

**BIGFORK AREA
LAND USE PLAN**

**AN ADDENDUM TO THE
FLATHEAD COUNTY MASTER PLAN**

**ADOPTED BY THE
FLATHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**RESOLUTION NO. 933A
AUGUST 16, 1993**

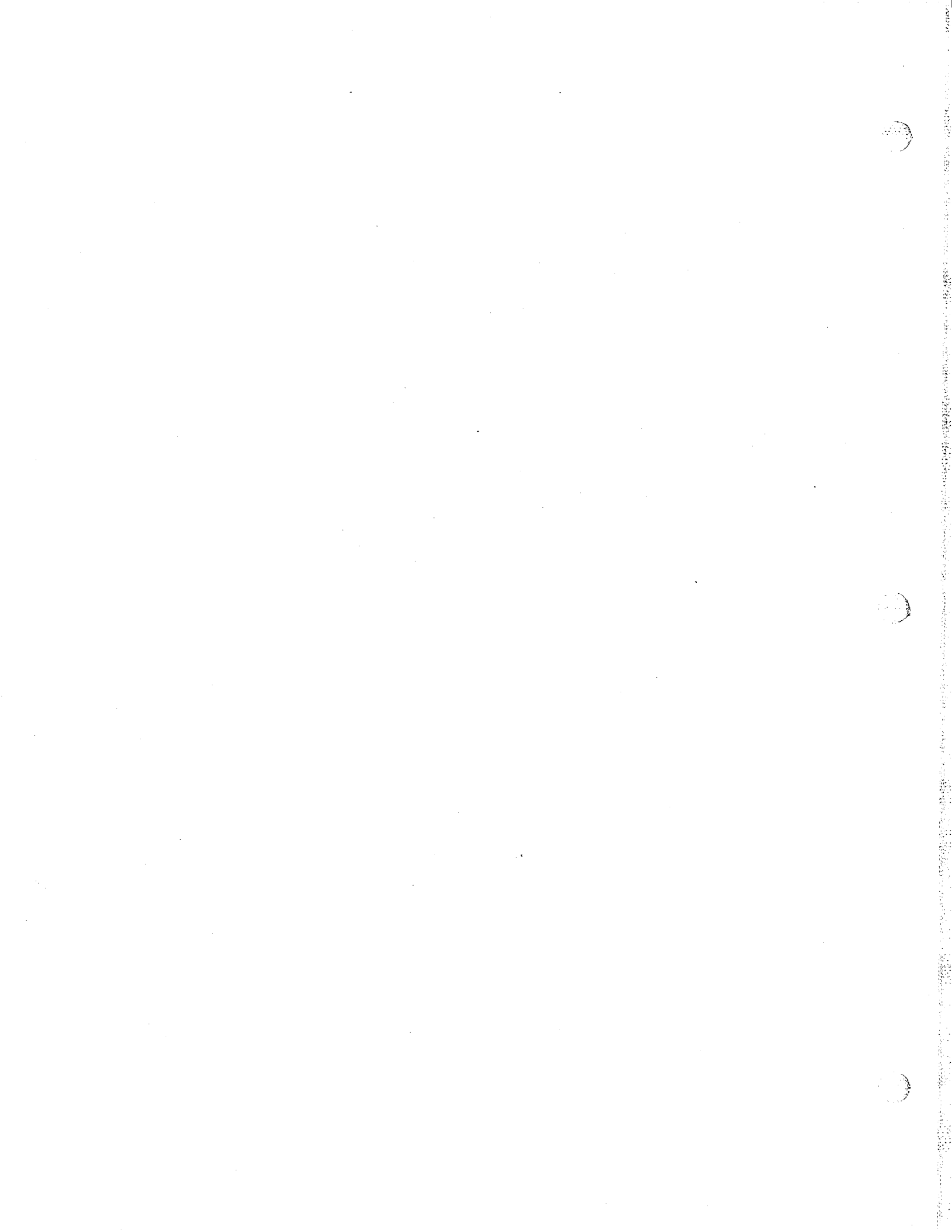


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TO: Flathead County Commissioners,
Flathead County Planning Board,
Flathead Regional Development Office,

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From: The Steering Committee for Bigfork Planning Area

Date: Plan submitted for review March 11, 1992.

The Steering Committee, representing the land area within High School District 38 and Grade School District 4, request that you review the enclosed proposal and accept the plan in its entirety. The stated goals and policies reflect responses to the survey with a 60% or greater concurrence by the community.

The Land Use Plan for the Bigfork Planning Area as described herein is proposed to become a particular part of the Flathead County Master Plan. Since we do not yet have access to the new Zoning Regulations and revised zoning categories currently being developed by the Flathead Regional Development Office, we wish to reserve the right to actively participate in conforming the Bigfork Area Plan to the revised Zoning Ordinances.

This plan does not stifle growth. In fact, some would say it permits too much growth. It does accommodate compatible growth. It will deter incompatible development.

The Committee believes this document makes the most sensible use of the land in the Bigfork area, given the constraints of present use and existing parcels. The committee has tried to be faithful to the expressed public interests in preserving open spaces and limiting commercial sprawl.

The Committee recommends a specific plan be prepared directed to the "Bigfork Village" area alone. The purpose of a specific plan is to "Provide For Harmonious Development" and to "Reduce Traffic Impacts."

The following are the specific plan goals:

1. It shall be a goal of the Bigfork Village Specific Plan to achieve a unique, identifiable, commercial and residential center around the Bay and inlet that provides a distinct cultural and physical unity in a manner that acknowledges and takes advantage of the Swan River, Flathead Lake and the surrounding mountain views.
2. It shall be a goal of the Bigfork Village Specific Plan to develop a community that provides uses and services to residents, visitors and employees of the Bigfork Planning District in a healthful, esthetic and safe environment.

The Committee plans to continue to work to refine this document. The Committee recognizes that the County's time limit precluded full articulation of regulations and other components of a plan that would address the Bigfork area concerns. Nevertheless, the unanimous request of the Committee is that the County adopt this Zoning Plan as quickly as possible.

STEERING COMMITTEE

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Lee Leivo -- water and sewer district

HOUSING & SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

Ted Groenke -- Chairperson
Members of the Bigfork school system and Superintendent's office

GENERAL TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Ron Knight -- Chairperson
Ann Hewitt

Elna Darrow

Bob McClain

Names listed above have participated in committee decisions and provided the research and information from which those decisions were made during 1991-1992. The names listed do not include those who provided input at numerous public meetings.

INTRODUCTION

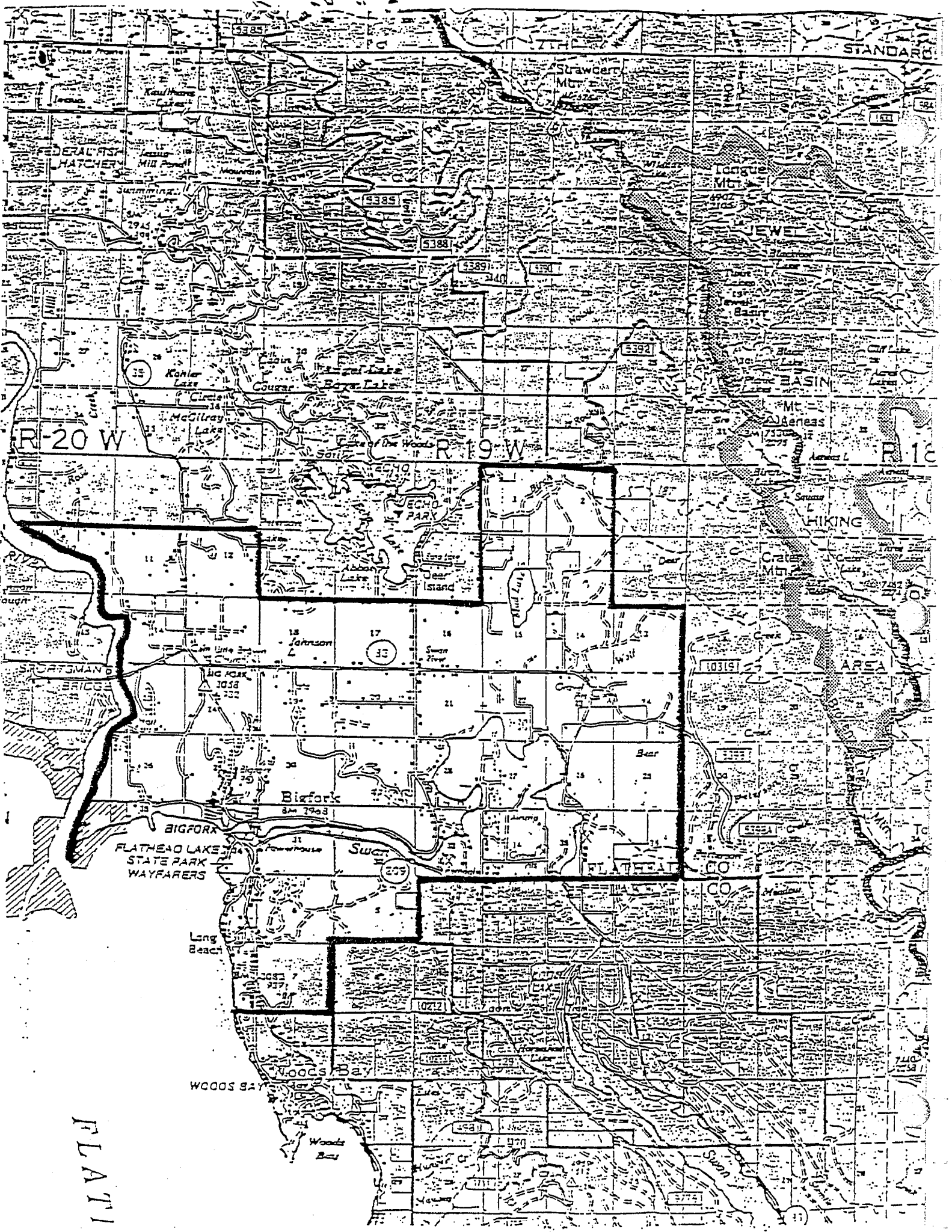
ESTABLISHMENT OF BIGFORK PLANNING DISTRICT

The flourishing growth seen in the Flathead Valley and Bigfork area within the last few years prompted a group of concerned citizens in 1991 to form an ad hoc committee to investigate the attitude of the community towards developing a Land Use Plan and zoning districts to cope with the anticipated future growth.

Members of both the Bigfork Chamber of Commerce and the Bigfork Development Company spearheaded the initial research required of the residents within the planning area to substantiate present land use and the desires of the community. In February of 1991 two organizational meetings were held in an effort to survey the community and determine the need or desire for zoning. Steve Herbaly, director of FRDO, attended those meetings and stated the need for Bigfork to expedite a plan. The unanimous response from these initial meetings, attended by over 35 people, was that we need to pursue a plan and start now. It was decided that the plan must have extensive local input and representation if it was to be acceptable. It was also decided that the area should include School District 38 and 4. It was agreed that if small areas within the proposed districts did not wish to participate in the Bigfork Plan, their withdrawal would be accepted. Subsequently, Echo Lake homeowners established a separate planning area in Echo Lake vicinity; the area north of Riverside Road withdrew to participate with the Creston Planning area; and the Swan Hill neighborhood established their own planning area. All other lands remain a part of the Bigfork Planning District. Land in Lake County that bordered the Bigfork area was not included. An effort is underway to coordinate the Bigfork's Area Plan with a Lake County plan.

As a result of the initial meetings, a steering committee was formed to pursue the task at hand. Volunteers were solicited from three categories: 1. Business: agriculture, retail, recreation, etc. 2. Community associations: Bigfork Chamber, Masons, Development Company, Fire Dept. etc. 3. Neighborhoods: East Shore, Ferndale, Lake Hills, Eagle Bend, etc. The committee has completed two surveys of the entire Bigfork Area. Each survey was mailed to 2600 property owners by the Flathead Regional Development Office. 1400 of the property owners lived in the immediate area, 600 elsewhere in Montana, and 600 live outside Montana, including foreign countries. The rate of return on the second long detail survey was 25%.

Survey results were strongly in favor of zoning. The Committee has, therefore pursued a 14 step plan to establish zoning for the Bigfork Area by March of 1992. Goals and Policies were developed from community input substantiated by the results of the surveys. Survey results are enclosed.



R-20 W

R-19 W

R-18 W

FLATHEAD LAKE STATE PARK WAYFARERS

Long Beach

WOODS BAY

FLATHEAD

Stawden Mt

Longus Mt

Lowell

Basin

Mt. Aeneas

HIKING AREA

HIKING AREA

FLATHEAD CO

FLATHEAD CO

FLATHEAD CO

FLATHEAD CO

5385

5388

5389

5391

5392

5390

5322

10319

5357

5358

5303

10212

5381

5377

5374

7400

5371

PROGRESSION SCHEDULE FOR THE PLANNING PROCESS

1. Information meetings, form steering committee. Feb-March '91
2. Solicit local and land owner input with a questionnaire. May-June '91
3. Advertise information to the public, request response. March '91
Held first public meeting to discuss zoning May '91
4. Compile information, select equal area representation. March-Sept '91
5. Hold series of community meetings, sub committee meetings to address specific needs. Sept-Dec '91
6. Prepare a draft of committee reports. Sept-Dec '91
7. Compile maps, graphics and statistical data. Sept 91-Feb '92
8. Mail detailed survey. Dec-Jan '92
8. Prepare a draft of goals and policies. Survey results. Feb '92
9. Local public meetings to discuss the plan. Jan '92
10. Present the plan to the Flathead Co. Planning Board. March 11, '92
11. Planning Board's recommendations to Commissioners. March '92
12. Public meetings advertised. March-Apr. '92
13. Commissioners' action. April '92
14. Implementation of planning regulation. May '92

THE VISION

The Bigfork Planning District encompasses an area with unique natural surroundings that has also become an exceptional cultural center. We believe that this combination of natural and cultural amenities needs to be preserved, protected and enhanced. The neighborliness and community enthusiasm that we now share must be nurtured as part of our social legacy. We believe it to be essential that growth and development within Bigfork and our planning area should be complemented by the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage that we now possess.

Goals are ideals to be attained, worthy of continued pursuit. As used in this document, a goal is an end that is aspired to; a policy is the means and direction by which the goal will be pursued.

We understand that zoning is nothing more than the legal enforcement of the golden rule.

"Successful communities —

- build their land use planning around a vision of what the community could be.
- build their land use planning around assets that make them distinctive.
- go beyond ecological and economic considerations and pay attention to esthetic concerns.
- go beyond regulations to secure quality development.
- are sustained by persistent individuals with tenacity who spearhead land use conservation and planning efforts."

GOALS & POLICIES

SECTION

General

Cultural

Environmental

Commercial

Public Services & Utilities

Residential

Parks & Recreation

Findings & Recommendations

Goals and Policies were created from community input and substantiated by the results of the surveys. Policies were developed from the survey questions that received greater than a 60% favorable response.

GOALS:

GENERAL

Strive for orderly and controlled growth with social and economic balance that will accommodate increased population through development that is compatible with the environment.

Protect the unique natural features and scenic views in the Planning Area through proper siting of development, conservation easements, proper setbacks and creative planning techniques.

Maintain the diversified agriculture land use, open space and scenic viewshed qualities of the Planning Area for the long term.

Improve and augment those community attributes that will retain the unique quality and characteristics that enable Bigfork to function as a sought after destination resort village.

POLICIES:

TOWARDS GENERAL GOALS

- A. Establish a community - wide Citizens Planning Council to advise the County Planning Board and County Commissioners. Nominees to the Council should be elected by the District.
- B. Maintain and enhance the quality of the community infrastructure - water, sewer, roads, schools, parks, recreation, community facilities, public institutions - and integrate the components for functional efficiency and environmental effectiveness.
- C. Provide for self-determination within the Planning Area of the character and mix of agriculture, residential and commercial uses consistent with these goals, appropriate to each discrete neighborhood within the Planning Area.
- D. Ensure that the land within the Planning Area is assessed for tax purposes according to "present use" rather than "highest and best use" as projected by Flathead County.

GOALS:

CULTURAL

Provide cultural programs that will enrich the lives of all residents of the community.

Promote cooperative efforts between County, State and Federal Agencies, as well as private land owners, to develop comprehensive cultural and recreational opportunities.

POLICIES:

TOWARDS CULTURAL GOALS

- A. Locate and manage educational and recreational facilities to the maximum benefit of the community at large.
- B. Encourage the maintenance of an active performing arts and arts and craft center within the "village" area. Assure appropriate separation of cultural and recreational activities to avoid intrusion of one upon another.

GOALS: ENVIRONMENTAL

Insure a social and economic balance of Health, Safety and Welfare while preserving the natural environment of the Planning Area.

Encourage use of appropriate timber management practices that respect the value of scenic viewsheds, preserve stream habitat and provide continuing wildlife cover.

Provide environmentally sensitive open spaces, scenic views and natural habitat in the Planning Area through use of easements, buffer zones, setbacks and creative planning techniques.

POLICIES: TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

1. Establish identifiable "village areas" separated by natural elements of open space and low density land use.
2. Encourage the quality of development that will minimize problems of pollution, erosion, fire, flooding and hillside damage.
3. Regulate land use and setback requirements to preserve agriculture, recreational and natural areas of interest, including wildlife habitat.
4. Identify and protect all wetlands in the Bigfork Planning Area.
5. Protect the surface and sub-surface waters from pollution and depletion through appropriate wastewater management systems and non source pollution controls.
6. Establish criteria to limit visual junk and minimize visual and noise pollution.
7. Protect agricultural use of economically sustainable productive agricultural units that meet these environmental policies.
8. Timber cutting in highly visible areas and along public roadways be required to leave a 100 foot buffer zone of older growth timber.
9. Clear cutting be regulated within the Planning Area.
10. Political campaign signs and posted signs to be limited in location and duration.
11. Garbage collection facilities be required to be contained and screened from view.
12. The County be required to screen or berm garbage collection areas from view.

GOALS :

COMMERCIAL

Preserve and improve the unique diversity of natural and man made cultural and recreational amenities that provide the Bigfork Planning Area with its unique character and form the foundation of the local economy.

Maintain the intimacy and human scale of the village atmosphere of the existing "downtown" Bigfork commercial area.

Provide suitable areas to accommodate well-designed service facilities, office space and non-polluting industries that will add revenues to the tax base and economic base, without encouraging urban sprawl.

Encourage sustainable enterprises based upon renewable resources and protect these resources for the long term future.

Encourage landscaping and architectural styling suited to the particular site and area.

POLICIES :

TOWARDS COMMERCIAL GOALS

1. Accommodate further commercial development either within the Bigfork Village Area or around existing commercial centers located at major intersections of arterial routes. Provide for limited neighborhood commercial development where appropriate to the neighborhood character.
2. Provide suitable sites for dispersed small scale resort facilities, such as Bed & Breakfast establishments, Country Inns, and dining facilities in appropriate rural areas where they will be desirable amenities.
3. Prevent strip development and commercial clutter along arterial highways. Transportation corridors should maintain the continued visual enjoyment of both the well-tended agricultural lands and the natural beauty of the area and provide unimpeded traffic flow.
4. Confine industrial use to designated areas.
5. Prevent consumptive industrial diversions of water.
6. Design and construct on-site and off street parking for all new commercial and multi-family residential development.
7. Promote a cooperative effort of property owners, business operators and community members to provide needed parking in the Village Area.
8. Establish a mixed-use zoning category to be compatible with the "village", subject to the approval of a specific plan to be prepared solely for that location.
9. Regulate the size and location of on-site and off premise billboards and signs. Highway signs be limited to 14 feet in height and 32 sq. ft. in surface area per side. On premise business signs, be limited in displays on any two sides of a land parcel, 32 sq. ft. maximum per side. Attached signs on buildings not to be allowed above the eave line or on the roof.

COMMERCIAL POLICIES CONTINUED

10. Signs in the Planning area to be constructed of natural materials and earth tone colors.
11. Portable signs may not be used for permanent display.
12. Control the design of commercial structures to limit the use of false fronts and facades in construction where side views are visible and assure the designs conform to community standards.
13. Establish height limitations of commercial buildings, generally not to exceed 3 stories with the limitation varying depending on the location and esthetic impact to the area.
14. Prior to extensive filling, excavating or altering the landscape, such as large pits, a plan of intent, completion and restoration be required before approval.
15. New commercial buildings adjacent to the highway be required to create a landscaped buffer zone between the buildings and the highway with parking in the rear where feasible.
16. Landscaping and approved sidewalks be required on new commercial buildings.
17. Businesses in the "village" be required to tightly contain garbage collection containers and provide landscaping or screening of the containers.

GOALS : PUBLIC SERVICE AND UTILITIES

Assure the existing and proper infrastructure facilities to service growth and local facilities efficiently.

Provide design and landscape standards to assure that public buildings will conform to the standards established for the private sector

POLICIES : TOWARDS PUBLIC SERVICES AND UTILITIES

1. Require all future utility lines (electrical, telephone, cable t.v.) with the exception of primary power lines to be underground.
2. Review all new subdivision and building applications to insure that public services and utility needs are adequately met without imposing a cost to the community.
3. Establish roadscape and cityscape standards to assure conformance with environmental goals and policies.
4. State, County and Public Utility land and facilities should be required to conform to the same standards as private sector land and facilities.

GOALS: RESIDENTIAL

Accommodate increased growth through development that harmonizes with and enhances the natural environment, protects and maintains wildlife habitat and directs patterns of development to those areas already urbanized.

Encourage very low density in visible open space areas.

POLICIES: TOWARDS RESIDENTIAL GOALS

1. Residential development should be in sustainable harmony with the native wildlife.
2. Prevent construction in flood plains, wetlands and natural drainage areas.
3. Require development to conform to terrain and minimize grading on steep slopes to prevent permanent scarring and erosion.
4. Insure that all new development will carry its own burden of costs in impact assessment for schools, roads and infrastructure requirements before such development is approved.
5. Residential areas of less than one acre should be restricted against parking large trucks or heavy equipment on a regular basis.
6. Mobile homes be restricted in some areas, particularly where permanent homes or commercial use are predominant.
7. Larger future subdivisions with lot size of less than one acre be required to provide sewage treatment facilities.
8. Subdivisions be required to provide fire exit routes.

GOALS: PARKS AND RECREATION

Promote public awareness of existing recreational facilities and opportunities; distinguishing among their range of uses from active to passive, motorized to manual and groups to individual.

Provide a full spectrum of recreational opportunities and facilities in concert and consistent with environmental goals and policies while assuring the protection of private property rights.

POLICIES: TOWARDS PARKS AND RECREATIONAL GOALS

1. Encourage the U.S. Forest Service, Montana Dept. of State Lands, and Montana Dept. Fish Wildlife and Parks to designate special use areas for appropriate recreational activities.

PARKS AND RECREATION POLICIES CONTINUED

2. Provide a system of greenbelts and paths within commercial zones to encourage pedestrian and bicycle use.
3. Develop recreational trail corridors for a variety of activities. Depending on the venue, provide handicapped accessibility where appropriate.
4. Inventory available recreational venues and outlets to determine the areas of need.
5. Establish a Bigfork Citizens Advisory Council for Parks and Recreation to assess community needs and recommend appropriate action.

End of Goals and Policies

FINDINGS

BASED ON A JANUARY 1992 SURVEY, OVER 60% OF THE
BIGFORK AREA POPULATION AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING:

- A. Camping and hiking are considered a high recreational priority.
- B. Boating is considered a high recreational priority.
- C. Biking and jogging are considered a high recreational priority.
- D. Fishing is considered a high recreational priority.
- E. The sports enjoyed by current residents of the Planning Area consider the facilities to be adequate.
- F. 75% of the population feel the Bigfork Bay Dock and public access is very important.
- G. The population feels the present roads are adequately sized for the future.
- H. The population feels strongly in favor that the future growth should be controlled by zoning regulation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the January 1992 long survey, over 60% of those surveyed agreed with the following.

- A. The Commissioners should appoint a 9 member Advisory Board from the numerous committees who worked on the Bigfork Plan. The appointed board would function until year end 1994. In November 1994 nominees to the board would be elected from the District and the Commissioners would appoint from the nominees. Details of the election will be made available.
- B. A mandatory time limit to approve or disapprove a variance application requesting a zone change be established, and a time schedule for each stage of the approval process be adopted.
- C. The input from government agencies should not be weighted heavier than the input from the residents of the neighborhood when applying for a variance.
- D. Echo Lake School corner, Hwy. #82 & 83 intersection at Somers cut off, and Hwy. #83 & 35 at the Little Brown Church should be designated neighborhood business areas, with commercial expansion limited in size of area.
- E. Highway #35 when rebuilt, should be required to do minimal landscaping and replanting.
- F. The "village" should establish a landscape plan.
- G. The "village" should have a street lighting plan.
- H. Land should be designated within the Planning Area for future fire stations.
- I. The State Highway Dept. and Utility Companies should be required to address aesthetic impact and site clean up when clearing rights of-way within the Planning Area.
- J. A bikeway system should be started and included in future highway plans within the Planning Area. (i.e. constructing wide road shoulders and designated markings.)
- K. Heavy commercial truck traffic should be limited on Hwy. #35.
- L. Heavy commercial trucks should be restricted from using retarder brakes (Jake Brakes) on all highways within the Planning Area. The State Highway Dept. be required to sign the Planning Area for no Jake Brakes.
- M. All recreational, industrial and construction equipment be required to meet legal vehicle and watercraft noise level requirements when recreating or working in the Area.