

# Chapter 3

## Growth Policy Framework



*Western Larches in October, Hellroaring*

Condition



Strategy



Community Goal



Objective



Action



Policy



Cooperation



Coordination



Subdivision Policy



## What is a Growth Policy?

Stripped down to the basics, a growth policy, or comprehensive plan or general plan, is a non-regulatory document that evaluates key issues that are important to a local government and its citizens. It should attempt to answer the following three questions:

- 1) Where are we today?
- 2) Where do we want to be tomorrow?
- 3) How do we get there?

In Montana, state law coins this type of plan a “growth policy” and outlines specific elements that growth policies are required to include and other items that are discretionary. State law also requires certain local regulations, such as zoning and subdivision regulations, to be made in accordance with the growth policy.

A growth policy typically includes policy statements and an implementation plan that will aid local government leaders in making decisions. It should also give officials general direction and set specific priorities and ways to promote county policies on a day-to-day basis.

This is a baseline document of current conditions, which also sets big-picture goals, pinpoints measurable objectives, and identifies policies that will assist the Lake County Commissioners in making decisions about how to manage county resources.

## How is it used?

This growth policy will of course be used to guide land use regulations and decisions and give county personnel direction as discussed above. However, Lake County sees this growth policy not just as a reference that is used by officials to provide a list of lofty goals with ideas on how to achieve them. This growth policy is intended to be Lake County’s most important planning tool. It is designed to be results-oriented and focus on actions and timelines to achieve the goals and objectives. It also identifies partners who should be asked to participate in county efforts to help carry out the actions.

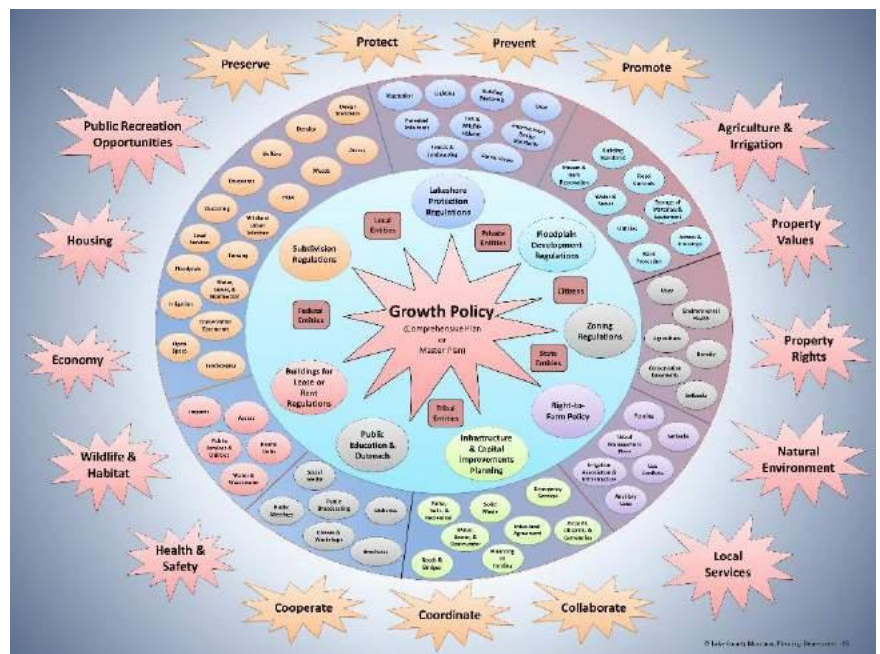
Lake County has chosen to use the growth policy as a resource management plan that the county can draw from to influence federal decisions that impact our citizens. It was also written to be a tool for the county, economic development agencies, farmers, and resource managers to use to gain competitive advantages when seeking grant funding.

Like the 2003 Lake County Growth Policy and preceding general planning documents, this growth policy will become a snapshot in time and an historic document.

But above all else, the Lake County Commissioners want this to be a document for our citizens. Our people should know what the county leaders envision for this great place we call home. This isn’t just the county’s vision, it’s your vision. Members of the Lake County public should be able to pick this book up, point to its content and identify with what it is saying; and see the same vision as the county officials who use it every day. This should be *your* plan, to shape your place from now to decades down the road.

## Growth Policy Mind Map

To a large extent, a growth policy is what a local government makes it, which depends on the local government’s view of its importance. The image below, which is attached as Appendix A in a larger format, depicts what the Lake County Planning Department created in 2016 when internally



discussing the needs to update the growth policy. The image is coined a “Growth Policy Mind Map”; its theme is to show that a growth policy is central to many layers of planning concepts, from main governmental entities, land use regulations and county policies to day-to-day planning issues on up to larger issues that affect all residents. The mind map is included in this document to help visualize the various pieces of the planning puzzle and show where the growth policy fits into that puzzle. What growth policy readers and users focus on can vary, but many issues relate back to the growth policy.

## *Document Organization*

Up until now, this growth policy has only scraped the surface of what it is and has only provided some background leading to the true heart of the document. Leading up to this point, the document should be considered introductory in nature, and hopefully enough to pique your interest so that you’ll want to know the entire Lake County Growth Policy.

From here forward, it is important to understand what state law requires of a growth policy. State law identifies several elements that a growth policy must include, but it also allows local governments to address issues that are specific to their jurisdiction. Some of the elements that must be addressed are:

- ✓ Land uses;
- ✓ Population;
- ✓ Housing needs;
- ✓ Economic conditions;
- ✓ Local services;
- ✓ Public facilities;
- ✓ Natural resources;
- ✓ Sand and gravel resources;
- ✓ Wildland-urban interface;
- ✓ Criteria for subdivision review; and
- ✓ Certain strategies, such as when and under what conditions the growth policy will be reviewed and updated.

The extent to which a growth policy addresses many of the above required elements is at the full

discretion of the governing body. In addition, state law gives the governing body discretion to include optional elements, some of which are included in this growth policy. This document includes the statutory requirements, but they are embedded within the overall document, as described below.

## **Key Issues (Chapter 4)**

Chapter 4 contains an overview of the ‘Key Issues’ addressed in this growth policy.

## **Existing Conditions, Trends, Projections, and More (Chapters 5 – 8)**

Chapters 5 through 8 give overviews of certain elements of Lake County, such as demographics, our natural resources, governmental frameworks and land use and development factors.

## **Implementation (Chapter 9)**

Chapter 9 outlines the goals, objectives, and actions that carry out this growth policy via an implementation table, which organizes the actions by the goals and objectives they are intended to achieve. The key players in the implementation plan are also detailed, along with signs of success and timelines for implementation.

## **Guidance Icons**

Guidance icons are used in various portions of this growth policy to identify various elements of the document. This section describes many of the required and optional elements of state law by paraphrasing language from 76-1-601, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) along with guidance icons that are used in the growth policy to indicate where the *required* elements are, as well as some of the important *optional* elements of state law.

## Key Issues

Through the growth policy rewrite process in 2017, a number of ‘key issues’ were identified, and the draft goals and objectives were organized around those issues, which

were quickly narrowed down to five. The verbiage and order of those five key issues evolved through





the project, but ultimately through development of this growth policy, Lake County arrived at those five key issues, which the implementation chapter is organized around. Where the “Key Issue” icons appear in Chapters 5 – 8, the text provides in important discussion on a key issue.

Existing Conditions

**Condition**



State law requires a growth policy to include maps and text describing an inventory of the existing characteristics and features of the jurisdictional area. Where the “Condition” icon appears, that part of the

text is intended to fulfill that statutory requirement. The “eye” is used for this icon because it illustrates that Lake County is observing the current county status.

Projected Trends

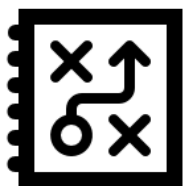


State law requires a growth policy to include projected trends for the life of the growth policy. Where the “Projected Trend” icon appears, that part of the document is intended to fulfill that statutory requirement.

Strategies

State law requires a growth policy to include certain “strategies,” such as a strategy for development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure, and an implementation strategy for the growth policy. Where the

**Strategy**



“Strategy” icon appears, that part of the text is intended to fulfill the statutory requirement.

Community Goals and Objectives

State law requires a growth policy to include community goals and objectives. Where the “Community Goal” and/or “Objective” icons appear, that part of the text is intended to fulfill the statutory requirement.

Goals and objectives are terms not defined by the state laws for growth policies, but Lake County uses the following definitions of those terms for this

growth policy:

**Goals** are broad statements describing a desired future condition. They are big-picture statements of what the county is trying to achieve.

**Community Goal**



**Objectives** are general descriptions of the steps Lake County should take to meet its goals. Objectives should be attainable, reasonable and measurable.

**Objective**



Implementation Actions

In describing the goals and objectives of the growth policy, certain implementation actions are identified to help achieve the goals and objectives. The following definition of action is used for the growth policy:

**Action** is a specific step Lake County can and should strive to take to attain the objectives.

**Action**



Policies

State law requires a growth policy to include a description of policies, regulations, and other measures to be implemented in order to achieve the goals and objectives. To Lake County, the word policy refers to certain ideals or approaches county officials intend to take as they make decisions on matters related to the growth policy in the coming years.

Where the “Policy” icon appears, that part of the text in the document is intended to fulfill the statutory requirement.

Signs of Success

Lake County has identified signs of success for particular goals and objectives, which are a way to evaluate whether the goals and objectives are being achieved. These are to help the county officials and members of the public to visualize real world signs that the growth policy is working effectively.



## Cooperation and coordination

### **Cooperation**



### **Coordination**

State law requires a county growth policy to explain how the governing body will coordinate and cooperate with other jurisdictions, including cities and towns located within the county's boundaries, on matters related to the growth policy. Lake County's policy is that intergovernmental coordination must extend well beyond the county working with cities and towns – this growth policy addresses intergovernmental coordination policies with other government units as well, including the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, county water and sewer districts, and the federal government (for "cooperating agency" status under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Where the "Cooperation/Coordination" icon appears, that part of the text is intended to address Lake County efforts to cooperate and coordinate with other jurisdictions, not only to meet the statutory requirements, but also other county policies.

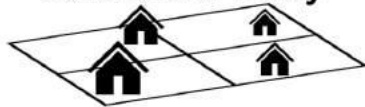
## Other statutory elements

Other elements of growth policies required by state law include certain elements related to subdivision review and the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Where portions of the growth policy include the icons for "Subdivision Policy" and "WUI" the growth policy



includes language intended to address those applicable requirements of state law.

### **Subdivision Policy**



## *How this Growth Policy was Created*

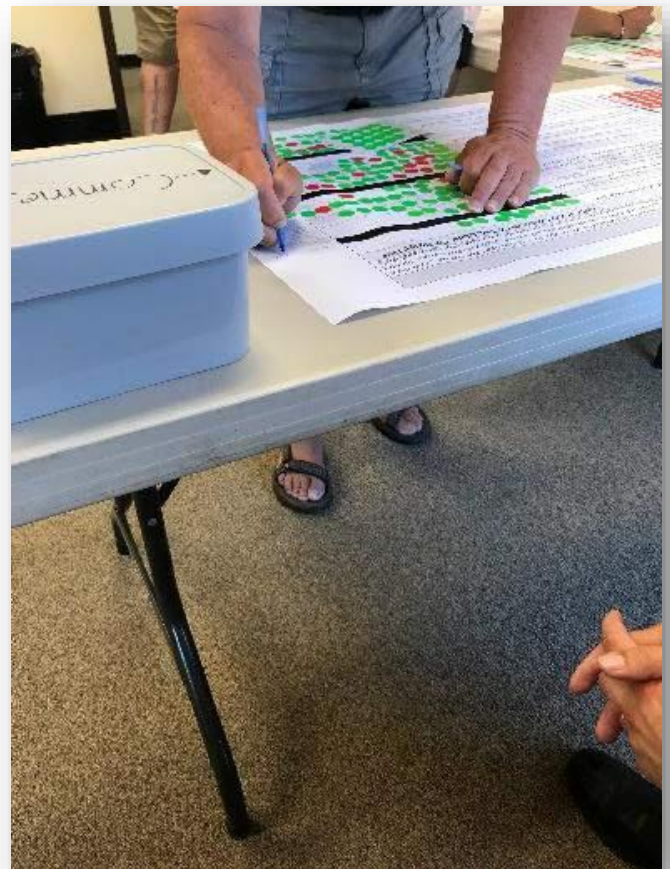
The first step in the growth policy rewrite process was to gather and analyze background information through research and interviews with top stakeholders, such as government officials, community leaders, and other interested parties. At

this time a website was established for the project so that information could be made readily available to the public throughout the process. At the end of the first phase, the first list of 'key issues' that needed to be addressed was developed.



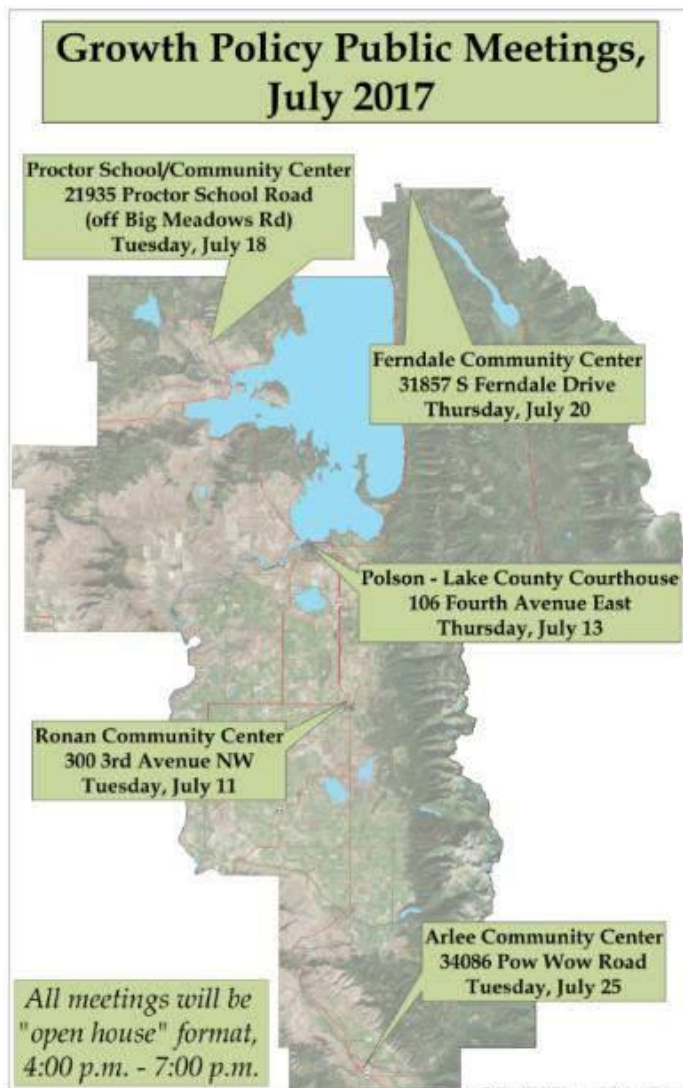
The next step was to further analyze and describe where the county was at as of 2017. A report of existing conditions and projected trends was created. Much of that information has been incorporated into this growth policy, with amendments as a result of public comments.

With 2017 data and information at the forefront, key issue statements, goals and objectives were written and an online survey to solicit public opinions of them was prepared along with a general questionnaire addressing public opinions and priorities. Once these materials were "online,"



*Arlee public meeting, July 2017*

planners from Land Solutions and Lake County took them to the public both through electronic communication and with community meetings in Ronan, Polson, Proctor, Ferndale, and Arlee.



In order to generate public awareness and to inspire public participation, Land Solutions and Lake County staff sent multiple emails via the project list serve to over 200 recipients; hung more than 30 posters around the county in post offices and stores; posted information on the county website and project website; worked with local newspapers; and participated in radio interviews.

At the July 2017 public meetings, nearly 100 members of the public discussed the main concepts and provided feedback on the draft goals and objectives, and Lake County issues in general.

The public outreach and online survey and questionnaire allowed the issue statements, goals,

and objectives to be refined and matched with draft implementation actions. With that, a first draft growth policy was written and taken to the Lake County Planning Board and Polson City-County Planning Board for public workshops and feedback from the boards and public.

At the public workshops of the planning boards, public input was provided, the boards requested edits, and further revisions were subsequently made based on the comments and county review of the comments.

Draft 2 was reviewed by the planning boards in January and February 2018. During this time, the Lake County Commissioners determined the Density Map and Regulations would be repealed as regulatory zoning to be made advisory only as a component of this growth policy, while majority of the Lake County Planning Board took the position that the Density Map and Regulations should remain regulatory.

In March 2018, Draft 3 was reviewed by the planning boards at public hearings, at which time the Commissioners worked through the repeal of the Density Map and Regulations as county zoning regulations. In March 2018, the Polson City-County Planning Board recommended Draft 3 be adopted with only minor revisions. The Lake County Planning Board continued working on the draft growth policy to keep up with the Commissioners' intentions with the Density Map and Regulations, and the Lake County Planning Board recommended adoption of Draft 3 of the growth policy subject to a long list of changes discussed at the Planning Board's multiple hearings.

The Board of Lake County Commissioners considered all public comments and recommendations of the planning boards and ultimately adopted this growth policy on August 21, 2018.

## Updates/Revisions

State law requires that a growth policy must have strategy and timetable for reviewing the document at least once every five years and revising the policy if necessary. This section provides for that strategy along with guidance on various types of amendments that may occur through the anticipated 20-year life of the growth policy.

### Strategy



## County Updates/Revisions

The most likely updates or revisions to the growth policy will occur as a result of county officials determining updates are appropriate. The county's strategy and timetables for county updates and revisions are as follows.

### Timetable

The planned timetable for reviewing the growth policy and revising if necessary includes an initial one-year review, and similar reviews that are planned to occur at least every five years.

### Criteria for revisions

A growth policy must include a list of conditions that should lead to revisions by the county.

Examples of conditions that should lead to revisions are:

- ✓ Significant changes in county policies
- ✓ Significant changes in demographics (current conditions or projected trends) or other baseline conditions related to the economy, population, housing market, etc.
- ✓ Gaps or unanswered questions in the growth policy
- ✓ Changes in state laws
- ✓ Needs of regulatory documents that are not reflected in the growth policy

### Procedures for revisions

The process for revisions should reflect the revisions contemplated. The minimum processes for reviews and possible revisions are outlined below; however, if significant revisions are necessary, such as a full rewrite, the required processes will be expanded to

respect the public's expectations.

### One-year review

It is expected that the Lake County Commissioners and Planning Department staff will use and work with this growth policy on a continual basis – the document will be referred to sometimes daily, and more often weekly. In addition, the Lake County Planning Board is likely to look to the growth policy for guidance on a regular basis, as may the Polson City-County Planning Board. Through working with the growth policy, the planners, Commissioners, and board members are likely to run into questions, seek clarification, or even find a growth policy provision to be inappropriate for its time or context. Throughout the first year, these users of the growth policy should make notes of possible needs for revisions.

At one year after adoption of the growth policy, the Planning Department and County Commissioners will meet and discuss any challenges and possible revisions. Included in the discussions will be the Density Map and text (Appendix C) and the usefulness of those documents as advisory elements of the growth policy. At this time, growth policy provisions that have been accomplished, those that have been a success, and possible challenges and revisions should be noted and communicated to the Lake County Planning Board and Polson City-County Planning Board. The planning boards should then conduct one-year reviews of the growth policy, allow for and consider public comment, and make recommendations to the Planning Department and Lake County Commissioners regarding possible revisions. The recommendations could be to take no action, or to take action to initiate amendments according to a recommended timeframe. The Commissioners will then meet again with the Planning Department staff to review the board recommendations, and the Commissioners will determine the next steps with consideration of the planning boards' and staff recommendations.

### Five-year reviews

State law requires a growth policy to be reviewed at least once every five years. If the one-year review occurs, the next review can occur as the Lake County Commissioners find appropriate. However, at least one review must occur every five years.



The process outlined above for the one-year review should be followed, except as below, when mandated by the Board of Lake County Commissioners, or when initiated by the Planning Department, which can occur at any time the Planning Director chooses using the one-year review process.

### Commissioners' Mandates

The Board of Lake County Commissioners, upon majority vote, may require an expedited review of growth policy revisions. At a minimum, such revisions must be made in accordance with state law, and include recommendations by both planning boards, although it is preferred that any proposed growth policy revision use the above procedures described for the one-year review.

### **Citizen Updates**

Citizens and other members of the public can propose growth policy revisions. Growth policy amendments by private parties would typically be proposed to support development proposals, but may be intended for various reasons to change county policy.

Proponents of proposed official updates to this growth policy must submit an application form (and review fee if adopted by Lake County), describe the precise revisions requested and how the request corresponds with and deviates from Lake County's adopted policies, goals and objectives.

Citizens should also be made aware that opportunities for public comment are available during any review or update to the growth policy.