



May 21, 2026

RE: MONTANA LAND USE PLANNING (MLUPA) ACT COMPLIANCE UPDATE
To: Local Government Interim Committee
From: David Taylor, AICP, Director of Planning and Building, City of Whitefish

Members of the Local Government Interim Committee,

The purpose of this letter is to provide an update on the City of Whitefish's compliance with the Montana Land Use Planning Act (MLUPA).

MLUPA COMPLIANCE BENCHMARKS TO DATE

Adopted Public Engagement Plan (PEP)

- PEP adopted in June of 2023; describes how community members and stakeholders would be engaged throughout the growth policy update process.
- A revised PEP was adopted in May of 2026 to include processes related to community plan updates, regulatory updates, and site specific development applications.

Population Projections Calculated for 20 Years

- Population projections prepared from data provided by Montana Department of Commerce and historic city growth rates (1.5%).
- 2025 population estimated at 9,256.
- 2045 full-time and seasonal population projected to be an increase of 3,000 to 5,000 people.

Completed a Comprehensive Update of the 2007 Growth Policy

- Adopted the new *Vision Whitefish 2045 Community Plan (VW2045)* which incorporates all MLUPA-required elements including land use, housing, economic development, environment, natural resources and hazards, transportation and public facilities.
- Plan adopted by City Council on April 20, 2026.
- Hired consultants to assist in background information required for economic development and housing elements.
- Hired consultant to prepare land use element.
- Hired consultant to update water, sewer and stormwater master plans to determine existing and future needs for projected 20-year population.
- Analyzed capacities of all public facilities to meet the anticipated 2045 population.

Addressed Existing and Future Housing Needs

- 5,700 existing housing units within the City of Whitefish.
- 2,100 additional units required by 2045.

- VW2045 addresses housing needs in the following ways:
 - New land use designations (place-types) that allow more diverse mix of housing types in widespread areas of the city.
 - Designates three areas for large scale housing development.
 - Targets preferred annexation areas
 - Suggests financial strategies to encourage housing.

Whitefish already meets six of the fourteen housing strategies pursuant to MLUPA

- Allow, as a permitted use, for at least a duplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted.
- Zone for higher density housing near transit stations, places of employment, higher education facilities, and other appropriate population centers.
- Eliminate impact fees for accessory dwelling units or developments that include multi-unit dwellings or reduce the fees by at least 25%.
- Allow, as a permitted use, for at least one internal or detached accessory dwelling unit on a lot with a single-unit dwelling occupied as a primary residence.
- Provide for zoning that specifically allows or encourages the development of tiny houses.
- Allow multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use development as a permitted use on all lots where office, retail, or commercial are primary permitted uses.

Initially Adopted Zoning and Subdivision Code “Quick Fixes” to Meet Requirements of MLUPA

- Updated zoning procedures to require administrative review of site-specific developments, conditional use permits, and variances.
- Revised public notification requirements and appeal process pursuant to MLUPA.
- Updated and expanded performance standards required for certain uses.
- Updated subdivision regulations to comply with process requirements of MLUPA.
- Proposed zoning and subdivision changes went to Planning Commission on April 29 and May 5, 2026 and were moved on to the City Council with a recommendation for approval.
- Zoning and subdivision changes to implement MLUPA were adopted by City Council on May 18, 2026, with a second reading on June 1, 2026, and fully go into effect on July 1, 2026.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- Initial notification of 10,000 postcards and fliers in all utility bills.
- Kick off meeting with more than 100 in attendance.
- Public notification on city website.
- Engagement website developed with all content posted and over 600 subscribers.
- Sent 45 newsletters with recent updates.
- Direct outreach and involvement with Whitefish High School students each year for their senior Government Class projects.
- Press releases released before each work session.
- Six community visioning sessions with more than 200 attendees.

- Three town hall land use meetings.
- Over 1,000 pages of public comment.
- Thirty Planning Commission work sessions for community plan; two additional work sessions on zoning and subdivision regulations.
- Five City Council work sessions on community plan; additional work session for zoning and subdivision regulation updates.
- Two Planning Commission Public Hearings on community plan; additional public hearing on zoning and subdivision regulation updates.
- Three City Council Public Hearings on community plan; additional public hearing on zoning and subdivision regulation updates.

FUTURE MLUPA-RELATED IMPLEMENTATION BENCHMARKS

Phase Two Zoning Updates (scheduled for Fall of 2026)

- Revise zoning districts to match community plan place types.
- Consolidate types of land uses.
- Create new zoning districts, including micro-lot zone and new place-types zoning.
- Implement character and form-based zoning standards for downtown residential areas.
- Revise multifamily and non-residential development standards.
- Revise zoning to encourage and create better standards for single-room occupancy developments

Community Plan (ongoing)

- Develop user-friendly condensed version of 300 page community plan.
- Develop implementation schedule of all VW2045 goals and objectives which are action items.

MLUPA COSTS TO DATE

- Three years of full-time work by long-range planner (to date)
- Economic Development Study by GSB Consulting - \$27,815
- Updated Housing Needs Assessment by Agnew Beck – \$42,460
- Land Use Element by czb, LLC - \$149,700
- Initial Zoning Updates by czb, LLC - \$75,000
- Water Master Plan Update by AE2S, LLC – \$164,512
- Sewer and Stormwater Master Plan Update by RPA Consulting - \$110,727
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan – \$87,365

Future Costs

- Phase Two Zoning Update – Est. \$225,000