
INTRODUCTION

The Lake County General Plan, adopted in 1988, was Lake County, Montana's first comprehensive land use plan. The General Plan was written in response to the rapid change that was taking place throughout the area. Over the past 15 years, the rate of change has not diminished. The population has grown by 25 percent, or around 7,000 people. The economy is no longer based on natural resources and is now dominated by service sector jobs and two-income families. Land prices have soared while agricultural profits have mostly fallen flat. Public services and infrastructure have not kept pace with the demands of an ever-growing public.

This document is an update to the 1988 General Plan, which is now called a growth policy, in accordance with 76-1-601 Montana Code Annotated. A growth policy is a land use planning document that is designed to guide and facilitate future growth and development in ways that limit the negative impacts of growth. It is not a regulatory document, but instead provides a framework and rationale for developing procedures, policies and working on specific projects that are intended to guide future population growth and development in a cohesive and intelligent manner.

The Lake County Growth Policy is divided into seven chapters. The first six chapters address specific subjects—population and economics, housing, land use, natural resources, public facilities and local and social services. These six chapters provide an inventory of current conditions and describe present and anticipated trends. Each of the first six chapters also lists individual goals and objectives as they relate to the specific subjects. The goals express a desired outcome and the objectives are actions Lake County intends to take in order to achieve the goals. There is overlap between the goals and objectives found in the first six chapters because all of the subjects are inter-related. The overlapping objectives also show which issues are the most pressing.

The seventh chapter, the implementation chapter, describes how and when the goals and objectives will be achieved. It is divided into three parts. The first part provides a description of specific planning tools, high priority actions and a timeline for implementing the growth policy. The second part focuses on the primary review criteria and public hearing procedure for subdivision review. The third part states how and when this document will be reviewed and revised.

The Lake County Growth Policy expresses a vision for future growth and development that has been in the making since 1999. Over the course of that period, Lake County staff and elected and appointed officials have participated in dozens of planning meetings, received hundreds of pages of written comments and considered countless hours of public testimony. In 2001 the Lake County Planning Department held a series of growth policy-specific meetings across the county, made presentations to civic groups and distributed questionnaires in order to gauge the public's planning-related priorities. Over 300 citizens participated in the public meetings and the Planning Department received over 440 completed questionnaires. The public's responses were compared with past survey results completed by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and the Lake County Community Development Corporation. All of this public input, combined with the experience of Lake County Planning Board members, County Commissioners and staff, provide the basis for the goals and objectives, the community vision, that is expressed in this document.

Change is inevitable. Lake County is growing and will continue to develop. The Lake County Growth Policy is intended to help guide and manage that change while protecting the resources and values that give us a great quality of life and make our home a very special place.

