

Review of Public Comments Received for 2019 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan/Open Space Plan Chapter of Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails (PROST) Plan

The following document provides a synopsis of the review of public comments received for the draft Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan, a chapter of the PROST Plan. The public comment period was open for 21 days and was advertised via emails from City and County, social media from City and County, a news release, and a newspaper article. Eleven public comments were received through the online form and 5 more comments were emailed. Below is a summary and response addressing the detailed comments that were submitted.

Summary of comment: Acquisition of trails and trail easements are important, trails should be connected across jurisdictional ownership, and acquisition of lands with public access should be prioritized over those that do not offer public access.

Response: Corridors and trails are an open space type that is a priority in the draft plan. Also, as the remaining chapters of the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails (PROST) plan are developed, the Trails chapter will address in greater detail the priorities for trails.

Summary of comment: It is essential to provide green spaces that can be accessed within the urban area and close to home. These are more accessible for families, people of all ages and abilities, etc.

Response: The plan prioritizes Urban Green Spaces as a type of area in need of further protection. Also, as the remaining chapters of the PROST plan are developed, the Parks chapter will address in greater detail the priorities for parks and urban green spaces.

Summary of comment: This plan over-emphasizes agricultural land protection.

Response: Agricultural land is one of several open space types that are priorities in the draft plan.

Summary of comment: The plan does not adequately factor in maintenance for trails and parks.

Response: As the remaining chapters of the PROST plan are developed, the Parks and Trails chapters will address in greater detail the priorities for parks, urban green spaces, and trails.

Summary of comment: Cost of open space conservation creates a hardship for rural residents and affordable housing.

Response: The City and County are committed to protecting the lands that make Missoula unique, while also working to address the host of challenges that arise regarding land use and public needs.

Summary of comment: We don't need more open space.

Response: With the open space funds voted for by County residents in 2018, it is important to have an updated plan that helps inform and guide the direction of open space in the future. Of note, the PROST survey results indicated continued strong support for open space protection. (See Appendices, particularly G, of the Draft Plan.)

Summary of comment: Land near the old pulp mill should be restored. Riverfront parks are important, especially along the north shore of the Clark Fork River.

Response: Riparian corridors, including the Clark Fork River, are prioritized for protection in the open space plan. The City also maintains a long-term goal to connect the river front trail along the north and south shores of the Clark Fork River through downtown Missoula.

Summary of comment: Lands with public access for recreation are important, especially west of Reserve Street, north of Clark Fork River.

Response: Open space acquisition is opportunistic and occurs voluntarily. Lands in this area are important for conservation, as depicted in the open space cornerstone map.

Summary of comment: Various comments recommended wording changes or pointed out grammatical errors or inaccuracies. FWP requested addition of certain FWP parcels to the appropriate maps.

Resulting edits to plan: Edits were, and will continue to be, addressed in the document text.

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From Advisory Committees

Comments were reviewed at the City Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) on June 13th, 2019 and the County Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee on June 20, 2019. Subsequent comments by OSAC were considered and many were implemented.

On July 9 the City Parks and Recreation Board reviewed the Plan and recommends OSAC to implement Park Board's edits related to the following themes (see plan for specific edits).

- Emphasize the significant role open space plays in addressing climate, growth, inclusion, health, and population growth
- Include the importance of stewardship, particularly for lands acquired that include public access
- Correct and move Figure 3 regarding current approval process to include role of Conservation Lands Advisory Committee and Parks & Recreation Board in determining short to long term public access and the importance of balancing conservation with recreation.

It is important to note that the Board was not unanimous and dissenting votes were because the items noted in the bullets above, and more specifically as shown in the DRAFT Plan, were not already included.

On July 11, OSAC completed their final reviews of all comments, including accepting all additions and comments by Park Board, and voted unanimously to recommend support and approval of the Plan by the City-County Planning Board, City Council and Board of County Commissioners.

On July 18, the Missoula County Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee (OLC) voted 6-2 in support of the Open Space Plan as presented. Supporting comments included overall positive considerations regarding open space, conservation, and planning and the desire to keep the open space plan's process moving ahead. Dissenting discussion points included:

- It seems the plan is written specifically for City priorities and projects. There should be more clarity in the differences between approaches of the city and county.
- The ongoing role of how the County and OLC will use this plan is unclear.
- The plan is long and more confusing than it should be.

- More details on implementation should be included.
- The difference between “anchor areas” and “cornerstones” should be clearer.