

City of Helena, Montana

Community Development Planning Division

Public Participation Plan

2023

Community Development Department
Planning Division
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Helena, Montana 59623





City of
Helena

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Introduction

In accordance with the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA), the Planning Division of the City of Helena Community Development Department (*Planning Division*) presents its first Public Participation Plan. The MLUPA creates a comprehensive update to Montana's land use regulations. The City of Helena's Public Participation Plan will provide a framework for communication and engagement to ensure access to public information, and continuous and ongoing public involvement throughout the three-year process for adoption of the future land use plan and associated regulations. As public involvement in the administrative decision-making process will be more limited after the adoption of this Land Use Plan and subsequent five-year updates, public involvement during this process is vital. This document serves as a starting point for MLUPA compliance and will be revised as needed to align with policies and recommendations adopted by the State of Montana or the Helena City Commission. Upon adoption of all documents required by the MLUPA, the City may review the Public Participation Plan periodically to ensure that communication objectives are being achieved.

Background

Currently, the City of Helena's commitment to public involvement is defined in the 2019 Growth Policy. The Growth Policy defines goals and objectives identifying the importance of encouraging and supporting the continuous improvement of public communication, outreach, and involvement in the planning process. The City of Helena zoning and subdivision regulations also include the right to legal notice and public hearings regarding the City's zoning and subdivision decisions.

The current process tends to drive public comment towards individual projects around the city. This can create tension as different visions for an area collide. The intent of the MLUPA is to drive public comment towards the land use planning phase to ensure that projects that come in have already been well-considered in the land use planning process.

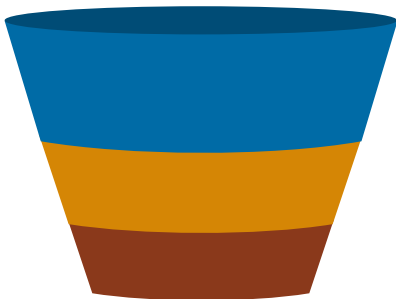
MLUPA Requirements

The Public Participation Plan is the beginning of a three-year process to replace Helena's current Growth Policy, zoning, and subdivision regulations (Helena City Code Titles 11 and 12, respectively) to comply with the MLUPA.

Public Participation Opportunity

The purpose of this plan is to define a set of strategies that can be employed to ensure that the public is not only informed but also provided ample opportunity to participate in the process of crafting the City's new MLUPA compliant Land Use Plan. The strategies outlined in this document will provide a framework for continuous and extensive public engagement.

Public Participation Opportunity



Land Use Plan and Future Land Use Map

The creation of the Land Use Plan and Land Use Map will allow for the greatest opportunity for public involvement.

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

The drafting of new zoning and subdivision regulations will allow for written and verbal public comment and analysis and response to public comments by City staff.

Public Notice of Administrative Decisions

The opportunity for public involvement in future developments conforming to the Land Use Plan, zoning, and subdivision regulations will be limited.

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission will initially be tasked with reviewing and making recommendations to the City Commission regarding the development, adoption, review, and approval or denial of a Land Use Plan, Future Land Use Map, and updates to the City's Zoning Regulations, Zoning Map, and Subdivision Regulations. To achieve and complete these initial goals, the Planning Commission will hold standing meetings on the first Thursday of each month in-person, virtually, or a hybrid of both. Additional meetings will be held as needed.

Meetings will typically be scheduled for 6:00pm but may be held at other times according to the needs of the meeting subject or to the needs of the community. In person meetings may be held in the City-County Building or within the community in various locations as the work of the Planning Commission dictates and requires. The goal being that these are meetings of particular community importance and should be held throughout the community.

Notices of each held meeting will be provided as required of City policy and as required in §2-3-203, Montana Code Ann. All meetings will be properly posted on the City website in the Public Meetings calendar, on the Community Development's MLUPA project page, and VIA social media postings through the City's various platforms. If any such meetings are held as official public hearings (policy recommendations, ordinance change recommendations), these meetings will also be posted in the legal section of the Helena Independent Record.

Land Use Plan and Future Land Use Map

The intent of the Land Use Plan is to identify opportunities for the development of land within the City of Helena and its greater jurisdictional area for housing, businesses, agriculture, public lands, institutions, and the allocation of natural resources. The plan will acknowledge and address impacts of development on adjacent properties, the community, the natural environment, public services, facilities, and address potential natural hazards that may limit development in certain areas of the city. Accompanying

the Land Use Plan will be the Future Land Use Map that establishes the City's expected jurisdictional area and future land use boundaries required to meet projected housing requirements over the next 20 years, as defined in the Land Use Plan.

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

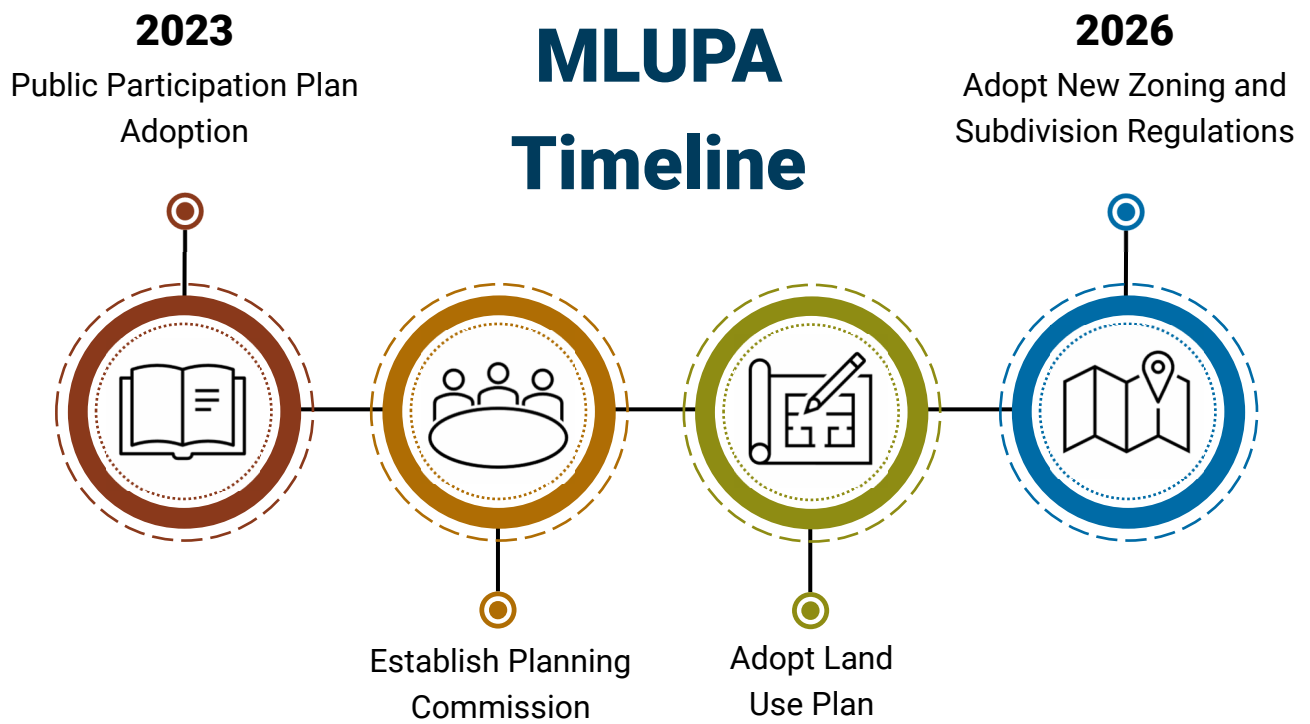
The City will review its zoning, zoning map, and subdivision regulations to ensure their alignment with the Land Use Plan upon its adoption. The MLUPA requires that city zoning and subdivision regulations meet its specific statutory requirements; including adopting a zoning map that aligns with the Future Land Use Map and implementing best practices to encourage the development of new housing to meet the projected housing demand for the next 20 years. The zoning, zoning map, and subdivision regulations adopted by the City Commission through recommendation of the Planning Commission will set forth the administrative and decision-making processes of the City's Planning Division.

What Should You Expect From Us?

At a minimum, the City, consultants, and contractors must allow the community access to:

- Draft planning documents and regulations;
- An opportunity to provide written and verbal comments;
- The chance to be heard at public meetings;
- A pathway for electronic communication to address any questions or concerns involving the planning and implementation processes, documents, comments, or any updates to the process; and
- Access to the analysis and response to public comment.

The Public Participation Plan establishes the framework detailing our commitment to public involvement throughout the process of adoption, amendment, modification, or rejection of any future land use plans, zoning, or subdivision regulations.



Public Participation Principles

City staff, consultants, and contractors will be guided by the following principles:

1. Thought and Purpose

Public participation helps to bring thought and meaning to our planning and decision-making process. The values imparted into planning and regulation documents through public participation will help preserve the City of Helena's culture, identity, and prosperity.

2. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity is the heart and soul of our community. The personal identity of every member of our community has intrinsic value and adds to its ever enriching and endearing character. It is our goal to ensure that all members of the community feel welcome to participate in the planning process and have their voice heard.

- We will continue to listen and evolve our participation tools and strategies;
- We will encourage all members of the public to stay informed and participate in public engagement events; and
- We will commit to making all communication and events accessible in the planning and regulation drafting process.

3. Transparency and Trust

Clear communication will be provided at each step of the planning process and the City will retain all material from public participation events as part of the public record.

4. Open, Adaptable, and Evolving

It is important to maintain a continuous dialogue between community members and the City, consultants, and contractors. Likewise, it is imperative that we continue to seek out new means and methods for improving communication and engagement activities through evaluation of participant feedback and public comment.

Goals and Objectives

City staff, consultants, and contractors will strive to achieve the following goals and objectives when engaging the public:

Goal 1: Create Consistency

Create a consistent approach to communication including clear expectations for where information can be found. Aim to improve current technology, create better processes, and continue to explore new methods of communication.

Objective A: Create Communication Expectations

Adopt policies for City staff, consultants, and contractors to follow which details how, when, and where information will be communicated to the public.

Objective B: Improve Customer Communication

Optimize and standardize publication of Planning Division projects to the City of Helena website. Periodically review communication processes and tools to evaluate their effectiveness.

Goal 2: Engage the Public

Receiving public involvement in planning and decision making is critical. We are committed to improving and increasing access to public participation opportunities and periodically refining engagement expectations.

Objective A: Create Public Engagement Expectations

We will use the IAP2 Spectrum, adopted by the City of Helena and described in the next section, as a standard framework for public participation opportunities and the distribution of public information.

Objective B: Improve Public Written Comment and Feedback

We will identify and provide an easily accessible pathway to receive and retain written public comments and will provide analysis and feedback when necessary.

Participation Framework and Tools

The IAP2 Spectrum, adopted by the City of Helena in 2021, is a matrix comprised of a range of public engagement strategies and varying levels of participation by the community. The strategies are implemented to set consistent expectations for public communications and involvement opportunities. This is an adaptable framework and the following tools are not all-encompassing; rather, the listings help illustrate the level of involvement the community can expect from the City at each step.

Information Tools

The following methods can be used for sharing information about the Land Use Plan process, and projects to follow the Land Use Plan.

- Legal Notice in Public Newspaper or other means, as stated in MCA 7-1-4127.
- Neighbor Notification
- Public Notice
- Signs
- City of Helena Website
- Be Heard Helena
- Social Media
- News/Media/Advisory

Engagement Tools

The following methods can be used for gathering public input about the Land Use Plan process, and projects to follow the Land Use Plan.

- Be Heard Helena
 - Surveys and Comment Forms
- Workshops
- Charrettes
- Storefront and “Pop-up” Studios
- Open Houses
- Presence at Public Events

Participation Spectrum

| | Inform/Consult | Involve | Collaborate |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Goal | Provide information in a timely manner, obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives, and decisions. | Work with the public to make sure concerns and aspirations are considered and understood. | Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making process. |
| Promise | "We will keep you informed, listen, and acknowledge your concerns." | "We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the decisions made." | "We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible." |
| What Part of the Planning Process? | Public notice and comments regarding administrative land use decisions. | Opportunity for oral and written comment with analysis and feedback from City staff when considering new zoning and subdivision regulations. | Interactive engagement opportunities contributing to Land Use Plan. |

When?

The creation of the Land Use Plan and the drafting of updated zoning and subdivision regulations will require public engagement at the *Involve* and *Collaborate* levels of the public engagement spectrum. It is important to take an active role in opportunities to be involved and provide feedback, being mindful that new land use plans and regulations will determine the outcome of future land use decisions that may allow for by-right development situations with limited opportunity for public hearings and comment.

Where?

Interactive and exciting engagement opportunities will be held at public events throughout the City. Our goal is to ensure that these events are both equitably distributed and accessible to allow for all of Helena's voices and concerns to be heard. Participants may also be asked to give feedback on how to improve future engagement tools, processes, and events.

Continuous Information and Involvement

The drafting and adoption of the Land Use Plan and subsequent land use regulations will be an extensive process, providing opportunities for continuous community engagement and feedback. Those who wish to remain involved throughout the planning process can stay up to date on current events by following activity on the City of Helena's website, Be Heard Helena, or by contacting the Planning Division office. Planning Commission meeting agendas, meeting materials, and minutes will be made available on the City website prior to each meeting. All public engagement material will be retained as public record and be available upon request.

Participation Feedback

Feedback from community members on the adequacy of public involvement opportunities and feedback on lessons learned from participation events is essential to ensuring a healthy communication stream. Using this combination of feedback, the Planning Division staff and working partners will determine next steps to ensure continuous public engagement. The Planning Division staff, consultants, and contractors will also provide an analysis and response to public comments and engagement activities at the *Consult, Involve, and Collaborate* levels of the participation framework.

Next Steps

The MLUPA established a different process for land use decisions. The changes will front-load public input, with limited public involvement during permit and application review.

Upon adoption of the Land Use Plan, the Planning Commission will hear appeals on land use decisions. Unless an amendment to adopted regulations is required, land use applications and permits will be reviewed, and approved or denied, by City staff. At this phase of the process, public input will be limited unless the permit or application in question differs significantly from the adopted Land Use Plan, zoning, or subdivision regulations. This section is subject to revision upon adoption of future regulations defining the public hearing and appeals process for the Planning Commission.