

Missoula City Council Land Use and Planning Committee Minutes - DRAFT

December 17, 2025

12:45 pm

Council Chambers (in person) or TEAMS (virtually)

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

Members present: Mirtha Becerra, Bob Campbell, Betsy Craske, Sierra Farmer, Gwen Jones, Kristen Jordan, Sean McCoy, Eric Melson, Mike Nugent, Amber Sherrill

Members absent: Stacie Anderson, Daniel Carlino

1. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

The meeting was called to order at 12:45 p.m.

1.1 Roll Call

Amanda Vermace called the roll.

1.2 Approval of the Minutes

1.2.1 Minutes from December 10, 2025

The minutes were approved as submitted.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments on items not listed on the agenda.

3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

3.1 Conditional Use Request for Wireless Communication Facility at 5425 Gharrett Street

Staff presentation.

Zoe Walters, Associate Planner with the Community Planning, Development, and Innovation department (CPDI), presented an informational overview of a conditional use request submitted by Lighthouse Baptist Church to install an 80-foot ground-mounted radio tower on the church property presently zoned R-8 Residential. Ms. Walters explained that City Council is authorized to approve, condition, or deny the request under Title 20, but that the January 5, 2026, meeting would serve as the formal public hearing and decision. She reviewed zoning context, site layout, setbacks, height exemptions for antenna structures, and safety features including fencing and vehicle barriers. Staff concluded that the proposed facility meets all conditional use criteria, would provide public benefit through community broadcasting and emergency communications, would not generate traffic or lighting impacts, and would have minimal noise and visual effects. Staff indicated they would recommend approval with conditions at the January hearing.

Kurt McGrane, a neighboring property owner to the south, spoke in opposition. He argued the tower was out of scale with the neighborhood, insufficiently buffered from nearby homes, and too visible. He raised concerns about persistent noise from equipment, questioned the public benefit, cited lack of demonstrated efforts to collocate on existing towers, and stated the proposal did not meet several conditional use criteria or proposed UDC standards.

Council members asked questions regarding applicability of zoning rules to religious institutions, how the proposal would be treated under the draft UDC, and whether collocating radio towers elsewhere had been explored. Questions were also raised about noise mitigation, enforcement options, electromagnetic frequency impacts, and the proximity to nearby residences. Representatives from Lighthouse Baptist Church explained the tower's low-power FM purpose, small physical footprint, insulated equipment enclosure, relocation on the site to reduce visual impacts, and willingness to work with the City on mitigation measures. Staff noted that noise limits could be addressed through conditions of approval. No action was taken, and the item has been scheduled for a public hearing on January 5, 2026.

3.2 Our Missoula Project – Unified Development Code

Q&A on the Unified Development Code; Sidewalks, Rights of Way, Bike Storage, and Urban Mixed Use Form Regulations.

Staff with the Public Works and Mobility department (PWM) and the Community Planning, Development and Innovation department (CPDI), provided an informational update on proposed Unified Development Code (UDC) amendments related to right-of-way improvements, sidewalks, infrastructure triggers, Bike Storage and Urban Mixed Use Forms Regulations. Staff emphasized proportionality, noting that small infill projects should not bear disproportionate costs, while larger developments should address infrastructure impacts. Proposed changes include requiring right-of-way improvements for developments creating seven or more units, removing parking-based triggers, clarifying driveway triggers, and allowing exceptions through a design exception process. Staff also discussed adding a “missing link” sidewalk provision where developments abut existing sidewalks, clarifying authority to require engineering studies, off-site infrastructure improvements, and aligning driveway paving rules with air quality standards.

Council members raised concerns about sidewalk gaps, safety, equity, and how the seven-unit trigger might affect different wards, particularly areas with limited existing infrastructure. Discussion addressed affordability, proportional costs to developers versus taxpayers, cumulative impacts of phased developments, and the City's ability to address gaps through capital improvement prioritization. Staff explained that the intent is to encourage “gentle infill” housing while maintaining tools such as sidewalk programs, CIP prioritization, and the concept of a “common plan of development” to address phased projects. Members emphasized the need to balance housing affordability, infrastructure funding, connectivity, and public safety. No action was taken; discussion will continue as part of the UDC adoption process.

David Gray provided public comments. He opposed several elements of the topics discussed and mentioned current development standards are costly, impractical, and exclusionary.

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.