City of Thompson Falls Montana



Comprehensive Plan 2025

Adopted:

December 8, 2025

CITY OF THOMPSON FALLS

Montana

December 2025

Prepared for:

City Planning Board

Acknowledgments

The completion of the Thompson Falls Comprehensive Plan would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts and valuable input of many individuals and groups. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the following:
Thank you to the Thompson Falls Planning Board members for their thoughtful guidance, commitment, and expertise throughout the development of this policy. Your time and effort in reviewing, discussing, and refining the key elements of the Comprehensive Plan have been indispensable.

- Earlene Powell
- Raoul Ribeiro
- Shawni Vaught

We also wish to express our appreciation to the Thompson Falls City Council for their continued support and leadership. Your collaboration and encouragement have been crucial in ensuring the success of this project. We are grateful for your dedication to making Thompson Falls a better place for all residents.

- Rusti Leivestad, Mayor
- Raoul Ribeiro, Ward 1
- Larry Lack, Ward 1
- Katherine Maudrone, Ward 2
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- Shawni Vaught, Ward 3
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Lastly, we extend our sincere thanks to the public for their active participation and feedback during the policy development process. Your engagement, suggestions, and willingness to share your thoughts have enriched this document and helped shape the future of Thompson Falls. We are grateful for your involvement and for helping ensure that this Comprehensive Plan reflects the needs and aspirations of our community.

Together, through the contributions of the Planning Board, City Council, City Staff, and the public, this Comprehensive Plan represents a collective effort to guide the future of Thompson Falls in a thoughtful and sustainable manner.

Thank you all for your contributions to this important work.

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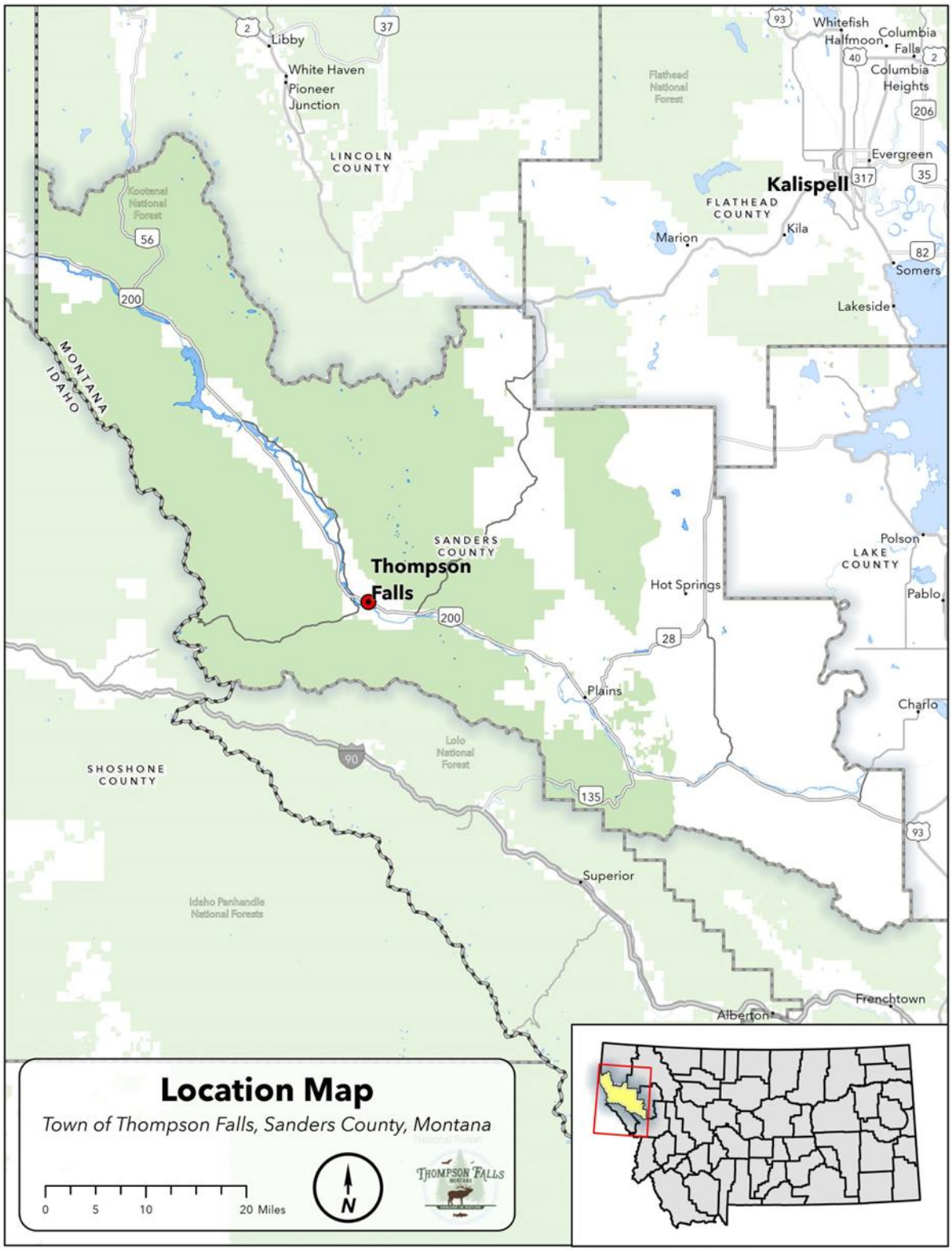


Map 1 – Location Map of Thompson Falls, Montana State Library

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Thompson Falls' community tag line is 'Genuine in Nature' because of its two greatest assets, people and open spaces. An example is the fact that in 2012, the City was chosen by Outdoor Life magazine as number 16 of the 35 best hunting and fishing towns in the United States.

Thompson Falls is in the warmest area of the state, thus allowing residents and visitors to enjoy outdoor activities year-round. The City is surrounded by the Lolo National Forest and very close to the Kootenai National Forest to the west. In addition, the community is set between the Cabinet Mountain Range and the Coeur d'Alene Mountain Range. The surrounding public lands and thousand miles of trails and logging roads offer many opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts.

Thompson Falls is the County seat for Sanders County and offers a variety of services for residents and visitors. The City is located adjacent to the reservoir created by the Thompson Falls Dam which provides access to swimming, fishing and boating. Residents and visitors can also walk from downtown across the Gallatin Bridge to Island Park and view the dams and the historic High Bridge over the Clark Fork River.

While the City has amazing natural assets, residents know there are other opportunities and challenges that need to be addressed. These include working to strengthening the economy, upgrading City infrastructure, retaining and attracting young people and families and harnessing the knowledge and resources of new City and County residents.

It is important to note that Thompson Falls and Sanders County have been actively working to improve the economy and quality of life of residents through thoughtful planning. These efforts include:

- 2013 Sanders County Technology Initiative Feasibility Study (Sanders County Community Development Corporation (SCCDC)/Big Sky Trust Fund)
- 2014 Thompson Falls Community Trails Plan (Thompson Falls Community Trails-TFCT)
- 2015 County-wide Resource Assessment (SCCDC and MEDA, sponsored by the County Commissioners)
- 2015 Downtown Master Plan (Thompson Falls Main Street-TFMS, Montana Main Street Grant Program)
- 2016 Thompson Falls Community Branding Project (TFMS, Montana Main Street Grant Program)
- 2017 Financial Measures Feasibility Study (SCCDC and City of Thompson Falls/LOR Foundation)
- 2017 Thompson Falls City Inventory and Assessment of Public Parks (SCCDC and City/LOR Foundation)
- 2017 Feasibility Study of Eastward Extension Trail (SCCDC and TFCT/LOR Foundation)
- 2018 Thompson Falls Visitor Survey (SCCDC/Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research)
- 2018 PAR for Black Bear (SCCDC/Montana Main Street Program)
- 2019 Recreation Economy Technical Assistance Grant (TFMS and SCCDC/EPA)
- 2020 City Growth Policy
- 2023 Capital Improvements Plan
- 2023 Community Assessment
- 2024 Wayfinding Plan

This updated Comprehensive Plan is the City's comprehensive effort to tie these many different planning projects into one document and to look 5 to 8 years into the future. The document contains nine sections, all of which provide the basis for achieving the goals developed by the City Planning Board. These sections include:

- Goals and Objectives: To take advantage of the opportunities and issues the City faces, residents must be willing to establish practical and achievable goals.
- Introduction: A description of the City, its location, features and history.
- Population: A description of the City's population characteristics.
- Economy: A description of the City's current economic situation through the lens of both City and County level data and other sources.
- Community Services: A description of the services and infrastructure provided to residents.
- Housing: The status of the City's current housing stock.
- Land Use: A discussion about how the City might grow in the future. This section also includes a discussion about annexation, subdivision regulations, the wildland urban interface, sand and gravel resources and floodplains that affect the City.
- Resident Engagement: A description of the steps used to obtain the advice and guidance of residents for this planning process.
- Action Plan: The actual steps the City may take to achieve the goals identified in the document.



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The City Planning Board reviewed the goals and objectives in the 2020 Growth Policy and identified those that had been achieved or were in the process of being completed. Those goals and objectives included:

- Assist with the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan.
- Help implement the City Marketing Strategy.
- Assist with implementing the priorities identified in the Thompson Falls Community Trails Plan
- Encourage satellite technology and a location for continuing/technology/distance training and education in the City.
- Continue to upgrade and maintain City services i.e. water, sewer and streets.
- Develop year-round indoor recreation facilities.
- Prioritize and incrementally complete street improvements.

The Planning Board updated the goals and objectives in the Comprehensive Plan to address the opportunities and needs identified through the entire process. The specific projects and policies to be used achieve these goals are found in the Action Plan on page 61.

Economy

Thompson Falls must create a foundation to help residents prosper. Therefore, the City will work to strengthen and diversify its economy.

Goals	Objectives
Increase the number of living wage jobs in Thompson Falls	• Support the creation and expansion of businesses that offer year-round employment opportunities to residents
Promote a business incubation strategy.	• Support the provision of low-cost space for new business startups to begin the process of developing and establishing their business

Improve and enhance the impact of the recreation economy upon City residents.	• Assist with the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan. • Help implement the City Marketing Strategy. • Assist with implementing the priorities identified in the Thompson Falls Community Trails Plan.
Help foster the continued development of a technology and communications industry in the City.	• Assist in implementing the Sanders County Technology Initiative by supporting private businesses and engaging the school district.
Improve technology and educational opportunities for residents.	• Encourage satellite technology and a location for continuing/technology/distance training and education in the City such as the Lifeline Trade School and a Montana University system satellite campus
Create events focused on the identity, cultural quality and social fabric of Thompson Falls.	• Create events focused on the identity, cultural quality and social fabric of Thompson Falls. • Create a rich cultural component to Thompson Falls identity.
Encourage business development through the provision of safe, economical and reliable City services.	• Continue to upgrade and maintain City services i.e. water, sewer and streets.

Community Services

Quality of life for City residents is determined by many things. Some of the most important are services, including healthcare, education, emergency services and recreation. The City will help to provide and/or encourage adequate community services including safe and economical infrastructure and facilities that range from drinking water and wastewater treatment to streets and parks.

Goals	Objectives
Provide safe and economical drinking water and wastewater collection and treatment services.	• Complete upgrades to the City's drinking water system. • Complete the installation of the new sewer collection system and treatment system upgrades. • Prioritize revenue expenditures on the most critical City facilities. • Utilize state and federal funding sources to help maintain and upgrade City water and sewer infrastructure.
Reduce stormwater drainage issues in the City.	• Focus on stormwater issues in the residential areas north of the railroad tracks.
Upgrade the surface condition of City streets.	• Prioritize and incrementally complete street improvements.
Promote quality year-round, indoor recreation/fitness opportunities for all City residents.	• Develop year-round indoor recreation facilities.
Ensure emergency medical and fire protection services for City residents.	• Provide residents with efficient, effective and economical fire protection and emergency medical services.
Improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety in the City and along Main Street.	• Maintain a good working relationship with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). • Construct pedestrian facilities across Main Street/Highway 200 and bicycle/pedestrian routes parallel to but not located on Main Street.

Housing

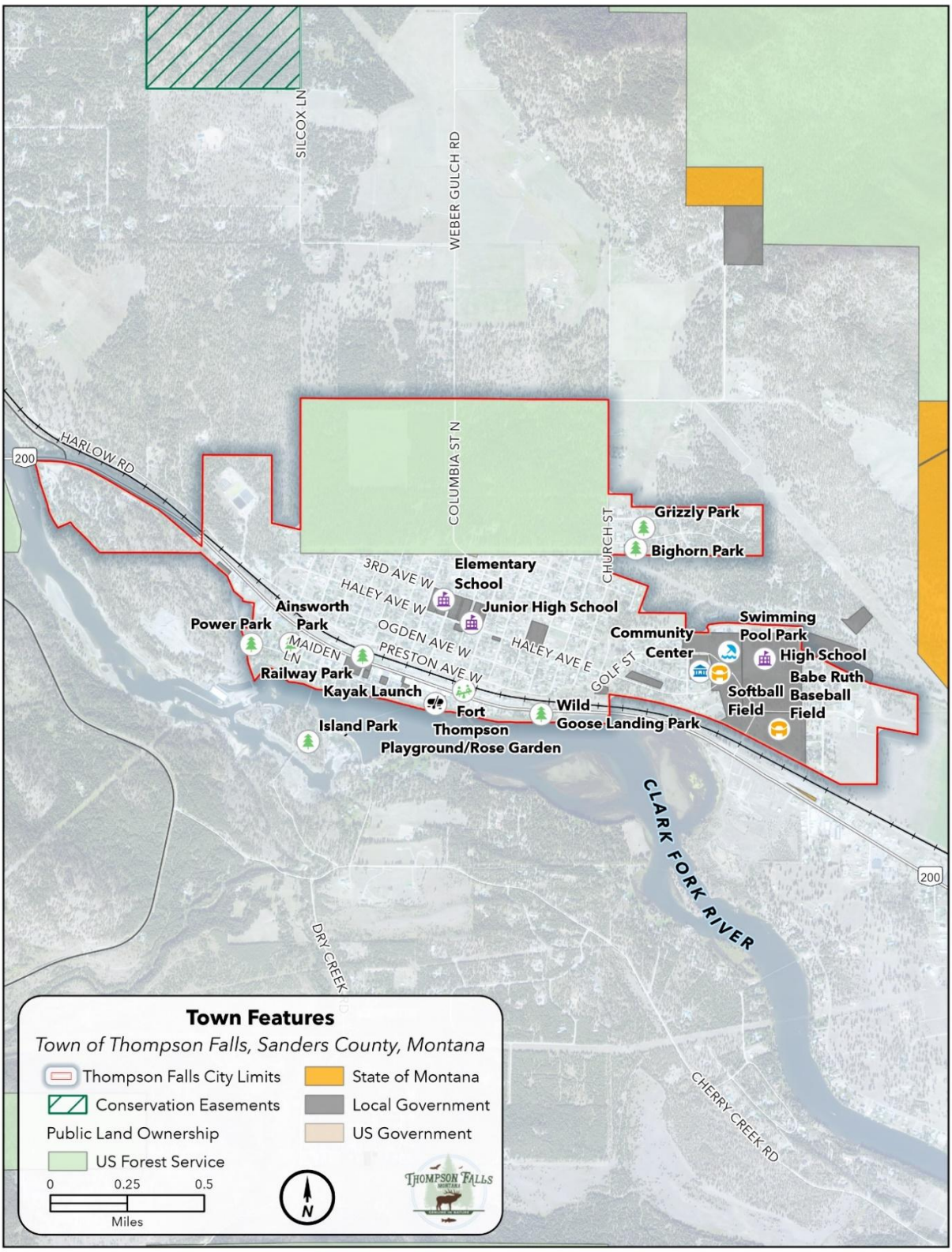
Adequate and affordable housing is essential to ensure the success of City residents. The City, along with other partners, will work to meet community housing needs.

Goals	Objectives
Facilitate safe and affordable housing for all City residents.	• Understand the housing and real estate market of the City and the County. • Encourage the use of vacant City lands for housing. Encourage the development of diverse housing types such as entry-level and senior housing.

Land Use

New growth will be essential for the long-term success of the City, but growth should occur in a logical and cost-effective manner. New development should take place in areas easy to provide services to and have a limited potential for natural hazards such as floodplain or wildfire.

Goals	Objectives
Annexation of new land into the City will only occur if it will be an asset to the City and can be economically and safely provided with services.	• Develop and adopt a formal policy and process for annexation. • Use existing City engineering reports to help identify areas appropriate for annexation
Efficiently and effectively update subdivision regulations.	• Update after legislative sessions for new regulations. • Ensure City staff and the Planning Board understand and can administrate the review of subdivisions.
Encourage the redevelopment of the Riley Creek Mill Site.	• Assess the property for any potential cleanup and development options.



Map 2 – City Features of Thompson Falls, Montana State Library



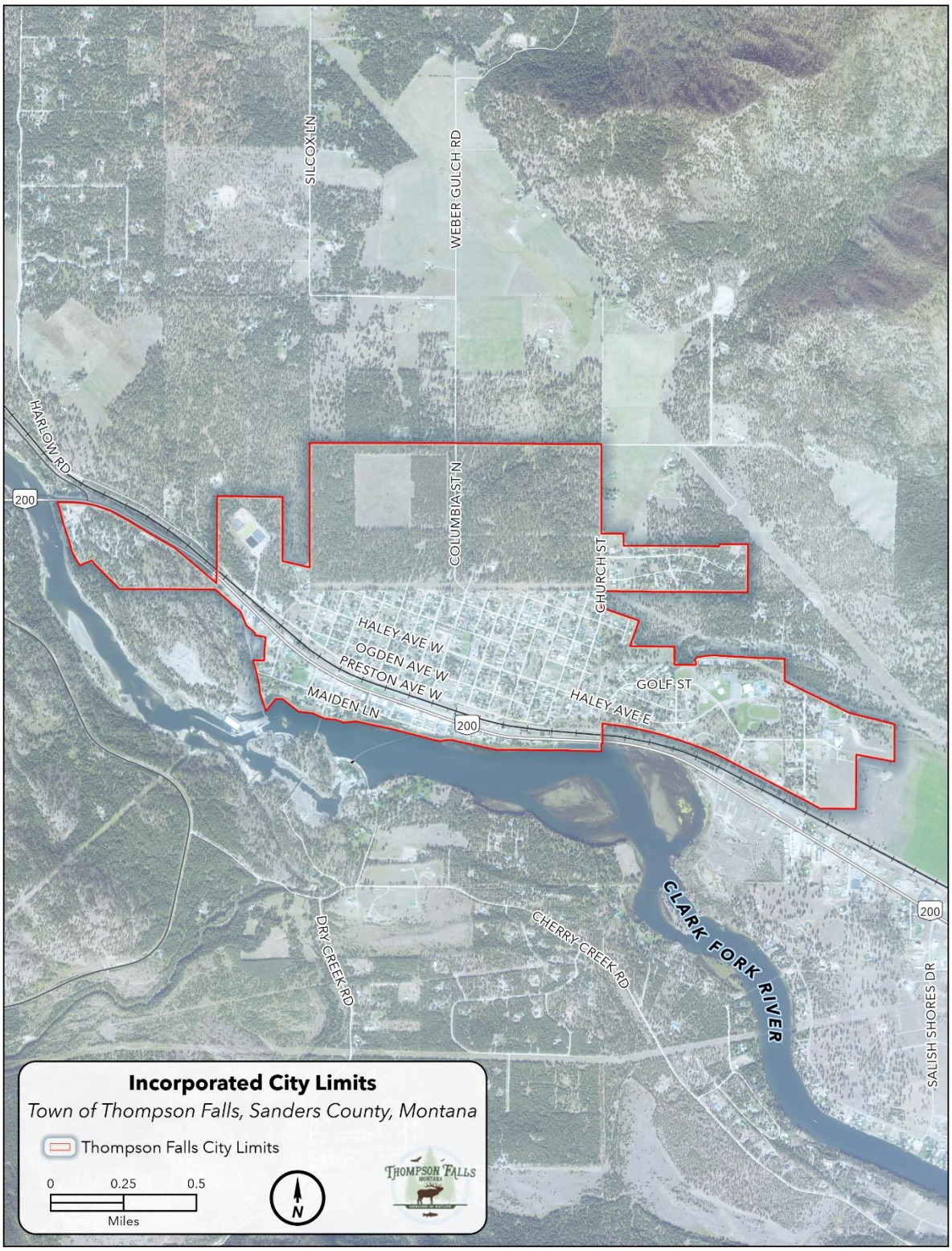
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The City of Thompson Falls determined that the term, Growth Policy had confused the public during the initial planning process and instead, the Town has elected to use the term, Comprehensive Plan. Statutorily, these monikers mean the same. A Comprehensive Plan is a guiding document, primarily driven by state statute (MCA 76-1-601), and is adopted by a city, town or county and outlines the community's vision for its future. A Comprehensive Plan is used by local governments to guide decision-making about the community's land use and development. A Comprehensive Plan is not a regulatory document and does not require regulations to be adopted and utilized. But regulations such as zoning and subdivision must be consistent with and supported by the Comprehensive Plan, for the purposes of consistency and clarity.

Location

The City of Thompson Falls is in Sanders County, Montana, approximately 101 highway miles northwest of the City of Missoula and 107 highway miles southwest of Kalispell. According to the United States Census Bureau, the estimated population of the City in 2023 was 1,568 people. The City also serves as the County seat for Sanders County.



Map 3 – Incorporated City Limits, Montana State Library

Geography

Thompson Falls is nestled in the Clark Fork River Valley between the Cabinet and Coeur d'Alene Mountains along the Clark Fork River. Main Street is part of Montana Secondary Highway 200, and the north side of the highway is bordered by the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad, which is leased by Montana Rail Link. Thompson Falls is surrounded by large amounts of public land, particularly the Lolo and Kootenai National Forests, which comprise well over 900,000 acres of land in Sanders County.

Land Ownership in Sanders County (Acres)		
Private Ownership	339,971	19.2%
Federal Lands	922,305	52.2%
Tribal Lands	439,412	24.9%
State of Montana	64,792	3.7%

Table 1 – U.S. Geological Survey, Gap Analysis Program, 2024, Protected Areas Database of the United States (PADUS version 4.0)

Climate

The climate of Thompson Falls is characterized by generally mild summers and cold winters. The City's warmest month of the year is July, with an average maximum temperature of 88.7 degrees Fahrenheit, while the coldest month is January, with an average minimum temperature of 36.9 degrees Fahrenheit. The average annual precipitation in the City is 20.32 inches, with precipitation evenly distributed throughout the year. Generally, the month with the highest precipitation is November, with an average snowfall of 2.82 inches.

It is important to note that Thompson Falls and the western end of Sanders County are the most temperate areas in Montana and thus have the longest growing season in the State. This highlights how mild the climate can be in Thompson Falls compared to the rest of the State of Montana.

History

It is generally assumed that the City of Thompson Falls is named after the British explorer and fur trader David Thompson. Thompson established a North West Company fur trading post in 1809 near the present-day City. Historical evidence shows the City was more likely named after James Thompson, a trapper, hunter, and prospector who lived in the area from the mid-1860s until 1888, when he was murdered at the Horse Plains (near the present-day Town of Plains).

Development of the City began in earnest upon the arrival of the railroad in 1881. Growth increased two years later, when a gold rush hit the region surrounding Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Thompson Falls served as a supply and transportation center to accommodate the men going to

the new mines. The first platted lots were established in 1885, and the City was incorporated in 1910.

The Thompson Falls Dam was completed in 1915, with the foundation of the dam constructed on a set of natural falls at the time. The dam was a major supplier of electricity to the electrified portion of the Milwaukee Railroad in Montana and mining operations in Idaho. The dam system is owned by Northwestern Energy. Currently, the dam complex creates an upstream reservoir with a water storage capacity of 8300 acre-feet and has a seven-unit hydroelectric generation capacity of 94 megawatts. The island in the middle of the dam complex contains a public park with hiking trails, picnic tables, and scenic overlooks.

Construction of a fish ladder at the Thompson Falls dam was completed in 2010, and it started operations in 2011. The fish ladder operates annually between March and October and provides passage for bull trout, as well as several other salmonid and non-salmonid species.

Thompson Falls Dam is one of a series of three (3) dams that are found on the lower Clark Fork River. The other two are Noxon Rapids Dam and Cabinet Gorge Dam, and are located downstream of Thompson Falls. Noxon Rapids Dam creates Noxon Reservoir, a 7,700-acre body of water that is a major recreation attraction for the area.



POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

In 2023, the City of Thompson Falls was estimated by the Census Bureau to have a population of 1,568 people, while Sanders County had an estimated population of 12,936, which includes Thompson Falls.

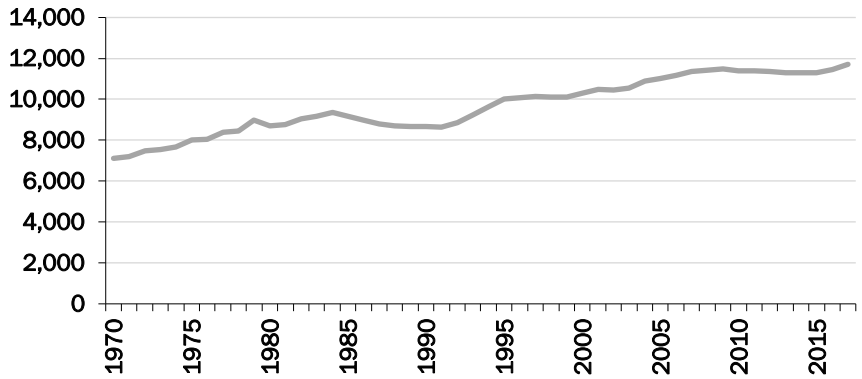


Figure 1 - Population Trends, Sanders County 1970-2023 (Census Bureau, 2014 Washington, D.C.).

Demographically, Sanders County finds itself in a situation familiar to many other communities in Montana: the median age of County residents has increased. American Community Survey (ACS) data from the Census Bureau showed that in 2010, the median age for County residents was estimated at 48.8 years of age, and by 2023, it had increased to 54.6. For the City of Thompson Falls, ACS data indicates the median age of residents has decreased from 44.5 to 47.2 from 2010 to 2023.

It is important to note that the City provides services to far more than just the people within the City limits. This is particularly true from a parks and recreation standpoint. For example, there are approximately 1,568 people in the City, and there are a total of 5,000 people living in the Library District, which also encompasses the City. The District helps fund the operation of the Library. While an actual number is unknown, many of the people living outside the City limits are likely to use City parks and recreation facilities at some point during the year; however, they do not pay to fund their operation and maintenance.

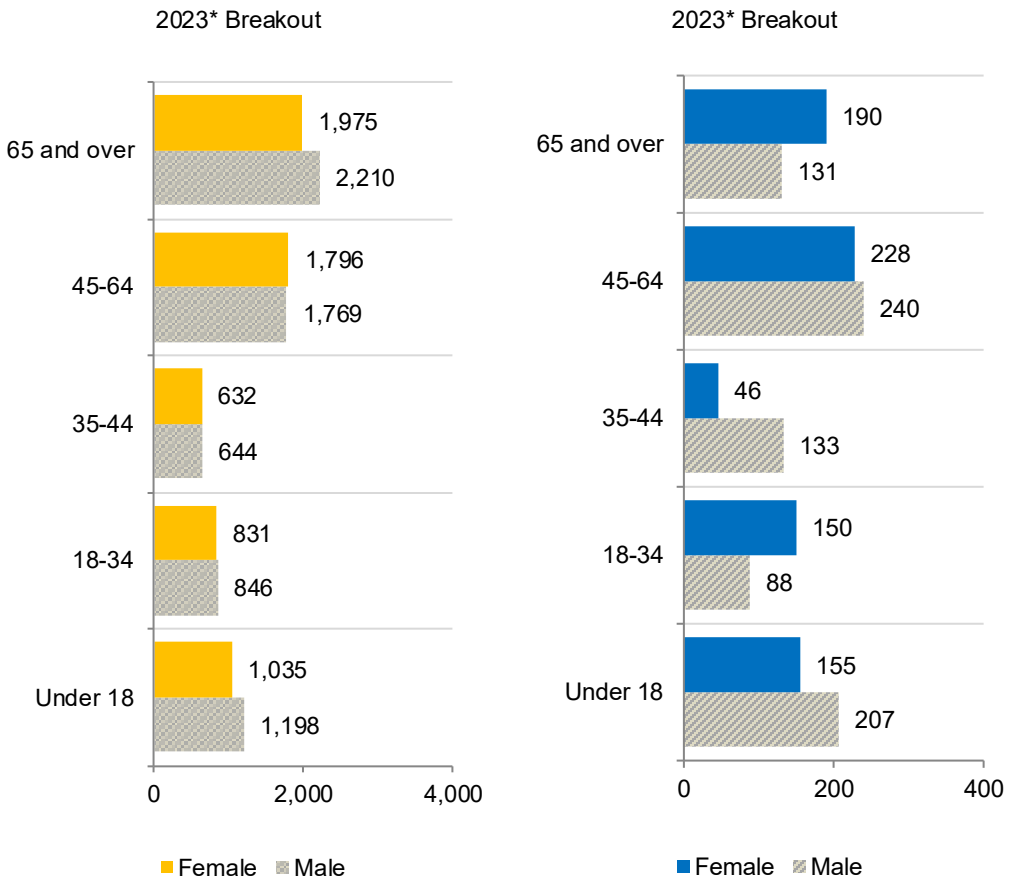


Figure 2 - Population Age Breakout for Sanders County (Left) and Population Age Breakout for Thompson Falls (Right), 2023 Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023 Washington, D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System (headwaterseconomics.org/eps).

Another trend that should be watched closely in both the City and the County is the increase in the number of people age 65 and over. In 2010, the Census estimated this number at 2,335 persons in the County; by 2023 it was estimated to be 4,185 persons, or approximately 32 percent of the total County population.

There are several factors that are leading to an aging population. These include:

- People of retirement age are finding Thompson Falls and the County an attractive place to retire due to a lower cost of living and the wide variety of amenities; and
- Young people graduating from high school in the County find it economically difficult to stay.

To slow or reverse this trend, it will be important to make the City and the County an attractive

choice for young people and families to choose for a home. To do so, it will require four key ingredients:

- Living wage employment;
- Housing affordability;
- Cultural and entertainment opportunities; and
- Continuing education opportunities.

Like many other Montana counties and communities, an aging population and a continued decrease in the number of younger people is something the City and Sanders County need to continue to watch closely. The trend could affect the ability of each jurisdiction to provide or facilitate services such as senior services, healthcare, housing and a stable workforce.



ECONOMY

ECONOMY

Based on the limited economic data available from the U.S. Census Bureau, Thompson Falls has six broad occupations that employ most of the residents. These include education, healthcare, retail trade, finance/real estate, manufacturing, and forestry/agriculture. Unfortunately, much of the detailed economic data available for Montana is compiled only at the State or County level. Hence, to understand the economic situation in Thompson Falls, it is essential to also look at data for Sanders County.

County Employers

In 2022, the top six employment sectors in Sanders County were healthcare (540), accommodation/food service (448), retail (428), educational services (332), manufacturing (266), and public administration (214). Other important employers in the County include construction and other services, excluding public administration.

From 2002 to 2022, the top three industry sectors that added jobs were health care and social assistance (373 new jobs), accommodation and food services (227 new jobs), and retail trade (210 new jobs).

From 2002 to 2022, jobs in non-service related industries (farm/ag/mining) grew from 1,626 to 1,749, an 8 percent increase. During that same time, jobs in service-related industries (retail/healthcare, etc.) grew from 2,559 to 3,641, a 42 percent increase. Over that same time, the number of government jobs shrank from 750 to 704, a 6 percent decrease. The significant increase in service sector jobs is likely related to the growth in the recreation economy of the County.

Compared to the County, the top 6 employment sectors in Thompson Falls in 2022 were public administration (153), retail trade (99), educational service (94), accommodation and food services (82), health care and social assistance (43), and real estate and rental leasing (40).

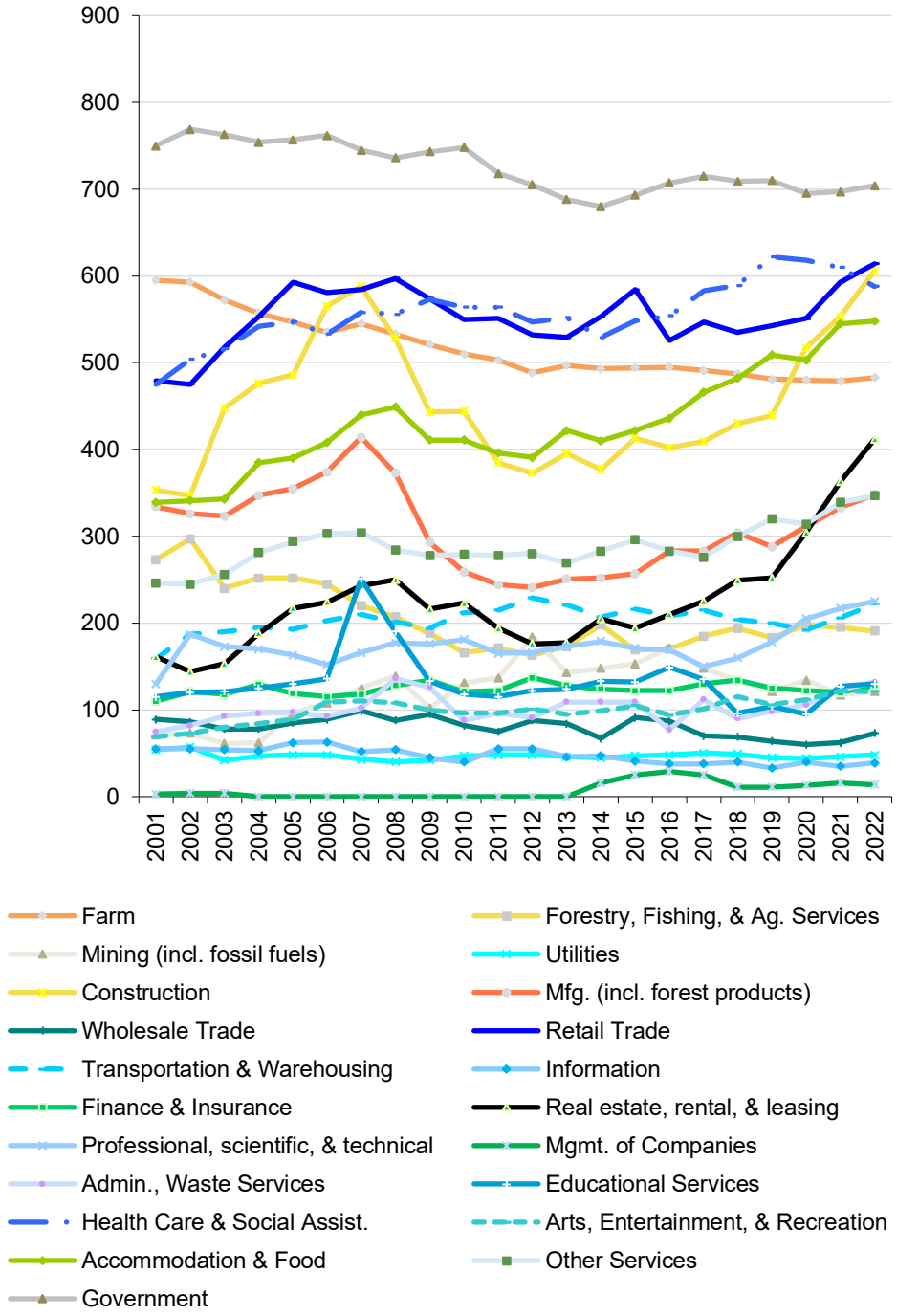


Figure 3 - Top Employment Sectors in Sanders County 2001-2022
U.S. Department of Labor. 2023. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Washington, D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System (headwaterseconomics.org/eps).

According to data from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, the following are the

firms or organizations in Sanders County that employed the most people in 2024:

• Bonnie Plants LLC	• 20-49 employees
• Clark Fork Valley Hospital	• 100-249 employees
• Clearview Academy	• 50-99 employees
• Little Bitterroot Special Services	• 50-99 employees
• Montana Moore Holdings LLC	• 20-49 employees
• Moodys Market Inc	• 20-49 employees
• Quinns Hot Springs Resort Inc	• 100-249 employees
• RTI Fabrication	• 20-49 employees
• Thompson River Lumber Company of MT	• 50-99 employees
• Town Pump Inc	• 20-49 employees

Figure 4 - Top Employers in Sanders County 2024
Montana Department of Labor and Industry 2024.

Labor and Non-Labor Income

In 2022, income from labor sources for County residents was $226.2 million, or 35.3 percent of all income. This was a significant increase from the estimated figure of $159.1 million in 2000. This increase may be attributable to an increasing "remote" workforce working from home or pending retirees bringing their labor income with them.

Non-labor income for County residents in 2022 was $413.9 million and represented 64.7 percent of income. This was a 14.1 percent increase from the estimated figure in 2000. Non-labor sources of income include dividends, interest, rent, and transfer payments such as Social Security and Medicare.

Per Capita Income

From 2000 to 2022, per capita income in the County increased from $31,304 to $47,623, a 52.1 percent increase over that time. Per capita income is a measure of income per person. It is the total personal income (from labor and non-labor sources) divided by the total population. Per capita income is considered one of the more important measures of economic well-being for communities.

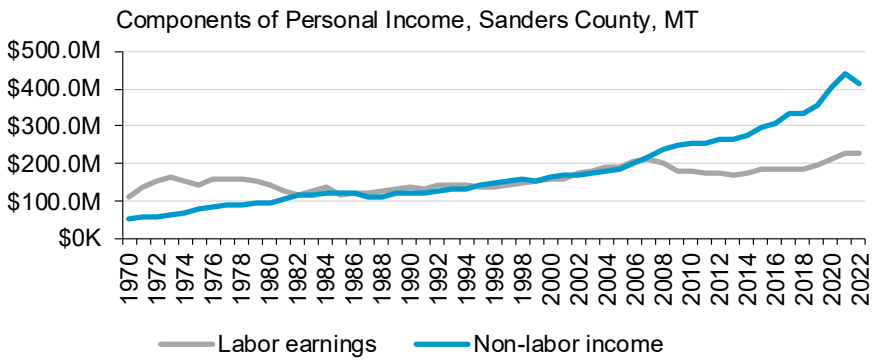


Figure 5 - Components of Total Personal Income, Sanders County 1970-2023
U.S. Department of Labor. 2024. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Washington, D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System (headwaterseconomics.org/eps).

Total personal income is a measure of the total annual gross earnings of an individual from all income sources, such as salaries and wages, investment interest and dividends, employer contributions to pension plans, and rental properties.

According to Census data, the median household income in the County in 2022 was $54,035, and the percentage of low to moderate-income families was approximately twenty-two (22) percent of the County's population in 2022. The Census defines median income as dividing the income distribution of a community, in this case the County, into two equal parts: one-half of the cases falling below the median income and one-half above the median. For households and families, the median income is based on the distribution of the total number of households and families, including those with no income.

Timber Industry

Natural resource industries had traditionally dominated the economy of Sanders County and communities such as Thompson Falls. The County used to be one of the top timber-producing counties in the State, with timber harvests taking place on national forest lands, corporate timber lands, state and tribal land, and other private holdings. The timber industry in the County was at its height of production in the late 1980s, but with increased Federal regulations, environmental litigation, and the national recession of 2008, timber harvests saw a significant decline, which negatively impacted the economy of the County.

At the height of timber production, there were four large mills and several smaller sawmills in operation in the County. Today, only one mill remains in operation. Thompson River Lumber, which is the second largest employer in the County.

In 1998, the timber industry represented almost 16 percent of total employment in the County.

By 2016, that percentage had declined by over half to just over a 7 percent total employment. From 1970 to 2023, the average earnings for such jobs shrank from $35,172 to $31,676 (in real terms), a 10 percent decrease. In addition, according to the University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research, in 2005, Sanders County reported 74,082 thousand board feet (MBF) of timber harvested. By 2016, volumes declined to 39,732 thousand board feet (MBF).

The potential exists to use the County's timber resources to diversify the County's economy. The area has significant timber biomass resources that could be used to create value-added products such as wood pellets for heating. Timber biomass is any timber-derived product capable of being converted to energy. Biomass mills that are manufacturing heating pellets are currently operating in nearby Superior and Columbia Falls, Montana.

Rock Creek Mine

The Rock Creek Mine is a silver and copper hard rock mine proposed by the Hecla Mining Corporation. The project has received Phase 1 approval by the United States Forest Service, and Hecla is proposing to invest $3.2 billion (over 35 years) in the project. The proposed mine is located approximately 36 miles northwest of Thompson Falls. During Phase II of the project, when the mine is fully developed, it could create approximately 300 high-paying jobs. These jobs will be distributed between Bonner County in Idaho, Lincoln and Sanders Counties in Montana, and other areas of the country. The jobs at the mine could generate nearly $700 million in salaries and $400 million in goods and services purchased during the estimated life of the mine, which is approximately 35 years.

When the mine begins operation, it will have a significant impact on the economy of northwestern Montana, including Sanders County and Thompson Falls. The City and the County need to think about how to ensure that adequate housing is available for the new workers and how additional services such as law enforcement, emergency services, and education can be provided. The most important question for Thompson Falls is how to position itself to attract some of the new residents who are a part of the mine workforce. One this the City can do is to ensure it has enough water and sewer capacity and land for the development of new residential housing.

Antimony Mine

Antimony is a rare earth metal that is used in a wide variety of products, but the most common uses for the mineral is in flame retardants, lead batteries, and ammunition. Currently, China is the largest producer of antimony in the world, mining 80% of the world's supply.

In an effort for the United States to produce more rare earth metals domestically, the Federal government has been paving the way for easier expansion and permitting of mines. The United

States Antimony Corporation is the sole processor of Antimony in the United States. This company was recently awarded a $245 million contract with the Department of Defense to produce more antimony.

The United States Antimony Corporation currently operates an antimony mine in Sanders County. With this new contract from the Department of Defense, they will be expanding the current footprint of the mine to produce more antimony and increase our Nation's defense. Thompson Falls should anticipate at least some influx of new residents and or more activity in the area as additional jobs are added at the mine.

Broadband Communications

Thompson Falls has very good Broadband internet service. Service is provided to City residents by two private entities: Access Montana and Blackfoot Telephone.

In the spring of 2019, Blackfoot Telephone began a multi-year project to upgrade its Broadband network in the Thompson Falls area. This includes the installation of new fiber optic cables in the area in 2019. This work could help encourage businesses that are reliant on fast internet speeds and facilitate any potential distance learning/continuing education programs.

Main Street Businesses

The Thompson Falls, Main Street Inc. was formed by concerned business owners and City residents who wanted to improve the appearance and economic vitality of the downtown area. As part of that process, the City became an affiliate member of the Montana Main Street Program, which is managed by the Montana Department of Commerce. The City's Main Street program essentially serves as a funding mechanism for downtown projects, and the Sanders County Community Development Corporation assists with implementing program projects.

In 2015, Main Street Inc. developed a Downtown Master Plan to serve as a guide for improving the economic condition and appearance of the downtown area. The Plan focused on the traditional downtown along Main Street/MT Highway 200 and extended along MT Highway 200 from Wild Goose Landing on the east side of the City to just beyond Pond Street on the west end of the City.

The plan addresses marketing, the design and improvement of buildings, and identifying how to connect the downtown to nearby amenities. It also focused on achieving measurable results. The plan contains short, medium, and long-term actions to improve downtown and addresses four main issues:

- Access and Mobility: Pedestrian and non-motorized connections between the core area and neighborhoods, important sites, and recreational amenities should be made and improved upon.
- Awareness: Thompson Falls should do more to brand and promote itself within its primary trade area and within the region. Signage is needed to direct visitors to amenities.
- Amenities: Thompson Falls has a wealth of quality-of–life amenities, especially outdoor recreational opportunities. These amenities can be used as assets to attract residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Appearance: The appearance of the community can help capture business and create a uniqueness to the community that people identify with. Opportunities to improve facades and the streetscape can create a sense of place where people will want to be.

An example of a project undertaken to implement the plan is the development of a preliminary architectural report (PAR) for the historic Black Bear Inn in 2019. The PAR will set the stage for the rehabilitation of the building and promote economic development by conducting a feasibility study for the use of the second floor of the building for office space etc. Another project identified in the Plan that was completed in 2016 was a Marketing Strategy. The strategy created a "brand" for the City and helped with the installation of wayfinding signage.

Implementation of the Downtown Master Plan continues to gain traction. This was highlighted by the recent award of an EPA Recreation Economy Technical Assistance Grant to help Main Street Inc. and the City work to implement the other goals identified in the Plan.

Ultimately, it is important that the Downtown Master Plan be coordinated closely with goals and actions identified in this Comprehensive Plan.

Recreation

Recreation is an important component of the economy for Thompson Falls and Sanders County. Data from the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) shows that average annual expenditures by non-residents in Sanders County in 2023 were $39,002,000. The highest expenditure categories were outfitting, restaurants/bars, fuel, lodging, and retail.

In 2018, Thompson Falls was one of five communities chosen by ITRR to participate in a tourism survey. The survey conducted by community volunteers and students from the University of Montana examined the impact of tourism on the City. The study used a visitor survey to collect data. The survey found that visitors spent an average of 5.66 nights on one form of lodging or another while traveling, and of that time, 2.01 of those nights were spent in Thompson Falls. In addition, expenditures by visitors on lodging in Thompson Falls totaled $7,062. Respondents also reported spending a total of $26,321 while in the Thompson Falls area. Of the 122 people

surveyed, most indicated that they stayed in Thompson Falls because it was their destination of choice.

Implementing the Downtown Master Plan, the Marketing Strategy, and the Community Trails Plan are all steps that the City can take to enhance the recreation economy in and around the City.

Technology-Communication

Technology and Communication infrastructure enable access to jobs in the business sectors not dependent on regional natural resources (lumber, mining, etc.). Work that can be done via computer and telephone can exist anywhere in the world. What is required is physical space to accommodate the workers, technology, and communication infrastructure, and a willing workforce.

One business sector that has surfaced as a solid source of jobs in areas with a lower cost of living is customer contact (call centers/customer service, and support). This industry has exploded into trillions of dollars annually. The single largest provider of these services is Tata (based in India) with $1.46 trillion annual revenue. While companies are attracted to the lower cost of offshore services, they are also deeply concerned about the negative impact of non-English-speaking support personnel who struggle to create satisfying customer experiences.

The idea of putting people to work in call centers across the US, where other industry opportunities are not prevalent, is not new. Significant call center operations have been opened in the last year in Billings and Butte, and each employs hundreds of workers. This is significant because it clearly signals the willingness of US corporations with a national presence to award contracts where they feel their needs can be met.

Thompson Falls has a willing workforce with the desire and ability to work living wage jobs. A Customer Service Call Center is being developed in the City by a local business owner, who is also working with Blackfoot to ensure fiber optic infrastructure is available for the new call center.

OTHER TECHNOLOGY OPPORTUNITIES

The City's excellent telecommunications system can be used to attract people who want to telecommute. This means working in a non-traditional capacity, outside of a traditional office or workplace, and using technology to complete one's work. There are many types of telecommuting jobs; here are just a few:

- Remote: Remote jobs might involve working from home, from a coworking space, or on the road. This can be a combination of home-based and office-based work.
- Virtual: Working in a virtual job usually involves working 100% of the time from a home-based office.
- Mobile: Describes a job that you can take with you, even if you start out in one geographic location and end up moving to another.
- Work-from-Home: These positions generally have established home offices and set hours.

Big Sky Rail Authority

The Big Sky Rail Authority was accepted into the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor ID (CID) Program in 2023. This CID was established to assist in kick-starting the North Coast Hiawatha route, revitalization of the passenger rail line between Chicago and Seattle. This proposed route would travel through Montana on a southern route along Interstate 90, before veering to the north, where it would ultimately travel through Thompson Falls and Sanders County.

As the Big Sky Rail Authority enters phase 2 of its development, they are determining candidates that could provide rail stops along this route. As the project moves forward, Thompson Falls needs to identify a variety of items:

- The location of a proposed rail station
- Funding for additional security measures to protect Thompson Falls residents and rail passengers
- Noise mitigation measures

The City may need to consider a feasibility study for the location of the proposed rail station.

Community Events

Organizing and holding community events is another way to boost the City's economy and bring City residents together to socialize and celebrate the community.

David Thompson Days was an annual event that used to be held in the City. It was a historical celebration of the life and times of the explorer, David Thompson. Attendance never met expectations, and eventually, the event was cancelled for some time, but it was resurrected in 2025, by Main Street and supportive individuals, car show, a restaurant/bar had sidewalk food, a farmers market collaborative effort that had a lot of public participation, and will try again next year.

City residents have shown that there is a desire for successful community events, which was evident by the 2025 David Thompson Days event. Future events could also include concerts, parades, and festivals. The success of any event will depend on finding the right mix of volunteers, sponsors, and venues.



COMMUNITY SERVICES

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Providing services and maintaining infrastructure in a safe and economical manner are the primary functions of the City. Services include but are not limited to, providing drinking water, treating wastewater, maintaining streets, police protection, emergency services, and parks/recreation.

Like many small communities in the State, Thompson Falls finds providing these services on a limited budget is challenging. According to a 2018 study completed by the Trust for Public Lands, the City's general fund budget totaled $873,042. The general City levy was set at 265.75 mills. A mill rate is the amount of tax payable per dollar of the assessed value of a property in the City. This is a figure that represents the amount per $1,000 of the assessed value of the property, which is then used to calculate the amount of property tax paid by residents.

In the year 2025, the Montana Department of Revenue reported that the current market value of all real property in Thompson Falls was assessed at $188,193,111, and the taxable value was assessed at $1,507,325. This was an increase of $141,124,298 in market value and $409,442 in taxable value since 2014

The City is not alone in providing services to its residents. Other local governments, such as Sanders County and local organizations like the Thompson Falls Chamber of Commerce, Thompson Falls Main Street Inc., Sanders County Arts Council, and Friends of the Thompson Falls Library, also provide services to residents and visitors. A comprehensive list of the services and facilities found in Thompson Falls follows.

Statute requires that a Comprehensive Plan provide a strategy for the maintenance and replacement of infrastructure. It is important to note that the City is developing a comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). The CIP in conjunction with this Comprehensive Plan, serves as the City's strategy for the maintenance and replacement of its infrastructure.

Thompson Falls Airport

FAA Designation THM is a county-owned, public-use airport located three nautical miles southeast of the central business district of Thompson Falls. It is included in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems, which categorizes it as a general aviation airport.

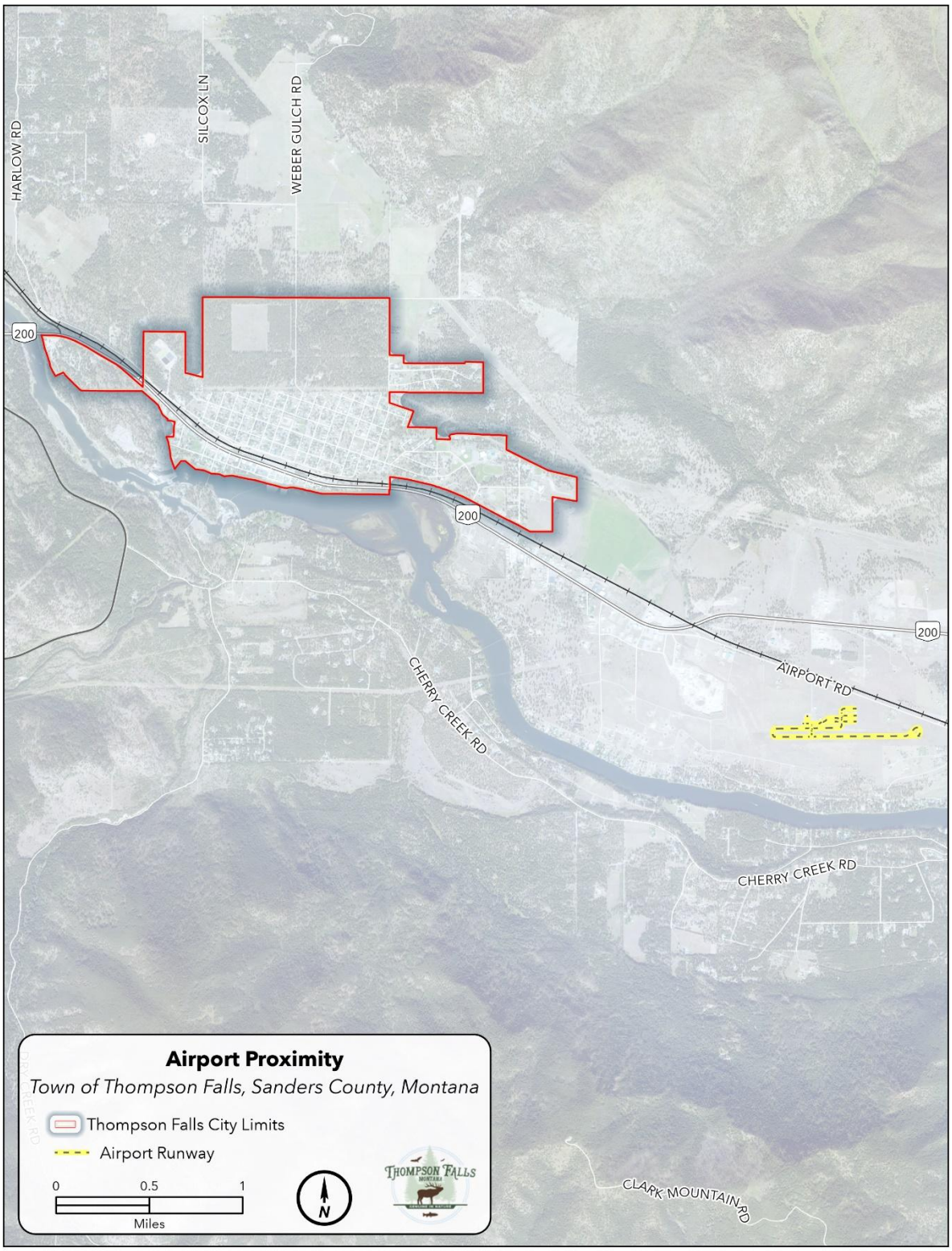
Thompson Falls Airport covers an area of 136 acres (55 ha) at an elevation of 2,467 feet above mean sea level. It has one runway designated 7/25 with an asphalt surface measuring 4,200 by 75 feet (1,280 x 23 m). For the 12-month period ending July 22, 2008, the airport had 7,000 general aviation aircraft operations, an average of 19 per day.

Currently, the airport includes several key features that make it an integral part of the story when promoting Thompson Falls as either a destination or a waypoint for the aviation enthusiast or recreation charter service. These features include:

- New state-of-the-art avgas self-serve fuel system.
- GPS cloud buster instrument approach in planning stages.
- Many lots available for hangar construction and an occasional hangar for rent.
- Nearly new snowplow, broom, and snowplow barn on the airfield.
- Courtesy car on the airfield.

FAA tax dollars (collected with the purchase of airline tickets) fund the development and maintenance of airport facilities. $3 million has been allocated to provide a 30-year upgrade to the airport runway in 2020.

There are currently 15 aircraft based on the airfield, with several experimental aircraft under construction. There is an active Sanders County Pilots Association that promotes aviation interest and safety and sponsors fly-in events annually. There are also plans to add a helicopter pad.



Map 4 – Airport Proximity Map, Montana State Library

Municipal Court

The City Court is in City Hall in the Council Chambers. The City employs a Judge, Court Clerk, and City Attorney. Court is held on the second and fourth Mondays from 1 PM to 3 PM.

Thompson Falls Ambulance Service

The service provides emergency services to an area that roughly covers from west to Beaver Creek Bridge, east to Mile Marker 62 up Highway 556 up the Thompson River, Blue Slide to the vicinity of Deep Creek, to the top of Thompson Pass, and up Cherry Creek.

The service is funded through mills and monies received from billing patients who receive the service. Currently, the service receives one mill annually, totaling approximately $18,000.

The service is currently staffed by 12-15 volunteers. Ambulance runs are staffed by an ambulance driver and an EMT. Due to personnel absences, ambulances are not always available when needed. There are two regular-use ambulances and one reserve ambulance. The reserve ambulance is not fully stocked. It is important to note that the service is only available when enough trained volunteers are available to fill work shifts.

The service has two main issues: funding and volunteers. Purchasing and maintaining ambulances is expensive. When an ambulance is purchased, the process of saving for the next one begins, and local banks are willing to assist with loans. Volunteers are paid $200-$300/month, but it is generally not enough to attract and retain enough numbers. Also, volunteers are required to be "on call" for 12-hour shifts and may work 18-20 shifts per month. There is also no retirement fund available for emergency medical volunteers, as there is for firefighters.

Fire Protection

Fire protection is provided by the Thompson Falls Volunteer Fire Department. The Department's primary station is located next to City Hall at 225 Grove Street. The secondary station is located at 1006 Maiden Lane. The Department has 10 volunteers and 3 fire engines. The engines consist of a 1991 International with a 750-gallon tank and 1000gpm capacity, a 1997 International with a 1000-gallon tank and a 1250gpm capacity, and a 1996 Chevrolet wildland truck with a 200-gallon tank and 100gpm capacity. The City has mutual aid agreements with the Thompson Falls Rural Fire Department and the Thompson Falls Community Ambulance, Plains, Trout Creek, and Noxon Fire Departments.

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) fire rating for the City of Thompson Falls is 6.

Police

The Thompson Falls Police Department employs a Chief and three full-time officers. The

Department's offices are in the basement of City Hall. Dispatch and jail services are provided to the City by the Sanders County Sheriff's Department.

Library

The Thompson Falls Public Library is located along Main Street. Services include a large collection of books, audiobooks, DVDs, music CDs, magazines, newspapers, and Montana and local history collections. Library cards allow patrons to download e-books and audiobooks for free. Patrons can access various online databases through the library's website. The facility has seven computers available for public use as well as free Wi-Fi. Library staff can help patrons with the internet, and staff are available, by appointment, to assist patrons with their devices. In addition, the library has color printing, scanning, and a self-service black and white copier.

The Thompson Falls Public Library is an independent, publicly supported library that collects operating funds through a tax on properties in the Thompson Falls High School district. Through an Interlocal Agreement, funds from a dedicated levy are collected by the County and administered by the City.

The Library is also supported by the "Friends of the Thompson Falls Public Library," which is a non-profit group that exists to increase and improve the Library's facilities and services, to promote reading and literacy in the community, and to fundraise for the Library.

Healthcare

The Clark Fork Valley Hospital (CFVH) is a non-profit organization that serves Sanders County. It operates a critical access hospital in the Town of Plains, where it also has a fully staffed primary care clinic and a residential long-term care facility. In addition, CFVH provides primary care, orthopedics, and rehabilitation services through its clinics in Thompson Falls and Hot Springs.

In 2018, CFVH employed two full-time mental health professionals, as well as coordinating other mental health care with the Sanders County Coalition for Families, Montana Western Mental Health Center, Sanders County Council on Aging, Sanders County Public Health/WIC, and licensed local mental health providers.

There is a need for 24-hour emergency services for City residents. Currently, after hours or on holidays, residents need to drive 20 miles on Highway 200 to reach the Clark Fork Valley Hospital in the Town of Plains for emergency medical services. In the winter, the drive can take place during a variety of road and weather conditions.

Old Jail Museum

Open from Memorial Day to Labor Day, the Old Jail Museum is one of the oldest buildings in continuous use in Sanders County. Originally operating as the county jail, sheriff's office, and sheriff's residence, the building now serves as a museum and focuses on preserving Sanders

County history, historical artifacts, images, and maps.

Parks, Trails and Recreation

For its size, Thompson Falls has an amazing park and trail system. Facilities owned and maintained by the City of Thompson Falls consist of nine (9) designated facilities. These include: Wild Goose Landing, Softball Field/Community Center, Fort Thompson Playground/Rose Garden, Swimming Pool Park, Railway Park, Babe Ruth Baseball Field, Ainsworth Field Park, Bighorn Park, and Grizzly Park.

Extensive improvements began at Ainsworth Field Park in the fall of 2019. The work included construction of a pavilion, restroom, amphitheater seating, a stage, park trail, parking area, installation of power, lighting, and landscaping, irrigation system modifications, and other site amenities. It is important to note that this project was identified as of high priority in the City's Downtown Master Plan.

Figure 5 shows the location of the City's park facilities.

The trail system in and around the City is extensive, and residents continue working to expand and improve it. The cornerstone of this effort is Thompson Falls Community Trails (TFCT), a community organization that was formed in 2008. TFCT is a not-for-profit organization for the purpose of enhancing the quality of life in the Thompson Falls area by building, maintaining, and improving trails that provide transportation ways, connectivity, and recreation opportunities.

In 2014, TFCT developed a trails plan with the goal of creating a *"safe and convenient network of non-motorized trails connecting existing recreation areas, as well as key locations within the community, such as schools and downtown Main Street. These connections will benefit our residents, our economy, and our environment."*

Community partners working with TFCT to improve the trail system include: Sanders County Community Development Corporation (SCCDC), Sanders County, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks/State Parks, Northwestern Energy, Rimrock Lodge, Frisbee Morbella Foundation, Avista Utilities, the US Forest Service and the City of Thompson Falls. Figure 6 shows the current trail system in and around Thompson Falls, including the Mule Pasture Trails, Powerhouse Loop Trail, Island Park, and Thompson Falls State Park Trail.

TFCT is currently working on a feasibility study for the "Eastward Extension Trail." This is a proposed trail that will extend from Wild Goose Landing at the east entrance to the City and provide pedestrian and bicycle access to Harvest Foods, the community grocery store, and other businesses. Most of this trail will be located outside the City limits.

It is also important to note that the local chapter of Babe Ruth Baseball recently completed the construction of a new field. Along with new sod and irrigation systems, there are dugouts. Eventually, the facility will include grandstands and a concession stand.

FUNDING PARKS AND RECREATION

While parks and recreation are an important part of the services and facilities the City provides to residents, they are by nature not as high a priority as maintaining streets and the drinking water system or constructing the new sewer collection system. This is the reality for the community. Nonetheless, there are ways the City can fund additional parks and recreation services with resident support.

To learn more about these options, in 2018, the Mayor of Thompson Falls asked the Trust for Public Lands to conduct an analysis of the mechanisms available to support the operation and maintenance of parks and other protected lands in the City. The results of the analysis found the best opportunities for financing parks and recreation are:

- Bonding. The City has ample debt capacity to issue a general obligation bond for parks and conservation purposes and to levy property taxes to pay the debt service. A general obligation bond issue must be submitted to City voters at a general election.
    - Bonds are almost always used to pay for land acquisition or construction projects and generally cannot be used for operations and maintenance purposes.

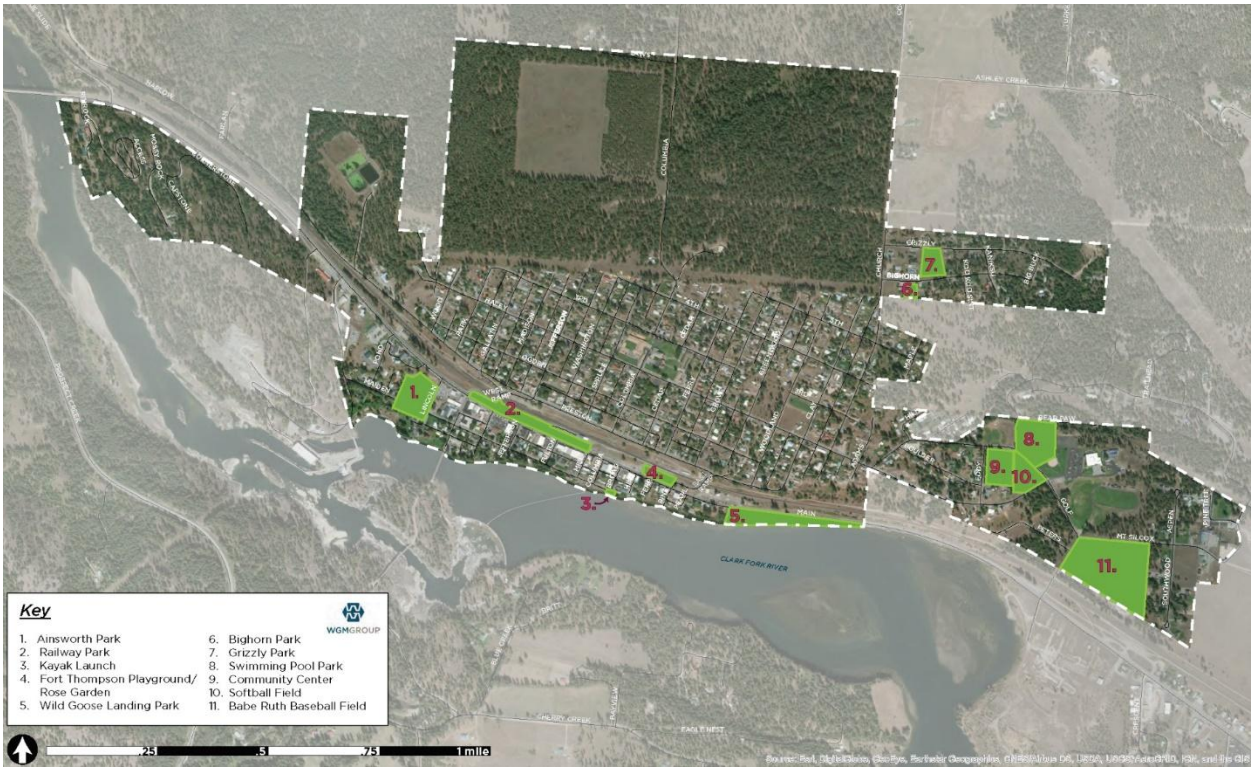
- Property Tax. Thompson Falls may impose a new mill levy by submitting the question to electors at a regular, primary, or special election. A mill levy must be approved by a majority of City voters.

- Resort Tax. The City can seek designation as a resort community, which would give the City authority to impose a local option sales tax. The Montana Department of Commerce determines the designation. The tax requires approval of a majority of voters.
    - Resort tax can be used to offset the financial burdens of hosting tourists. Monies raised by this tax can be used for developing and maintaining local infrastructure. It is important to note that at least 5.0 percent of the tax revenues must be used to provide property tax relief to residents in the jurisdiction.

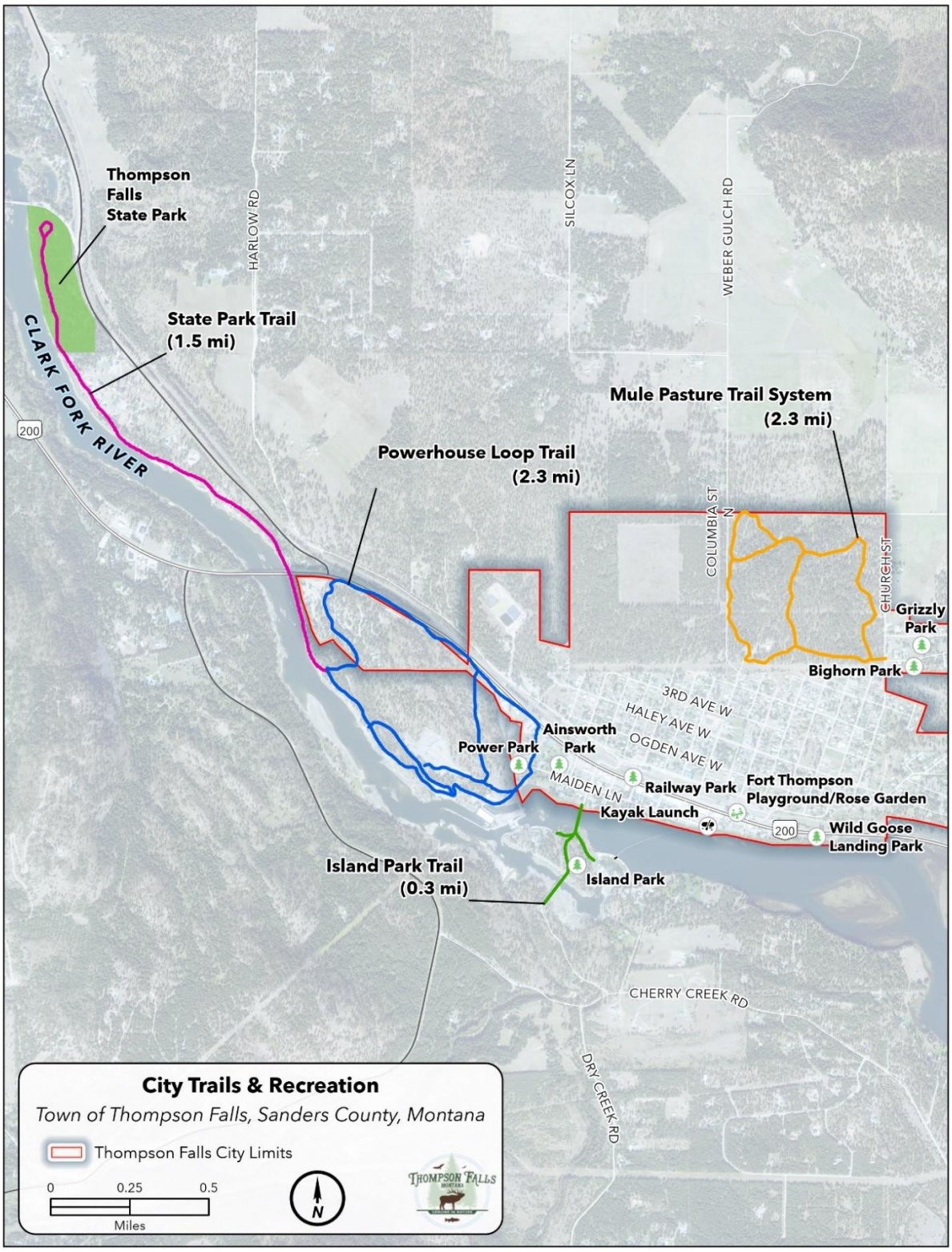
- Special District. Finally, Thompson Falls could consider creating a special district for local improvements and/or parks. The district could adhere to City boundaries or be drawn to encompass a larger area, such as the Thompson Falls School District. A special district is created by resolution (subject to hearing and protest) or by referring a ballot measure for approval by the local electorate.
    - A district could be used to fund the operation and maintenance of a facility such as the City swimming pool, which serves a population beyond just City residents.

INDOOR RECREATION-FITNESS FACILITIES

There is a need for a quality year-round indoor recreation and fitness facility, particularly in the winter months. Such a facility would need to serve a wide variety of fitness levels, particularly senior citizens and children. City-wide resources (banks, business owners, volunteers, local donors) may be able to work together to develop and maintain an indoor recreation/fitness center. This would probably require a long-term, well-coordinated fundraising effort to build a facility.



Map 5 – City Parks of Thompson Falls, WGM Group



Map 6 – Thompson Falls Community Trails, City of Thompson Falls

Rex Theater

The Rex Theatre is a 220-seat theater located on Main Street in Thompson Falls. The theater first opened in 1939 and finished construction in 1940. When the availability of movies on film transitioned to digital distribution, small-town theaters across the nation, including the Rex, were no longer able to show current movie titles. The prohibitive cost of upgrading to digital has made the operation of these theaters economically challenging. It typically requires a community population in the vicinity of 20,000 people to justify the financial upgrade by the owner of a theater.

However, in 2020, four individuals, two of whom are Main Street business owners, created a 5013C non-profit, called the Thompson Falls Film and Theater Foundation. The nonprofit was able to raise $80,000 within 8 months to replace the long-decaying roof, and in April 2023, another $70,000 was raised to install the digital equipment needed to show current first-run movies. There have also been numerous, smaller upgrades, such as electrical work, new windows throughout the theater, a lobby remodel, and exterior painting.

The theater hosted a variety of concerts, plays, dance recitals, town hall meetings, as well as the regularly scheduled movies.

Saving the iconic Rex Theater has brought back to life a community asset that benefits a variety of user groups in Thompson Falls. The fully functional entertainment and cultural venue draws in both local residents as well as visitors, especially during the winter months.

As of 2025, the Rex Theater is the only operational theater in Sanders County, after the Llano Theater closed its doors in Plains.

Schools

The Thompson Falls School District is made up of three schools: a high school, middle school, and an elementary school. The teacher-to-student ratio for the elementary school is 12:1 and has an enrollment of 240, as of 2024. The high school has a student-to-teacher ratio of 14:1 with an enrollment of 183.

It is important to note that enrollment in the District has declined significantly since 2009. This is particularly true for the high school. In 2019, the high school had 156 students, and by 2024 that number had increased to 183, or an over 17 percent increase. Elementary school enrollment has stayed relatively stable, from 217 in 2019 to 240 in 2024. These increases could be attributed to the availability of remote work and population increase post-COVID.

Solid Waste

Sanders County provides solid waste services to City residents. According to a preliminary engineering report developed for the County in 2016, approximately 6,800 tons of solid waste is generated in the County on an annual basis. The solid waste generated in Thompson Falls is either collected at the “curb” by a private hauler or customers haul their own waste directly to

the transfer station located east of Thompson Falls, just south of Highway 200.

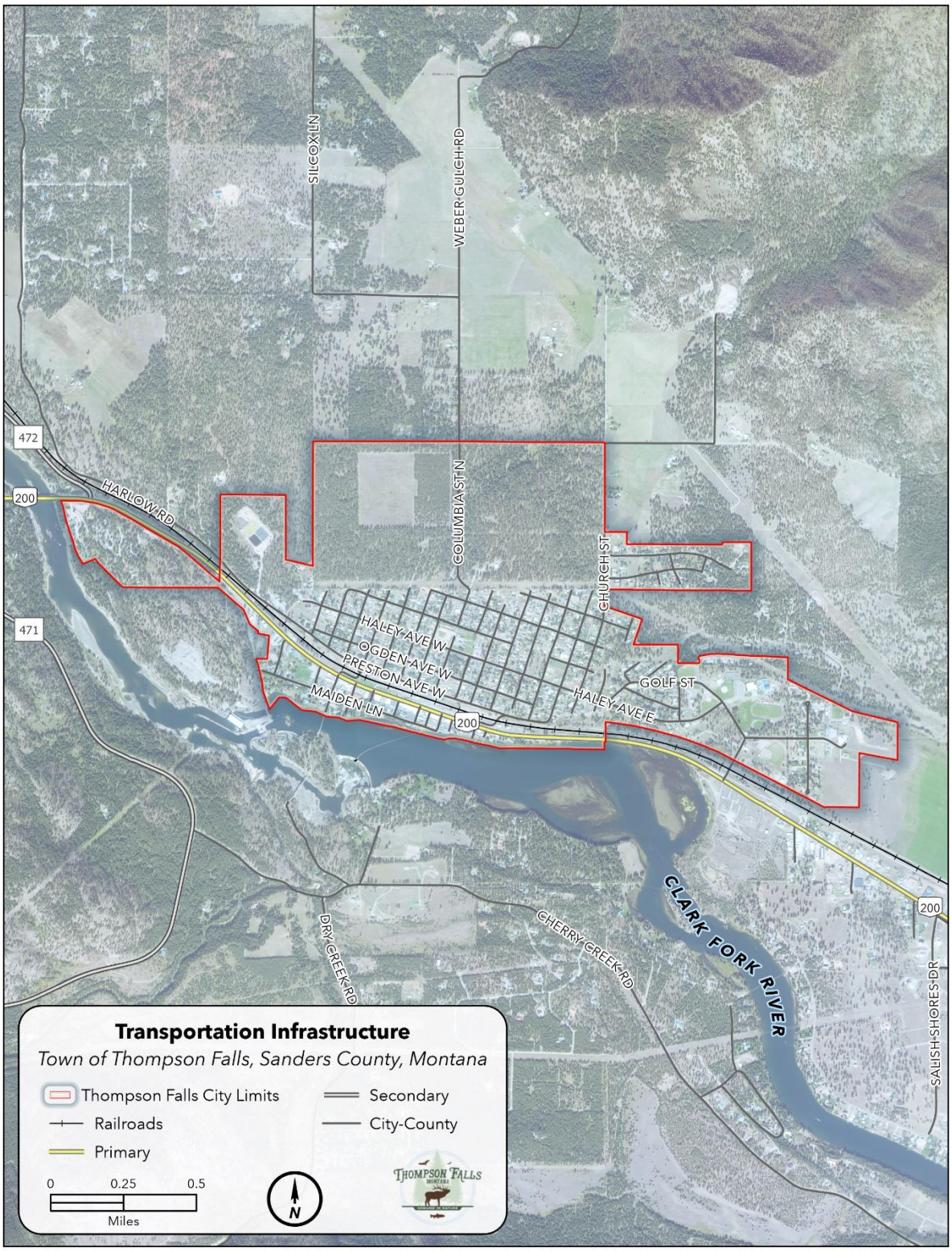
Streets

The City has about twenty miles of streets and alleys, which it maintains. Approximately 15 miles of these are paved. Many of the paved streets are in relatively poor condition and have problems, including poor drainage, cracks, and potholes.

The City is working to upgrade the streets in conjunction with improvements to the water and wastewater systems. Funding for street maintenance is provided through the City General Fund, gas tax receipts, and infrastructure projects.

Main Street in Thompson Falls is also part of Montana Secondary Highway 200, and therefore, maintenance is the responsibility of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Residents have had longstanding concerns about pedestrian and bicycle safety on Main Street. This is particularly true due to the lack of facilities and signage to ensure safe pedestrian crossings of Main Street from the north side of the street to the businesses and services located on the south side.

Because MDT is regularly evaluating and scheduling maintenance and reconstruction on the roadways under its jurisdiction, it would be beneficial for the City to collaborate with the Department to determine when, in the future, any maintenance and/or reconstruction may occur on Main Street and what type of work that might entail. Any future reconstruction of the highway through the City will provide an opportunity for residents to work with MDT to improve pedestrian facilities, utilities, and the streetscape along Main Street.



Map 7 – Transportation Infrastructure, Montana State Library

Stormwater

The City has an existing storm sewer system that consists of approximately one mile of collection lines located in the downtown area and along Haley Avenue. Stormwater in the downtown area drains into the Clark Fork River. There are additional stormwater needs in the City, but they are primarily in the residential area above the downtown.

Wastewater Treatment

The existing sewer system for Thompson Falls currently only serves the commercial district of the City and a few residential users south of Highway 200. The main issue for the City from a wastewater perspective is that most of the community utilizes on-site septic systems and drain fields, and is not connected to the centralized sewer collection system. An overwhelming majority of residents and all three of the City's schools are not connected to the City's sewer system. In addition, many of the residential lots in the City are small and do not have the capacity to install septic systems that can meet current Montana DEQ standards.

In order to address the need for wastewater collection in the unsewered areas of the community, the City is undertaking a phased project to create a City-wide sewer collection system. In addition to the collection system, the City will also upgrade its wastewater treatment system. The City's Capital Improvements Plan contains a detailed description of the wastewater collection and treatment project. It is important to note that Phases 1 and 2 are being funded primarily through grants awarded to the City for the purpose of improving the system.

Drinking Water

According to the Capital Improvements Plan, the City's public water supply system serves approximately 682 residential services and 54 commercial services. The system provides basic domestic water service, irrigation service, and partial fire protection to its residents.

The existing water system is the remnant of the original water system built for the railroad in the late 1800's and significant updates were completed in the 1930s and 1940s. It has been owned and operated by the City since 1936. In 1996, the Town completed a City-wide Water System Master Plan, which led to significant system improvements. In 2005 and 2006, the City completed a Water System Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) and is taking a phased approach to the system improvements.

The water supply for the City consists of a spring supply source, two operating water wells, two backup groundwater wells, and two concrete storage reservoirs. The existing water supply showed adequate capacity to serve the community through 2025.



HOUSING

HOUSING

Like many Montana communities, the City of Thompson Falls' housing stock is aging. 2023 data from the American Community Survey (ACS) of the Census Bureau estimated there were 746 housing units in the City. Of these units, 628 were estimated to be occupied. 200 or 26.8 percent of the existing units were estimated to have been constructed prior to 1970. This is an important characteristic to understand, as older homes generally require more maintenance and upkeep and are often less energy efficient, all of which add to housing costs.

The age of the City's housing stock is also highlighted in a physical assessment that was conducted by the Montana Department of Revenue (DOR) in 2008. At that time, the Department conducted assessments of the physical condition of residential structures throughout the State, including in Thompson Falls. Those assessments are highlighted in Table 2. It is important to note that the ACS numbers in the table below are for housing units, and the DOR numbers are for structures, and those two are very different. Housing units typically include apartments and condominiums, where a structure would be an entire building.

Approximate Age of Residential Structures (American Community Survey - 2023)		
Year Built	Number of Units	Percentage
2010 or later	32	4.3%
2000 to 2009	88	11.8%
1990 to 1999	79	10.6%
1980 to 1989	76	10.2%
1970 to 1979	169	22.7%
1940 to 1969	200	26.8%

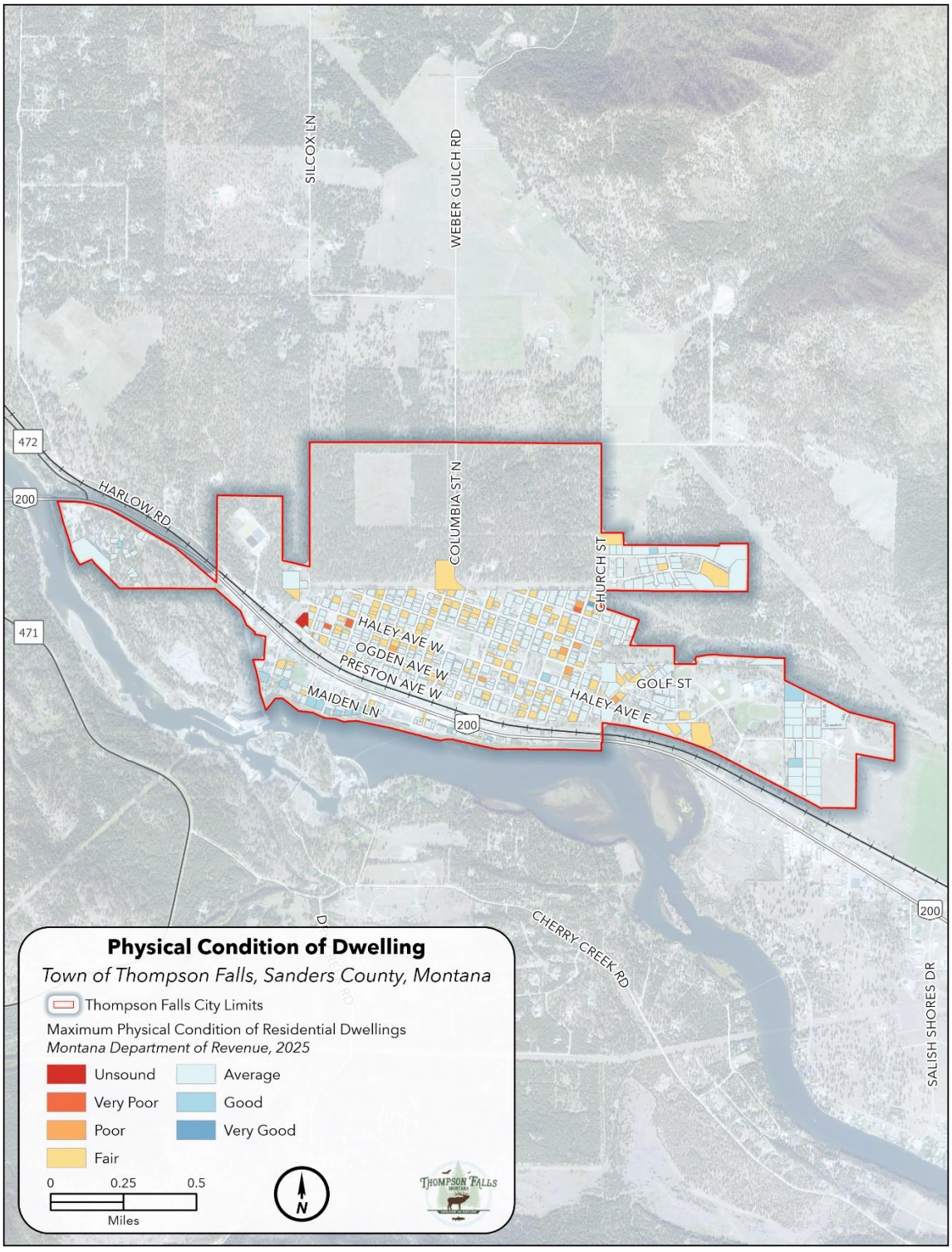
Table 2- Approximate Age of Residential Structures, 2023 American Community Survey

In early 2016, residents of Sanders County participated in a Montana Economic Development Association (MEDA) Resource Team Assessment, which was used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the County and to select needed projects. The team held two meetings, one in Noxon and the other in Thompson Falls. Regarding housing, participants in the meetings identified the following needs as very important:

- Senior housing
- Aging in place
- Affordable housing
- Assisted Living

Condition of Residential Structures (Montana Department of Revenue - 2024)		
Condition	Number of Structures	Percentage
Unsound	1	0.13%
Very Poor	2	0.26%
Poor	12	1.56%
Fair	148	19.22%
Average	537	69.74%
Good	69	8.96%
Very Good	1	0.13%

Table 3 – Condition of Residential Structures, Montana Department of Revenue 2024



Map 8 – Housing Condition, Montana Department of Revenue

Housing affordability is clearly an issue in Sanders County. According to American Community

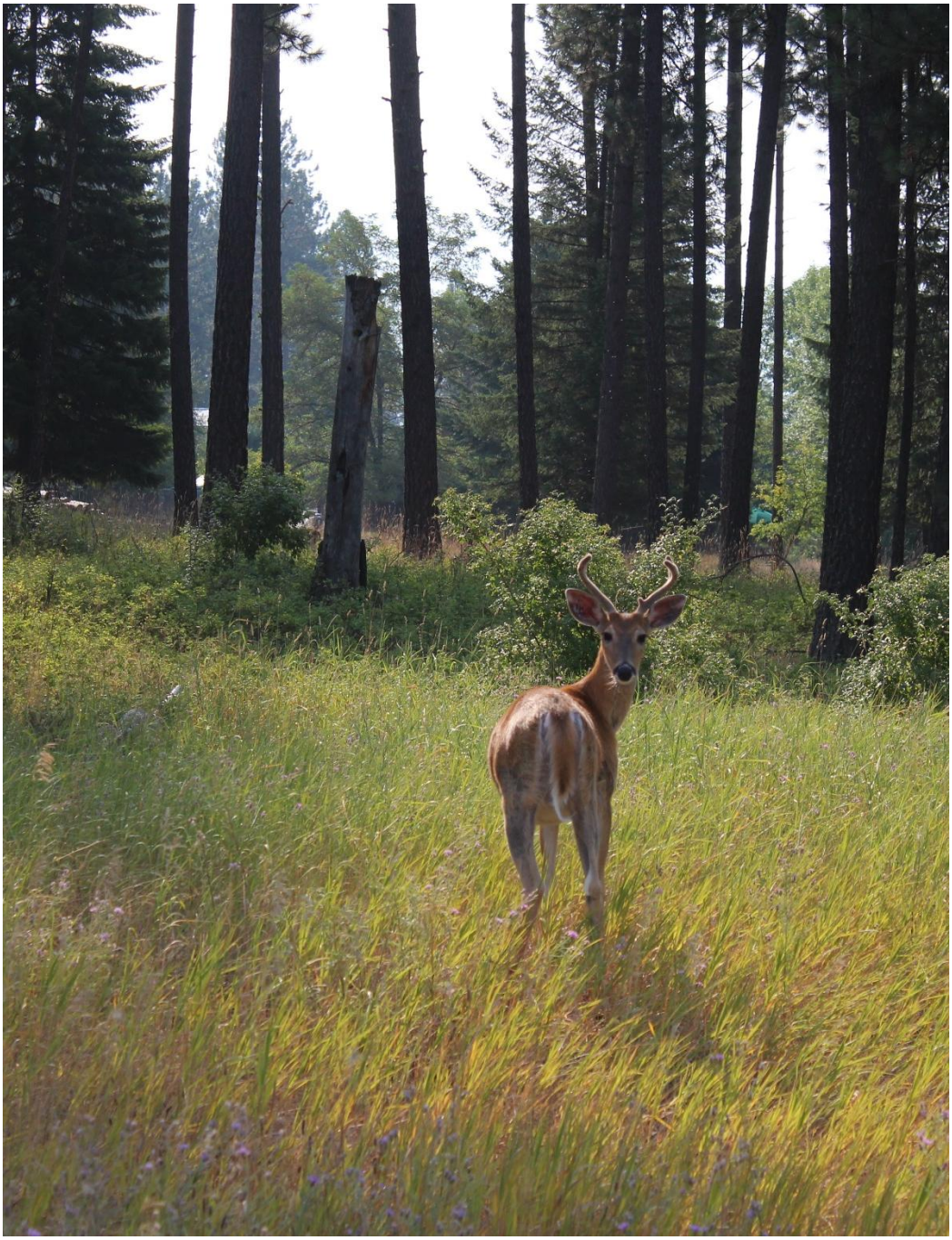
Survey data from 2023, there were 1,816 owner-occupied homes in the County that were under a mortgage. Of those homes, it was estimated that 744 or 41.0 percent required the owners to spend more than 30 percent of their income on mortgage costs. The same data showed that there were 1,092 renter-occupied units in the County, and of those, 583 or 53.4 percent required the renter to spend 30 percent or more of their income on rent.

Young professionals who are interested in living in the County find that housing is either not available or is too expensive. This includes both rentals and homes for sale. This is a situation that is deterring teachers, natural resource, and healthcare professionals from settling in the County and its communities.

Finding affordable housing is even more difficult for low-income residents, particularly senior citizens. There is an unmet need for additional multi-family housing and for assisted living facilities for seniors.

Sanders County also has a high number of seasonal homes. Of the 6,789 housing units identified by the American Community Survey as existing in the County in 2023, 687 or 10.1 percent of them were determined to be seasonal/recreational in nature. This is significantly higher than the statewide average of seasonal homes, which was (6.9) in 2023. Most of these seasonal homes are likely not available for rentals or for sale.

In order to better understand the housing situation in the area, Sanders County is going to undertake the development of a Housing Assessment that will focus on aging in place and workforce housing.



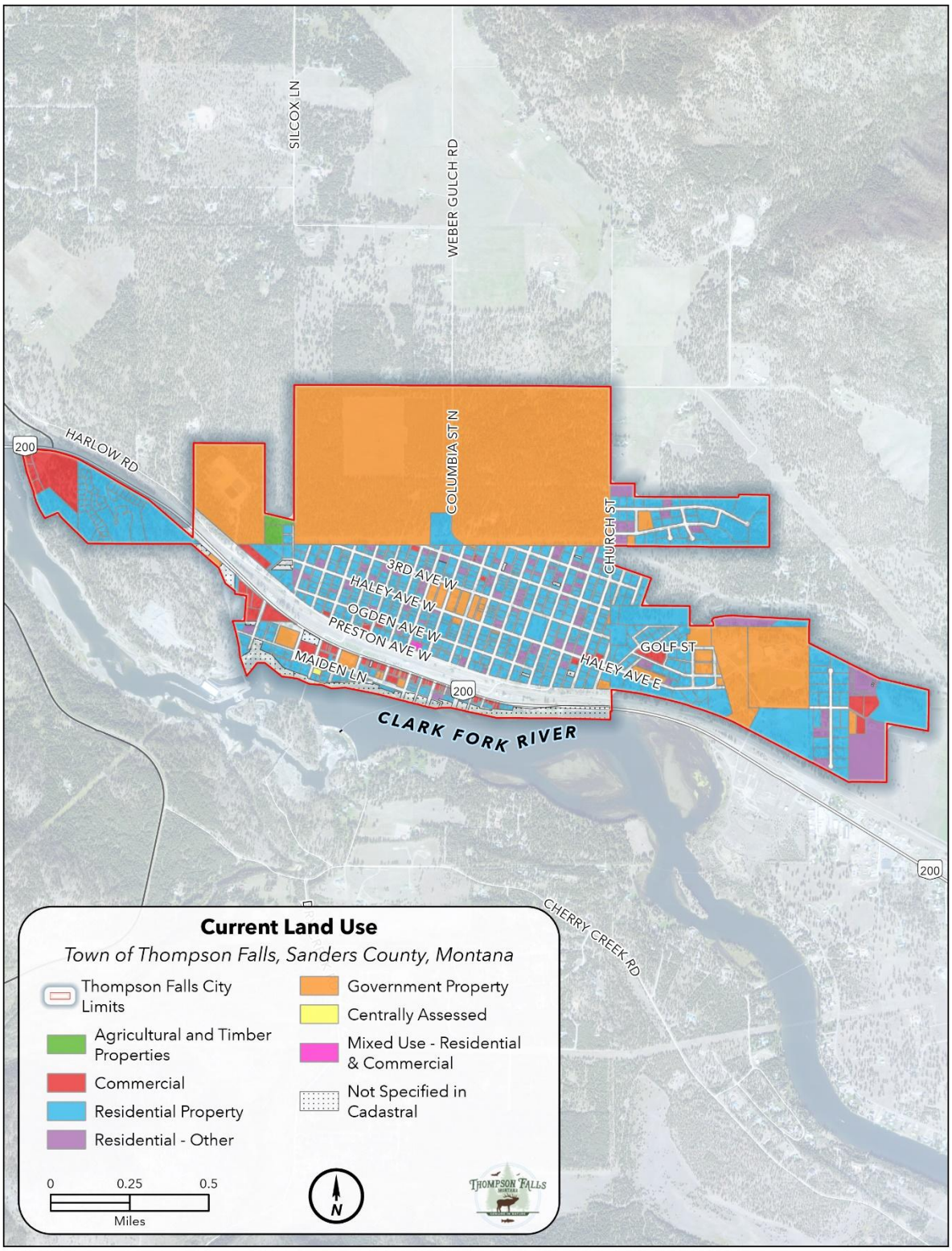
LAND USE

LAND USE

Existing Land Use

Development within the City is distinctly divided into the residential area of the City that is located north of the railroad tracks and the commercial district south of the railroad and along Highway 200. There are some residential dwellings located along the Clark Fork River and up against the commercial development along Highway 200.

The newest residential development is in the eastern end of the City and north of the railroad and highway. All the Thompson Falls School District's facilities are also located north of the railroad and highway.



Map 9 – Current Land Use, Montana Department of Revenue, Montana State Library

Community Appearance

Like many communities in Montana, issues regarding the accumulation of debris and junk vehicles exist in Thompson Falls. In order to improve the appearance of the City, maintain property values, and increase residents' pride in the community. The City will continue to make efforts to meet the requirements of the City Community Decay Ordinance.

Riley Creek Mill Site

The Riley Creek Mill site was once the location of the largest lumber mill within Sanders County and closed in 1995. The property is 115 acres in size and is located at the eastern entrance of Thompson Falls. The property is in a state of decay, overgrown with weeds, and the current out-of-state owner does not maintain the property. In addition, the owner will not allow for a voluntary EPA Brownfield Assessment to determine what site cleanup may be required for redevelopment.

This is a project that the City and Sanders County could work together on to facilitate a potential cleanup and redevelopment plan. If the property could be "cleaned up" and redeveloped, perhaps it could be annexed into the City and eventually help provide City services and annexation to the outlying business district east of the City.

Annexation

While some new development will occur via the construction of homes and businesses on existing vacant land, inevitably, the annexation of new land into the City will be necessary. From a topographic and practical aspect, new annexations will likely only happen on the east side of the City.

It will be important for new annexations be reviewed to ensure that they become an asset to City residents and to determine what their effect will be on the City's ability to provide services, including fire protection, water, sewer, stormwater drainage, and street maintenance. Typical requirements for the annexation of property include a plan that describes how City services such as water and sewer will be installed and how the construction of additional streets, including curb, gutter, and sidewalks, will be completed.

The City of Thompson Falls does not currently have an annexation policy to provide a formalized and predictable process for annexing new properties. Developing and adopting such a policy and procedures is something the City will consider. It is important to note that if the City is proposing to annex property that will also be subdivided, the City Council must officially annex the properties prior to deciding on whether to approve a subdivision application.

Subdivision Regulations

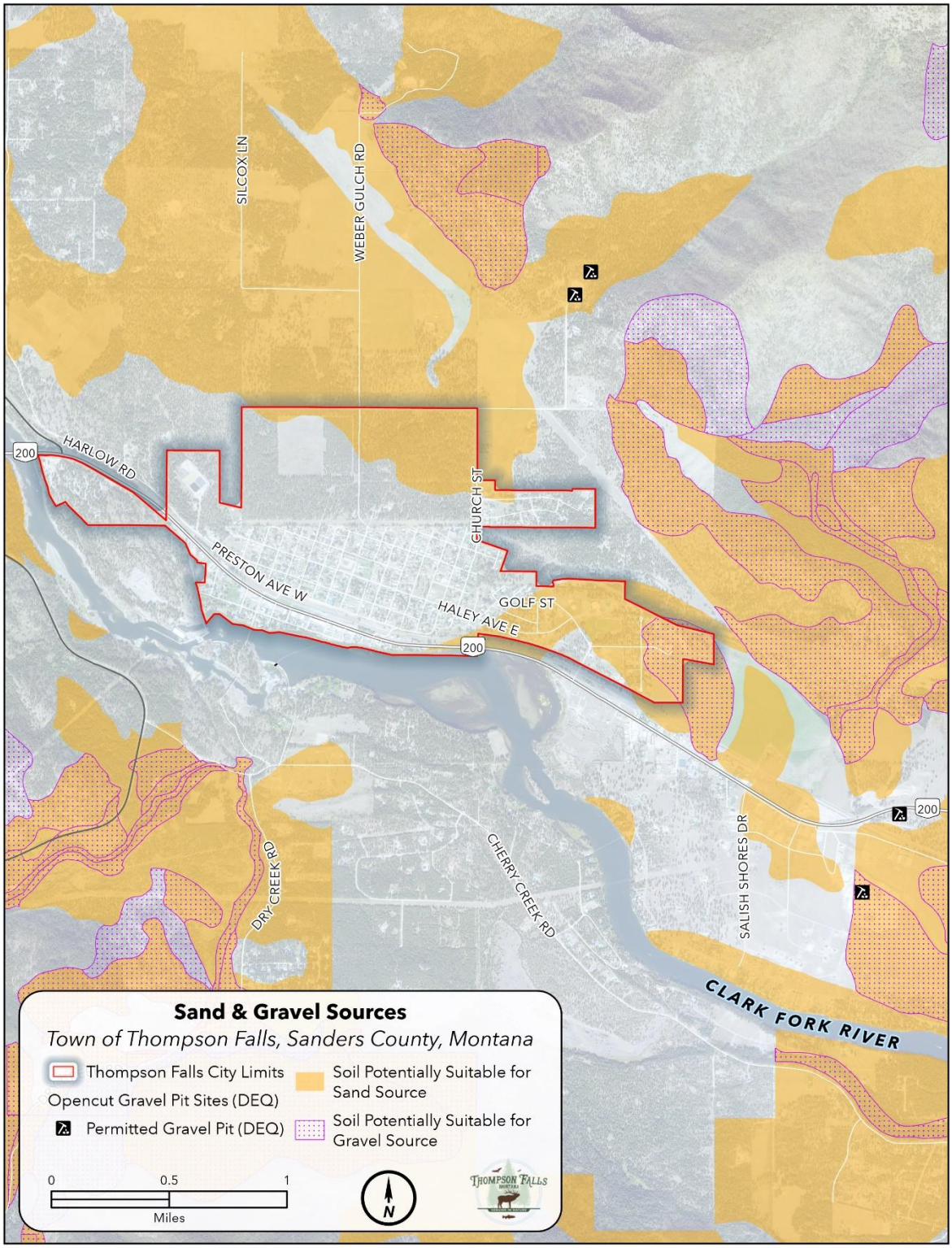
The City has adopted subdivision regulations as of March 8, 2021. These regulations are developed in accordance with the Policy per 76-1-606, MCA.

Subdivision regulations can be used by the City to address the issues related to new residential and commercial development by ensuring accurate surveying, providing legal and physical access, provision of utilities, parkland requirements, right-of-way location, mitigating hazards, and ensuring the overall development fits the character of the City. Subdivision review can also help ensure that the installation of infrastructure (water, sewer, streets, and sidewalks) is completed in accordance with City standards.

Sand & Gravel Resources

Sand and gravel are important resources for the construction and maintenance of streets and roads as well as the construction of new homes and businesses. According to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality Open Cut Mining Program, there are numerous permitted gravel pits in Sanders County. Only one of the pits is located within one mile of City limits (to the north) and is operated by the Sanders County Road Department.

The Soil Survey completed for Sanders County, by the Soil Conservation Service, shows eight (8) soils near the City that are suitable for use as gravel. These include: Totelake, Winkler, Tevis, Mitten, Oldtrail, Yellowbay, Sharrot and Big Arm. See Map 6 for the location of these soils in relation to the City.



Map 10 – Sand and Gravel Soils Map, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Web Soil Survey

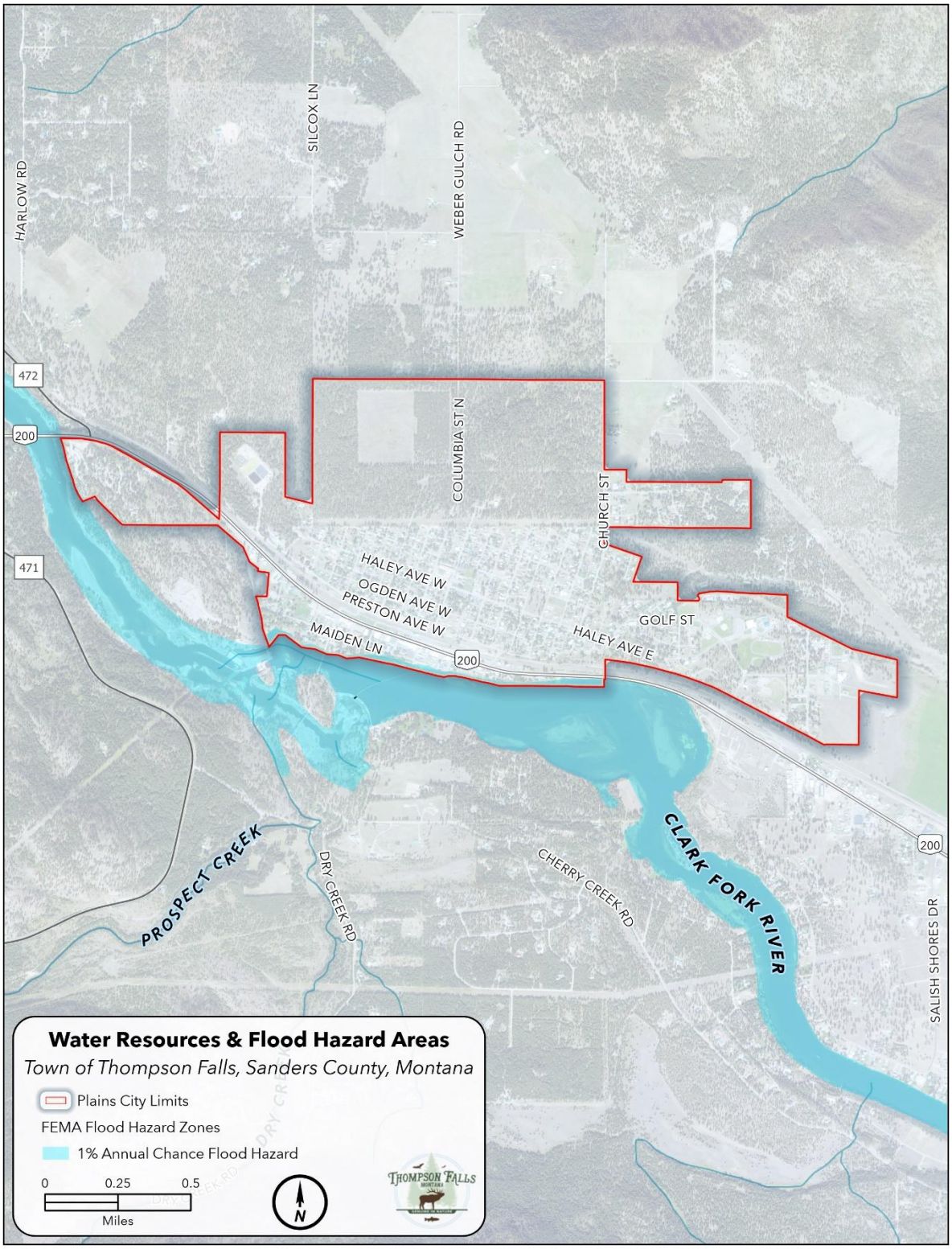
Flooding & Floodplain

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the City of Thompson Falls is not currently participating in the National Flood Insurance Program and has not adopted floodplain regulations as of 2019; however, Sanders County does participate in the program.

A 2012 Flood Insurance Study completed for Sanders County indicated that major flooding occurred in the County in 1948, 1964, 1975, 1996, and 1997. The report stated that a maximum discharge of 128,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) was recorded on the Clark Fork River in June of 1964 at the gaging station near Plains. In June of 1948 the stream gaging station for the Clark Fork River near Plains reached a maximum discharge of 134,000 cfs, the highest ever recorded. In June of 1975, the Clark Fork River reached a maximum discharge of 107,000 cfs at the stream gage near Plains.

With regard to flooding from ice jams, in February of 1996, an ice jam 12 miles in length formed above Thompson Falls. The jam flooded farms and a four-mile stretch of US Highway 200 in the Eddy Flats area. Above Eddy Flats, the river washed away 500 feet of railroad track causing the derailment of two freight trains.

Based on a Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) for the area surrounding the City of Thompson Falls, no portion of the City is currently located within the Special Flood Hazard Area (100-year floodplain) as designated for the Clark Fork River. See Map 7 for a zoomed version of the Flood Insurance Rate Map.



Map 11- Water Resources & Flood Hazard Areas, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Montana State Library

Tree Inventory

The Montana Department of Natural Resources completed a tree inventory for the City of Thompson Falls in 2017 as part of the State of Community Trees in Montana Assessment. The DNRC was able to compile a list of quick facts and a community forest summary that detailed the overall benefits that the urban forest provides to the City. Figure 6 displays the DNRC Community Forest Summary for the City of Thompson Falls.

Trees can provide a wide variety of benefits to a community. Some of these benefits are reduced stormwater runoff, water quality protection, reduced air pollution, and lower summer air temperature by the reduction of heat islands through impervious surfaces.

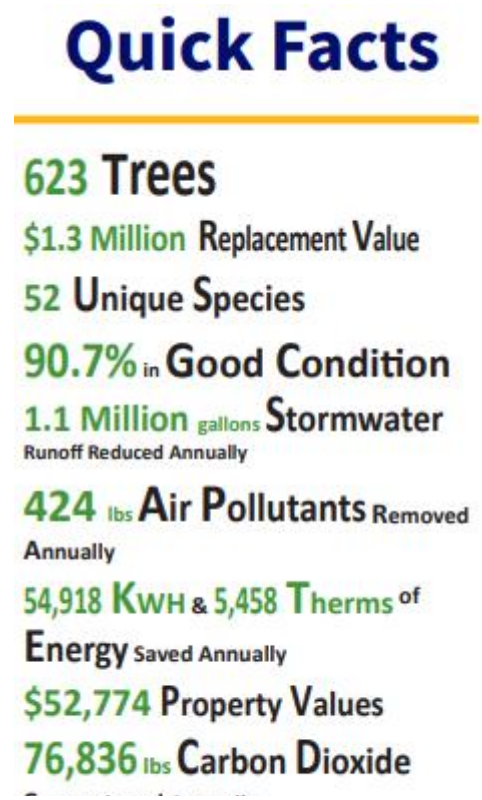


Figure 6 – Tree Inventory Quick Facts, Montana Department of Natural Resources Community Forest Benefits, Thompson Falls Tree Inventory

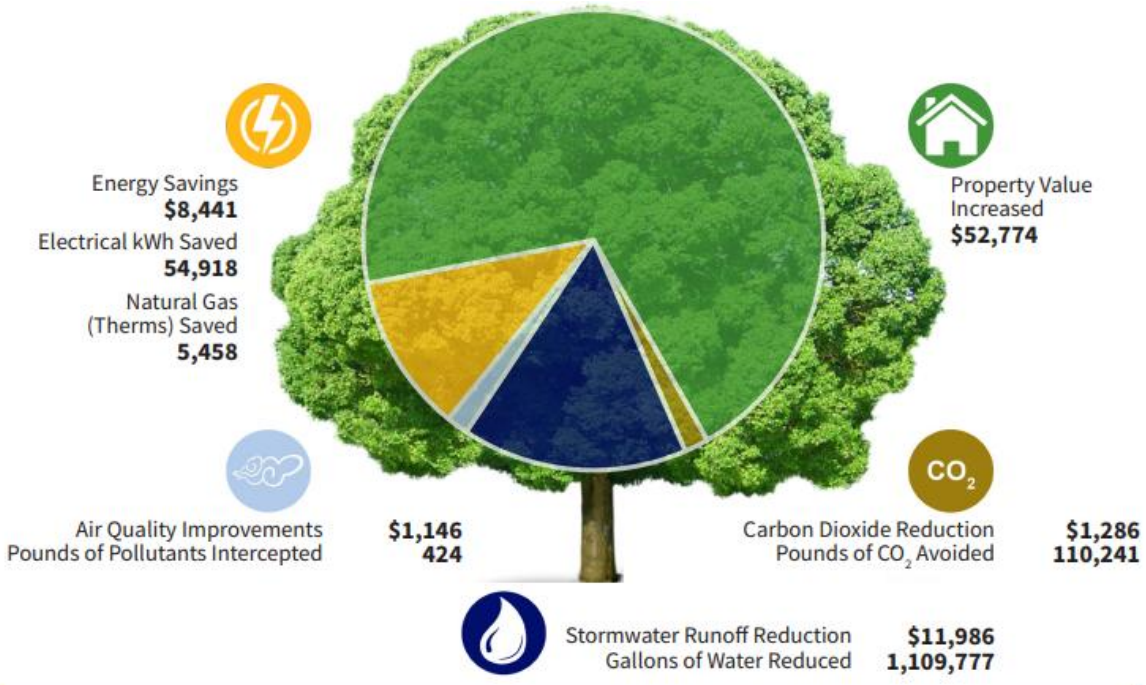


Figure 7 - Tree Inventory Quick Facts, Montana Department of Natural Resources Community Forest

Climate Resilience

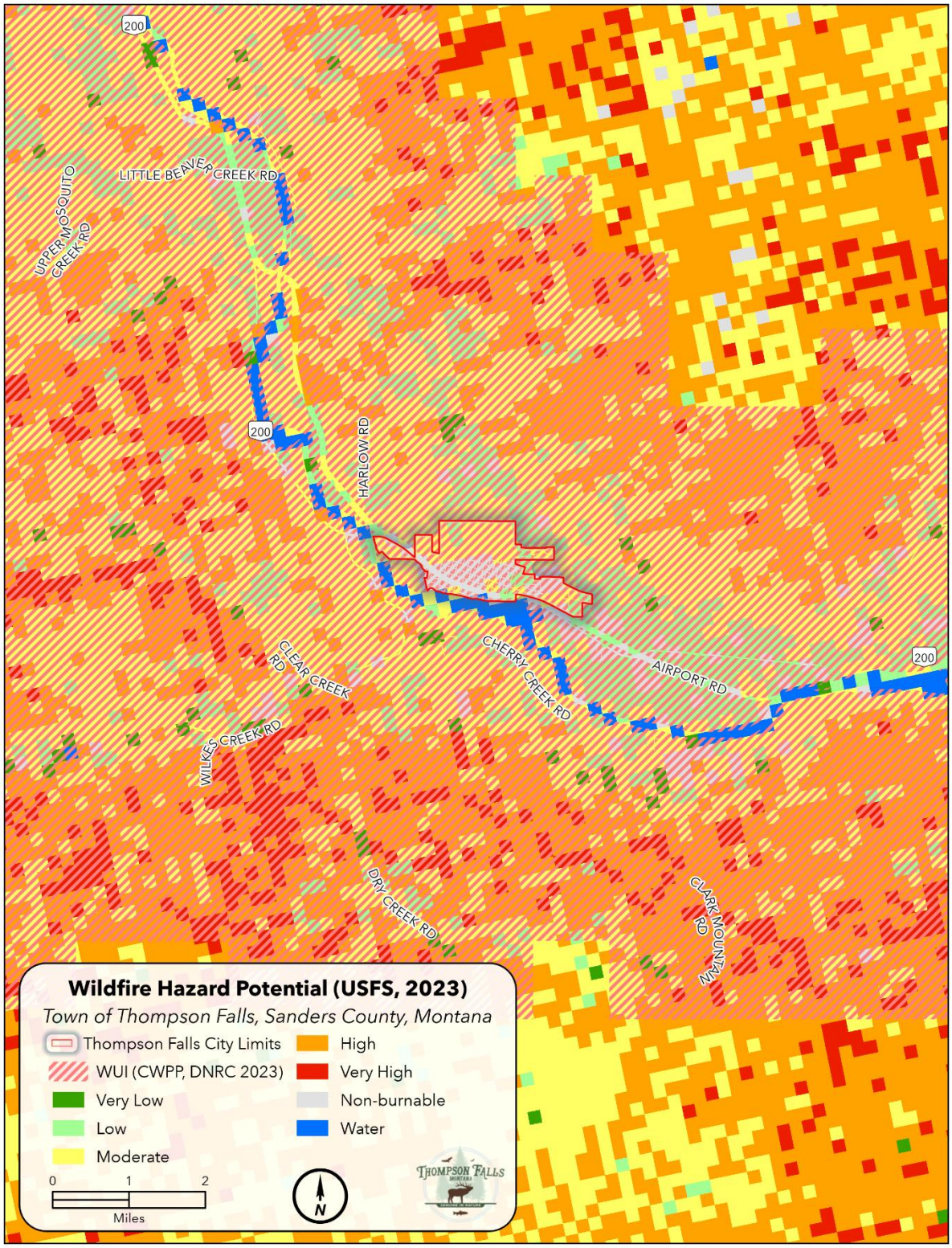
Climate resilience is the ability of a system, whether that is community, ecosystem, economy or infrastructure, to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the impacts of climate shift. Montana and Thompson Falls are experiencing increased summer temperatures, wildfires, decrease in snowpack which leads to decreased groundwater regeneration.

There are often associated risks to health, property, the economy, the environment, and emergency services demands. Thompson Falls residents deserve a healthy community. The City is encouraged to work with residents and stakeholders to identify mitigation efforts and increase of green infrastructure to reduce negative environmental impacts and their effects on the well-being of the residents.

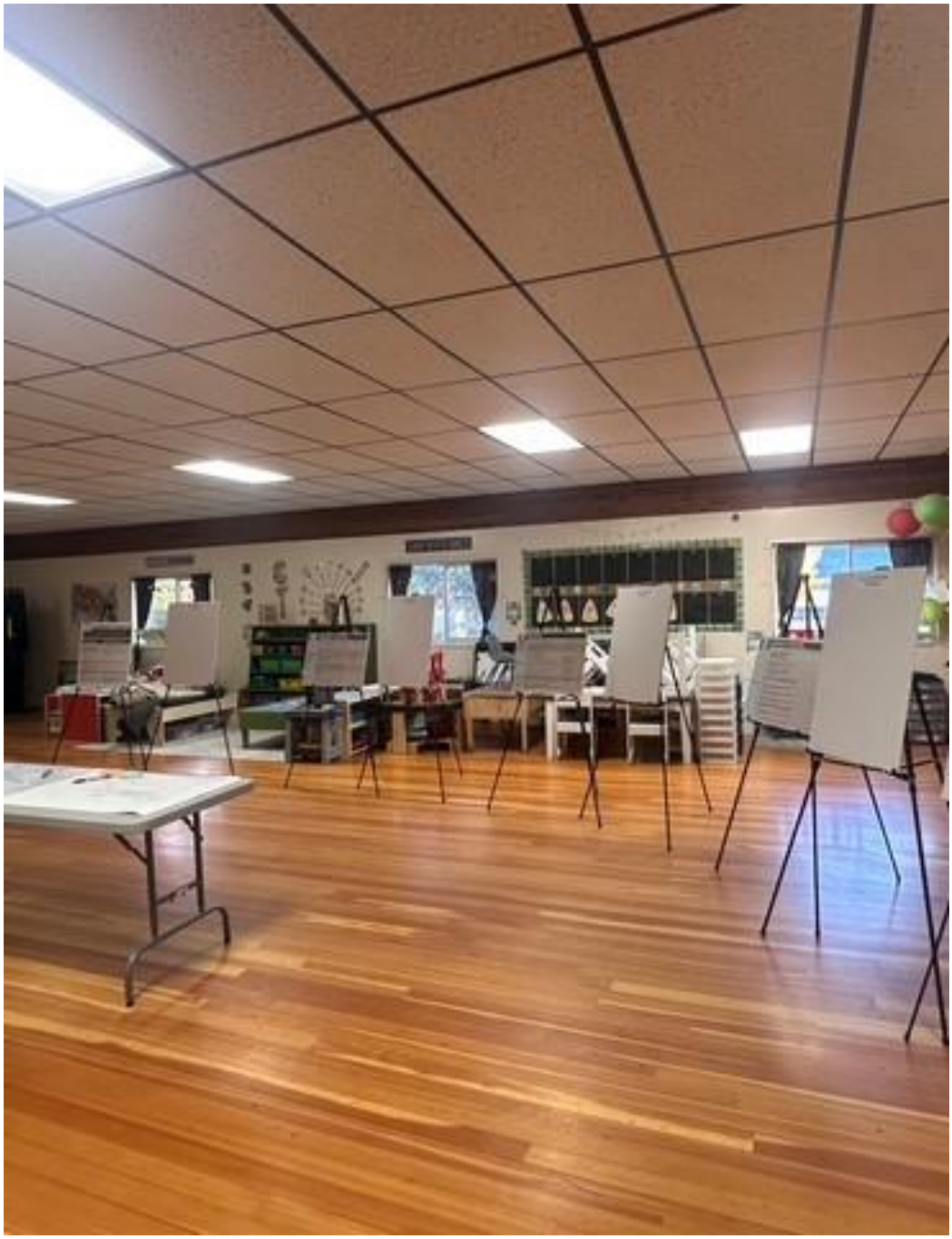
Wildland-Urban Interface

The City of Thompson Falls is located adjacent to lands identified as part of the wildland urban interface (WUI), particularly to the north, east and west of the City. The City is bordered to the south by the Clark Fork River. See Map 8 showing the wildfire hazard for the City and surrounding area.

The City adopted subdivision regulations in early 2021. Subdivision regulations address development in the WUI and ingress-egress, defensible space, and fire protection, including water supply systems. It is important to note that the City does have a water system which includes fire hydrants located throughout the community.



Map 12 – Wildland-Urban Interface, USDA Forest Service



RESIDENT ENGAGMENT

RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

Gathering the ideas and advice of City residents was a critical step in creating the new Comprehensive Plan. Outreach to residents included meetings, a hearing and the use of an online and hardcopy survey.

The Planning Board held a total of 7 public work sessions to discuss the creation of the Comprehensive Plan. Work sessions were held at City Hall.

As part of the outreach process to City residents, the Planning Board created a survey to assist in gathering advice and guidance from residents about what opportunities and issues are their priority. The survey was distributed to residents via the internet and hard copies and was marketed via word of mouth, Facebook, websites, and in an article in the Sanders County Ledger. Ninety-six (96) residents responded to the survey. The general survey results showed the following:

- Residents like the City's rural lifestyle, quality of life, and recreational opportunities it affords.
- Residents want to increase their indoor recreation opportunities, increase affordable housing, and increase economic opportunities
- Respondents would like to see more single-family homes and rental options available in the City.
- Respondents stated that street maintenance, law enforcement, the City water system, and fire protection were the most important infrastructure and services to them.

The Planning Board held a formal public hearing on the draft Comprehensive Plan on December 1, 2025, at the City Hall. The Board discussed the draft goals and action plan and ultimately recommended that the draft Comprehensive Plan be adopted by the City Council, contingent upon the edits and changes that they recommended at the meeting. The hearing was noticed in the Sanders County Ledger on November 20th, 2025, and November 27th, 2025.

The City Council adopted the new Comprehensive Plan on December 8, 2025



ACTION PLAN

ACTION PLAN

Implementation of goals identified in this Comprehensive Plan will take time and resources. Most important, it will require a commitment by City residents and the City Council to follow through on the guidance provided by the document. The projects and policies to be pursued by the City are identified below by the broad category they fall under.

ECONOMY		
Action	**Responsibility**	**Schedule**
Business Incubation		
Encourage the creation of office space for new businesses.	SCCDC, Private Sector	Ongoing
Continuing Education/Technology/Distance Training		
Implement the Sanders County Technology Initiative.	SCCDC, Private Sector	Ongoing
Create an "on the job training" and GED achievement program for high school students and adults.	SCCDC, School District, Private Sector	Ongoing
Create a working group to research the feasibility of a Montana University system satellite campus (U of M and MSU) in Thompson Falls.	City, local working groups	1 to 2 years
Coordinate with US Antimony Company to provide an educational event to the community on the economic impact of the mine expansion.	City, US Antimony Corp	1 to 2 years
Recreation Economy		
Participate on the Main Street Committee.	City	Ongoing
Sponsor applicable Main Street Projects.	City	Ongoing
Permanently staff the Visitor's Center.	SCCDC, Main Street Inc., Chamber of Commerce, Private Sector	1 to 2 years
Produce and display City advertising/marketing materials.	SCCDC, Main Street Inc., Chamber of Commerce, Private Sector	Ongoing
Create a collaborative branding and marketing strategy for the City.	SCCDC, Main Street Inc., Chamber of Commerce,	1 year

	Private Sector, City	
Promote the City through the direct marketing email and broadcast-social-print media.	SCCDC, Main Street Inc., Chamber of Commerce, Private Sector	1 year
Develop a City-County parks and trails maintenance agreement.	City, Sanders County and Thompson Falls Community Trails	2 years
Participate in funding and/or sponsoring trail projects.	City, Sanders County and Thompson Falls Community Trails	Ongoing
Retain green space within the City.	City	Ongoing
Community Events		
Create a working group to examine the potential for community events in the City.	Main Street Inc., Chamber of Commerce, Private Sector	1 year
City Business Attraction		
Complete the drinking water and wastewater treatment projects that are underway.	City	Ongoing
Use the City Decay Ordinance to improve the appearance of the Community by removing debris and junk vehicles.	City	Ongoing
Continue to support the program to recognize well maintained residential and commercial properties.	City and County	1 year

COMMUNITY SERVICES		
Action	**Responsibility**	**Schedule**
City Infrastructure		
Complete upgrades to City's drinking water system. • Replace aging water distribution mains. • Replace Jefferson Street reservoir. • Increase overall water storage capacity.	City	Ongoing
Complete the installation of the new sewer collection system and treatment system upgrades.	City	Ongoing

• Complete Phases III and IV of the sewer upgrade project.		
Prioritize expenditures on the most critical facilities. • Use the Capital Improvements Plan for prioritizing projects and budgeting.	City	1 year
Continue to pursue funding from Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Rural Development, Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) etc. for projects.	City	Ongoing
Develop a preliminary engineering report to identify and prioritize stormwater improvement projects in the City.	City	1 to 2 years
Complete the chip-seal 4th Avenue, 2 blocks of Spruce Street, 2 blocks of Columbia Street and 2 blocks of Clay Street.	City	TBD as sewer project progresses
Develop an overall street condition assessment and street project prioritization.	City	Ongoing
Pursue grant funding through the DNRC for tree planting grants to create more urban forest diversity while also mitigating stormwater issues through green infrastructure.	City	1 to 2 years
Identify cooling centers during the summer to assist residents who may be impacted by elevated temperatures.	City	1 to 2 years
Develop rain gardens within the City to facilitate stormwater mitigation.	City	1 to 2 years
Conduct a local traffic impact study to identify areas of needed traffic control, including but not limited to traffic control lights, speed bumps, stop signs, etc.	City	2 to 3 years
Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety		
Meet with MDT district staff to discuss pedestrian and bicycle safety on Main Street and formulate solutions.	City, SCCDC, Main Street Inc., Chamber	Biannually
Install “bulb-outs” and user activated crosswalks with lights along Main Street	MDT	5 to 8 years
Identify and implement traffic control measures on Haley Street to alleviate speeding cars adjacent to the School.	City	2 to 4 years
Cultural, Entertainment and Recreation Opportunities		
Create a working group to examine the potential for an indoor fitness and recreation facility.	Private Sector, Clark Fork Valley Hospital, Insurance Companies	5 years
Local Government Opportunities		
Provide the residents of Thompson Falls with educational opportunities on local happenings in the government with a strong emphasis on transparency.	City	5 years
Coordinate with the local schools to create a “Mayor of the week” civic program to promote education on local government.	City, School District	1 to 2 years
Utilize diverse means of communication to attract attendees to local events and to assist local civic groups and non-profits in promoting volunteerism in the community.	City, local civic organizations	Ongoing

Fire Protection, Emergency Medical and Ambulance Services		
Create a working group consisting of fire protection, emergency medical and ambulance services to identify current issues, opportunities and mutual aid agreements, and to discuss the need for full-time staffing of these agencies for the City of Thompson Falls.	City, Sanders County, Fire Departments, Ambulance Service, Search and Rescue.	5 years
Monitor funding opportunities through the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant Program	City, Sanders County, Fire Departments	Ongoing
Air Quality		
Consider constructing diversion in streets/alleys to prevent gravel washout onto streets and to reduce the need for sweeping roads following heavy runoff events.	City	2 years
Wildlife Resources		
Work with Sanders County Extension to provide City residents with information on how to protect pollinators (bees etc.) and through pollinator friendly landscaping.	City, Sanders County Extension	1 year
Work with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to create a strategy for dealing with CWD.	City, FWP	1 to 2 years
Work with FWP to enforce ordinance prohibiting the feeding of wildlife to reduce herding and the spread of disease.	City, FWP	Ongoing
Coordinate with FWP to create a wildlife management plan	City, FWP	4 to 5 years

HOUSING		
Action	**Responsibility**	**Schedule**
Understand and use the information gathered from the housing assessment/plan developed by the County.	City, SCCDC, Sanders County Community Housing, Private Sector	1 year
Consider the use or sale of vacant City-owned land for affordable housing purposes.	City	Ongoing
Coordinate with the Montana Department of Commerce and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development on providing local officials and City residents with educational training opportunities on state and federal funding for housing development, as well as provide information on community land trusts and the impact they have on the City's housing market..	City, Montana Department of Commerce, HUD	3 years
Identify the quantity of Short-term Rentals (STRs) in the City, review the results, and discuss the regulation of STRs.	City	Ongoing

LAND USE		
Action	**Responsibility**	**Schedule**
Subdivision Regulations		
Update subdivision regulations.	City	1 -year
Obtain subdivision review training from the Montana Department of Commerce.	City, MDOC	2-years
Riley Creek Mill Site		
Organize a meeting with the County and the owners of the site to discuss the cleanup and redevelopment of the site.	City, Sanders County, SCCDC	1-year
Support and sponsor a voluntary EPA Brownfields assessment of the property.	City, Sanders County, SCCDC	3- years



CITY-COUNTY COORDINATION

COORDINATION WITH SANDERS COUNTY

The City of Thompson Falls will examine the potential to coordinate efforts with Sanders County in the following ways:

- Work to promote the use of the County's timber resources.
- Clean up (if necessary) and redevelop the Riley Creek Mill site.
- Initiate a plan to provide additional workforce housing.
- Foster the technology and communications economy.
- Expand and improve the recreation economy.



CONDTIONS AND TIMING FOR REVIEW AND REVISIONS

CONDITIONS AND TIMING FOR REVIEW AND REVISION

To ensure the Comprehensive Plan remains a relevant and effective document for decision making in the City; the Comprehensive Plan will need to be periodically reviewed and updated.

The document will be reviewed every 5 years from the date of its adoption. The City Planning Board will be the entity responsible for reviewing the Policy and will make any recommendations regarding revisions or changes to the City Council. Future reviews will include an evaluation of every section of the Policy. It is anticipated that a full update of the Policy will be necessary within 10 years of its original adoption.

The Comprehensive Plan may also be revised when a situation or issue has been identified by the public that necessitates changes or when changes are deemed to be in the public interest by the Planning Board or the City Council. It is also possible that Legislative changes to the Comprehensive Plan statutes may require significant amendments or changes. Finally, amendments to the Policy may also be necessary when litigation in the City or elsewhere in Montana sets legal precedent that is clearly contrary to the stated goals, objectives or implementation strategies in the Comprehensive Plan.

APPENDIX A: SUBDIVISION REVIEW

The City adopted subdivision regulations in early 2021. The Montana Code Annotated requires the City Council provide a statement in the Comprehensive Plan explaining how they will:

- Provide definitions for the review criteria for subdivisions found in 76-3-608 (3) (a) MCA.; and
- Describe how the City will evaluate and make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions with respect to the criteria in 76-3-608 (3) (a) M.C.A.

Thus, even though the City does not have adopted subdivision regulations it is essential to provide the information listed above in order to help develop and adopt the regulations in the future.

Definition of 76-3-608 Criteria:

The City of Thompson Falls will use the following definitions in its future Subdivision Regulations to define each of the subdivision review criteria listed below.

- Agriculture: The practice of cultivating the ground, raising crops, and/or rearing animals.

- Agricultural Water User Facilities: Any part of the an irrigation system used to produce an agricultural product on property used for agricultural purposes.

- Local Services: Any and all services that local government entities are authorized to provide.

- Natural Environment: The physical conditions, which exist within a given area including land, air, water, mineral, flora, fauna, noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance.

- Public Health and Safety: A condition of optimal well-being, free from danger, risk or injury for a community at large, or for all people, not merely for the welfare of a specific individual or a small class of persons.

- Wildlife: Living animals, which are neither human nor domesticated.

- Wildlife Habitat: Place or type of site wildlife naturally lives and grows.

Evaluation of Subdivisions Based Upon 76-3-608 Criteria

The evaluation of subdivision applications by the City will include an analysis of whether and to what extent a proposed subdivision will impact agriculture, agricultural water user facilities, local services, the natural environment, wildlife, wildlife habitat, and public health and safety as defined in this Comprehensive Plan.

The City will evaluate each proposed subdivision regarding the expected impacts on each of the criteria, and the degree to which the subdivision applicant proposes to mitigate any adverse impacts. This evaluation will be based on the subdivision application submitted by the applicant, review by City staff and reports and information gathered from public hearings and other sources of information as deemed appropriate.

Upon completion of its review and evaluation, the City will render a decision on a proposed subdivision with respect to the requirements of the City of Thompson Falls Subdivision Regulations, the City of Thompson Falls Comprehensive Plan, and the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act.

Evaluation Criteria for Effects on Agriculture

a. The number of acres that would be removed from the production of crops or livestock. Acreage will be obtained from Department of Revenue tax records.
b. Removal of agricultural lands critical to the Sanders County's agricultural base. Maps and land capability classifications developed by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation shall be used to determine the agricultural significance of land.
c. Potential conflicts between the proposed subdivision and adjacent agricultural operations shall be evaluated including:
    - Interference with the movement of livestock or farm machinery
    - Interference with agricultural production and activities
    - Maintenance of fences
    - Proliferation of weeds
    - Increased human activity
    - Harassment of livestock by pets

Evaluation Criteria for Effects on Agricultural Water User Facilities

a. Location and proximity to a ditch, canal, headgate, sprinkler system, watering tank or developed spring shall be considered.
b. Potential subdivision nuisance complaints or problems due to agricultural water user facilities such as safety hazards to residents or water problems from irrigation ditches, headgates, siphons, sprinkler systems or other facilities shall be considered.
c. Ownership of water rights and the historic and current use of facility on the proposed subdivision shall be examined. Easements to protect the use of water user facilities on or access through a subdivision shall be considered.
d. Allocation of water rights within a subdivision shall be considered.

Evaluation Criteria for Effects Upon Local Services

a. Increased demand on services and need to expand services for a proposed subdivision:
    - Ambulance service
    - City drinking water supply and distribution system
    - Fire department
    - Parks and recreation
    - Police protection
    - Schools
    - Solid waste management
    - Streets and stormwater management
    - Sewer treatment and collection system

b. Cost of services
    - Current and anticipated tax revenues
    - Cost of providing services to the subdivision
    - Evaluate the need for special improvement districts

Evaluation Criteria for Effect on Natural Environment

a. Any draining, filling or alteration of any wetland.
b. Needed cuts and fills on slopes as a result of street or building construction.
c. Removal of vegetation contributing to potential soil erosion or bank or slope instability.
d. Evaluate whether the subdivision design maintains significant open space.

Evaluation Criteria for Effect on Public Health and Safety

a. Potential hazards to residents of subdivision from high voltage lines, high-pressure gas lines, highways, streets, railroads or railroad crossings, nearby industrial or mining activity.
b. Evaluate existing activities taking place in the vicinity of the subdivision.
c. Evaluate traffic conditions.
d. Presence of natural hazards such as flooding, wildfire, or difficulties such as high-water table, expansive soils or excessive slopes.

Evaluation Criteria for Effect on Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

a. Location of the subdivision with respect to critical wildlife areas such as big game wintering range, calving areas, migration routes, nesting areas, wetlands, or habitat for endangered or threatened species.
b. Expected effects of pets and human activity on wildlife.

Upon completion of its review and evaluation, the City will render a decision on the proposed subdivision with respect to the requirements of the City of Thompson Falls Subdivision Regulations, the City of Thompson Falls Comprehensive Plan, and the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act.

Public Hearing Procedure

Public hearings on proposed subdivisions will be conducted by the City Planning Board for major subdivision proposals in the City. Hearings shall be structured according to the following procedures:

1. Planning Board President opens the public hearing.
2. Planner provides a summary of the subdivision application and staff report.
3. Subdivision applicant is given an opportunity to make comments.
4. Planning Board members are given an opportunity to ask clarifying questions of the subdivision applicant and planning staff.
5. Members of the public have an opportunity to make comments.
6. Public comment will be closed, and the Planning Board discussion takes place.
7. If Planning Board members feel prepared to render a decision on the application, they will vote to either recommend project approval, conditional approval, or denial.
8. If Planning Board members feel they need more information or time to consider the project before voting, or if the subdivision applicant wishes to modify the project and bring a revised proposal back to the Planning Board, the Board may opt to extend the public hearing in accordance with the review period outlined in statute. An extension of the public hearing must take place with the concurrence of the applicant.
9. Once all public comments have been received within the allowable timeframe, and once the Planning Board has taken its vote, the Planning Board President closes the public hearing.

APPENDIX B: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Introduction

1. City of Thompson Falls
2. Sanders County Community Development Corporation
3. National Weather Service
4. Sanders County
5. United State Census Bureau

Population Characteristics

1. Sanders County Community Development Corporation
2. Headwaters Economics, Economic Profiling System, 2014
3. United States Census Bureau

Economy

1. Sanders County Community Development Corporation
2. United States Census Bureau
3. Headwaters Economics, Economic Profiling System, 2023
4. Montana Department of Commerce, Housing Division
5. Montana Department of Labor and Industry

Local Services & Public Facilities

1. City of Thompson Falls
2. Sanders County Community Development Corporation
3. Sanders County
4. Thompson Falls Capital Improvements Plan
5. Thompson Falls School District

Housing

1. American Community Survey, Census Bureau
2. Montana Department of Revenue
3. Sanders County Community Development Corporation

Land Use

1. City of Thompson Falls
2. Sanders County Community Development Corporation
3. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
4. United States Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
5. United States Forest Service

APPENDIX C: DEFINTIONS

Affordable Housing – housing that costs no more than 30% of a household's income, including utilities.

Aging in place - The ability for residents, especially seniors, to remain living safely and comfortably in their homes and communities as they age.

Agriculture – The practice of cultivating soil, growing crops, and raising livestock for food, fiber, and other products.

Agricultural Water User Facilities – Infrastructure used to divert, convey, and manage water for agricultural purposes, such as irrigation ditches, headgates, and canals.

Airport – A facility for the takeoff, landing, and servicing of aircraft, providing transportation and aviation services.

Ambulance Service – Emergency medical transportation and care provided to people experiencing medical crises.

American Community Survey (ACS) – An ongoing U.S. Census Bureau survey that provides annual demographic, economic, housing, and social data for communities.

Annexation – The process by which a municipality expands its boundaries to include adjacent unincorporated land.

Antimony Mine – A mining operation that extracts antimony, a metal used in batteries, flame retardants, and industrial alloys.

Assisted Living – Housing that provides personal care services, support, and limited medical assistance for older adults or individuals needing help with daily activities.

Big Sky Rail Authority – A Montana regional authority focused on restoring and managing passenger rail service.

Branding – Developing a distinct identity, message, or image to represent a community, organization, or program.

Broadband communications – High-speed internet service that supports modern data, video, and communication needs.

Brownfields – Properties where redevelopment is complicated by the presence or potential presence of hazardous substances or contamination.

Business Incubation – Support programs that help new or early-stage businesses grow by providing space, mentorship, and technical assistance.

Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) – A multi-year planning document that identifies, prioritizes, and budgets for major infrastructure and facility investments.

City Council – A municipality's elected governing body responsible for policymaking, budgeting, and local ordinances.

Climate Resilience – A community's ability to anticipate, withstand, adapt to, and recover from climate-related impacts.

Community Engagement – Efforts to involve residents, stakeholders, and organizations in planning, decision-making, and community initiatives.

Comprehensive Plan – A long-range planning document guiding land use, growth, infrastructure, and policy decisions for a community.

Cubic feet per second (CFS) – A standard measurement of water flow equal to one cubic foot of water passing a point every second.

Decay Ordinance – A local law addressing neglected, unsafe, or blighted properties to improve public health and community appearance.

Downtown Master Plan – A focused planning document guiding redevelopment, land use, mobility, and investment in a community's downtown area.

Drinking Water System – Infrastructure that treats, stores, and distributes potable water to residents and businesses.

Emergency Services – Public safety services including police, fire, EMS, and other responders who address emergencies and protect life and property.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) – The U.S. agency responsible for regulating civil aviation, airports, safety, and airspace.

Fire Protection – Services that prevent, control, and respond to fires, typically provided by fire departments.

Floodplain – Low-lying land adjacent to a river or stream that is subject to flooding during high-water events.

Flood Insurance Rate Map – FEMA maps that identify flood risk zones and determine flood insurance requirements and rates.

General Obligation Bond – A municipal bond backed by the full taxing authority of a government to finance public projects.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) – Computer-based tools for mapping, analyzing, and visualizing spatial and geographic data.

Goals – High-level, long-range statements of desired outcomes within a planning process.

Green Infrastructure – Natural or engineered systems (rain gardens, permeable pavement, bioswales) that manage stormwater and support environmental health.

Growth Policy – Montana's long-range planning document (similar to a comprehensive plan) guiding land use, services, and community development.

Housing Assessment – A study evaluating housing conditions, needs, supply, affordability, and market trends within a community.

Implementation – The process of carrying out actions, policies, or projects identified in a plan.

Infrastructure – The foundational systems supporting a community, including water, sewer, roads, power, communications, and public facilities.

Insurance Services Office (ISO) – An organization that rates fire protection effectiveness in communities, influencing insurance premiums.

Labor/non-labor income – Labor income includes wages and salaries; non-labor income includes pensions, investments, and transfer payments.

Land Trust – A nonprofit organization that conserves land through acquisitions, easements, or stewardship.

Land Use – How land is utilized or designated, such as residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, or open space.

Library – A public facility offering books, media, educational programs, and community services.

Local Services – Essential municipal services such as water, sewer, streets, emergency services, and administration.

Main Street Program – A community revitalization approach focused on strengthening historic downtowns through design, promotion, and economic development.

Marketing Strategy – A plan for promoting a community, program, or initiative to target audiences.

Mill Levy – The property tax rate applied to assessed value, expressed in mills (one-tenth of a cent).

Mitigation – Actions aimed at reducing or preventing negative impacts, such as environmental damage, hazards, or economic decline.

Natural Environment – The ecological systems, landscapes, and natural resources within a community or region.

Objectives – Specific, measurable steps toward achieving broader goals.

Open Space – Undeveloped or preserved land used for recreation, conservation, or scenic purposes.

Parks and Recreation – Public spaces and programs supporting outdoor activity, sports, and community well-being.

Per capita income – The average income per person in a community or region.

Planning Board – A citizen board responsible for reviewing development proposals and making recommendations on land-use planning.

Police Protection – Law enforcement services that maintain public safety, enforce laws, and prevent crime.

Pollinator Friendly Landscaping – Landscaping that supports bees, butterflies, and other pollinators through native plants and habitat features.

Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) – A technical report evaluating engineering solutions, costs, and feasibility for infrastructure projects.

Public Health and Safety – Protecting the well-being of the community through health services, sanitation, emergency services, and regulation.

Public Hearing – A formal meeting where citizens can provide input before officials make decisions.

Recreation Economy – Economic activity generated by outdoor recreation, tourism, and related services.

Redevelopment – Reinvesting in or revitalizing underused, blighted, or previously developed areas.

Resort Tax – A local tax (used in Montana resort communities) on goods and services to fund public services and infrastructure.

Review – The examination or evaluation of plans, proposals, or progress.

Revision – Updates or changes made to an existing document, plan, or regulation.

Rock Creek Mine – A proposed or existing mining project involving extraction of minerals (often copper or silver) in the Rock Creek area.

Senior Housing – Housing designed or designated for older adults, often with accessibility features or support services.

Seasonal Homes – Residences used part-time, typically for vacation or seasonal occupancy.

Short-term Rentals (STRs) – Housing units rented for short stays (e.g., Airbnb, VRBO), typically under 30 days.

Solid Waste – Municipal garbage, refuse, and discarded materials collected and disposed of by public or private services.

Special District – A local government entity created to provide a specific service, such as fire, irrigation, or parks.

Stormwater – Runoff from rain or snowmelt that flows across land and into drainage systems.

Streets – Public roadways that support transportation and access throughout a community.

Subdivision – The division of land into lots for development, sale, or building.

Subdivision Regulations – Local rules governing how land can be subdivided, including design, infrastructure, and review requirements.

Subdivision Review – The process for evaluating proposed subdivisions for compliance with regulations and community goals.

Tax Revenues – Funds generated from taxes to support government operations and services.

Technology Initiative – Programs or investments that expand or improve technological capabilities, such as broadband or digital services.

Timber Industry – The sector involved in harvesting, processing, and selling wood and forest products.

Tourism – Economic activity related to visitors traveling for leisure, recreation, or events.

Traffic Conditions – The state of vehicle flow and congestion on roadways.

Tree Inventory – A catalog of trees in a community, recording species, health, size, and location.

Visitor Center – A facility providing information, services, and resources to travelers and tourists.

Wastewater Treatment – The process of cleaning sewage and used water so it can be safely discharged or reused.

Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) – Areas where development meets or intermingles with forests or wildlands, creating wildfire risk.

Wildlife – Animals that live naturally in the wild within a region.

Wildlife Habitat – The natural environment that supports wildlife species with food, water, shelter, and space.

Workforce Housing – Housing affordable to workers earning moderate incomes, often essential for local employers.

Zoning – Local regulations governing land use, building types, density, and development patterns.