

STAFF REPORT

2019 GROWTH POLICY REVIEW

PLANNING BOARD HEARING

MAY 21, 2019

ITEM: Review of the Cascade County Growth Policy adopted May 27, 2014 (Resolution #14-45)

INITIATED BY: Cascade County Planning Board

REGARDING: Public hearing scheduled for May 21, 2019

ACTION REQUESTED: Planning Board consideration of Growth Policy review, public input, and determination on whether Growth Policy revisions are necessary

PRESENTED BY: Cascade County Planning Division Staff

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Purpose

The Cascade County Planning Division was directed by the Cascade County Planning Board (CCPB) to initiate the review process for the Cascade County Growth Policy (CCGP). The current CCGP was adopted in May 2014 and is approaching the five-year review required pursuant to §76-1-601(3)(iii) Montana Code Annotated. The basis for assessing the need for revisions for the five-year review are provided in §10 of the CCGP. This report provides a staff assessment of the review criteria and provides a staff recommendation.

Jurisdictional Area

The entirety of Cascade County, exclusive of the incorporated towns and cities of Great Falls, Belt, Cascade, and Neihart.

Public Notice

Notice of this public hearing was published in the Great Falls Tribune on Sunday, April 21 and Sunday, April 28, 2019. Notification letters were sent to 73 interested agencies. No comments from interested agencies have been received. On April 18th public notices were posted in the Cascade County Courthouse, Courthouse Annex, and the Planning Division Office. The deadline for written public comments to be included in the staff report was 11:59 PM on Monday, May 13th, 2019. The Planning Division received 215 written comments from the public in total since January 24th, 2019. Of the 215 written comments, 32 were submitted under solicitation for public input on the need to revise the

Growth Policy. These were received between April 16th, 2019 and May 13th, 2019 and were included in the meeting materials for the Planning Board's consideration.

Procedural History

On April 16, 2019 the Cascade County Planning Board directed Cascade County Planning Division staff to initiate the five-year review of the Cascade County Growth Policy and open up public comment on the need for growth policy revisions.

DISCUSSION

Pursuant to §76-1-601(3)(f) Montana Code Annotated, growth policies must include an implementation strategy with a list of conditions that will lead to a revision of the growth policy. The Cascade County Growth Policy provides these conditions in §9. The assessment criteria for the five-year review are provided in §10 and the review timeline is provided in §9. Both the conditions and assessment criteria for revising the Growth Policy will be considered in this report.

Revision Conditions

This section addresses the two listed conditions that will lead to a revision of the Growth Policy.

1. Mandates dictated by changes in state laws.

Planning Staff are not aware of any changes to state laws that would require revisions to the Growth Policy.

Finding #1

There are no known mandates dictated by changes in state laws.

2. A major disruption in the circumstances that led to the adoption of the Growth Policy occurs.

Planning Staff are not aware of any major disruptions in the circumstances that led to the adoption of the Growth Policy.

Finding #2

There are no known major disruptions in the circumstances that led to the adoption of the Growth Policy.

Assessment Criteria

This section addresses the nine assessment criteria that serve as the basis for determining the need for revisions to the Growth Policy.

1. Changes in the legal framework regarding the Cascade County Growth Policy or its implementation.

Changes in state law regarding growth policy statutes have the potential to require revisions to the adopted Cascade County Growth Policy. Such developments would likely trigger a revision under the first condition provided in CCGP §9. Other changes in the legal framework that would affect implementation might consist in changes in community development programs involved in the implementation strategy. Staff are not aware of any changes that apply here.

Finding #3

Staff are not aware of any changes to the legal framework regarding the Cascade County Growth Policy or its implementation which would necessitate revisions.

2. Significant changes in existing trends and conditions or projected trends.

Pursuant to §76-1-601(3)(b) and §76-1-601(3)(c) growth policies must include an inventory and projection of trends for land uses, population, housing needs, economic conditions, local services, public facilities, natural resources, sand and gravel resources, and any other characteristics and features proposed by the planning board and adopted by the commission. Establishing significant changes in these broad categories presents several challenges and requires extensive input from community members. For this reason, staff have chosen to focus the review of this condition on a limited assessment of population, housing, and economic conditions based on established data sources and quantitative analyses.

Population figures provided in the current Cascade County Growth Policy cover up to the 2010 Census. The American Communities Survey (ACS) provides statistical data on social, economic, and demographic indicators in lieu of the long-form census. These figures are based on survey samples and provide very limited insight into rural areas like the jurisdictional area of Cascade County. Census figures on Cascade County will include the incorporated cities of Great Falls, Belt, Neihart, and Cascade. With this caveat, contemporary estimates on population trends in Cascade County do not suggest significant population changes. Other counties throughout the state, however, are experiencing significant and on-going population changes associated with a high growth rate. Refer to Figure 1, below.

Figures on total population provide insight into growth and decline but they do not shed light on the age composition of the population. Figure 2 provides insight into the compositional structure of Cascade County's population by age group for 2000, 2010, and 2017. A few general trends are worth noting here. First, the developmental ages from birth to 19 have composed less of the total population of the county since 2000. Second, the young adult and young professional age groups of 20 to 34 have increased in portion. Third, the 35 to 49-year-old cohort has dropped substantially since 2000. Fourth and, finally, those 55 and over are increasing in their portion of the population congruent with rural trends elsewhere in the nation. These changes in the age composition of Cascade County's population warrant further investigation. With the county's total population remaining relatively steady from 1970 to now, shifts in population age composition raise questions

about in-migration, births, and deaths. They also raise important questions about how these demographic trends are affecting economic conditions, senior services, and other important issues.

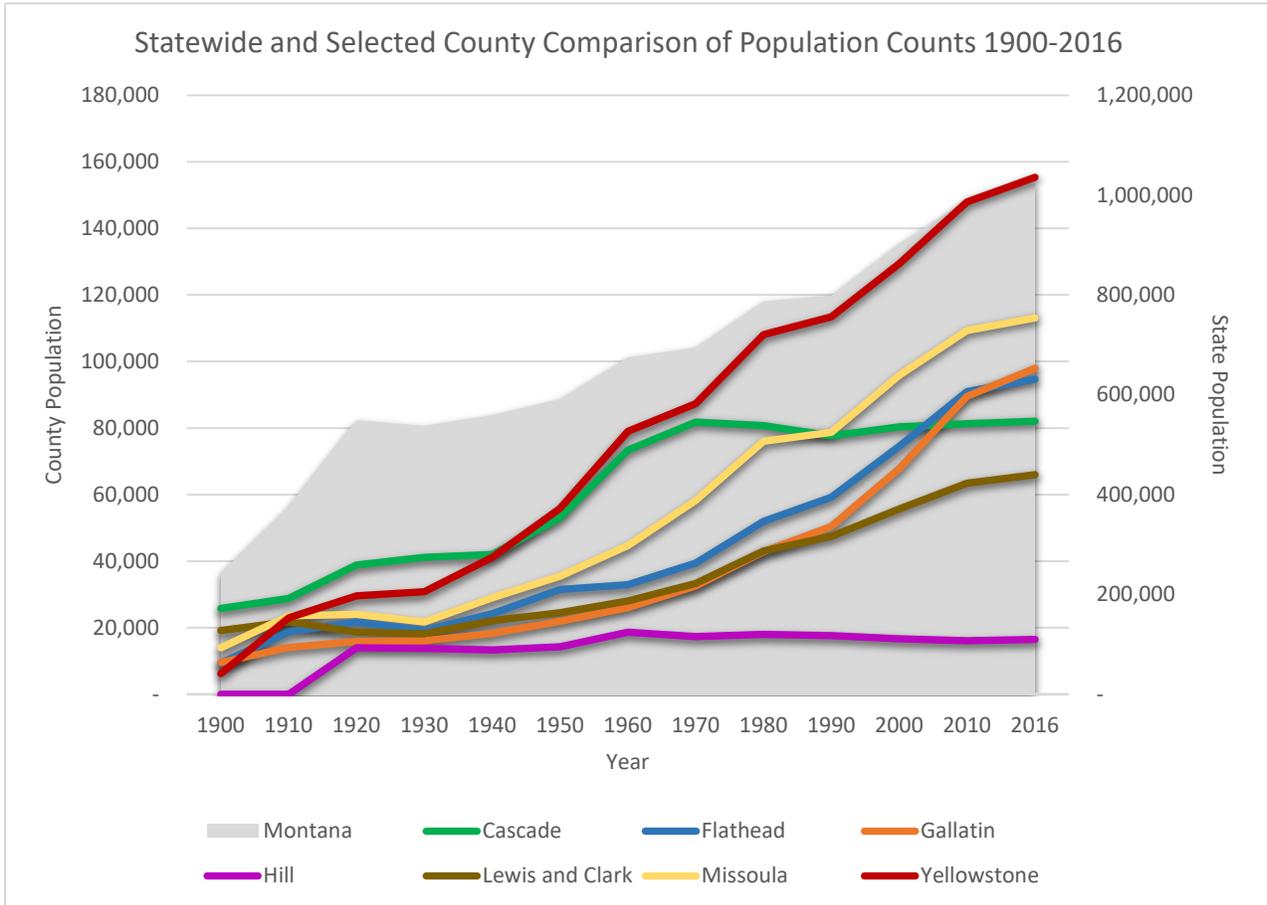


Figure 1. Statewide and Selected County Comparison of Population Counts 1900-2016

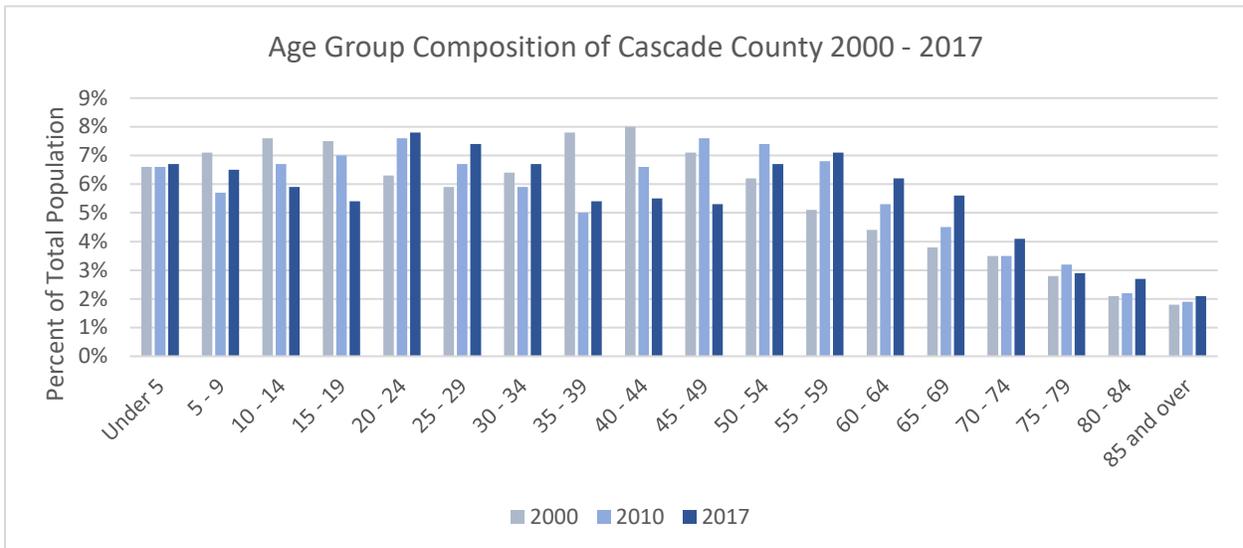


Figure 2. Age Group Composition of Cascade County 2000-2017

Finding #4

Although Cascade County is not experiencing a boom in growth, demographic changes in age composition are significant and warrant further exploration to identify the sources, causes, and impacts of the changes.

Housing affordability and attainability were identified as an ongoing concern in CCGP §4 of the growth policy. Data collected at that time from the Montana Department of Commerce’s 2010 White Paper on Housing in Montana revealed that median home prices in the county were increasing at a higher rate than the median household income. This situation suggests that housing in the county is becoming increasingly difficult to attain. Figure 3 displays Census and ACS data on housing unit counts and the median home value for owner-occupied units. This recent data suggests that the trend is continuing even though the supply of housing is increasing. Although this trend raises other questions of interest, there is not a significant change here from the trend described in the currently adopted growth policy.

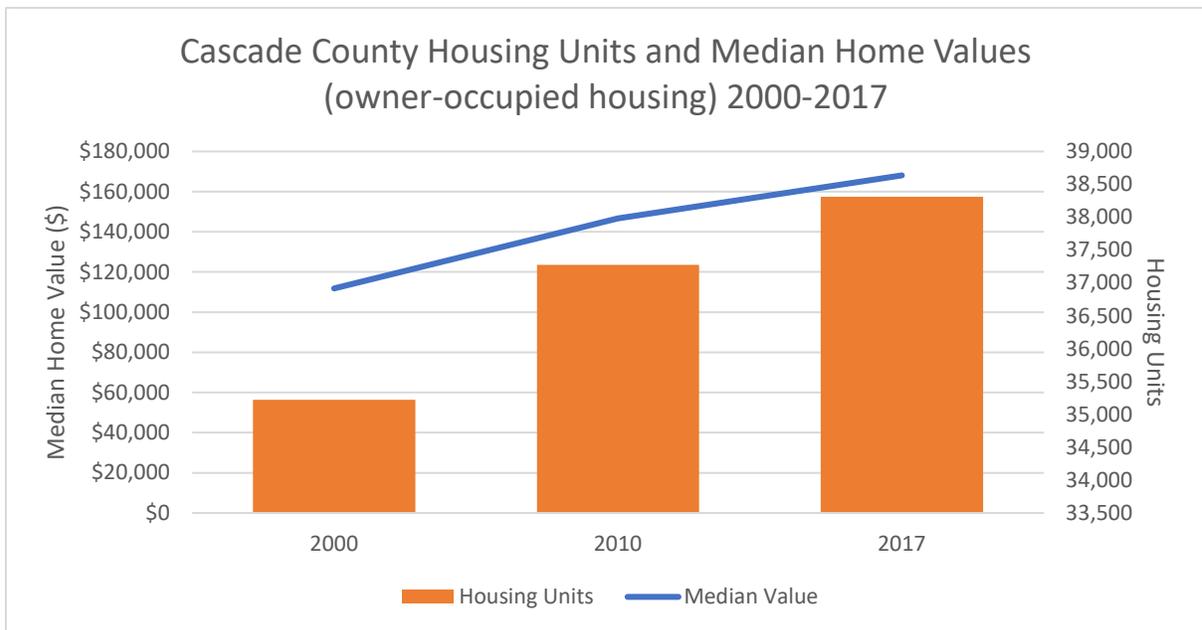


Figure 3. Cascade County Housing Units and Median Home Values 2000-2017

Finding #5

Decreasing housing affordability and attainability in Cascade County is an ongoing trend. As such, housing does not present any significant changes in trends or conditions.

The mean and median household income will be the only economic indicators considered since they provide a general indicator for increases in community wealth. The values provided in Figures 4 and 5, below, are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2000 Census Summary File 4, and the 2010 and 2017 American Communities Survey 5-year Estimates; all values in Figure 4 are inflation-adjusted to 2018 dollars using the annual average consumer price index research series provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The median household income in Cascade County has decreased from \$49,847 in 2000 to \$47,968 in 2017 while the mean household income has increased from \$59,851 in 2000 to \$67,406 in 2017. All counties in Figure 5 show increases in mean household incomes. Cascade, Hill, and Missoula Counties all show decreases in median household income while the rest

show gains. The increasing gap between mean and median household incomes in Cascade County suggests a trend of decreasing “average” household wealth. The general disparity of income suggested by these figures is not unique to these counties but reflects a nation-wide trend.

The current growth policy does not consider median or mean household incomes for the county, so these trends cannot be compared with a prior assessment. The two statistics provide a limited perspective on the condition of the county economy as it translates to income for households. Further analysis is necessary to better understand other important indicators of community wealth, trends in employment, changes in income sources, land uses, etc.

The trends in population, housing, and economy briefly discussed in this report reveal several important trends that warrant further address: (1) the population of Cascade County has been relatively stagnant since the 1970s in contrast to other populous Montana counties; (2) housing in the county continues to be increasingly unattainable; (3) median household incomes are decreasing while the mean household income is increasing; and (4) shifts in age group composition have led to greater proportions of young professionals and seniors within the county’s demography.

Finding #6

While some trends recognized in the Cascade County Growth Policy are continuing, other important trends are not covered at all or in any detail. The median household income is an important and standard measure of community economic well-being. The median household income in Cascade County is estimated to be decreasing 3.8% from 2000 to 2017; more than any other comparatively populous county in Montana.

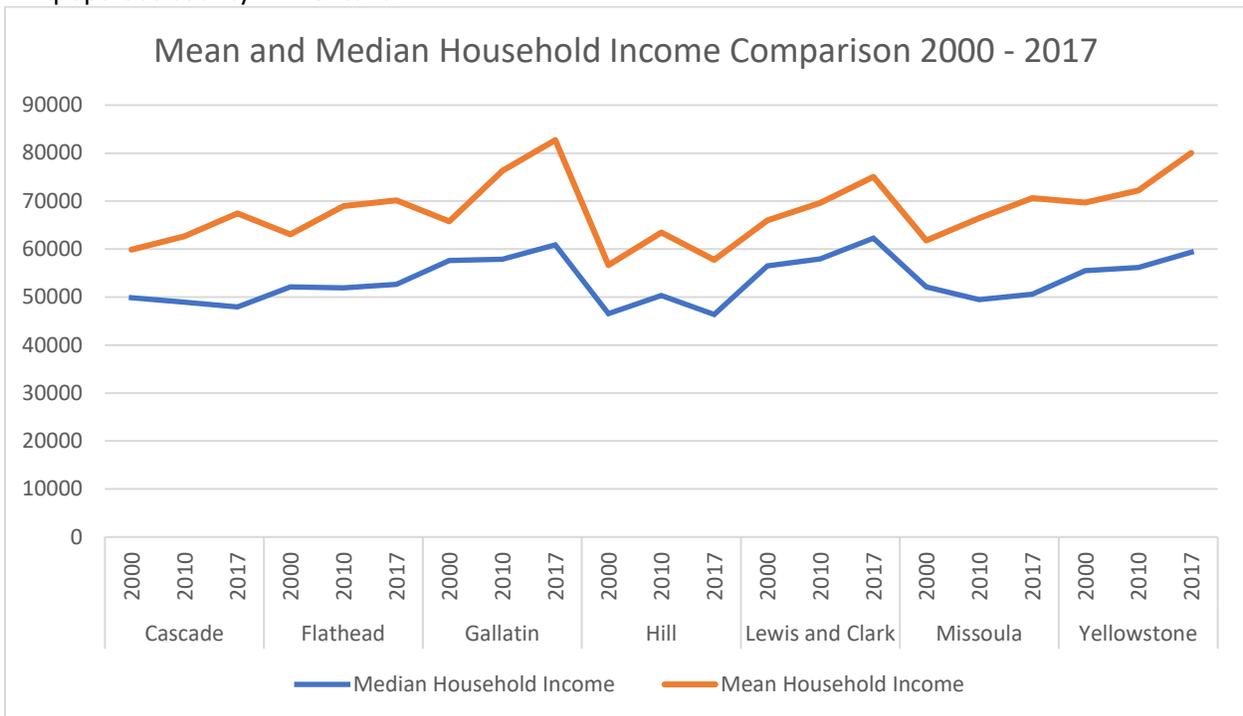


Figure 4. Median and Mean Household Income Comparison 2000-2017

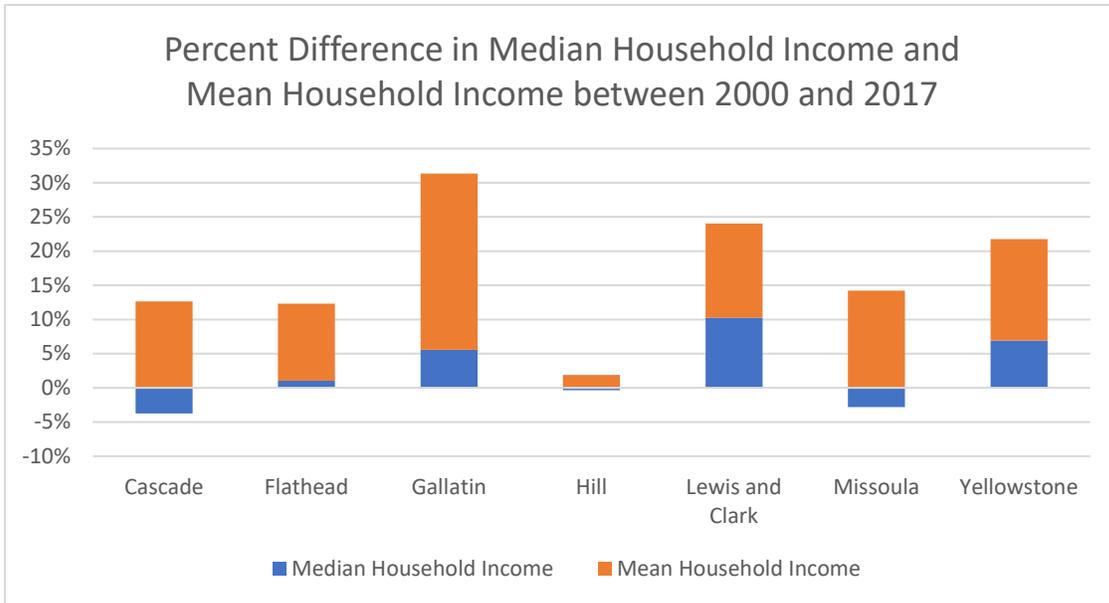


Figure 5. Percent Difference in Median Household Income and Mean Household Income between 2000 and 2017

3. Changes in the circumstances upon which the goals and objectives are based.

An example of a change in the circumstances that formed the basis for a growth policy goal and objectives would be the closing of Malmstrom Air Force Base. The closing of Malmstrom AFB would render Goal 4 of the Growth Policy obsolete. Staff are not aware of any such changes which would impact current Growth Policy goals and objectives.

Finding #7

Staff are not aware of any change in circumstances that formed the basis for any currently adopted growth policy goals and objectives.

4. Changes in community goals.

Without extensive outreach to the communities within Cascade County it is not possible to determine a change in community goals. Staff have not initiated any form of county-wide assessment of community values or any other means of gathering the necessary input for assessing a widespread change in community goals. Public comments solicited in the growth policy review and zoning regulation revision processes are the best available indicator of changes in community goals.

Since public input is a component of the review criteria for assessing the need to revise the growth policy these comments have been utilized to provide some insight into whether community goals have changed. Planning staff have reviewed a total of 215 comments received since January 24th, 2019 and have identified two areas where the public contributors have raised issues which may indicate a change in community goals. These two areas are: agriculture and environment.

Agriculture and environment span several goals and objectives. Particularly Goals 1, 2, and 3 are problematized in the public input. A problem that has developed out of the public input concerns desirable or undesirable agricultural operations. For example, some comments refer to “industrial agriculture” as opposed to “family farm/ranch” with the latter being the desired development.

Growth policy goals and objectives concerning agriculture and/or value-added agriculture do not make such a distinction although “family farm” is quoted in the findings on CCGP page 5-7. The promotion, protection, and expansion of the agricultural sector is promoted throughout the growth policy with no emphasis on any particular type of agricultural operation. Input from the public over the past two years indicates that some community members seek to support one kind of agriculture over, at least, one other kind. The context of the distinction tends to focus on environmental, social, and economic impacts.

A common corollary to public comments concerned with agricultural land uses is concern over environmental impacts from large-scale operations. Overall, environmental concerns were focused on impacts to water quality and quantity, nuisance, and health. The focus on environment in the comments stands out in relation to agricultural and industrial developments. Given that none of the five primary goals is directly concerned with environment, this public input indicates that there may be a change in community goals.

In sum, there is evidence for a change in community goals or, at the least, their current emphasis. However, more public input specifically focused on goals and values would be necessary to do justice to the question and to determine how to move forward in revising or replacing goals and objectives.

Finding #8

There are no known changes in community goals that can be demonstrated at this time. However, the limited public input received to date has provided evidence suggesting changes in values around agriculture and environment which may necessitate changes to goals and objectives of the growth policy. A proper assessment of community goals and values will be necessary to provide a determination about the extent of this change within the community.

5. Plausibility and ability of the County to achieve stated goals and policies.

The potential change in community values around agriculture and environment has implications for the plausibility and ability of the County to achieve stated goals and policies. The most glaring example is economic condition policy #3 (CCGP page 5-8) which is concerned with the findings on economic constraints identified in §5 of the growth policy. Two findings explicitly identify a need for a meat processing/slaughter facility with several other findings addressing constraints that would be addressed by such a development and in service to Goal 1, Objective A, among others. Since the County has received an application for a slaughterhouse facility with a relatively high level of public resistance to the proposal, it raises questions about the County’s ability to implement policy #3 in that particular way. Several other kinds of agricultural developments can occur though. Other kinds of development would be in conformance with policy #3 while working towards relevant goals and objectives. In this case, the growth policy goals and policies are broad enough to accommodate several courses of action but, this case places importance on understanding if there has been a change in community goals and modifying the growth policy accordingly.

Section 8 of the growth policy covers policy and goal implementation. This section fails to provide applicable standards, conditions and procedural review requirements for the following kinds of developments: commercial development, industrial development, and floodplain development. Only subdivision development and conditional development areas are covered. Since these are absent from the growth policy, the County cannot implement these intended policies.

Finding #9

Shifts in community goals and values concerning agriculture and environment may hinder the achievement of goals and policies in particular cases but not in general. Due to their absence from the adopted growth policy, applicable standards, conditions and procedural review requirements for commercial, industrial, and floodplain developments cannot be implemented. Therefore, the County is hindered and/or not able to achieve the associated goals and policies intended to be supported by those review standards and conditions.

6. Completion of implementation strategies.

Pursuant to 76-1-601 (f) MCA, the growth policy must include an implementation strategy that includes: a timetable for implementing the growth policy; a list of conditions that will lead to a revision of the growth policy; and a timetable for reviewing the growth policy at least once every 5 years and revising the policy if necessary. A timetable for implementing the growth policy is absent from the document. The list of conditions that will lead to revisions of the growth policy are identified on CCGP page 9-1. A timetable for reviewing the growth policy at least once every 5 years is available on CCGP page 9-1, however, a timeline for revising the growth policy is not provided. Resources for implementation are provided in CCGP §9 but there are no strategies or implementation timelines identified. Since no clear strategies are provided for implementing the Growth Policy within a designated timeline it is not possible to assess whether implementation strategies have been achieved.

Finding #10

The absence of implementation strategies and associated timelines for completion is a deficiency of the current Growth Policy. Whether implementation strategies have been completed cannot be addressed as a result.

7. Deviation from implementation strategies.

Since no clear strategies are provided for implementing the Growth Policy within a designated timeline it is not possible to assess whether deviation from implementation strategies has occurred.

Finding #11

The absence of implementation strategies and associated timelines for completion is a deficiency of the current Growth Policy. Whether implementation strategies have been deviated from cannot be addressed as a result.

8. Public input suggesting the need to make changes.

Of the public comments collected concerning whether to revise the Growth Policy, 10 unique contributors were explicitly proponents to revising the Growth Policy while two were explicitly opponents. The reasons provided by these contributors are varied and many. Planning staff have provided a thematic analysis of received written comments attached to this report as Appendix 1. The analysis provides some preliminary evidence suggesting the need for revisions but points out that a more thorough assessment would be necessary. Such an assessment would be a component of a properly conducted growth policy update process.

Specific reasons for or against revising the Growth Policy have not been assessed or provided in this report since Planning Board members have been provided with copies of all received public comments as of May 13th, 2019 for their consideration. Staff decided to provide a thematic analysis to identify the major themes of the comments and connect them to the relevant assessment criteria for the five-year review and to facilitate understanding. Reasons provided by public contributors are left for the consideration of the Board in situ.

Finding #12

Several public comments have suggested the need to make changes to the Growth Policy. Two public comments have suggested that there is no need to make changes.

Finding #13

A substantial number of public comments emphasized expanding public outreach and involvement.

9. Knowledge of specific and identifiable amendments that would improve the Cascade County Growth Policy's usefulness, so that it better serves the public.

Planning staff have identified several amendments that would provide a Growth Policy that better serves the public. These amendments are provided in Appendix 2 and attached to this staff report.

Finding #14

Planning staff have prepared a list of specific and identifiable amendments to the Growth Policy in Appendix 2. These amendments are proposed to improve service to the public.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. There are no known mandates dictated by changes in state laws.
2. There are no known major disruptions in the circumstances that led to the adoption of the Growth Policy.
3. Staff are not aware of any changes to the legal framework regarding the Cascade County Growth Policy or its implementation which would necessitate revisions.
4. Although Cascade County is not experiencing a boom in growth, demographic changes in age composition are significant and warrant further exploration to identify the sources, causes, and impacts of the changes.
5. Decreasing housing affordability and attainability in Cascade County is an ongoing trend. As such, housing does not present any significant changes in trends or conditions.
6. While some trends recognized in the Cascade County Growth Policy are continuing, other important trends are not covered at all or in any detail. The median household income is an important and standard measure of community economic well-being. The median household income in Cascade County is estimated to be decreasing 3.8% from 2000 to 2017; more than any other comparatively populous county in Montana.
7. Staff are not aware of any change in circumstances that formed the basis for any currently adopted growth policy goals and objectives.
8. There are no known changes in community goals that can be demonstrated at this time. However, the limited public input received to date has provided evidence suggesting changes in values around agriculture and environment which may necessitate changes to goals and objectives of the growth policy. A proper assessment of community goals and values will be necessary to provide a determination about the extent of this change within the community.

9. Shifts in community goals and values concerning agriculture and environment may hinder the achievement of goals and policies in particular cases but not in general. Due to their absence from the adopted growth policy, applicable standards, conditions and procedural review requirements for commercial, industrial, and floodplain developments cannot be implemented. Therefore, the County is hindered and/or not able to achieve the associated goals and policies intended to be supported by those review standards and conditions.
10. The absence of implementation strategies and associated timelines for completion is a deficiency of the current Growth Policy. Whether implementation strategies have been completed cannot be addressed as a result.
11. The absence of implementation strategies and associated timelines for completion is a deficiency of the current Growth Policy. Whether implementation strategies have been deviated from cannot be addressed as a result.
12. Several public comments have suggested the need to make changes to the Growth Policy. Two public comments have suggested that there is no need to make changes.
13. A substantial number of public comments emphasized expanding public outreach and involvement.
14. Planning staff have prepared a list of specific and identifiable amendments to the Growth Policy in Appendix 2. These amendments are proposed to improve service to the public.

CONCLUSION

This staff report has discussed and made findings of fact for the Cascade County Growth Policy update conditions provided in §9 and the five-year review criteria provided in CCGP §10. Planning staff made no findings that would initiate a growth policy revision based upon the conditions of CCGP §9. Of the nine five-year review criteria, planning staff made findings for seven that support a growth policy revision. Deficiencies in inventory and trends reported in the growth policy can be improved as discussed in findings 4 through 6. Public input received since January indicates possible shifts in community goals and objectives that would warrant a growth policy revision and several comments were received in support of revisions based on several issues. Findings 10 and 11 reveal gaps in the growth policy that affect implementation and progress tracking. A list of specific and identifiable amendments the growth policy recommended by staff have been provided in Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATION

Planning staff believe the findings of fact established in this report strongly support revising the Cascade County Growth Policy. Under this consideration, planning staff recommend that the Cascade County Planning Board move to determine that the Cascade County Growth Policy **DOES** need to be revised. Staff also believe the findings provide guidance on the process of revising the Growth Policy. The revision process should involve a comprehensive review, increased and improved public involvement, and result in an overall improvement of the document and its deliverables. Such a revision process may take two or more years to perform since several lengthy tasks would likely be involved such as: the procurement of funding; bidding for contracts; soliciting public input through surveys and other means; analyzing public input; formulating revisions based on collected input; drafting the revised growth policy; and the successful adoption of the revisions. This process would involve a general revision to the Growth Policy and staff have provided this as motion option #3. An alternative revision process, motion option #2, of specific and identifiable amendments is proposed by staff for the Planning Board's consideration. Furthermore, staff recommend that the Planning Board President form a standing

committee for both options, pursuant to Article VIII of the Cascade County Planning Board Bylaws, tasked with initiating the process for revising the Growth Policy and providing a timeline for the revision process along with other responsibilities of the board as determined by the President.

MOTIONS

The following motions are provided for the Board’s consideration:

1. “After considering the Staff Report and public comments, I move the Cascade County Planning Board determine that the Cascade County Growth Policy **DOES NOT** need to be revised.”

or

2. “After considering the Staff Report and public comments, I move to the Cascade County Planning Board determine that the Cascade County Growth Policy **DOES** need revisions and that a Growth Policy committee should be formed by the President within 90 days to produce a report providing specific and identifiable amendments to the Cascade County Growth Policy.”

or

3. “After considering the Staff Report and public comments, I move the Cascade County Planning Board determine that the Cascade County Growth Policy **DOES** need to be revised and that a Growth Policy committee should be formed by the President within 90 days to oversee a general revision process.”



Attachments: Appendix 1, Appendix 2