordable housing types broadly throughout the city; or prevent significant upzoning concentration on the Westside. This neighborhood, which is currently zoned in a mostly homogeneous manner, is designated for split, and significant, upzoning. The proposed map divides the Westside roughly in half, north to south, in an inexplicable and seemingly arbitrary manner, stair stepping and zig zagging, splitting the neighborhood between the two highest urban density designations, Urban Residential 3 and Urban Residential 4. Proportionally, the Westside contains more UR 4 designation than any other neighborhood in the city, followed closely by the University area.

City staff have indicated that a UR4 rating is based on the frequency and proximity of bus service, plus proximity to at least three amenities (within a 15-minute walk) such as shops, schools and parks. Since most of the streets on the Westside do not have contiguous sidewalks, this formula is based on a mostly false premise – that the Westside is walkable for any but the most able-bodied people. On the Westside, people do most of their walking in the streets. Most of the non-contiguous sidewalks do not conform to ADA regulations. Most people living on the Westside cannot point to three amenities that are within a 15-minute walk of their residence. So, how does the Westside qualify for UR4 zoning?

In addition, the explanation about how a neighborhood “earns” a UR4 rating does not explain why the Westside is split between UR4 and UR3. Neighbors who live across a side street from each other share the same amenities, proximity and bus service options and yet are zoned differently. At a LUP Committee meeting in December 2025 one staff explained, “We had to draw the line somewhere.” This is certainly not a valid reason to split zoning on the Westside.

U-R3/U-R4 are not aligned with the land use development goals which specify compatible development, housing diversity and missing middle housing and buildings that fit within the established context of the neighborhood in terms of building size and shape.

Since developing “missing middle housing”, described as 4-8 plex units, is a priority in the plan, prescribing more zoning that supports that goal makes sense. Neither UR3 or UR4 will aid in providing this “missing middle housing”.

Would clustering this higher density, taller housing around main arteries make more sense than scattering it through the center of established neighborhoods? Is there a way under Code Reform to prescribe where the tallest/densest housing can be built to help maintain the character and protect the scale of existing housing – which is one of the guiding principles of the LUP?

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Council: Remove U-R4 from consideration on the Westside, except on major arteries (Broadway, Russell Streets), or in areas that already contain multi-dwelling units and are not within 5' of single-family homes.

07 Jan 2026, 06:29 AM

Consider zoning most of the Westside UR 2 which supports missing- middle housing and aligns with land use planning and city goals.

And finally, I urge the Council to accept the Consolidated Planning Board's amendment to the complicated Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R) formula which would raise the floor and lower the cap which would aid in keeping the scale of new development in line with existing residential neighborhoods.

At a December 2025 Consolidated Planning Board meeting this example was given: under the proposed F.A.R. formula, a 35-unit building could be built on a specified lot size; in contrast, the LUP calls for 6-8 units on the same size parcel. Adjusting the F.A.R. formula would help close this gap.

Since the LUP informs Code Reform, I am hoping that the two documents will continue to be linked in meaningful and measurable ways monitored by City Staff and Council.

Code Reform will help to make things easier, clearer and more financially feasible for developers, and that ought not to happen at the expense of neighborhoods losing their identity, reducing livability, skimping on needed improvements and infrastructure, or sacrificing connectivity.

Thank you for your hard work on Code Reform. It is weighty and important and will define how Missoula grows for years to come. Maintaining neighborhood character, historical integrity and our small-town charm will serve all of us well.

Gail Gutsche

1530 Cooper Street

END OF REPORT