

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATION

### INTRODUCTION TO THE GROWTH POLICY

Communities are living organisms that are constantly reacting to internal and external forces. While some communities live only a few years and others survive for many centuries, the sole constant is change. All communities evolve in

response to the complex interactions of economic, environmental, social, and cultural forces. For example, changes in the local economy may affect the growth rate of housing and commercial activity, which then drives the need for improved and expanded City infrastructure. Balancing the need for economic development with the desire to maintain the quality of life continues to be a significant challenge.

The planning process can help define community values, which, in turn, guide future growth and development under the framework of the adopted growth policy. A successful growth policy is best measured by its implementation. Because communities are in a state of continual change, future events and circumstances cannot always be accurately predicted, despite the use of current data projections. Therefore, growth policies serve as *flexible guides* for future decision-making.

The City of Helena has participated in several comprehensive planning processes since the 1960s. The most recent plan was updated in 2001 when Montana law was changed to require growth policies instead of comprehensive plans. The 2001 Growth Policy was amended in 2008 and was reviewed to determine what implementation had occurred and which sections were less relevant because of changing situations. This 2011 Helena Growth Policy builds upon the philosophical underpinnings that were developed with the 2008 Growth Policy's collective vision for the Helena area's future. Additionally, other plans from other Montana communities were reviewed, including the 2004 Lewis and Clark County Growth Policy, which provided background information for this planning document.

Focus groups, surveys, and open houses were used to gather information from the public in the 2011 Growth Policy's preparation. Summaries of the focus groups discussions and survey results are located in the Appendix of this document. Major facilities plans for the City of Helena were instrumental documents in designating areas where land uses could efficiently utilize existing and planned infrastructure. These

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plans addressed wastewater facilities, water supplies, transportation, parks, recreation and open space. Descriptions of these plans can be found in the Chapter 5, [PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES](#) and Chapter 6, [TRANSPORTATION](#).

This Growth Policy is based upon Montana law (76-1-601 MCA) and serves as the basis for the City of Helena’s zoning and subdivision regulations, and other City Codes. It can help with decisions related to budgeting, the comprehensive capital improvements program (CIP), and annexation. The Growth Policy is intended to be reviewed and updated every five years as required by Montana law (76-1-601 (3)(f)). (See Chapters 12 and 13, [SUBDIVISION REVIEW](#) and [FUTURE REVIEW, EVALUATION, AND UPDATES](#) respectively for more information.)

Each chapter of this Growth Policy corresponds to the specific requirements for a growth policy with goals and objectives as described in Montana law. The law allows communities to include other characteristics and features (76-1-601 (3) (c)). Natural resources are addressed in the [ENVIRONMENT](#) chapter; a new chapter, [CULTURE](#), formerly was included in [PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES](#). This document does not provide the level of detail to serve as an infrastructure plan described in 76-1-601 (4) (c) MCA.

Any City action intended by this Policy is subject to Commission approval and financial constraints. A copy of the MCA Growth Policy requirements is included in the Appendix of this document.

## RELATIONSHIP OF THE GROWTH POLICY TO LAND USE REGULATIONS

Montana’s Growth Policy Act defines a growth policy as “an official public document adopted and used by a local government as a general guide for development and conservation decisions.

By Montana law (76-1-605 MCA), growth policies are not regulatory documents, but are used to guide and help determine implementation mechanisms, such as zoning and subdivision regulations. Typically, growth policies serve as a long-term statement of land use and do not have immediate effect on land use. The growth policy anticipates future changes of some existing land uses, presenting a generalized picture of an area’s dominant land use character and trends and can reflect the transition of an existing land use to a new one. The growth policy attempts to show how current trends and logical progressions in land uses can be managed over a relatively long time frame.

In contrast, the *Zoning Ordinance* reflects the growth policy and regulates land development and the use of established zoning districts. The zoning map is a parcel-specific statement reflecting boundaries and present and proposed uses of lands. As a legal statement, the zoning map has immediate force and effect.

Given the relationship between the growth policy and zoning, the zoning map should not be a copy of the future land-use map. Because the growth policy’s future land-use

map is generalized, it is not intended to show the location of small-scale land uses. The growth policy document does, however, contain information and policies that can help determine specific rules and decisions about the location of individual land-use proposals.

In cases where the Growth Policy recommends a land use designation that differs from the existing land use or zoning, it is appropriate to let the existing zoning or use remain, provided that the zoning is gradually revised over time to phase in the desired future land use pattern.

Other regulatory documents include subdivision regulations to guide the division of land, the extension of water, sewer and streets, and the acquisition of parkland. City Codes address a variety of requirements, such as infrastructure, lighting, noise, and building, which can be established to implement the Growth Policy.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE GROWTH POLICY**

The 2011 City of Helena Growth Policy is organized into 13 chapters and an Appendix.

**Chapter 1: Introduction and Organization of the Growth Policy** contains a general discussion of how a Growth Policy is used, and explains how this document is organized.

**[Chapter 2: Population](#)** describes the changes that have occurred in the population, including aging, migration, natural increase, neighborhood growth, population projections, and related social issues.

**[Chapter 3: Economic Conditions](#)** describes the current and projected economic situation, and identifies personal income sources and growth, and income by industry.

**[Chapter 4: Housing](#)** describes current housing conditions and home values, affordability, changing demographics, and the role of regulations in addressing the community's needs for housing.

**[Chapter 5: Public Facilities and Services](#)** identify the current situation related to infrastructure and the ability to accommodate future growth. Infrastructure includes transportation, water, wastewater, stormwater drainage, solid waste, parks, recreation, open space, and fire and police protection.

**[Chapter 6: Transportation](#)** addresses multi-modal transportation options for the City of Helena.

**[Chapter 7: Environment](#)** describes the physical surroundings of the City and identifies potential physical constraints to development. This section also includes information related to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), wildlife, weeds, sand and gravel, air and water quality, climate change, and energy.

**[Chapter 8: Water](#)** describes the quantity and quality of water in the Helena area, including ground water, surface water, and wetlands.

**[Chapter 9: Culture](#)** contains a description of Helena's arts, including historic, public art, and recreation amenities.

[Chapter 10: Land Use](#) describes existing and future patterns of commercial, industrial, and residential development, downtown, mixed-use areas, and future annexation. This chapter identifies issues related to infrastructure capacity and efficiency; infill, rehabilitation, and redevelopment; and community design, sustainability, and livability. The existing and future land-use maps are included in this chapter.

[Chapter 11: Coordination](#) describes how the City of Helena will coordinate with other jurisdictions, particularly East Helena, Lewis and Clark County, and Jefferson County.

[Chapter 12: Subdivision Review](#) addresses how the Growth Policy will be used during the subdivision review process.

[Chapter 13: Future Review, Evaluation, and Updates](#) describes considerations for updating the Growth Policy and for creating neighborhood plans.

**Appendix: Reference Materials** includes a list of previously adopted plans and other supporting background data that provide a basis for much of the information included in the Growth Policy.