



City of East Helena

GROWTH POLICY

August 2008

<http://www.rpa-hln.com/ehgrowth/ehgrowth.htm>

What's A Growth Policy?

A **Growth Policy** is a term introduced into Montana law during the late 1990s, and under state law means the same as “comprehensive plan” or “master plan”. These terms all refer to a long-range comprehensive planning document adopted and used by a local government to guide decisions about the community’s future development.

Comprehensive planning considers a community’s past and present conditions, and uses that knowledge to influence the future physical, environmental, economic, and social character of the area included in the plan. A growth policy includes maps and policies which depict land uses, and direct those uses and their future arrangement.

A growth policy analyzes and summarizes community-wide issues and trends in order to recommend broad goals, objectives, and policies. It is comprehensive in nature because it focuses on the entire community and all functional aspects of development as a single unit, with all components working together, not apart. A growth policy is long-



East Helena Main Street circa 1900

range because it looks beyond pressing current issues to the potential problems and opportunities five or ten years or more into the future.

While it is not a regulatory document by itself, once adopted, a growth policy forms the legal and rational basis for regulations, public investments, or programs undertaken by local government to implement the growth policy. For example, a growth policy does not zone property, nor does it enact any regulation. However, land may be zoned and regulations written and enacted based upon recommendations contained in the document.

Why Does East Helena Need a Growth Policy?

The City must plan for its future. Simply said, the City of East Helena needs a growth policy because the time is right to plan for its future. While Lewis and Clark County and the City of Helena have had comprehensive plans (and now have Growth Policies) to help guide land use decisions and growth for many years, the City of East Helena has never drafted a comprehensive plan.

According to U.S. Census estimates, the City of East Helena’s population has grown increased by about 27% since the 2000 Census and expectations are that it will continue to grow. This growth has resulted in

many changes in the City of East Helena and adjoining county lands. A growth policy will help give residents a voice about how this growth should occur in the East Helena area. The following statement (from the *Great Falls Growth Policy: A Greater Great Falls - Plan on It!*) sums up why a community should plan for its future.

“Planning allows the community to envision its future and proactively work to achieve it, instead of just reacting and moving from one short-range, quick-fix solution to another, as events occur.”

Why Does East Helena Need a Growth Policy? (Continued)

The City needs a growth policy to enable it to enact regulations to control land uses. Under Montana law, local governments have the option of deciding whether to prepare and adopt growth policies for their jurisdictions. However, after October 1, 2006, jurisdiction without a compliant growth policy cannot adopt or amend zoning regulations. Without such regulations, the City must generally rely on regulations or policies established by others to control existing land uses and new development.

A growth policy can help improve the community. The public involvement and planning associated with the development of a growth policy can help make East Helena more beautiful, healthful,

interesting, and efficient. Citizens input can help identify what features or characteristics are valued and should be preserved and they can establish a “vision” for the City’s future.

A growth policy can be a valuable economic development tool for the community. First, it provides important resource information regarding which areas are most suitable for development and which should be avoided because of building constraints like poor soils, high groundwater, or flood risk. Second, the growth policy also offers developers and prospective homeowners predictability in terms of the areas the community has selected for future growth and extension of infrastructure.

What’s in a Growth Policy?

The 1999 Legislature made significant changes to the laws governing land use planning in Montana. Under the revised law, minimum requirements have been established for the content of such documents. Section 76-1-601, **Montana Codes Annotated (MCA)** identifies several elements that must be addressed as part one of the growth policy but does not define the extent to which each element must be described.

The major required elements of growth policies include:

- Community goals and objectives;
- Maps and text describing the existing characteristics and features of the jurisdictional area (including information on land uses, population, housing needs, economic conditions, local services, public facilities, natural resources, and other characteristics);
- Projected trends for each of the above listed elements;
- A description of the policies, regulations, and other tools that will help achieve identified goals and objectives;

- An implementation strategy for the growth policy; and
- Strategies for intergovernmental coordination.

Growth policies are “big picture” non-regulatory planning documents. Growth policies, establish the general goals which a community wishes to pursue, but seldom provide exact detail about the use of, or application of policies to, a particular tract of land within the community.

A Growth Policy is:

- A community vision for how it sees its future.
- A community vision for how and where the community wants to grow.
- An official statement of public policy on growth and development issues.

A Growth Policy is not:

- A set of regulations – it forms the legal and rational basis for follow-up regulations or programs to implement the growth policy.
- Stagnant – it is a document that must be regularly updated to reflect changes with the community and new information.

Planning Area for the East Helena Growth Policy

The Planning Area includes the general area around the City of East Helena that will be considered in Growth Policy review of existing conditions and trend analysis. The boundaries of the Planning Area are shown below.

The Planning Area does not include any lands in the City of Helena or property associated with the Helena Regional Airport. Lands within the Mountain Meadow View Subdivision are not included since the property will be annexed by the City of Helena.



Public Participation is Important to the Growth Policy

To be successful, community planning efforts must provide adequate opportunities for citizens to participate. Community planning needs to be an open public process in which every interested citizen has an opportunity to express their views on community goals, needs, problems, and opportunities.

Montana law requires public hearings to be held on the growth policy and any proposed documents must be available to the public for review. The growth policy must be adopted by the City of East Helena as a statement of policy and their commitment to future actions.

Opportunities to be involved and contribute to the East Helena Growth Policy will be available throughout the development of the document. The most notable opportunities will include:

➤ **August 2008 Open House Meeting:** This informal meeting will be held to obtain citizen views on community needs, problems, and

opportunities. The input received from the meeting will help identify issues and help establish goals and objectives for the City.

- **A Land Use Plan Workshop:** This workshop will help residents explore future land development scenarios for the East Helena Planning Area. The goal of the work session will be to identify desired future land development patterns showing areas most desirable and appropriate for various land uses within the planning area.
- **Open House Meeting on the Draft Growth Policy:** This Open House Meeting will provide an opportunity to share information about existing and projected trends in the East Helena area and present a future land use plan, draft goals and objectives, and implementation strategies.
- **Public Hearing on the Growth Policy:** The City of Helena will hold a public hearing prior to the adoption of the growth policy.

Major Tasks and Schedule for the Growth Policy

The work for the East Helena Growth Policy is expected to occur over the next four to six months and work should be substantially completed by the end of 2008.

Major tasks associated with the Growth Policy and their tentative completion dates are shown at right.

Major Tasks and Expected Project Timeline

- **Hold First Public Open House Meeting–August 21**
- Identify Existing Trends/Future Trend Analysis
- **Land Use Plan Workshop – Early Fall**
- Develop Draft Community Goals and Objectives
- Develop Draft Implementation Strategies
- Submit Draft Growth Policy for Review
- **Public Meeting on Draft Growth Policy– Late Fall**
- Consider Public Comments and Revise Growth Policy
- **Public Hearing on Growth Policy – January 2009**
- **Adoption of Growth Policy – February 2009**

Project Information and Contacts

For More Information or to Offer Comments Contact:

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Growth Policy Links and Resources:

2007 Montana Codes Annotated (MCA):

<http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/mca/76/1/76-1-601.htm>

Montana Growth Policy Resource Book:

<http://comdev.mt.gov/Includes/MTGrowthPolicyBook.pdf>

Lewis & Clark County Growth Policy:

<http://www.co.lewis-clark.mt.us/departments/community-development-planning/growth-policy.html>

City of Helena Growth Policy:

<http://www.ci.helena.mt.us/departments/community-development/planning/growth-policy.html>

Visit the Project Website

The project website is found on the homepage of Robert Peccia & Associates, Inc. at:

<http://www.rpa-hln.com/ehgrowth/ehgrowth.htm>