

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
April 7, 2026 -- City Commission Work Session
Civic Center, Gibson Room 212 -- Mayor Reeves Presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 PM

ROLL CALL/STAFF INTRODUCTIONS:

City Commission members present: Cory Reeves, Joe McKenney, Rick Tryon, Shannon Wilson and Casey Schreiner.

Also present were City Manager Greg Doyon and Deputy City Manager Jeremy Jones, City Attorney David Dennis, Finance Director Melissa Kinzler, Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry, Associate Planner Alaina Mattimiro and Senior Transportation Planner Andrew Finch, Public Works Director Chris Gaub and Development Review Coordinator Mark Juras, Assistant Chief of Fire Prevention Mike McIntosh, Police Captain Brian Black, and City Clerk Lisa Kunz.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ben Forsyth, City resident, provided a Liberty Bell article titled “Illicit Chinese Toxins Discovered at Somerset County Triad Cannabis Operation” and raised concerns about the alleged smuggling and sale of illegal chemicals, including insecticides, pesticides, and fungicides, by Chinese criminal organizations into the United States. He noted that 13 such chemicals are being sold nationwide, including two that are potentially fatal, and cited possible evidence of sales in Great Falls. He urged the Commission to give the matter serious attention.

Howard Plouffe, Co-Chairman of Neighborhood Council Number 5, referred to the City’s Growth Plan update document. He highlighted Table 8.2 (pages 131–132), noting state law requirements that may allow multi-unit development in existing or future residential neighborhoods. He expressed community concerns about potential impacts, including parking issues and changes to neighborhood character, particularly when single-family homes are converted into duplexes or triplexes. He appreciated the emphasis on public safety as a priority.

Sheila Rice, City resident, commended City staff and officials for the quality of the growth plan and for incorporating public input throughout the process. She emphasized the importance of permanent affordability in housing, recommending that any city-supported affordable housing include permanent deed restrictions. She also highlighted alternative

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shared equity models, such as community land trusts, deed-restricted homeownership, and cooperative housing, as strategies to maintain long-term affordability.

Shyla Patera, North Central Independent Living Services, submitted written comments expressing appreciation to the Growth Policy Steering Committee, City staff, and Planning & Community Development for their inclusive public engagement efforts throughout the Growth Policy 2045 process. She voiced support for advancing the policy to the Planning Board and City Commission for final adoption.

Her comments emphasized the importance of maintaining focus on affordable and accessible housing, infrastructure, and transportation. Key priorities included expanding affordable and accessible housing options, supporting low-income housing, and promoting universal and visitable design in new developments. She also highlighted the need to strengthen accessibility standards and ADA compliance—particularly in infill, mixed-use, and historic properties—and to encourage accessibility in ADUs and tiny homes.

Additionally, Ms. Patera called for improvements in accessible transportation and stronger enforcement of disability parking regulations. She acknowledged progress in accessible recreation and encouraged continued collaboration between the City and nonprofit partners to enhance community-wide accessibility.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. GROWTH POLICY UPDATE

Planning and Community Development Director Brock Cherry noted that Alaina Mattimiro and Andrew Finch were instrumental in getting to this point. He also acknowledged and expressed appreciation to the steering committee. He reviewed and discussed PowerPoint slides (available in the City Clerk's Office). Highlights included:

- ❖ Our Goal for Today:
 - To determine whether this draft is substantively complete enough to begin the formal adoption process, with the understanding that refinements and revisions can continue as the process moves forward.
 - We may still find a few typos, formatting issues, and other edits. Staff will continue reviewing and refining the document for grammar, spelling, formatting, and similar clean-up items all the way through adoption.

Director Cherry indicated that additional adjustments are expected prior to and during the Planning Advisory Board's review process. Version 2 will be updated to Version 3 following Planning Advisory Board and public comments.

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- ❖ Introduction – Why a Growth Policy?
 - Required by state statute, the newly adopted, Montana Land Use Planning Action (MLUPA).
 - The City’s current Growth Policy was adopted in 2013.
 - The Growth Policy provides a level of predictability for residents and developers alike – “Frustration is born out of unmet expectation.”
 - Coordinated planning allows the City both internally and externally to maximize our resources for desired outcomes.

In summary, state law requires an updated growth policy focused on housing accessibility, with a new framework that emphasizes upfront planning and more administrative approvals, while retaining an appeals process.

- ❖ Growth Policy Project Timeline: 33 Months in the Making:
 - August 2023 – Brock was hired.
 - September 2023 – Preliminary Work – Introduce community to the concept.
 - January 2024 – RFP for consultant services.
 - February 2024 – Growth Policy Steering Committee formed.
 - April 2024 – Consultant, Orion Planning + Design selected.
 - May 2024 – Formal public outreach began.
 - August 2024 – In-person Stakeholder Roundtables.
 - December 2024 – Virtual Stakeholder Roundtables.
 - January 2025 – Community Planning Week.
 - January 22, 2025 – Community Survey launch.
 - March 31, 2025 – Community Survey closed.
 - January 9, 2026 – 1st Draft published for public comment.
 - February 28, 2026 – 1st Draft closed for public comment.
 - April 28, 2026 – Planning Advisory Board public hearing.
 - June 16, 2026 – Growth Policy adopted.

Director Cherry explained project delays were due to expanded and more deliberate public engagement efforts, resulting in a more thorough, credible, and legally defensible planning process. No member of the Commission expressed concern regarding the timeline.

- ❖ Chapter 2 – Past and Present Conditions (Pg. 11):
 - Population growth has been slow (less than 2% increase from 2010).
 - Aging infrastructure and housing shortages are key challenges.

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- Strong assets: Regional hub for healthcare, education, agriculture, and military; Extensive parks, trails, and natural features; Revitalization of Downtown.
- Development patterns show: Suburban expansion + underutilized areas in the core; Opportunity for infill and reinvestment; Need for consideration of public services and new/existing infrastructure.

Director Cherry discussed historically low population growth and proposed a modest but increased growth target, reflecting community support for growth while balancing realism and infrastructure capacity.

❖ Chapter 3 – Public Engagement Summary (Pg. 58):

- 150+ hours of engagement.
- 97 Meetings/Presentations.
- 27 Media features.
- 63 Social Media posts.
- 2308 Survey responses.

He reported strong public engagement, noting record participation and community involvement exceeding prior planning efforts.

❖ Chapter 4 – Vision Statement and Planning Principles (Pg. 73):

- Establishes the community vision (pg. 74) for Great Falls.
- Defines core planning principles (pgs. 75-76) to guide decisions including Montana Values, Community Building, Economic Vitality, International Growth and Innovation, Community Connection and Place-Making, and Participatory Planning.

❖ Chapter 5 – Future Land Use Types and Future Land Use Map (Pg. 77; Land Use Map Pg. 101):

- What the Future Land Use Map is and isn't: Not a Zoning Map – Does Not provide development rights; Is a key component of the basis of decisions for Land Use and it will inform development code changes, land use decisions and the like.

He explained that public input and data informed planning principles and a flexible future land use map, which guides—but does not regulate—land use decisions.

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- ❖ Chapter 6 – Fiscal Chapter (Pg. 103):
 - Great Falls’ fiscal health depends not just on growth, but on the cost of serving that growth. The form, location, and intensity of development determine whether it strengthens or strains long-term stability.
 - Projecting taxable value helps show how different development patterns support the tax base that funds core City services. As Great Falls grows, financial analysis and infrastructure planning should help align development with long-term service and utility capacity.

This chapter emphasized evaluating the long-term financial impacts of development, encouraging fiscally sustainable growth that balances housing needs with infrastructure costs.

- ❖ Chapter 7 – Planning Focus Areas and Concepts (Pg. 111):
 - Applies the plan to focus areas and corridors.
 - Demonstrates how vision becomes real, physical change.
 - Identifies Potential growth areas, redevelopment opportunities and policies, regulations, and design tools needed.
 - Encourages mixed use development, housing diversity, walkability and connectivity.

Director Cherry highlighted redevelopment opportunities in key areas, emphasizing mixed-use development and better utilization of existing infrastructure to support growth.

- ❖ Chapter 8 – Goals and Implementation (Pg. 131):
 - Provides an action plan to implement the Growth Policy – Specific strategies and recommendations; Partners involved; Timelines.
 - Designed to be a living document – planned reviews and updates.

- ❖ City Commission Policy Decisions:

The City Commission will need to provide specific directions regarding:

- (1) The Future Land Use Type of the Little Shell Recreation and Gaming Facility. Currently, the subject property is designated as Traditional Neighborhood. The Tribe has asked the future land use type to indicate its proposed commercial pursuits (Commercial Corridor). Surrounding property owners are concerned about the character of their neighborhood;

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- (2) Whether to officially sunset the Missouri River Urban Corridor Plan. The Plan was adopted in 2004. Some community members believe the plan is too dated, while others believe the plan is still relevant and can be officially sunset with new Growth Policy; and
- (3) Staff highlighted that neighborhood parks are currently designated as “open space” on the Future Land Use Map, appearing as distinct green areas within other land use categories. This designation may limit flexibility, as converting parkland to another use could require a Future Land Use Map amendment, effectively signaling long-term preservation as green space. An alternative approach would be to incorporate park areas into the surrounding land use designation (e.g., Urban Neighborhood or Traditional Neighborhood), allowing for greater flexibility in future land use decisions without requiring map amendments. The Steering Committee expressed differing perspectives on this issue. Some members favored maintaining the current designation to ensure strong protection of green space, while others supported increased flexibility to adapt underutilized parkland to other community needs without additional regulatory steps.

Director Cherry requested direction to formally initiate the adoption process for the Growth Policy Update. The proposed process will include a Planning Advisory Board public hearing and recommendation on April 28, 2026, City Commission Resolution of Intent at the May 19, 2026, City Commission meeting, and public hearing and consideration of adoption of the Growth Policy Update “Future of Great Falls 2045” at the June 16, 2026, City Commission meeting.

After Commission discussion about the adoption and future amendment processes, the Commission requested another work session be scheduled after the May 19, 2026, Planning Advisory Board meeting.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL UPCOMING WORK SESSION TOPICS

Due to the lack of time, upcoming work session topics were not discussed.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Reeves adjourned the informal work session of April 7, 2026, at 6:50 p.m.