
INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Comprehensive Plan (hereinafter referred to as “The Plan”) is a policy document that is used as the basis of all land use regulatory documents in Kootenai County. It describes the County in broad terms and recommends goals, objectives, and strategies to guide the development of regulations to be used as the basis for decisions by the County’s elected leaders and staff. It is the key to development regulations and a vital tool in working with other local and state jurisdictions in formulating responsible, compatible growth guidelines. The Plan should be amended and updated on a periodic basis to ensure that new trends and changes are properly reflected. This Plan will provide guidance over the next 20 years.

Idaho Code 67-6508 states: “It shall be the duty of the planning or planning and zoning commission to conduct a comprehensive planning process designed to prepare, implement, and review and update a comprehensive plan. The plan shall include all land within the jurisdiction of the governing board. The plan shall consider previous and existing conditions, trends, desirable goals and objectives, or desirable future situations for each planning component. The plan, with maps, charts, and reports, shall be based on the following components as they may apply to land use regulations and actions unless the plan specifies reasons why a particular component is unneeded.

- (a) Property Rights
- (b) Population
- (c) School Facilities
- (d) Economic Development
- (e) Land Use
- (f) Natural Resources
- (g) Hazardous Areas
- (h) Public Services
- (i) Transportation
- (j) Recreation
- (k) Special Areas or Sites
- (l) Housing
- (m) Community Design
- (n) Implementation

- (o) National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors
- (p) Capital Improvements

Idaho Code 67-6508 lists the subjects that must be addressed as alphabetized above. This Plan orders the subjects differently to provide the reader with cascading information that ultimately leads to the County’s new land use regulations and zoning laws. The Plan also provides this Introduction to explain the process by which the new Plan was conceived and created and an Executive Summary that highlights critical features of the Plan.

The Plan updates and amends the previous 1994 Plan. It is the result of over two years of research, community input, debate, meetings, writing, and thought. The 2008 plan was drafted pursuant to the elements designated above by the Kootenai County Planning Commission, in conjunction with the County’s Building and Planning Department, the public, and numerous experts, government agencies, and the Board of County Commissioners. It is meant to reflect the guiding principles on which Kootenai County was built and will be developed in the future. It pays tribute to the extraordinary and unique beauty of our County, while acknowledging the need to accommodate growth and economic viability as we move forward in the 21st century.

To begin the process, in 2006 Kootenai County hired the firm of Kezziah Watkins to formulate a “visioning” exercise that would obtain and digest the public’s thoughts about where they live and what they wanted their County to look like now and in the next 20 years. “Meetings in a Box” were initiated that allowed County residents to hold meetings in the privacy of their homes with neighbors. Standard questions were posed to the attendees, and discussion was encouraged to develop a consensus of thought about area-related issues. The program gathered information from hundreds of Kootenai County residents in all sectors of the County. Recurrent topics of discussion included the burgeoning population, traffic, housing concerns/costs, economic vitality, pollution, and the development of rural land for large housing projects.

Additionally, some of the public attending the “Meetings-in-a-Box” expressed concern about public access to lakes/wildlife areas, the diminution of open space, lack of sufficient infrastructure to accommodate growth, and inconsistent land use decisions by local governments. The data was then presented by the Kezziah Watkins Firm to the Kootenai County Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners at public meetings held in December 2006.

Some of the County’s residents spoke at length about the desire to keep the environment more rural and environmentally protected, and to manage growth so that these “quality-of-life” factors could thrive in conjunction with a healthy economy and appropriate planning for inevitable population growth. Numerous relevant quotes taken directly from the public are interspersed in this Comprehensive Plan. A “Vision Statement” was also created to keep the focus on the actual desires of the participating public, and formed the basis for drafting The Plan.

Based on a number of factors, “sub-areas” in the County were identified so that the public could focus on different needs and concerns in the diverse topography and cultures that make up this County. The sub-areas are: Selkirk, North Kootenai, Rathdrum Prairie, Fernan, Bitterroot, Cougar Gulch, Mica, East Coeur d’ Alene Lake, and Worley. The sub-areas reflect not only different geography around the County, but also separate more urban areas from rural, account for environmentally sensitive areas, and consider the residents’ attitudes about “community” and culture as well. The sub-areas are a tool for future land use and a way to gather data from residents intimately familiar with a smaller portion of the County. However, the sub-areas do not constitute any attempt at zoning, nor are they intended to form separate comprehensive plans. The Plan includes the entire County, and all identified sub-areas.

In January 2007 the Planning Commission began holding workshops to continue the process of gathering information and thoughts about land use from the public. Workshops were scheduled

not only at the County Building, but at “road shows” held all over Kootenai County so that the maximum amount of input could be received and discussed. In all, there were nine road shows and each sub-area of the County was personally visited by the Planning Commission. After the road shows were concluded, the Planning Commission made the final decision about the sub-area locations and changed and added sub-areas based on the public’s input.

The next step in The Plan update was fact gathering. The Planning Commission met with numerous governmental entities (including the Idaho Department of Fish and Game; Idaho Transportation Department; Idaho Department of Lands; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ); highway, fire, school, and water districts; the Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization (KMPO); the Kootenai County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission; the Coeur d’Alene Tribe; and others) to gather the necessary facts to make informed decisions about the future. Statistics were gathered from state and federal sources on population trends, housing needs, environmental issues, and economic indicators. The members of the Planning Commission attended meetings and seminars offered by such varied groups as the Kootenai Environmental Alliance, the Chamber of Commerce, and groups interested in promoting the real estate/building industries as well as those committed to affordable work force housing, and local business development. Other persons were specially invited to Planning Commission meetings to discuss wages, education, the erosion of agriculture and mining in the County, water quality issues, and many other topics of importance to the general citizenry. At all meetings, individuals and groups were asked to participate, and they did.

The next step in the process of updating The Plan was to begin writing and mapping the required elements outlined in the chapters above. In order to accomplish this next phase, the seven-member Planning Commission met at least twice per week for nearly a year. Over 100 public workshops and 10 “open mics” were held (open

mics were workshops held after work hours where the public could address any topic). The Board of County Commissioners was periodically consulted throughout the process. Experts were retained who provided critical data in such areas as community design, economic development, and mapping. The various governmental entities, including the surrounding cities, were once again consulted to try and present a cohesive plan on which the County as a whole could agree. Chapters were posted on the Kootenai County Comprehensive Plan website for public review as each was completed. Comments were received on the website and in writing; these were also available on the website.

In April 2008 the Planning Commission held four more informal road shows, going out to the public in their communities to discuss the posted chapters and to discuss The Plan and answer questions. Based on the public's continuing input, changes and corrections were identified and additional editing made to the chapters. The editing was completed in early September 2008. At the request of the public, an additional 60-day comment period was commenced and the revised chapters again posted to the web and available in hard copy.

Public hearings on The Plan were conducted by the Planning Commission on December 1, 2008 and continued to December 2, 2008 and December 3, 2008. At the conclusion of the public hearings, Planning Commission deliberations were conducted on December 8th, 10th, 11th, 12th, and 16, 2008, and again on January 16, 2009, after which the revised draft of the Plan was forwarded to the Kootenai County Board of County Commissioners. The Board held two open record public hearings. The first was in review of Draft #3, which began May 27, 2009 and continued to May 28th and June 1st. The second Board hearing was for review of Draft #4, which was conducted on October 26, 2010. Following a lengthy series of final deliberations, the Plan was approved and adopted by the Board on December 30, 2010.

Philosophy and Intent of the Plan

The fundamental premise for The Plan is attention to the clear public sentiment that the County's beauty and culture not be compromised and that growth occurs in a responsible way that preserves these virtues. The Plan pays much attention to the natural environment, while accommodating the need for change, especially to create jobs and build new housing of various types. The Plan envisions continuing the trend of a larger percentage of growth happening inside cities. This should also continue to improve the rural/urban split of land use 70/30 ratio, while allowing necessary growth and development.

In order to relieve development pressure around sensitive areas such as lakes, rivers, wetlands, and wildlife corridors, The Plan directs higher-density development to happen within existing cities that have the capacity to provide urban services.

The Rathdrum Prairie has the most capacity for dense development and also the greatest risk to harm our sole source aquifer. For this reason The Plan envisions that most of the new growth will happen inside the existing cities on the Rathdrum Prairie. The Plan also envisions protecting the undeveloped portion of the prairie to be reserved for future city annexation and to minimize the need for redevelopment, thus helping to preserve and protect the Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer.

Conclusion

"The basis of effective government is public confidence." —John F. Kennedy, 1961

The Plan is the culmination of thousands of hours of dedication by many, many people, from all walks of life and all perspectives. It should demonstrate, without equivocation, that this County is a special place, with a unique character, incredible natural resources, and very independent thinkers. It is a document that must account for change while preserving the unique way of life its citizens insist on. It will be the road map on which future land use regulations will be based. It is meant to be used as the foundation for new zoning regulations, development standards,

and other implementation and enforcement tools to promote not only its stated intent, but the spirit of the people, wildlife, and land entrusted to its care.

The Kootenai County Planning Commission thanks all the hardworking, dedicated, and thoughtful participants who added content, intellect, and heart to this new Comprehensive Plan. We trust that it will provide excellent guidance and vision during the next 20 years.