

Chapter 1: Dealing With Change

What is a Growth Policy?

Local Montana governments (counties, cities, and towns) have been allowed to adopt optional comprehensive plans for many years. The City of Hamilton implemented its own Comprehensive Master Plan in 1998.

In 1999, as a result of a study of growth issues conducted by the state's Environmental Quality Council, the Montana Legislature revamped the requirements of the comprehensive plan and created a new planning tool. This revised planning tool, now called a "Growth Policy", is to be used for community development and land use planning, and must contain these minimum requirements:

- ✓ A strategy for development and replacement of public infrastructure;
- ✓ A strategy for implementing the Growth Policy;
- ✓ A list of conditions that will prompt a revision of the Growth Policy;
- ✓ A timetable for Growth Policy review;
- ✓ An explanation of how the Planning Board will make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions.

Furthermore, the legislation provided that existing comprehensive plans would not automatically qualify as growth policies, since they wouldn't necessarily meet the new requirements contained in the 1999 law under section 76-1-601 of the Montana Code Annotated (MCA).

The Legislature adopted this change in order to create an incentive for local governments to deal with these issues "up front" in a community policy development process, rather than addressing the issues one subdivision at a time.



"The mission of the City of Hamilton is to provide for the public health and safety and promote the economic prosperity and environmental well-being of its citizens."

Mission Statement

adopted February 1994 by the Hamilton City Council.

"Hamilton will remain a friendly, safe place that values diversity and a spirit of community while continuing to preserve its natural beauty, history and culture."

Vision Statement

adopted July 1994 by the Hamilton Vision Committee.

Developing a Growth Policy

Hamilton's approach in developing a Growth Policy will be the same one the Planning Board and City Council used when developing the 1998 Comprehensive Master Plan. The approach is articulated in four key directives:

1. ***The Growth Policy must be developed by the same citizens it seeks to serve if it is to be effective.*** It cannot be imposed artificially on the citizens. The effort leading to this Growth Policy builds on the public involvement process conducted for the existing Comprehensive Master Plan.

The process used to develop the Comprehensive Master Plan began with a series of Planning Board meetings, interviews conducted with key department heads, and City Council members, as well a series of workshops for the public. A similar process was used to develop this Growth Policy.

2. ***The Policy must reflect the uniqueness of Hamilton.*** Throughout this document, the Growth Policy has been written to recognize and reinforce the same characteristics that make Hamilton unique and which have shaped Hamilton physically and socially.
3. ***The Policy must be easy to understand.*** Quite simply, this means that no buzzwords have been used, technical terms have been defined in a glossary, and policies have been tied to a specific goal.
4. ***The Policy must be technically competent.*** Upon completion, the Growth Policy will meet the minimum requirements of Montana State Law.

Reviewing the Growth Policy

State law now requires that a Growth Policy be reviewed at least every five years. This periodic review will help to ensure that the information upon which the Policy was based is

Maps relating to various aspects of this Growth Policy are included at the end of this document in the MAPS chapter.

Map ① delineates the City of Hamilton Ward Boundaries, from which City Council members are elected.

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

from **Montana’s Growth Policy Resource Book**, pg iii, June 2000

accurate, and that the goals and objectives of the Growth Policy still reflect the desires of the community.

The review process should evaluate both the text and the accompanying maps contained in the existing Growth Policy. City planning staff should update the information, and the Planning Board should re-evaluate the Policy's conclusions, goals and objectives in light of the new information.

When updated baseline information has been prepared, the review should consider the following questions:

- Are Hamilton's goals still current and valid?
- Have circumstances, information, assumptions, needs or laws materially changed since the Growth Policy's adoption?
- Where have problems with the text or maps occurred since the last review?
- Is the Growth Policy working – that is, does it appear to meet the current needs of the community?
- Can the Growth Policy be modified to better serve the citizens of Hamilton?
- Is there a balanced and proportionate amount of land provided for urban land uses expected to be required over the next planning period?

An informal review process carried out more frequently than every five years might be beneficial, especially when significant change occurs.

Amending the Growth Policy

The Planning Board has the responsibility to oversee the preparation of the Growth Policy, periodic reviews and identify necessary amendments to the Policy. The City Council adopts the Policy and makes it binding on the community. Either the Planning Board or City Council, by an affirmative vote of the majority of its total membership, may initiate an amendment to the Growth Policy any time they feel it is in the best interests of the community.

NOTE: *The regular review and amendment processes are not intended to limit development on land that is properly planned and zoned for the proposed uses. Such development applications may be submitted to the Office of Community Development at any time, and processed as staffing and other circumstances allow.*

Amendments to the Growth Policy must meet the same statutory requirements as its original adoption, including public input and review, public hearings, approval by the Planning Board and adoption by the City Council. Alterations should provide a significant opportunity for public participation and understanding of the proposed changes.

Statement of Coordination

The City of Hamilton is one element in a larger setting. Actions taken by the City, Ravalli County or other governmental body may affect one another. For example, the development requirements of the County influence how people evaluate development requirements within the City. Because of these interactions, working to establish cooperative approaches will be beneficial to all entities concerned.

Section 76-1-601 of the MCA requires a statement of how the City of Hamilton will coordinate and cooperate with Ravalli County in matters relating to the Growth Policy. The following is intended to meet this requirement:

In relation to the City of Hamilton Growth Policy and any subsequent amendments and updates, the City will cooperate and coordinate with Ravalli County as follows:

- County officials and staff will have an opportunity to review and comment on all proposed amendments to the City of Hamilton Growth Policy.*
- County officials and staff will have an opportunity to review and comment on the implementation tools for the City of Hamilton Growth Policy.*
- The City will work with the County to coordinate land use policies within the City's defined Planning Area.*
- The City will work with the County on identified areas of common interest, including transportation planning, open space protection, water quality and supply, and other items. Joint funding, if appropriate, will be pursued as allowed by state law.*

definitions:

Implementation

Tools:

a City's or County's subdivision and zoning regulations contained in its Growth Policy.

The Planning Area:

is defined on Map ⑤.