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Re: Highway 93 South Corridor Plan and Rezone Request

August 15, 2017

Having reviewed the proposed South Whitefish Corridor Zone amendments, Citizens for a Better Flathead will be urging denial of both the underlying zone changes to immediate and potential future commercial uses and the overlay zone, which establishes standards for things like setbacks, landscaping, signage, and highway access for such commercial development. These comments focus on why we believe the overlay zone should not be supported and why it is such a flawed proposal.

The proposed buffer and landscaping provisions for the South Whitefish Overlay Zone are in no way suitable to this rural highway corridor. **The proposed standard for a mere five foot landscaped setback for development and signs along this corridor---a standard that might work in a central downtown area where sidewalks, narrow strips of landscaping, curb and gutters, numerous stoplights, and very slow traffic speeds are the norm---but not on a rural highway corridor with speeds up to 70+ miles per hour that serves as a gateway to the City of Whitefish.**

Unfortunately, both the City of Whitefish Planning Director and the County are so blindly focused on if the mere words in the proposed zoning standards for development in the county's proposed overlay zone are the same as standard used for a zone within the city, that they are totally missing the point that development standards for a slow moving road within the city are totally inappropriate for development along a rural fast moving highway connecting two rural towns.

In contrast, the City of Kalispell calls for landscaped buffered setbacks from Hwy 93 North with a 20ft landscaped building setback where traffic speeds are at 35mph, a 40ft landscaped building setback at 36-45mph, and 100-150 ft. landscaped building setback at 45mph and above. A far cry from what the county is proposing of a mere five foot setbacks. (While many folks are critical of the traffic issues created by the pattern of big box store retail north of Kalispell within the city limits, without the landscape and building setback standards the city has put in place this corridor it would be far more unattractive.)

Kalispell adopted these standards into their growth policy and requires properties annexing in along Hwy 93 to comply with these setbacks. In cases where an existing buildings/property can't comply they are required to annex in by PUD so that a workable solution that addresses the corridor entrance goals can still be met. This plan was adopted in 2006 and was renewed in their most recent Growth Policy update—see pages 83-84 of this plan on line at <http://www.kalispell.com/planning/growth.php>

Whitefish should join Kalispell in calling for highway corridor standards that at a minimum match those Kalispell has long been championing.

Whitefish has a proud history of setting a high bar for quality development and it has paid off with a strong and growing economy for the city. The five-foot Whitefish WB-2 zone setback has been recognized as inadequate even within the city. **The City didn't adopt the WB-2 five-foot setback for the city from Highway 40 north to Columbia Ave along Hwy 93—instead the city worked with the MDOT to get the 20-40 foot landscaped setbacks along this WB-2 corridor within the city!!!**

Visualize the set back in Whitefish at the former Dairy Queen—now Fly Shop—and its tiny strip of grass at maybe five feet---which I am not sure is even still there ---all along Hwy 93 south and the setback and the contrasting landscaping in front of Wrights Furniture which is from at least 20-to 40 feet in depth. What do you want to see along the south gateway entrance to Whitefish?

Look at the raised landscaped bermed area along Hwy 93, which includes a pedestrian trail, within the 125-foot set back at Sliverbrook Estates just north of Kalispell. This 325-acre subdivision complied with the city standards for this 125-foot setback when they annexed into the city. It demonstrated that mid to high end residential development is possible and feasible along Hwy 93 with attractive setbacks and berms to address noise issues.

While some elements of the proposed overlay do have merit, as a package this proposed overlay zone fails sorely to meet the quality standards needed for Hwy 93. We encourage the City of Whitefish to stand with the City of Kalispell in calling for greater setbacks and higher standards to secure access control and address traffic issues along the Hwy 93 Corridor.

This entire zoning proposal for the South Whitefish Corridor Zone amendment should be opposed until a plan can be developed with MDOT for setbacks needed to ensure that development occurs in conjunction with dedicated areas for bike and pedestrian trails and with a network of roads that can serve as back roads or frontage roads to address future traffic growth and traffic impacts.