CITY OF LAUREL
GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN
PAINTING A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

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Introduction

This Growth Management Plan is designed to be a livable document that will be a general guide for the City of Laurel's development for the next 20 years. The plan's primary purpose is to serve the people of Laurel by providing general guidelines for a **safe, livable and economically viable community with which they are proud to identify**. Goals, strategies and objectives found in this plan were formulated based on anticipated change and growth in the coming years.

City of Laurel Background

The project area for this plan has been identified as the City of Laurel and its zoning jurisdiction. The City of Laurel, located in the Yellowstone Valley, is surrounded by natural beauty and productive agricultural lands. A major transportation network adds to the viability of this location. Interstate 90 runs through the southern portion of the City and provides local businesses with direct access to broader markets. Additionally, Laurel is served by Route 212 to the south and provides opportunity for good access to Wyoming markets.

Laurel's neighboring localities include the City of Billings, 8 miles to the east, and Yellowstone County. Laurel is known for its industrial roots and is home to the largest rail yard between Minneapolis/St. Paul and Seattle, Washington. CHS refinery is also located in Laurel.

Purpose of the Growth Management Plan

The Growth Management Plan is a broad statement of community goals and policies that should generally guide future physical development of the City. The plan consists of several elements including demographics, housing, infrastructure and more. The value in the planning process is that the community is able to answer the following four key questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where are we going?
3. Where do we want to be?
4. How will we get there?

MCA 76-1 states that Growth Management Plans are required for every locality.

Plan Structure

The Growth Management Plan is organized into several chapters which touch on all facets of local government and the community. Each chapter includes an assessment of the current environment. Additionally, a narration of any anticipated change or growth is included. Each chapter ends with a section of goals and objectives. It is the goal of this plan to incorporate and encourage measurable, yet realistic goals. Furthermore, the goals and objectives are provided in table format and are to be reviewed and reported on each year.

The elements of the plan contain accompanying maps, charts, descriptive information and strategies for action. Together, this offers an overview of the present and future needs of the City, but it also does the following:

- It provides a vehicle for local government officials and residents to express their goals for the future of their community.

- It is a means to anticipate and constructively address the inevitable changes occurring within a community.
- It improves the likelihood that decisions affecting a community's development will be based on the desires and needs of its residents.
- It promotes consistency in decision-making by facilitating reasonable and well-informed decisions and removing the potential for discrimination in the decision process against individual landowners.
- It provides a guide with which the City Council, Planning Commission and staff may reasonably evaluate development proposals.
- It serves as the basis for more detailed ordinances developed to implement the plan.

Plan Development

In March of 2012, an eight member advisory committee was created to update the City's plan. The City of Laurel Planning Department staffed the undertaking. The members of the committee are listed below:

Review Committee

Mr. Ken Olson	Mayor
Mr. Dan Koch	Planning Board
Mr. Dennis Eaton	Planning Board
Mr. Dick Fritzler	Planning Board
Mr. Greg Nelson	Planning Board
Ms. Judy Goldsby	Planning Board
Mr. Tim Bronk	Laurel School District
Ms. Monica Plecker	City Planning Department

The City also partnered with the Billings Association of Realtors to secure a $5,000 grant from the National Association of Realtors specifically for the creation of the maps used in the plan, as well as printing costs.

Plan Implementation

Growth management plans are intended to be long range, and they must be flexible enough to change or be revised as the City undergoes change over time. The plan does not provide specific regulations or restrictions. It does, however, provide the framework for implementing appropriate ordinances and policies. It is these that help bring the plan to reality.

Adopting a growth management plan is the first step toward achieving the City's vision. The goals and objectives, outlined at the end of the chapter, set forth a plan for implementing Laurel's vision for the next 20 years. A priority designation was identified for each strategy.

High (H) = Years 1-5

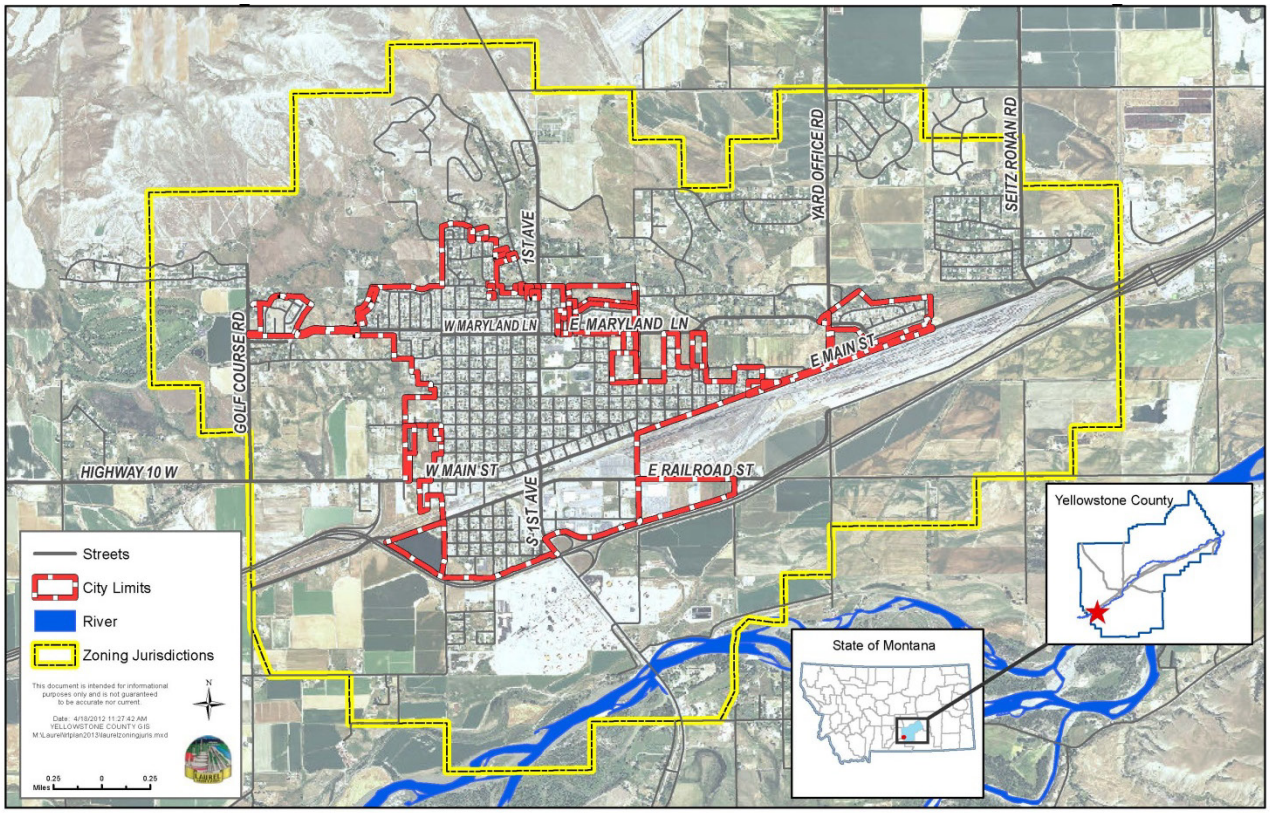
Medium (M) = Years 5-7

Low (L) = Years 7-10

Ongoing = Strategies with zero to minimal costs associated with implementation. These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the life of the plan.

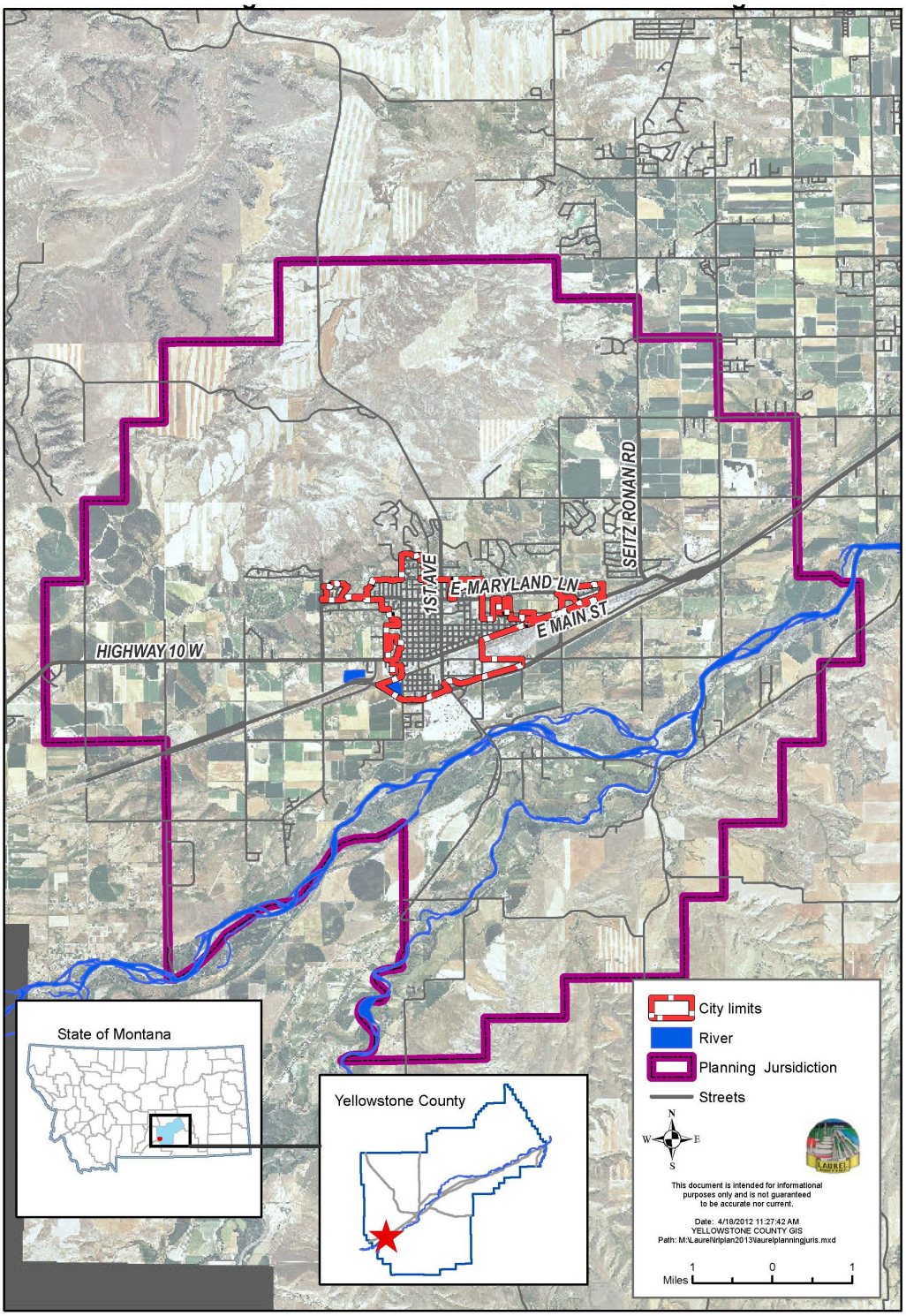
Policies specified in this plan are the foundation for decision making. However, policies are not applied in isolation but weighed in relation to other relevant policies. They are considered in the context of the goal that they are intended to achieve. Finally, the implementation strategies noted in each chapter of the plan are not exhaustive. Other strategies may be used in the future.

Map I.1|City of Laurel Municipal and Zoning Boundary



The City of Laurel Municipal and Zoning boundaries are shown in Map I.1. Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 76-2-310 gives third class cities, like Laurel, the authority to extend the application of its zoning or subdivision regulations beyond its limits in any direction up to one mile.

Map I.2|Laurel City/County Planning Area



The City/County Planning Jurisdiction boundary is shown in Map I.2. Through an interlocal agreement, the City of Laurel Planning Department handles all planning issues in the identified area.

Early Settlement (1800's)

By the time the first European explorers arrived, the Crow was the principle tribe in the Yellowstone Basin. In July 1806, on their return journey, Captain William Clark and his expedition floated down the Yellowstone River from Livingston in crude canoes. They camped at the mouth of the Clark's Fork, near the present site of Laurel, and noted it made a likely spot for a trading post. Several years later in 1877, Chief Joseph led the Nez Perce over the Yellowstone River near Laurel in their retreat to Canada, heading north through Canyon Creek approximately six miles north of Laurel. Col. Sam Sturgis and his cavalry caught up with the tribe there, and a battle ensued. The Nez Perce escaped the cavalry to continue on their flight to Canada. Laurel is presently located on both the Lewis & Clark and Nez Perce National Historic Trails.

Settlement in the immediate Laurel area began in 1879. The railroad had reached Billings by 1882 and reached Laurel by fall. The town of Laurel, first named Carlton, was established in 1882 along the newly-laid tracks, and was originally located, by different accounts, from one-half to two-and-a-half miles west of the current city limits. Between 1883 and 1889, the name of the town was changed from Carlton to Laurel.

A western legend, "Calamity Jane" Cannary, was associated with Laurel in the early years. Calamity Jane came to Laurel around 1882. She had a dugout near the Canyon Creek Battleground.

20th Century Industry

Laurel boomed in the early years. Only ten years after the railroad made its appearance, the population was 368. By 1910, it had doubled and by 1920, the city's population reached 2,338. The rail yards were a permanent and dependable employer and there was stable demand for agricultural products. To date, three major industries have played a significant role in the growth and development of the City. These industries include agriculture, rail and oil.

Agriculture

The rural areas surrounding the City of Laurel were settled prior to the main years of the City's development. Alfalfa, grain and sugar beets were popular crops for local farmers and ranchers. Laurel was not only a shipping center for the agricultural resources from the surrounding area, but has also remained the seat of a rich agricultural area. In 1928, the Northern Pacific Railroad built a stockyard in the Laurel Yard, but it no longer operates.

Railroad

The railroad has been the impetus for the establishment of Laurel. In 1906, the Northern Pacific, Great Northern, and the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroads, all controlled by James J. Hill, made their junction in Laurel. In 1907, the Northern Pacific was at work building the terminal yards, which would make Laurel the leading terminal and classification station between St. Paul, Minnesota, and Seattle, Washington. At least twenty-four tracks, two-and-a-half miles long, were planned. Eventually the yards would have a fifty-five-stall roundhouse (one of the largest in the West), a

machine shop, an ice-making plant, loading docks, a huge water tank, and a disinfecting plant. The original yards cost over a million dollars, a staggering sum for the times. Currently the rail yard is operated by Montana Rail Link but owned by the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railway. Laurel remains the largest rail yard between Minneapolis and Seattle.

Oil and Gas Development

The railroad and agriculture were two primary economic forces in Laurel until the mid 1920s, when a third industry became a significant force. Throughout the early 1920s, the area surrounding Laurel was repeatedly drilled to explore for oil. In 1922, the Northwest Refining Company bought a site for a 2,000-barrel refinery. The Northwest Refining Company never built their refinery. In 1927, productive oil fields were discovered in Oregon Basin, Wyoming. With rail infrastructure in place, crude oil could be shipped easily from oil sites to Laurel, refined and exported, making Laurel the ideal location for a successful refinery. Since its inception, the refinery has been known as the Independent Refining Company, Farmers Union Central Exchange and now CHS.

Significant Events

1806	Area discovered by Lewis and Clark.
1877	Canyon Creek Battle occurs as the Nez Perce fight the greatest Indian retreat of western military history.
1879	Carlton settlement is established southwest of current day Laurel.
1883	Carlton officially becomes Laurel.
1885	First post office and rail depot are built.
1906	Laurel is officially considered a town.
1907	Fire sweeps through town.
1908	Laurel becomes incorporated and city government is established.
1909	Laurel Fire Department is established.
1910	806 citizens reside in Laurel.
1915	Laurel school district is created.
1920	Population explodes to 2,338.
1922	Northwest Refining Co. purchases land with plans to build a refinery.
1924	Oil is found in Oregon Basin, Wyoming. Laurel is considered prime location for refinery due to rail infrastructure.
1928	Northern Pacific Railway builds stockyard in the Laurel Yard.
1930	Laurel Leaf Refinery starts operation.
1937	Flood occurs. Valley and Canyon Creek suffer great losses.
1958	The last of steam locomotives were taken off the Northern Pacific.
1970	The Northern Pacific, Great Northern, and the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy merge to become Burlington Northern.
1995	Burlington Northern merges with Santa Fe.
1996	Pipeline from Canada to Laurel was completed as a raw source of crude.
2010	Downtown Historic District created.
2011	Yellowstone River floods causing levy to break and oil spill occurs.

Historic Properties

Reminders of the City of Laurel's history remain today, particularly in its street layout and a few key buildings. One individual building in Laurel is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is known as the Abraham and Carrie Erb House located at 110 4th Avenue. This structure is significant because of the turned porch supports, elaborate carved brackets, baluster frieze and decorative cresting along the roofline. Railroads brought these precut architectural elements to small towns along their tracks, allowing builders to personalize their homes.

The National Register of Historic Places is administered by the National Park Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of Interior. The National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect historic and archaeological resources.

Downtown Historic District

The Laurel Downtown Historic District is the historic business center of the City. The district is an example of the 'boom towns' that sprang up as the railroad moved west. The historic district remained the City's principal commercial center until businesses began to locate closer to the highway.

The heart of the historic district is roughly eight blocks of East and West Main Street stretching from just east of Fifth Avenue to just west of Wyoming Avenue. Main Street is a wide thoroughfare, with four lanes and parallel parking spaces on each side. Most of the resources on Main Street line the north side of the street, facing the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company tracks. In fact, most of the land on the south side of Main Street within the historic district is owned by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company and is currently being leased by Montana Rail Link. The district totals roughly twenty acres and is comprised of 59 contributing resources. There are 57 buildings, one structure and one object. The predominant building type is commercial with some multi-story mixed use buildings.

The listing of the Laurel Downtown Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places acknowledges the importance of the downtown to the history and architectural development of the City. Listing on the National Register does not protect properties from alteration; however, it serves as a good way to bring recognition and pride in a community's historic properties. National Register landmarks and districts also serve to pinpoint areas in a community where preservation and local protection may be implemented.

Map 1.1 | HISTORIC DISTRICT

Goal 1: Historic Resources

The City of Laurel will be a community that supports a healthy mix of historic preservation and new growth. Historic resources are assets that support economic development, community revitalization, education, civic pride and contribute to the character of the community.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Preserve older and historic structures, landscapes and features in order to provide a sense of identity.
- Increase awareness of neighborhood and block landmarks that create community character and provide linkages to the past.
- Increase awareness of the social and economic value of historic preservation.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Encourage and promote festivals highlighting heritage.	M	Chamber of Commerce
2	Promote historic destinations that provide entertainment and educational opportunities such as the Lewis and Clark Trail and the Nez Perce National Historic Trail.	M	Planning Department & Chamber of Commerce
3	Continue to develop and maintain productive partnerships among local organizations to promote and accomplish goals.	Ongoing	Planning Department
4	Promote participation in federal tax credit program.	Ongoing	Planning Department
5	Promote a greater inter-relatedness between preservation, community revitalization and tourism development activities.	Ongoing	Planning Department
6	Review existing zoning regulations so that preservation and revitalization of historic areas is encouraged.	Ongoing	Planning Department
7	Seek tourism recognition for historic resources.	M	City Planning, Chamber of Commerce, LURA

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing = These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

References

Adamson, Sara and Jecyn Bremen. “A Cultural Resource Survey.” (2010)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Introduction

The City of Laurel is an urban area. The City recognizes, however, that its natural environment needs to be sensibly preserved and enhanced to promote recreational opportunities, to protect property and to improve water quality. Furthermore, the City of Laurel is surrounded by rolling farmland along the Yellowstone River, which contributes to the overall quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Laurel's natural features pose special opportunities and challenges that require consideration when putting together a long-range plan.

The most basic goal of this element is to manage natural resources so that they continue to provide social, economic and environmental benefits to people over time while supporting other important natural functions. The elements of the environment form the foundation for the quality of life that residents often seek when choosing a place to live and work.

"Open space planning should take its cue from the pattern of nature itself – the water table, the floodplains, the ridges, the woods and above all, the streams."
William Whyte

Laurel's natural features are the interconnected network of land and water that contribute to the health, economic wellbeing and quality of life for the community. Natural resources require investment and maintenance just like roads, sewers and utility systems. This chapter identifies environmentally sensitive areas, balances land use and economic development practices with environmental protection and sets goals and policies for sensible management and protection of sensitive areas.

Relationship to Other Plan Elements

Economy	Natural resources and environmental quality can be key elements of an economic development program. Natural resources can support local manufacturing in addition to tourism and recreation.
Infrastructure & Utilities	Recycling and reuse programs decrease the waste stream to the landfill/transfer station.
Transportation	Transportation corridors can serve a recreational purpose. Additionally, corridors can be enhanced by preserving view sheds and buffers.
Land Use	Natural resources affect how land can be used and how the use of land affects the natural resources. Land use, transportation and utility initiatives, policies and impacts need to be integrated with environmental policies.

Environmental Characteristics

CLIMATE

The City of Laurel has a semi-arid climate as reflected in the table below.

	Avg. Max. Temp. (F)*	Avg. Min. Temp. (F)*	Avg. Total Precip. (in.)	Avg. Total SnowFall (in.)	Avg. Snow Depth (in.)
Jan	33	14.5	0.67	8.3	3
Feb	38.9	19.4	0.51	5.5	1
Mar	46.1	25.1	0.94	6.4	0
Apr	56.8	34	1.76	4.1	0
May	66.9	43.3	2.58	0.7	0
Jun	76.7	51.7	2.1	0	0
Jul	86.7	58.4	1.03	0	0
Aug	85.1	56.8	1.06	0	0
Sep	72.8	47.1	1.51	0.5	0
Oct	60.2	37.4	1.09	1.6	0
Nov	45.1	26.1	0.69	4.9	1
Dec	35.7	18	0.66	7.6	2
Annual	58.7	36	14.61	39.4	1

Source: Western Regional Climate Center
*Billings, MT

WETLAND RESOURCES

Wetlands are lands where water is the dominant factor determining soil, plant and animal development. Wetlands include riparian areas along the Yellowstone and Clarks Fork Rivers, marshes, fends, prairie potholes, marshes and spring seeps. In such areas where water is often near or at the surface for most of the year, the soil is often described as hydric.

Wetlands have traditionally been maligned and drained. Much of Laurel suffers from high groundwater. As a result, close attention must be paid to the potential impact on septic tank sewage treatment systems and stormwater runoff. Understanding such lands can only lead to a better appreciation of the functions of wetlands and their relationship in the broader scope of land use.

SURFACE WATER

Laurel is fortunate to be located along the Yellowstone River. As with groundwater, the realization of the importance of the river as a partner and tremendous asset in the advancement of community is starting to be realized. As with everything of such importance, the issues are tremendously complex and include the intricate ecosystem, historic rights of water use and the needs of industries and municipalities.

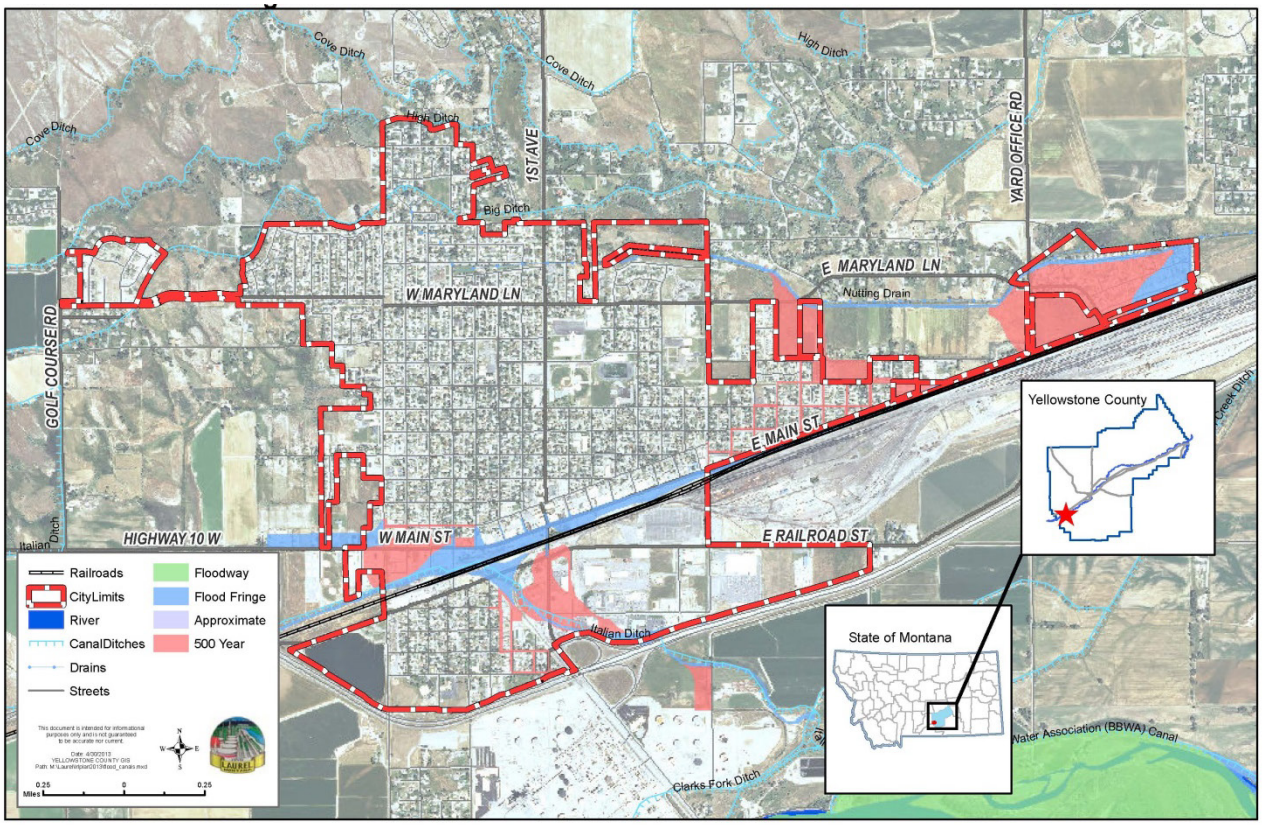
Other surface water flowing through the City is contributed by either year-round or seasonal groundwater ditches or irrigation canals. The Nutting Drain Ditch and 8th Avenue Ditch are year-round groundwater drains. Other nearby ditches include the High and Cove ditches. Flooding is known to occur occasionally.

The Yellowstone River in Laurel

FLOODPLAINS

Floodplains are natural drainage basins for the discharge of heavy precipitation. Due to the terrain, the Yellowstone River exhibits wide floodplains and wide variations in flow. Flow rates are dependent upon the season and rain

Map 2.1 | FLOODPLAIN AND CANALS



Map 2.2 shows all surface water located in the greater Laurel area. FEMA floodplains and floodways are shown. FIRM maps are currently being updated as a result of the recently completed FIS.

and snow melt. Flows are usually at their highest during the spring months.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) determines the 100-year floodplain boundaries, which encompass areas that have a one percent chance of flooding each year. The federal government expects localities to take a proactive approach to flood damage prevention.

GROUNDWATER

The groundwater in the planning area occurs in relatively thin alluvial gravel deposits. The average saturated thickness of these aquifers is 15 feet, with the thinnest saturated zones occurring along terrace scarps and the existing river channel; well yields are likely to increase with saturated thickness.

Groundwater recharge averaged 8.2 inches per year but depends greatly on land use and soil types. Irrigation accounts for nearly six inches. (Olson & Reiten)

"The primary impact from development of the area is in the reduction of groundwater recharge." Reduced recharge will result in lower groundwater levels and decreased well yields.

Groundwater, its quality and quantity, will become a bigger issue as the area around Laurel grows. Traditional concepts of rural living will change as a result.

SOILS

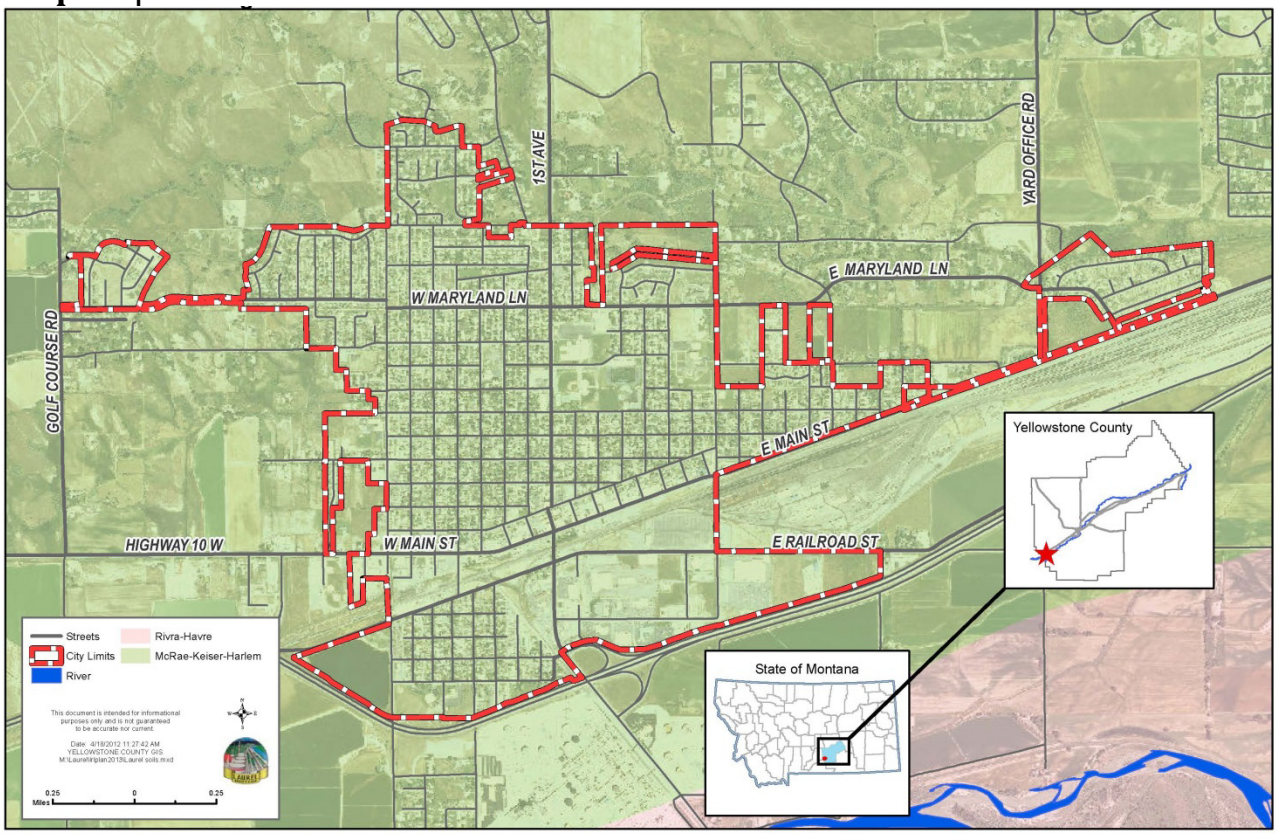
The identification and location of various soil types is an essential element for planning the land use of a particular area. Soil types influence building foundation strength, erosion, drainage, plant cover and crop yields, and the effectiveness of septic systems. Soils are classified according to particle size (from sand and gravel to silt and clay) and parent bedrock material. Map 2.1 shows soil formations for the greater Laurel area.

FARMLAND & VEGETATION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) defines prime farmland as land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops. Prime farmland is also available for these uses, i.e., it is not inside communities or under water. It has the soil quality, growing season and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management according to acceptable farming methods. NRCS further describes prime farmland as having adequate and dependable water supply (from precipitation or irrigation), favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. Further, such soils are permeable to water and air, not excessively erodible or saturated with water for long periods of time and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding.

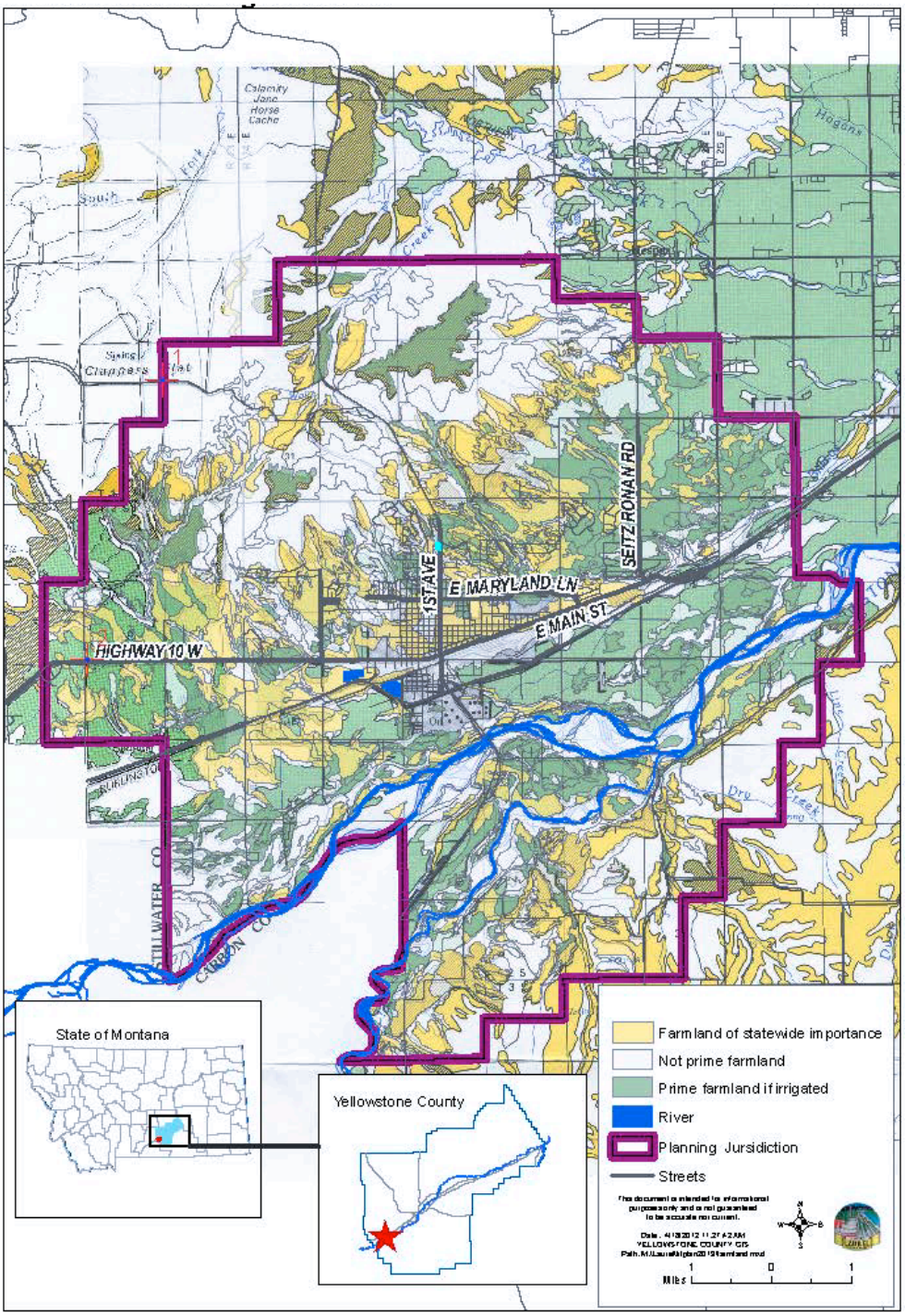
The law usually does not say that one cannot build a subdivision in an area of prime wildlife habitat or highly productive farmland; the law just requires that such issues be considered as a part of the review process.

Map 2.2| LAUREL SOILS



Map 2.1 shows the McCrae-Keiser-Harlem formation is prevalent in the greater Laurel area. Some areas of clay and high groundwater have been observed in the greater Laurel vicinity.

Map 2.3|Farmland



Map 2.3 shows the rich agricultural land located in the planning area. Prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance make a majority of the area.

There are two other farmland types defined by NRCS:

- **Farmland of local significance**: Lands used for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage and oilseed crops that have been specified as important by local agencies concerned with farmland.
- **Farmland of state significance**: Lands that include those that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods as determined by appropriate state agencies.

VIEWSHED

Laurel's south central Montana location provides for great viewsheds. Common Laurel viewsheds include the low bench lands north of the City, which provide spectacular views of the entire valley, the open space and distant tree line along the Yellowstone River, the low panorama mountains and farm and grazing lands.

Viewsheds can be lost or preserved. Since viewsheds are valued among residents, the impact of new development on viewsheds should be considered and preserved where possible. Scenic vistas can help attract visitors and preserve the character of a community.

Summary of Natural Resources

- The City of Laurel is defined by its environmental features.
- Its environmental features, particularly the Yellowstone River, create economic opportunities for the City.
- The city needs to protect and invest in its natural infrastructure.

Goal 1: Natural Resources

The City of Laurel will achieve a balanced and sustainable use of natural resources in the community to accommodate the economic and noneconomic needs of residents, industries and visitors.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Adopt regulations that protect sensitive areas including, but not limited to, steep slopes, floodplains and stream corridors.
- Educate the public on the importance of protecting environmentally sensitive areas.
- Manage a system of water resources that functions as a healthy, integrated whole and provides a long-term public benefit from enhanced environmental quality.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Review and update existing zoning and subdivision regulations as necessary to ensure the goals of environmental preservation are being achieved.	M	Planning
2	Review and update landscaping ordinances.	M-H	Planning
3	Develop programs to educate citizens about the effects of storm water runoff on water quality and related pollution prevention measures.	L	Public Works
4	Sponsor joint cleanup and rehabilitation programs, including the City, schools, community organizations and residents.	Ongoing	Planning & Public Works
5	Manage floodplains, rivers, groundwater and other water resources for multiple uses, including flood and erosion hazard reduction, fish and wildlife habitat, open space, recreation and water supply.	Ongoing	Planning & Public Works
6	Participate in regional, broad-based watershed studies to achieve effective and long-term flood protection.	L-M	Planning & Public Works
7	Enhance public access to riverfront.	H	Planning & Public Works
8	Evaluate current wastewater treatment facility and develop a strategic plan to consistently meet discharge limits and compliance with water quality standards.	M	Public Works
9	Encourage appreciation of area wetlands as another of Laurel's natural resources and valuable pieces of an interconnected bike and pedestrian trail way.	M	Planning & Public Works
10	Support river protection measures by encouraging a conservation corridor along the Yellowstone River.	M	Planning

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing =These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

Introduction

Population analysis and projection are fundamental to planning decisions. Past, current and projected population information is important for understanding the changes that are taking place and providing the ability to act on those changes. Identifying demographic trends is necessary for determining the future demand on public facilities, community services, housing, employment and land. Policy decisions are based on this information.

The source of the population data varies. Much of the data in this chapter comes from the U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey (ACS).

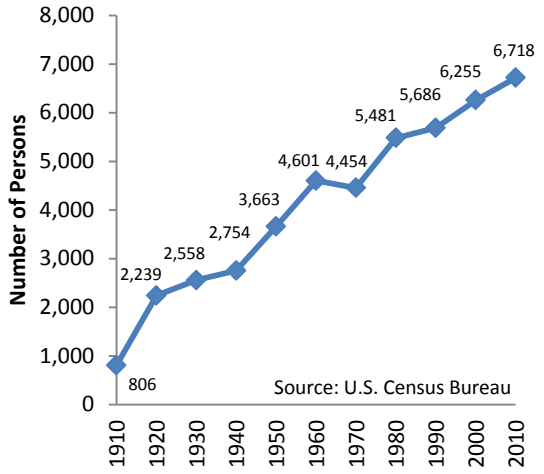
To better understand the population characteristics of Laurel, comparative data is offered for Montana and the neighboring localities of Yellowstone County and the City of Billings. Furthermore, the data for the City of Laurel is shown at two different geographic levels, including census tract and block group. The City's municipal boundary corresponds to the census tract boundaries. Census Block Groups and Tracts are defined below:

Term	Definition
Block Groups	Statistical divisions of census tracts are generally defined between 600 and 3,000 people and are used to present data.
Census Tract	Relatively small statistical subdivisions that are generally defined between1,200 and 8,200 people and are used to present data

Population Trends

The City of Laurel has continued to grow since 1910. Since the 1950's, the biggest jump in population occurred between 1970 and 1980. During this decade, the population increased by over 1,000 people, a 24 percent increase.

Figure 3.1
Population 1910-2010

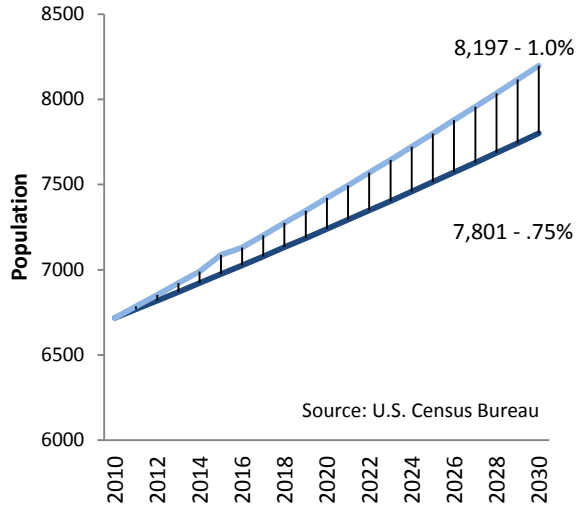


Growth has remained fairly consistent throughout the City's history. Between the 2000 and 2010 Census, the population increased by 7.4 percent or .7 percent annually. Over this same time, the population of Billings increased by 15.9 percent and the population of Yellowstone County increased by 14.4 percent. In comparison to its neighbors, the City of Laurel is growing at nearly half the rate of its neighboring communities.

Population Projections

After analyzing the population growth from 1990, 2000 and 2010, a .75 percent annual growth rate was used to create population projections. This is a conservative, yet realistic growth rate. A one percent growth rate is also shown to depict possible increases in growth due to development in eastern Montana.

Figure 3.2
Population Projection 2010-2030



Total population of the city has changed modestly over the last decade, but Laurel, Billings and Yellowstone County are growing naturally and also because of migration.

Population Density

Population density is the average number of persons per square mile of land area. The number is derived by dividing the total number of residents by the number of square miles of land area in the specified geographic area. The population density for the City of Laurel is 3,133.4 persons per square mile.

Age

It is important to look at the age structure of the City. As people progress from one age group to another, their needs change, as do their role in the community. Median age is an initial indicator of changes in a community's age groups. From 2000 to 2010, the median age of Laurel's population decreased while it increased in Yellowstone County and Billings.

Figure 3.3
Median Age

Locality	1990	2000	2010
Laurel	35.6	38.4	37
Billings	33.7	36.8	37.5
Yellowstone	33.5	36.9	38.3
Montana	33.8	37.5	39.8

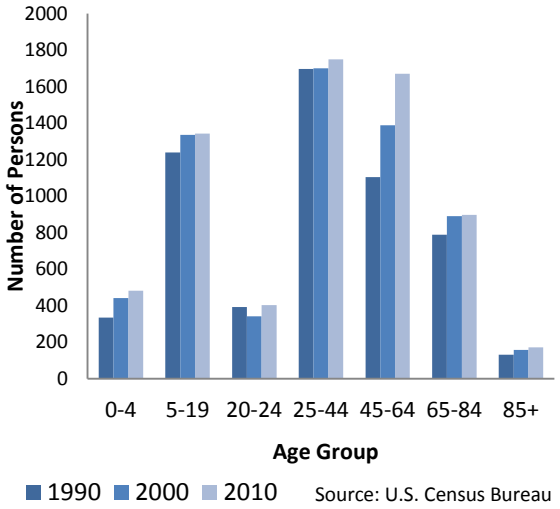
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Further analysis and Figure 1.4 show the largest age group remains those between the ages of 25 and 44. This is a particularly important age group as it relates to the workforce.

The 20-24 age group, which includes college-aged persons and younger-aged workers, has remained stable in the past 30 years.

The sharpest increase is shown in the 45-64 age group. This is mostly due to the baby boomer population. This number is expected to stabilize.

Figure 3.4
Population by Age Group 1990-2010



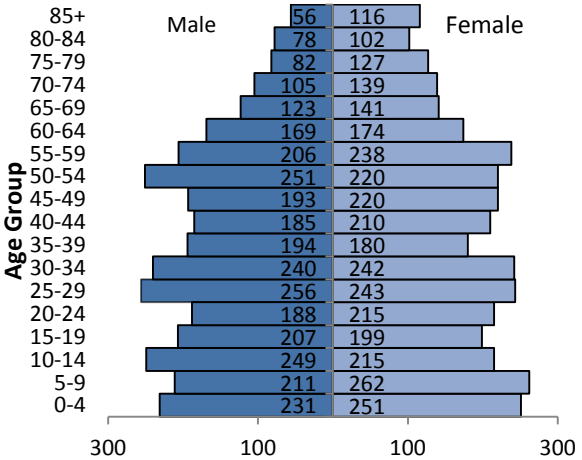
Consideration of the aging trend, sometimes referred to as the "age wave," is important when planning for community services and workforce preparedness. Although the aging trend presents challenges, it may be seen as an

opportunity. Examples include economic activities that address the needs and wants of an aging population, recreational and cultural amenities, workforce mentorship and community volunteerism.

Male/Female Distribution

The 2010 Census indicated that 52 percent of Laurel's population is female and 48 percent is male. The population pyramid also clearly shows the stability among the middle-aged groups.

Figure 3.5
2010 Population by Age and Sex



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The race and ethnicity of Laurel's population is shown in Table 1.6 by percentage of total population.

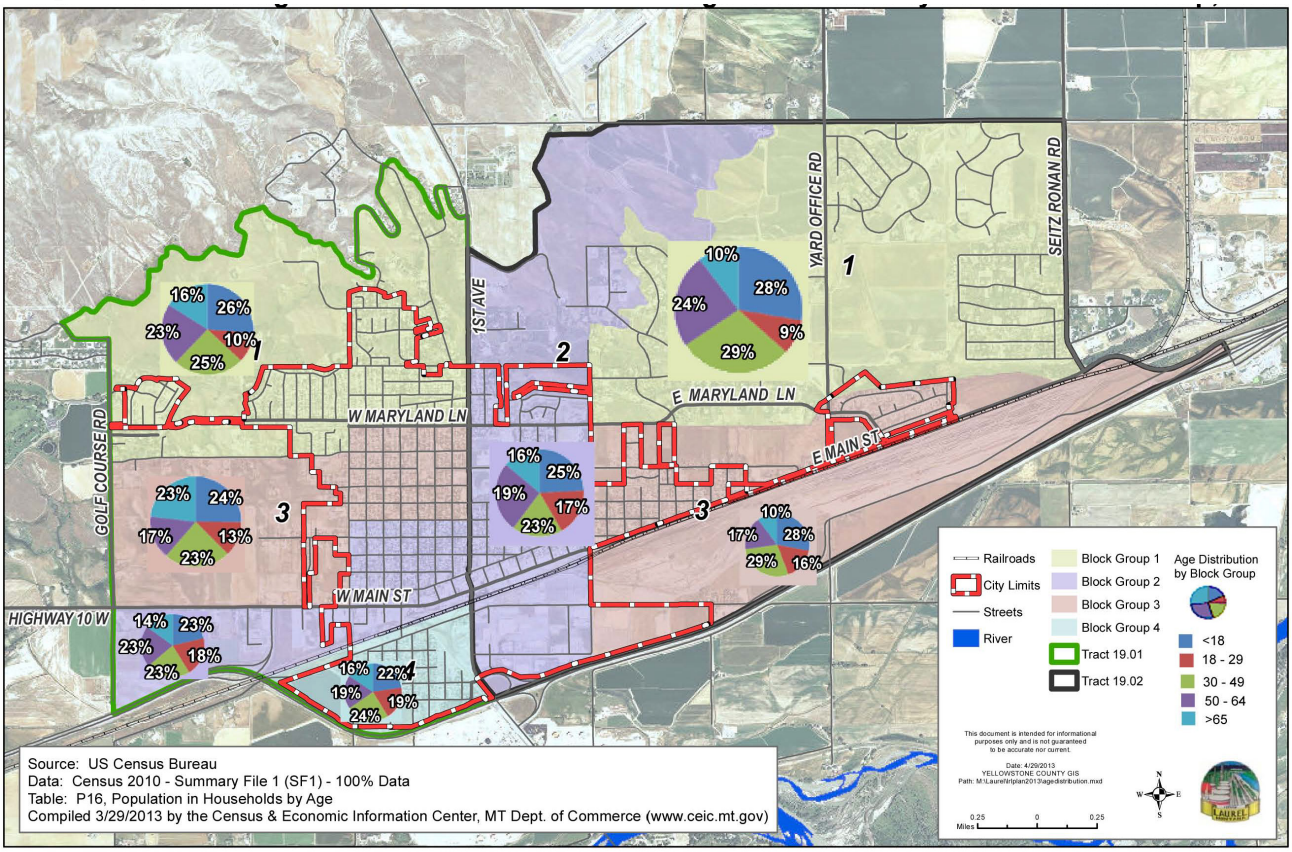
Figure 3.6
Race and Ethnicity by Percentage

	2000 Census (%)	2010 Census (%)
White	97.5	97.3
Black or African American	.2	.7
American Indian and Alaska Native	1.8	2.8
Asian	.5	.7
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	.1	.1
Other and Multi Race	1	.7
Ethnicity	-	-
Hispanic or Latino	2.4	3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau
Notes: Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding. Census data prior to 2000 was not used because it cannot be compared to later data. Census 2000 was the first in which more than one race could be selected.

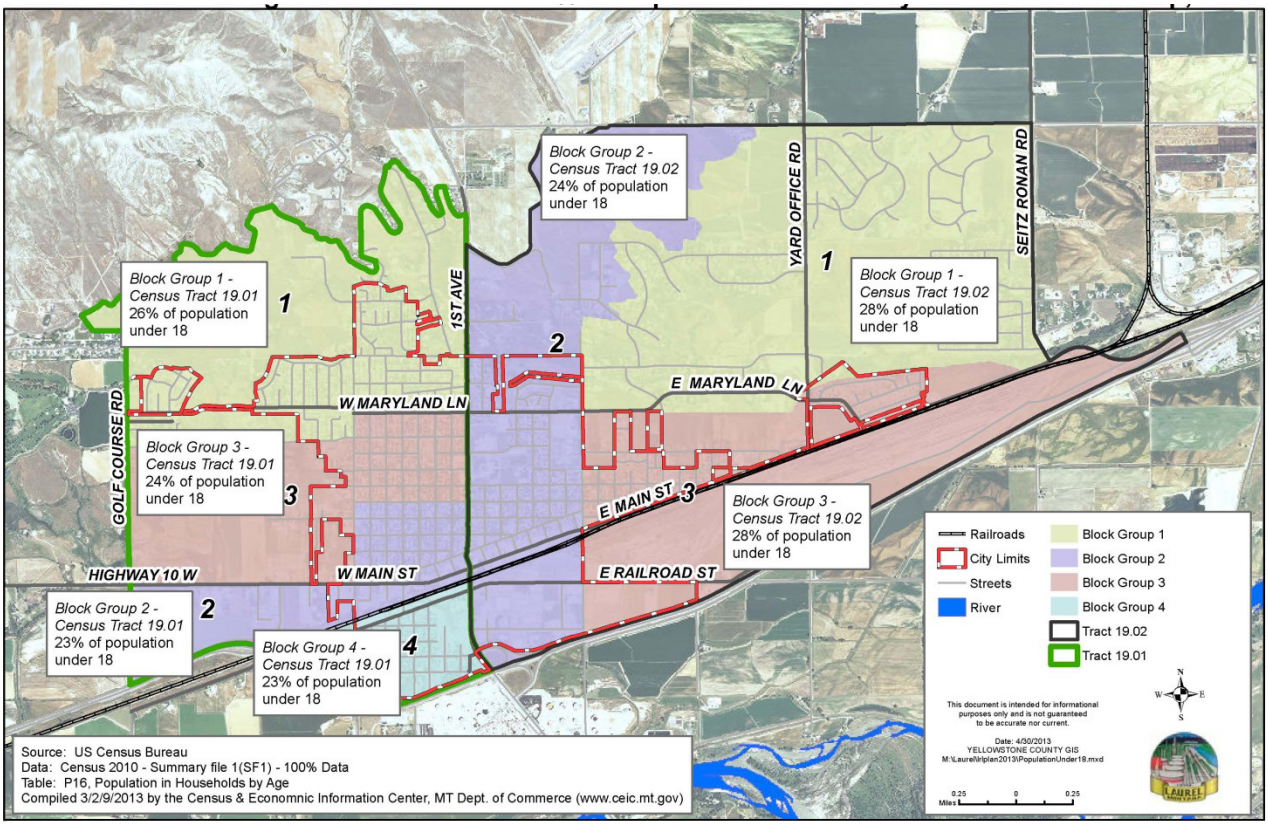
Race and Ethnicity

Map 3.1 | AGE DISTRIBUTION



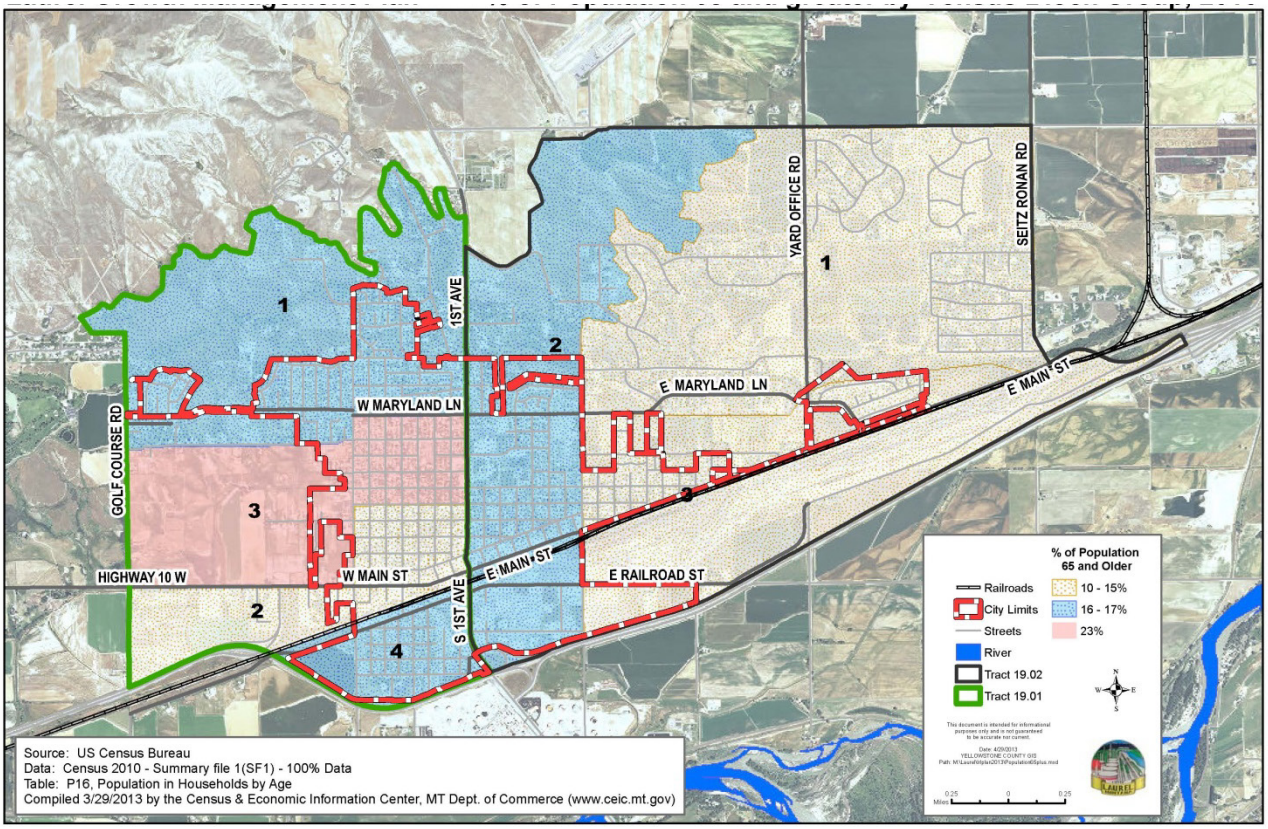
Map 3.1 shows census data broken down by tract and block group. No definitive trends are shown as all age groups seem to be represented equally among the various block groups.

Map 3.2 | POPULATION UNDER 18



Map 3.2 shows census data for populations under 18. No definitive trends are shown as nearly a quarter of all people represented in Tracts 1 and 2 are under the age of 18. It is assumed that through diverse housing options young families are well represented throughout the area. The area is defined as Tract 19.02 and 19.01, which includes the City of Laurel in its entirety and a substantial amount of the zoning jurisdiction.

Map 3.3 | POPULATION OVER 65



Map 3.3 shows census data for populations over 65. Based on the illustration, it is assumed that in-town living is more attractive for seniors. It is the west central area of the City and zoning jurisdiction that holds the highest population of 65 and older.

Summary of Trends

- Laurel's population growth has the potential to grow more rapidly than in the past due to oil development in Eastern Montana.
- Population growth is both natural and due to migration.
- The 65+ age group is expected to increase.
- The workforce age group shows stability.

HOUSING

Introduction

A housing profile is a useful tool for communities and is important to the planning process since housing market needs are ever changing. It is imperative for communities to plan for housing to help ensure that there will be housing opportunities for people of many different socioeconomic conditions. Furthermore, housing creates neighborhoods and community. The two, housing and neighborhoods, are intertwined. Good neighborhoods exist and thrive in the context of quality housing and the civic pride of residents.

This plan is intended to guide the City of Laurel in maintaining and enhancing its housing stock. Housing is primarily a private system that is influenced by factors beyond which local government plays a part. However, the City plays a role in housing and neighborhoods through education, traffic, public safety, taxation and more.

Characteristics such as location, type, age and affordability are a few characteristics examined among Laurel housing stock. This will provide the background for evaluating implementation strategies necessary to achieve the City's housing goals. Much of the housing data comes from the 2010 Census and the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Relationship to Other Plan Elements

Economy	Different types of housing attract various types of buyers and tenants; therefore, housing costs should reflect the salaries of those in the community. Also, the availability of different types of housing is important to consider, especially when trying to attract and retain a well-balanced work force.
Infrastructure & Utilities	The amount and location of new housing can cause strain and create concern for different types of infrastructure. For instance, the transportation network should be considered when planning residential growth. It is important to consider the capacity of the roadway network to and from these newly developed areas. Aside from transportation, the availability of water, wastewater and electric utilities should also be considered.
Demographics	Demographic changes trigger changes among the housing market. For instance, the needs of a community change as its population ages. This is the same for housing; as the housing stock ages, so do needs. Also, as the age of a structure increases, so does the need for maintenance.
Land Use	Zoning and housing are quite possibly the most interrelated. Housing density is an important factor in determining the future land use map.

Figure 4.1
Housing at a Glance

City of Laurel

Housing at a Glance

Occupancy	Number of Units	
	Owner Occupied	2850
	Rental	160
	Total	3010
Housing Types	Single Family Dwelling	% of Total Units 67.2%
	2 Units	6.0%
	3-4 Units	3.1%
	5-9 Units	6.1%
	10 or more	17.7%
Miscellaneous	Housing Cost* Median Value	$141,300
	Household Size*	2.46
	Household Income	$40,906
	Mortgage* Median Value	$1,023
	Gross Rent Median Value	$593
	Rate of New Construction	

*Owner Occupied Units
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Housing Characteristics

Figure 4.2
Housing Stock

Year	# of Total Units	% of Total Units
2000-2010	196	6.5
1990-1999	391	13.0
1980-1989	374	12.4
1970-1979	783	26.0
1960-1969	183	6.1
1950-1959	397	13.2
1940-1949	251	8.3
Before 1939	435	15.5

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS

Examination of the Laurel housing stock shows 43.1 percent of its homes were built before 1970. With lack of continued maintenance of older structures, this can be seen as an influential factor in the future. In large part, demographic changes trigger changes among the housing market. For instance, the needs of a community change as its population ages. This is the same for housing; as the housing stock ages, so do needs. Also, as the age of a structure increases, so does the need for maintenance.

Older buildings face unique challenges. In general, the sales of houses built more than 30 years ago are not as high as those built more recently. Reasons for this include the lack of modern amenities and appeal that most middle-aged homebuyers are seeking. How the aging of housing is addressed contributes to either neighborhood vitality or decline.

Financial Characteristics

Figure 4.3
Regional Housing Values

Locality	Median Value
Laurel	$141,000
Billings	$169,000
Yellowstone County	$168,800

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS

The median housing value in the City of Laurel is $141,000, which is significantly lower than both Yellowstone County and the City of Billings. The lower value could be associated with the aging housing stock.

Occupancy Characteristics

Figure 4.4
Occupancy Types

	Number of Units	
Year	2010	2000
Owner Occupied	2,850	2,451
Rental	160	123
Total	3,010	2,574

All occupied housing units are classified as either owner occupied or renter occupied. The above figure shows the change between 2000 and 2010. The total number of housing units increased by 436. Of these, owner occupied units increased by 399 while rental units only increased by 37 units.

Housing Affordability

Monthly owner costs are the sum of payments for mortgages, real estate taxes, insurance on the property, utilities and fuel. The 2005-2009 American Community Survey estimated that 63.9 percent of those living in owner-occupied housing units had a mortgage. Their median monthly costs were $1,023. Those without a mortgage had median monthly owner costs of $381. The median gross rent was $593.

Besides housing values and rent, it is important to look at costs and the percentage of income that is devoted to housing costs. Housing expenditures that exceed 30 percent of household income have historically been viewed as an indicator of a housing affordability problem. If expenditures exceed 30 percent, the household is considered to be "cost burdened." In Laurel, 46.3 percent of renters and 33.8 percent of homeowners fall within this category.

Figure 4.5
Monthly Median Costs

	Number of Units	
Year	2010	2000
Owner Occupied	$1,023	$745
Rental	$593	$426

Figure 4.6
Regional Monthly Median Costs of Owner Occupied Units with a Mortgage 2010

Locality	Median Value
Laurel	$1,023
Billings	$1,242
Yellowstone County	$1,242

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS

Figure 4.7
Regional Monthly Median Costs of Rental Units 2010

Locality	Median Value
Laurel	$593
Billings	$656
Yellowstone County	$652

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS

Healthy growth encompasses multiple facets.

City of Laurel, Montana
Projected Population and Demand for Housing

	2010	2020		2030	
	Total Housing Units	Population Increase	New Units	Population Increase	New Units
.75% Population Increase	3,010	521	221	1083	460
1.0% Population Increase		703	299	1479	629

Notes: Based on 2.35 persons per household

Housing Projections

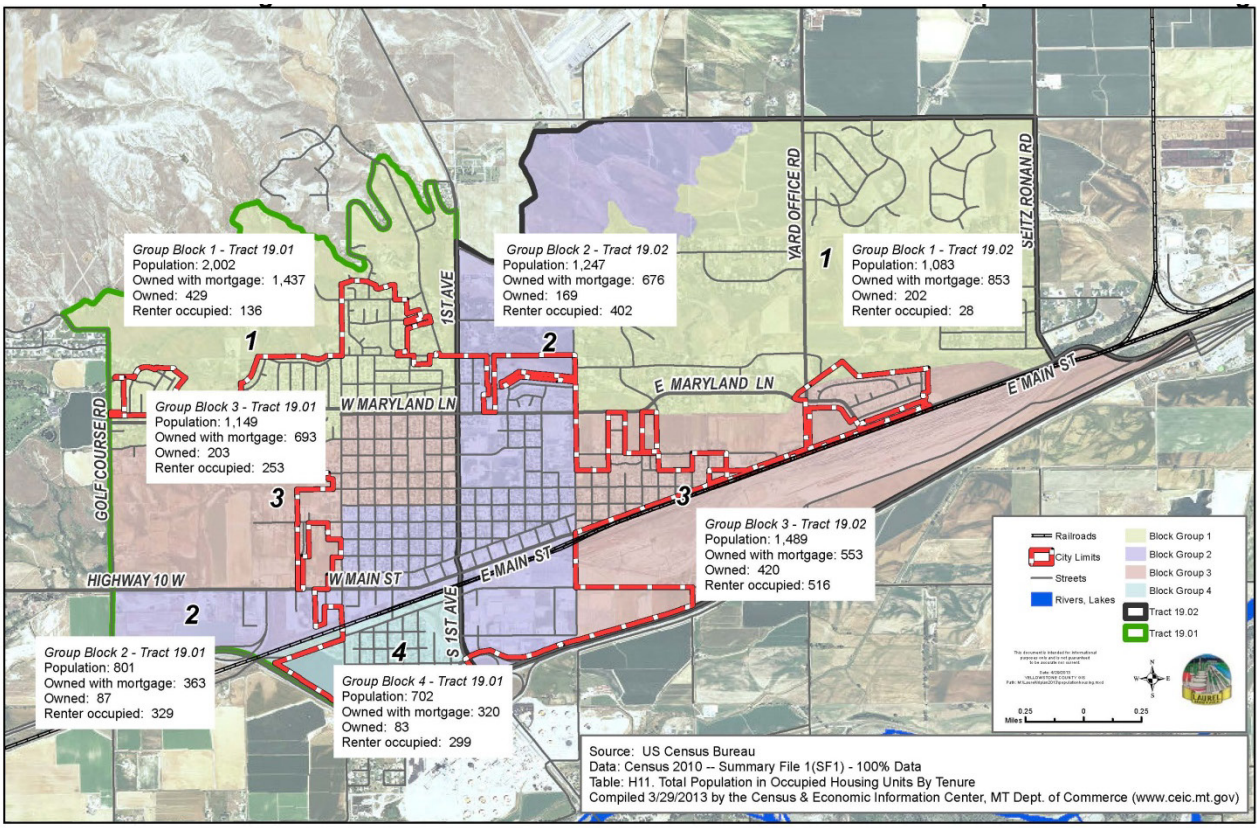
Housing projections for the City of Laurel were prepared using 2010 Census data and the population projection prepared in the previous chapter. These numbers were derived using the persons per household (2.35) as a constant throughout the year. This represents both owner and renter occupied units. In all likelihood, the City will not need this many homes due to its aging population; thus, population per household is expected to decrease slightly.

Housing Growth Potential

As previously mentioned, the number of housing units increased by 436 units between 2000 and 2010. Under healthy growth conditions, more homes are built than households are created to live in them.

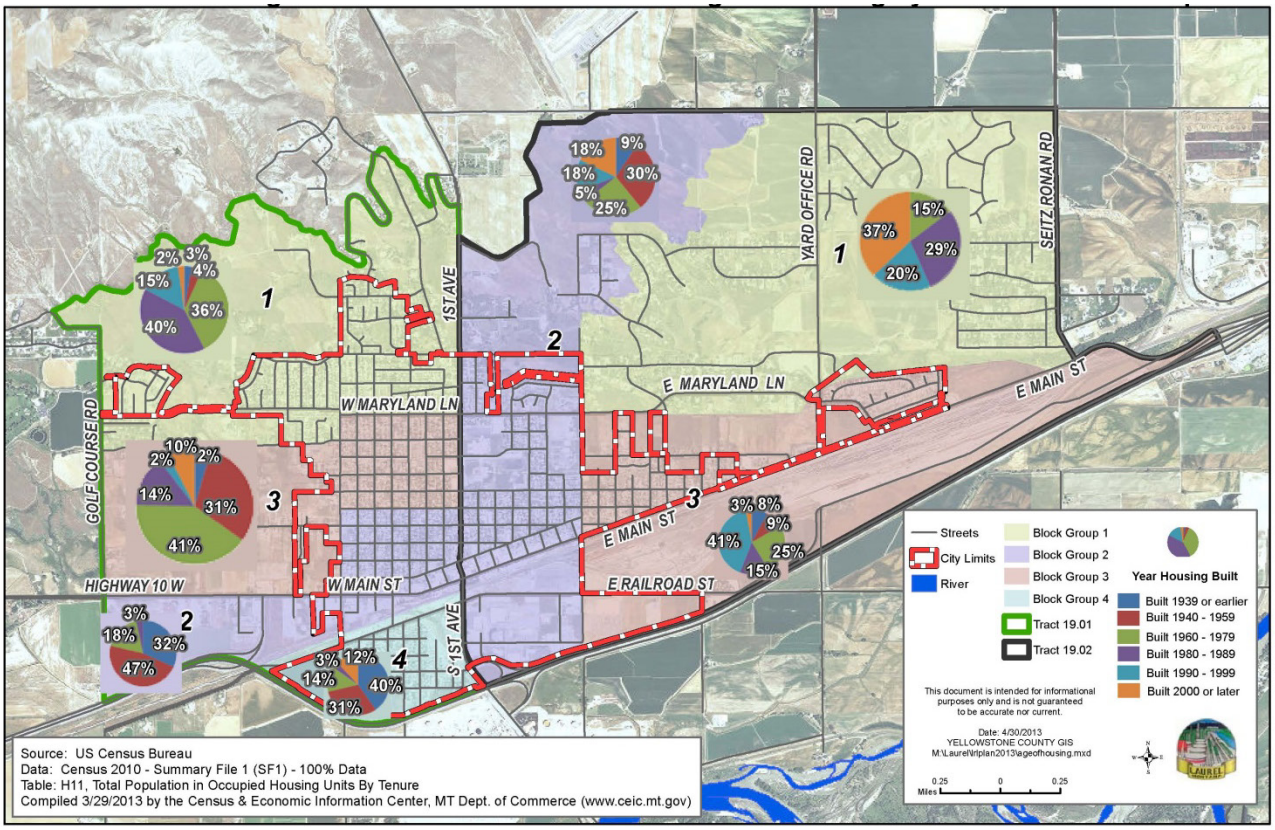
Even with slow population increase, some growth is expected. Two areas west and north of the current City Limits have been identified as key areas for future residential growth. Each of these areas includes undeveloped land and neither is currently served by water or sewer, which is the main challenge the City will face in encouraging development in these areas.

Map 4.1 | POPULATION & HOUSING



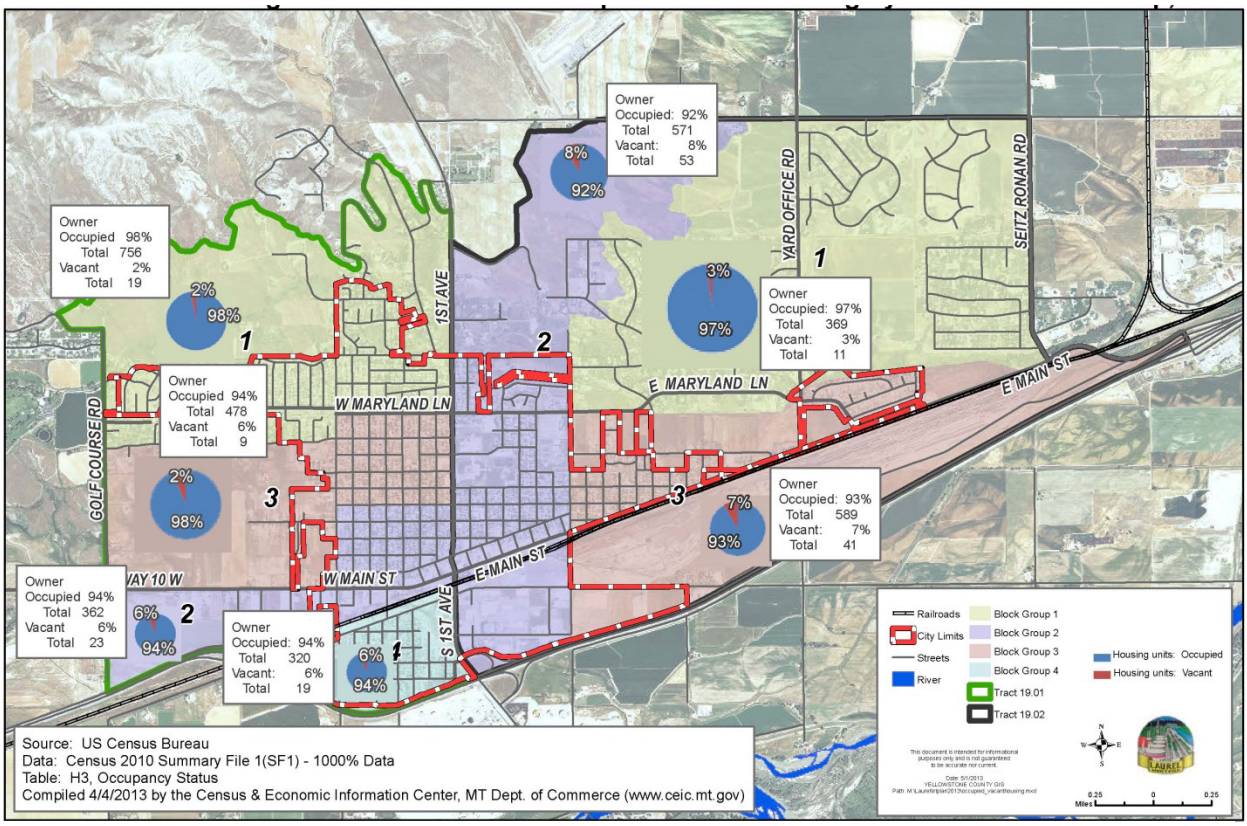
Various data for population and housing characteristics are shown on Map 4.1. Specifically, population and owner/renter occupied units are accounted for by Census Tract and Block Group. In both Census Tracts, individuals living in homes that are owned or are owned with a mortgage outnumbered those individuals who are living in rental units. Information is displayed in number of people.

Map 4.2 | AGE OF HOUSING STOCK



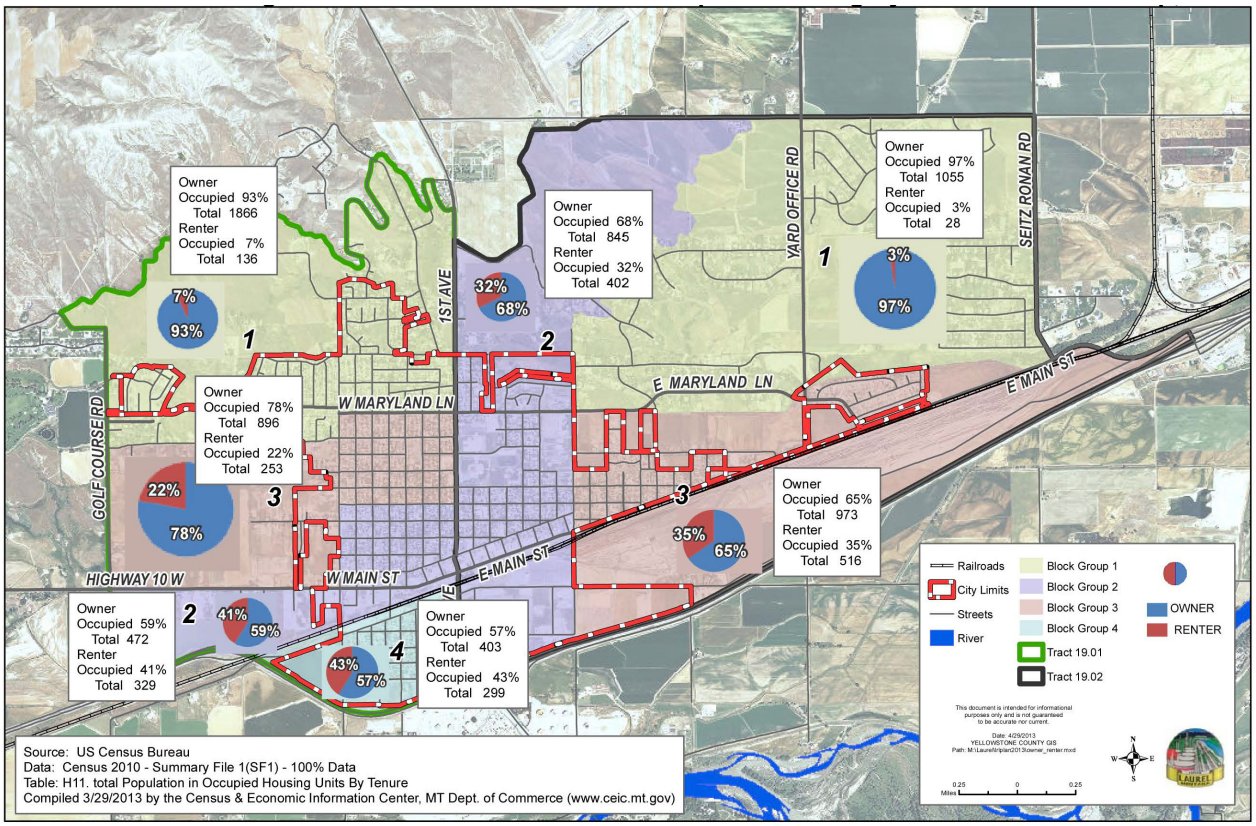
The age of housing stock by Census Tract and Block Group is shown on Map 4.2. Forty-three (43) percent of all housing units were built prior to 1969. The oldest housing stock is represented by Census Tract 19.01, Block Groups 2 and 4, which includes the original townsite and south side.

Map 4.3 | OCCUPIED AND VACANT HOUSING



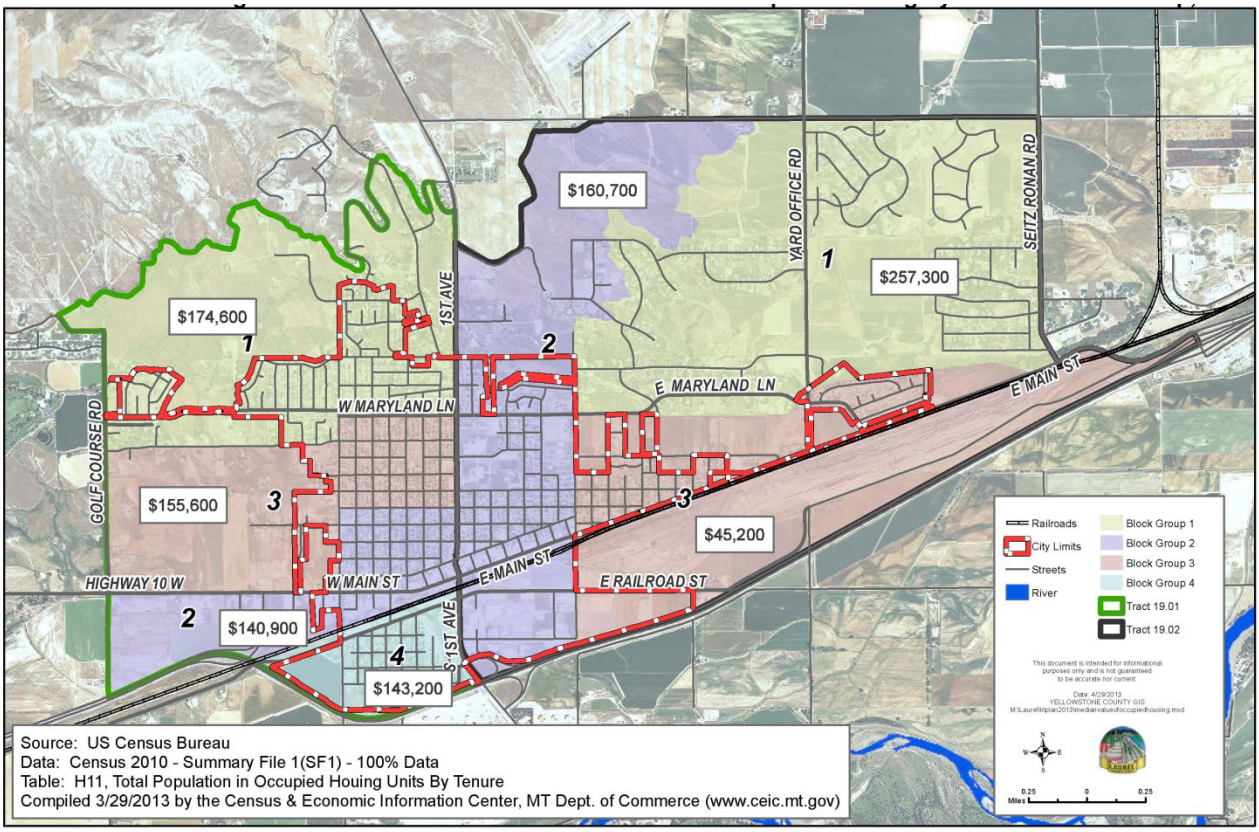
Map 4.3 shows the number of vacant owner occupied units in comparison to vacant units. Whether in City Limits or the immediate outlying area, there is a shortage of available units. There are 122 vacant units in comparison to the 2,784 occupied units in Census Tracts 19.01 and 19.02.

Map 4.4 | OWNER/RENTER OCCUPIED



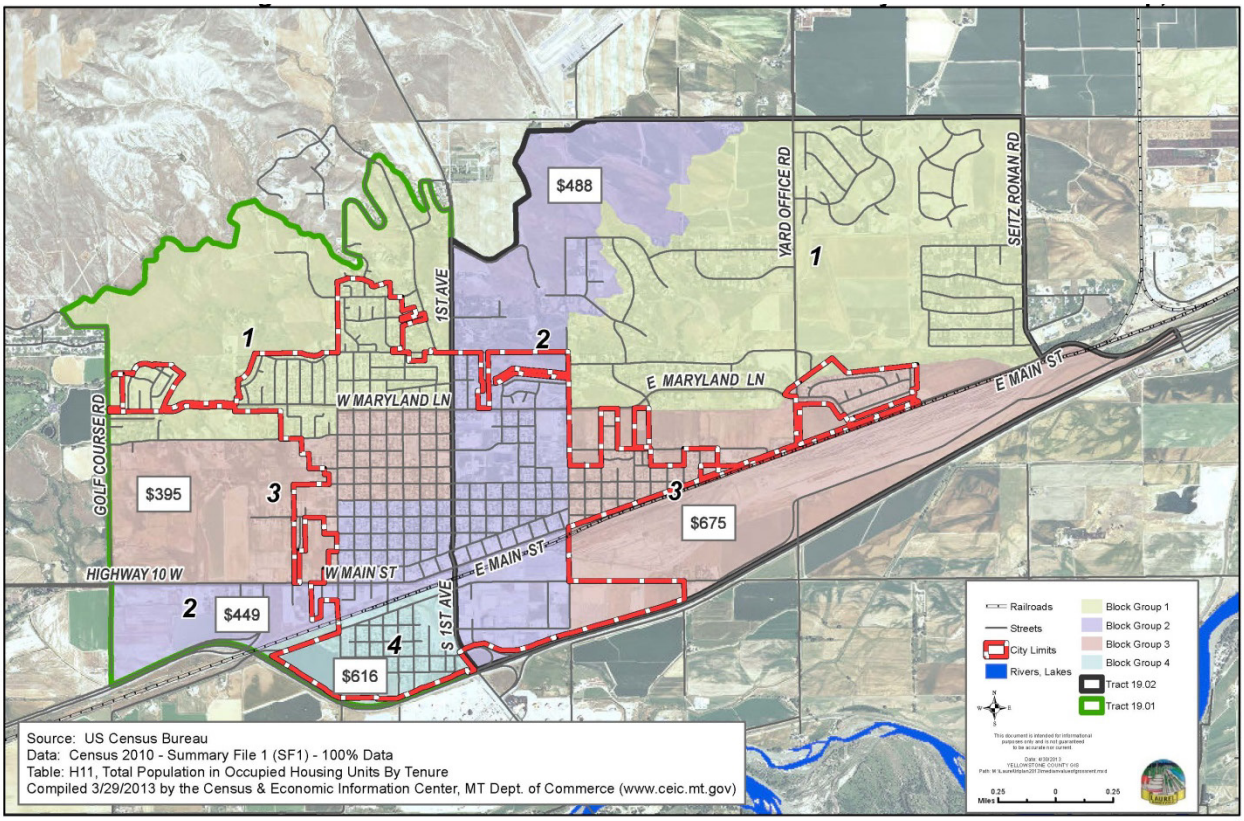
Map 4.4 shows the number of people living in a renter or owner occupied unit. There 8,473 total people represented in both Census Tracts. Of those, 6,510 are living in owner occupied units (with or without a mortgage) in comparison to 1,963 living in rental units.

Map 4.5 | MEDIAN VALUE OF OCCUPED HOUSING



Map 4.5 shows the median value of occupied housing units. Census Tract 19.02, Block Group 3 represents the area with the lowest median value. It is assumed the number of mobile home units contributes to this number. Other Block Groups representing the City seems to be fairly consistent. Census Tract 19.02, Block Group 1 represents the highest median value. This area is comprised of mostly newer subdivisions on larger lots.

Map 4.6 | MEDIAN VALUE OF GROSS RENT



Map 4.6 shows the varying median value of gross rent. This is the total cost of rent contributed for living per month.

Current Initiatives

In the past, the City of Laurel has attempted to address housing deterioration and blight through the introduction of code enforcement ordinances to establish standards equivalent to those in the International Code Council. The adoption of such ordinances put into place language that permits a greater emphasis on providing a safe and sanitary living environment for all residents.

Summary of Trends

The housing analysis has identified the following trends:

- Laurel has an older housing stock.
- The percentage of renters is increasing.
- Neighborhoods need improved walkability to community services.
- Infill and redevelopment are central to housing and neighborhood planning.

Goal 1: Housing

The City of Laurel will have neighborhoods that offer stable, yet diverse housing options.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Promote attractive neighborhoods.
- Build on assets that stabilize existing neighborhoods.
- Provide housing choice within neighborhoods.
- Provide connectivity.
- Establish systems that can serve utilities to existing subdivisions and areas of identified growth.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Provide a range of incentives to create high quality and affordable housing such as reasonable density increases, development fee waivers, time-limited property tax abatements, expedited development reviews and other focused incentives.	M-H	Planning
2	Identify older and abandoned structures in need of preservation, stabilization, repair or demolition.	M-H	Planning
3	Identify appropriate locations for compatible infill housing that would replace vacant or underutilized sites in existing neighborhoods.	H	Public Works
4	Develop a water policy and plan that ensures adequate water quality, pressure and quantity are provided.	M-H	Public Works and Planning
5	Facilitate the development of new downtown housing.	Ongoing	Planning
6	Support residential weatherization, maintenance and rehabilitation programs.	L-M	Planning & Public Works, LURA

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing =These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze previous, existing and potential economic conditions in the City. A review of the economic structure of a community serves as a useful tool in forecasting and planning a community's future. This chapter examines the City of Laurel's labor force, community facilities, presence of industry and the demand for various goods and services.

Economic development is defined as the betterment of a community's economic vitality. It is growth that is planned and desired. Ways in which a community can strengthen its economic vitality can vary. Job creation, expanding the tax base, increasing industrial opportunities, attracting a diverse base of industries, and the nurturing of existing and developing businesses are just a few examples of ways communities are strengthening and revitalizing their economy.

The role of local government is large in economic development efforts. All departments and committees should use the City's economic development strategy and Growth Management Plan to guide their policy and decision making. Other agencies like nonprofit organizations or citizen groups also play a sizeable role in a community's economic development activities. Ideally, a partnership should exist between local officials and outside agencies seeking to achieve the same goals.

"Economic development is defined as the betterment of a community's economic vitality. It is growth that is planned and desired."

Economic Development Efforts

The City of Laurel is fortunate to have a number of groups actively working and serving the business sector of the community. These groups include:

- Laurel Urban Renewal Agency
- Chamber of Commerce
- Laurel Revitalization League
- Laurel Alive
- Beartooth RC&D
- Big Sky Economic Development Authority

In 2008, Laurel Urban Renewal Agency (LURA) was established to create economic viability in Laurel while maintaining its hometown atmosphere. Additionally, the Laurel Chamber of Commerce plays a role in business promotion and community coordination. Groups like Laurel Alive and the Laurel Revitalization League are actively working in the community.

TIF District

The Laurel Urban Renewal Agency (LURA) was created in coordination with the Tax Increment Finance District (TIF). LURA serves as the governing body for funds accrued through the TIF District designation. The organization has several main goals that were identified in the formation of the group. The goals are listed below:

1. Encourage an economically and culturally vibrant downtown.
2. Create a vibrant and cohesive extension of the core downtown Laurel area.
3. Improve traffic patterns to further enhance the business experience for the owner and consumer.
4. Create a destination place where people will want to repeatedly visit.
5. Have state of the art, updated utilities and infrastructure.
6. Encourage more housing and business choices within the district.
7. Have rational consideration of all neighborhoods and sites for public fund expenditures.

To carry out these goals, LURA has focused their efforts on providing technical assistance and façade improvement grants to businesses located within the Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District. Map 5.1 identifies the TIF District boundary.

Other Community Efforts

Groups such as Laurel Alive and the Laurel Chamber of Commerce work actively to host events to be enjoyed by the citizens of Laurel, visitors and businesses alike. Examples of community events include:

- Farmers' Market
- Rock the Block
- July 4th Celebration

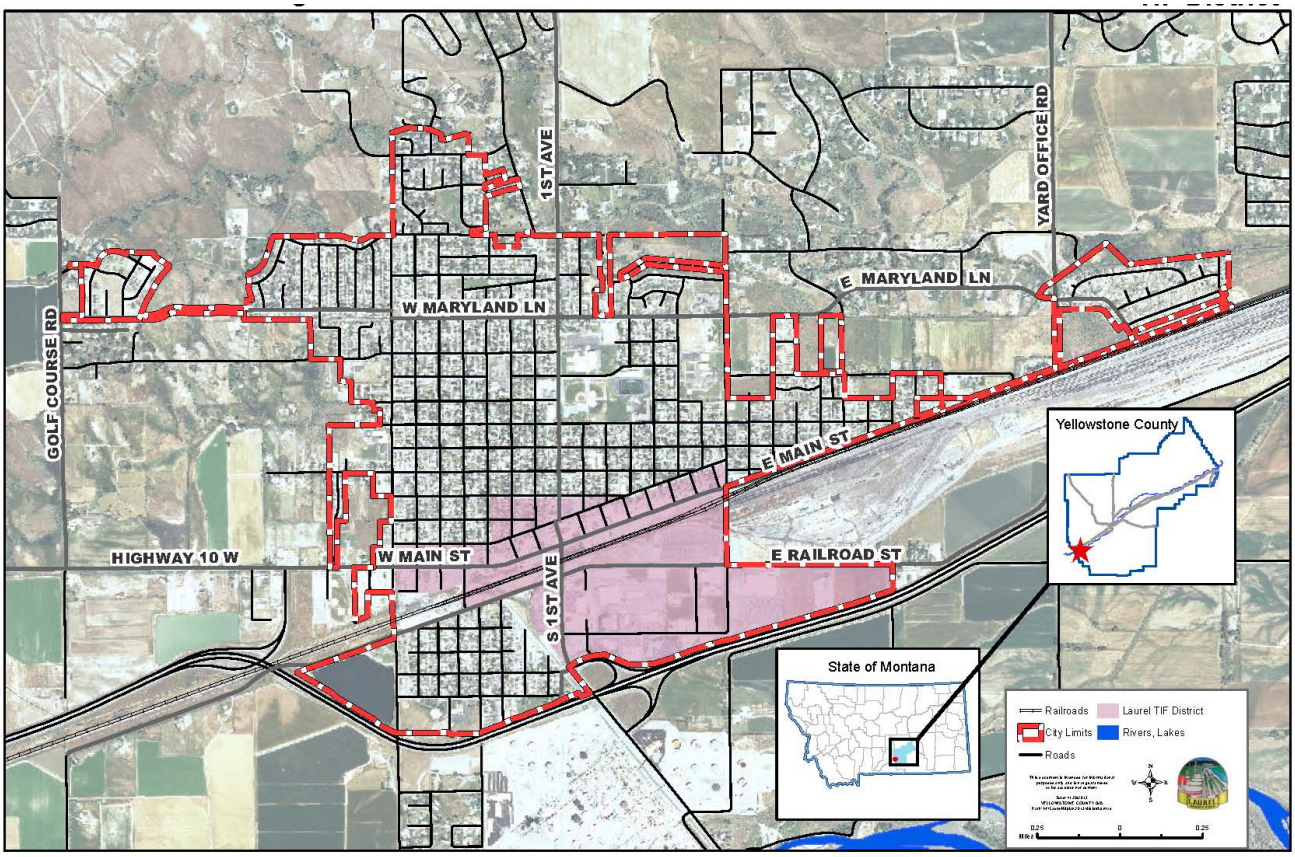
"The Hub of Montana"

The City of Laurel has prime proximity to Interstate 90 providing optimum conditions for growth. Additionally, the largest rail yard between Minneapolis, Minnesota and Seattle, Washington is located in the City Limits. Laurel is also fortunate to have access to Route 212, which provides access to Red Lodge and Wyoming markets.

Within the City Limits, Highway 10 and the SE 4th Street corridors provide opportunity for business growth with some vacant industrial and commercial zoned tracts. The potential for large industrial sites remains small due to infrastructure concerns and the inability for the City to provide water without investing in substantial upgrades. Because of the industrial nature of the community, the City should actively work to create an environment for industrial growth.

Where the City's greatest potential lies is in the redevelopment of vacant commercial buildings located in the downtown area, as well as along First Avenue south of the underpass. Redevelopment includes repurposing buildings, renovating, and retrofitting or tearing buildings down to construct new buildings.

Map 5.1 | Tax Increment Finance District



The Tax Increment Finance District incorporates the Downtown and SE 4th Street commercial areas. This represents a majority of commercial and industrial lands within the City.

Laurel Work Force and Economic Profile

As shown previously in Chapter 3, approximately 56.9 percent of the Laurel population is of working age, defined as 18-65. To better understand the Laurel labor force, this working age population has been examined on a number of levels, such as educational attainment, commuting patterns and occupation characteristics.

Commuting Patterns

Commuter information from the American Community Survey shows that 84.3 percent of the working residents drove alone to work and that the mean travel time to work was 18.2 minutes. 25.6 percent of residents have a commute to work that ranges between 20 and 24 minutes. Many Laurel residents commute to a variety of locations within Yellowstone County, the City of Billings and elsewhere. The American Community Survey indicated that 66.2 percent of Laurel's working residents commute outside of the City limits for work each day. A majority of workers commute to Billings.

Occupational Characteristics

The 2010 American Community Survey collected data for 3,396 Laurel workers. This is the number of people who were employed at the time the data was collected. Occupation and industry data has been provided in Figure 5.1 and 5.2. It reflects a strong business sector oriented mostly around retail.

Figure 5.1
Occupation Characteristics

Occupation	# of People	% of Pop.
Sales and office occupations	1,086	32
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	737	21.7
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	602	17.7
Service occupations	543	16.0
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	428	12.6

Figure 5.2
Industry Characteristics

Industry	# of People	% of Pop.
Ag., Forestry, fishing and hunting, mining	148	4.4
Construction	211	6.2
Manufacturing	339	10
Wholesale Trade	127	3.7
Retail Trade	591	17.4
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	285	8.4
Information	35	1.0
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	122	3.6
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative waste management services	260	7.7
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	695	20.5
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	271	8.0
Other services, except public administration	196	5.8
Public Administration	116	3.4

Business Sector

As of October 2012, 406 business licenses had been issued in City Limits; this is an increase of 63 licenses from 2004 (the date of the last Growth Management Plan). Of the 163 licenses issued, 82 are classified as contractor, 97 are service, 18 are professional, 51 are retail and the remaining licenses are classified in various other categories. It is important to note that the number of business licenses does not accurately reflect the number of businesses located within City Limits. This is due to the fact that the City of Laurel requires all businesses doing work in City Limits to obtain a license; thus, some businesses may be based out of other communities but temporarily working in Laurel.

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is important to this chapter for a number of reasons. Higher levels of education lead to a higher quality work force that is well rounded and highly skilled in a variety of different sectors. Laurel is in a key location for attracting and encouraging a skilled workforce. Montana State University Billings and Rocky Mountain College are located in the neighboring community of Billings.

Income

Median Household Income levels have been steadily climbing in Montana, Yellowstone County and Laurel. The median household income is the amount which divides the income distribution into two equal groups, with half having income above that amount and half having income below that amount. Median Household Income is also used as an indicator of the current economic state, as the higher the income, the better the economy. If the Median Household Income number declines, it is seen as a sign of worsening economic conditions. According to the 2010 Census, Laurel's median household income was $40,906.

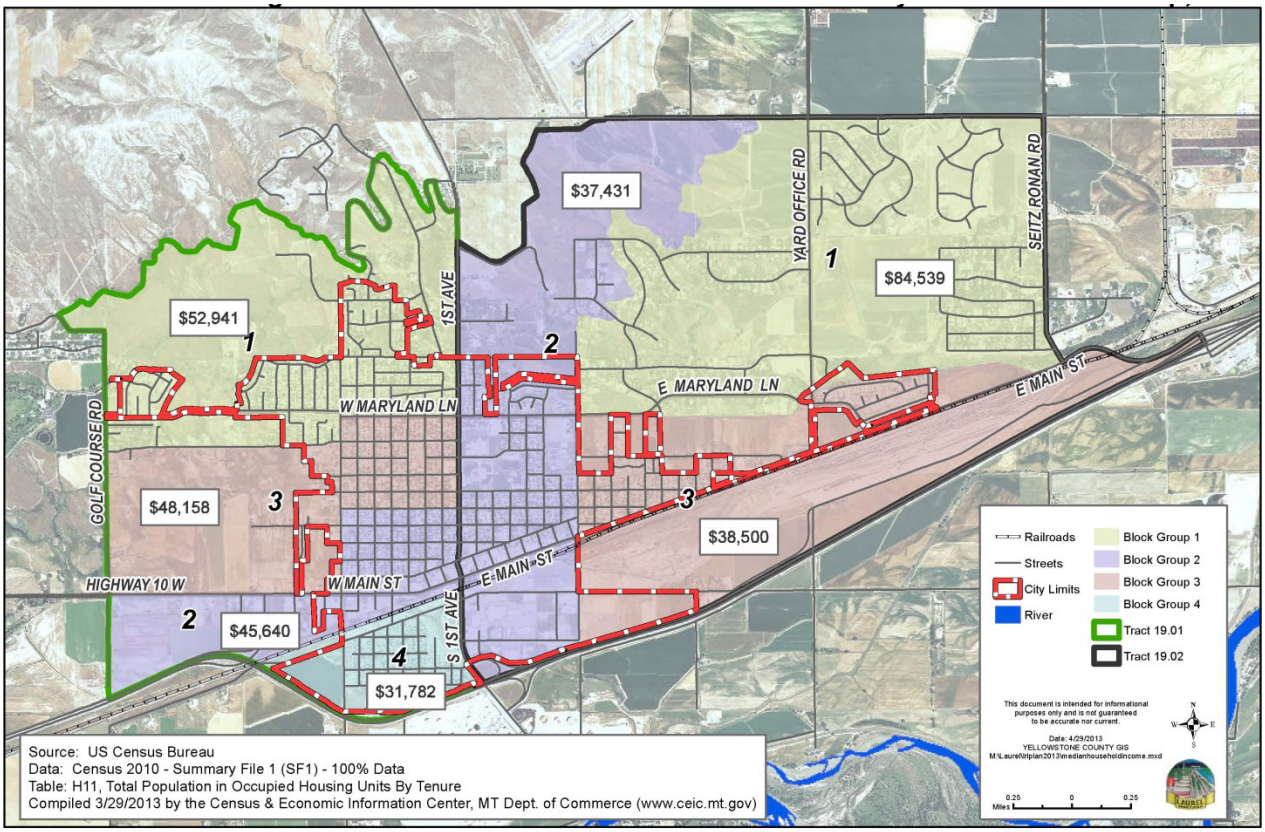
Retail/Service

The traditional "downtown" along Main Street and SE 4th Street provides the bulk of the retail services available in the City. Other areas of commercial activity include First Avenue.

Most of the retail stores are a combination of small scale non-franchised and franchised operations. These businesses are sufficient to meet the basic, everyday needs of Laurel residents. However, the small scale of the stores, with corresponding limitations on selection and hours coupled with high commuter rates, indicates that residents shop elsewhere for many items. The proximity to Billings means that some services can be provided in one community for the benefit of both. For larger items, Billings is approximately 10 miles away.

The health of the downtown area is usually a critical issue in small towns because traditional businesses have to compete with strip malls and large discount stores, often

Map 5.2 |Median Household Income by Census Block Group



Map 5.2 provides insight on the relationship between median household income and census block group. Within City Limits, the median household income is $40,906. Giving the City an even closer look, Tract 19.01, Block Group 4 shows the lowest median income ($31,782). This area is composed of older homes on small lots. Tract 1, Census Block Group 1 represents the area with the highest median household income ($52,941) within City Limits. Overall, Tract 19.02, Block Group 1 represents the highest median household income ($84,539). This area is outside of city limits and is primarily consists of newer single family dwelling subdivisions.

located just outside the corporate limits. Laurel's downtown health has been called into question since trends show it has become increasingly difficult to compete with "one-stop shopping." The traditional downtown also has a physical barrier with the rail yard being located directly across from Main Street.

Laurel is fortunate to have access to a diverse group of medical professional facilities which include several dentist offices, a veterinary clinic and St. Vincent's Laurel Medical Center. Recently, the City has observed interest in expanding this sector of business.

Industrial

The City of Laurel is fortunate to have stable industries in close proximity. The CHS Refinery, BNSF/Montana Rail Link and Woods Power Grip are examples of the stable industrial atmosphere the greater Laurel area represents.

Growth Potential

Historically, the City has had limited vacant industrial zoned tracts. Recent analysis by the City confirms that the City has limited ability to attract major industry due to its aging infrastructure. However, Laurel's location provides for great opportunity to have direct access to Interstate 90, rail infrastructure and one of the best roads leading south to Wyoming.

Laurel's Historic District provides opportunity for future niche marketing with redevelopment opportunities of historic buildings (see Historic Resources Chapter for more information).

Laurel has come to realize that, until infrastructure improvements are made, there is limited opportunity for growth, both residentially and commercially. It is not until new infrastructure is in place that the City can plan for annexing existing subdivisions outside of City Limits.

Economic Opportunities

Local economic development is a process that involves a number of factors. As a local government, the City of Laurel is in a position to play a key role in promoting economic development. The City plays many roles in economic development; they include, but are not limited to:

- Adopting a Growth Management Plan that guides development of the City;
- Adopting supportive land use policies and regulations;
- Providing and maintaining infrastructure, including the transportation system, water system and wastewater collection system;
- Facilitating economic activity;
- Providing technical and financial assistance through incentives;
- Promoting labor force training; and
- Coordinating with educational institutions.

Economic development does not grow spontaneously, rather it happens as a result of careful planning. Furthermore, the

demand for industrial, commercial, retail and residential type space usually does not grow at the same rate. In an expanding economy, typical jobs attract workers who then seek housing, and finally shop for goods. In older communities such as the City of Laurel, this has proven to be true. Industrial buildings were generally built or redeveloped first, followed by housing units and finally retail businesses for goods.

Business Attraction and Retention

Attracting new businesses and growing existing businesses are both desired economic activities. New business in a community means more jobs and a higher tax base. Generally, new businesses lead to increases in local wage levels and discretionary spending. On the other hand, focusing on business retention and expansion activities results in growth oftentimes without the cost and risk of luring new industry. Laurel offers the following qualities to new and existing businesses:

- Prime location to Interstate 90;
- Recreational resources;
- Quality schools; and
- Affordable housing

Tourism and Branding Opportunities

The City of Laurel currently has no coordinated approach to tourism. In recent years, it has come to be understood that tourism is a successful industry that contributes to the overall economic health of a community. Tourism encompasses several facets all promoting unique experiences that a community has to offer. The promotion of parks and recreation can contribute to a local economy because:

- Parks and open space often increase the value of nearby properties, along with property tax revenue.
- Parks and open space attract business and trained employees in search of a high quality of life.
- Parks and open space attract tourists and boost recreational spending.
- Conserved open space helps safeguard drinking water, clean the air and prevent flooding.

Laurel Tourism Resources

Yellowstone River
Riverside Park and Boat Ramp
Nez Perce Trail
Lewis and Clark Trail
Historic District

To sustain tourism, the City must have an adequate support network of motels, restaurants, shopping and worthwhile attractions. Although tourism creates many job opportunities, most of these positions pay low wages. This is a criticism of the tourism industry. On the other hand, if tourism and recreation development attract significant numbers of seasonal and permanent residents, this too could change the City for the better. Visitors and new residents could spark demand for more goods and services, resulting in a more diversified economy with higher paying jobs.

Consequently, tourism and outdoor recreation as a means of fostering economic development need to be balanced with other economic activities.

Summary of Trends

- Service and retail continues as the largest industry sector for employment.
- The City of Laurel is an exporter of workers.
- The City offers limited number of incentives to attract and retain business.
- The City has limited growth opportunity with the restraints of the current infrastructure.

Goal 1: Economy

The City of Laurel will be a community with a sustainable, diverse economy that can weather national economic fluctuations.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Provide and retain a high quality workforce.
- Position the City in the new economy with a diverse, expanded economic base.
- Nurture existing businesses.
- Promote a healthy business environment that spurs economic development.
- Encourage redevelopment.
- Ensure adequate infrastructure to support existing and future business development.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Foster a working relationship among economic development stakeholders at the community, state and federal levels.	Ongoing	City Staff
2	Ensure adequate water supply and distribution system to support economic growth.	H	Public Works
3	Encourage adequate transportation infrastructure, including public transit.	M	Planning
4	Ensure that local businesses are aware of City, State and Federal programs and services.	Ongoing	Planning, Chamber of Commerce, LURA
5	Develop opportunities to collaborate and reach out to the business community.	H	Planning, Regional Development
6	Maintain an updated inventory of available business and industrial properties in the City.	Ongoing	Planning
7	Organize or coordinate development efforts between existing groups like LURA and the Chamber of Commerce.	Ongoing	Planning
8	Create an identity and brand for the City of Laurel through detailed strategy for marketing and promotion efforts.	H	Planning
9	Establish a competitive review of policies, taxes and fees, processes and other influences that impact City business.	Ongoing	Planning
10	Implement the recommendations from the Bike Ped Plan.	M	Public Works
11	Develop undeveloped park land.	M	Public Works
12	Encourage light industrial development.	Ongoing	Planning

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing =These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

Introduction

This chapter has been reserved and will be amended once the Laurel Area Transportation Plan is adopted. Robert Peccia and Associates began working on the plan in the spring of 2013. Local and state funds are being used to complete the project. Laurel's current transportation plan was adopted in 1972. For the purpose of this document, goals have been established.

Goal 1: Transportation			
The City of Laurel will maintain a safe and efficient transportation system (including rail and air) that meets the local needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.			
To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished. • Invest in existing transportation infrastructure. • Design a transportation network that is accessible for various modes of transportation.			
		Priority	Responsibility
1	Update the 1972 Laurel Transportation Plan.	Ongoing	Planning
2	Identify and mitigate conflict between transportation modes and users.	Ongoing	Planning
3	Encourage the use of rail for transportation of local manufactured goods.	Ongoing	Planning
4	Invest in wayfinding signage and clearly identify truck routes.	Ongoing	Planning and Public Works
5	Implement an airport affected area to save important airspace for the Laurel Airport.	H	Planning
6	Coordinate planning with Montana Department of Transportation and other government agencies.	Ongoing	Planning & Public Works

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing =These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

UTILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Introduction

The utilities component is an important part of any Growth Management Plan. The City's infrastructure is a key component in its ability to ensure clean, safe and abundant supplies of drinking water, which ultimately relates to the prosperity of a community. This chapter also takes solid waste and wastewater into account.

Relationship to Other Plan Elements

Economy	Access to water and sewer infrastructure is directly related to economic development and a community's ability to attract a diverse business base.
Land Use	The Land Use chapter and Future Land Use map should take into account the City's ability to provide services. It is important to understand the limitations and opportunities of the community's infrastructure when planning for future growth and development.
Natural Resources	The development of water supplies sometimes has an effect on other natural resources. In such cases, one should be aware of sensitive areas and resources.
Land Use	Zoning and housing are quite possibly the most interrelated. Housing density is an important factor in determining the Future Land Use map.

Water

The Laurel Water Treatment Plant, located at 802 Highway 212 South, treats water by conventional methods in the operation of a multimedia filtration plant. The plant operates 24 hours per day and is staffed by 6 employees, not including management. The Water Treatment Plant has a treatment capacity of 5,000,000 gallons per day (gpd). Additionally, the plant provides water service to more than 6,700 people and has a total of 2,710 metered connections. Records for the calendar year 2012 confirm that Laurel treated an average of 2,306,438 gpd and sold an average of 2,097,675 gpd. This equates to an average of 300+ gallons per person per day. This number is high because of the industrial water users within the town. It is assumed that at least half of all water sold is for industrial purposes, therefore, residential consumption is estimated to be around 150 gallons per person per day.

# of Connections	
Residential	2413
Commercial	266
Irrigation	31

Source: City of Laurel

The current raw water source for the City is the Yellowstone River. In 1908, a water right was filed giving the City access to 12.6 million gallons per day (MGD). In 1978, a water reserve allowed for the anticipation of future growth and added an

additional 6.38 MGD. To date, this source has provided adequate water for the City; however, the combination of recent erosion caused by flooding coupled with droughts has created challenges with ensuring sufficient flow to the intake. Since the Yellowstone is an undammed river, its course is constantly changing. Because of this, each year poses a risk of sedimentation deposits which can compromise the water intake. Since the river meanders, the City had to install a new intake in 2003. As of now, if water levels are not sufficient, the City is forced to enter the river and mitigate the situation by constructing temporary dams to raise the flow of water over the intake.

In 2012, the City constructed a temporary dam in the Yellowstone River to raise flow levels over the intake structure.

The original water distribution system was installed in 1908. Currently, there is one ground storage tank, built in 1967 with a capacity of 4,000,000 gallons with 2,000,000 of them being usable and the other 2,000,000 creating pressure for distribution. Additionally, the City has two booster pump stations. Pipe sizes in the system range from 2 to 18 inches in diameter. The 301 fire hydrants scattered throughout the system are tested routinely to assure they are working properly.

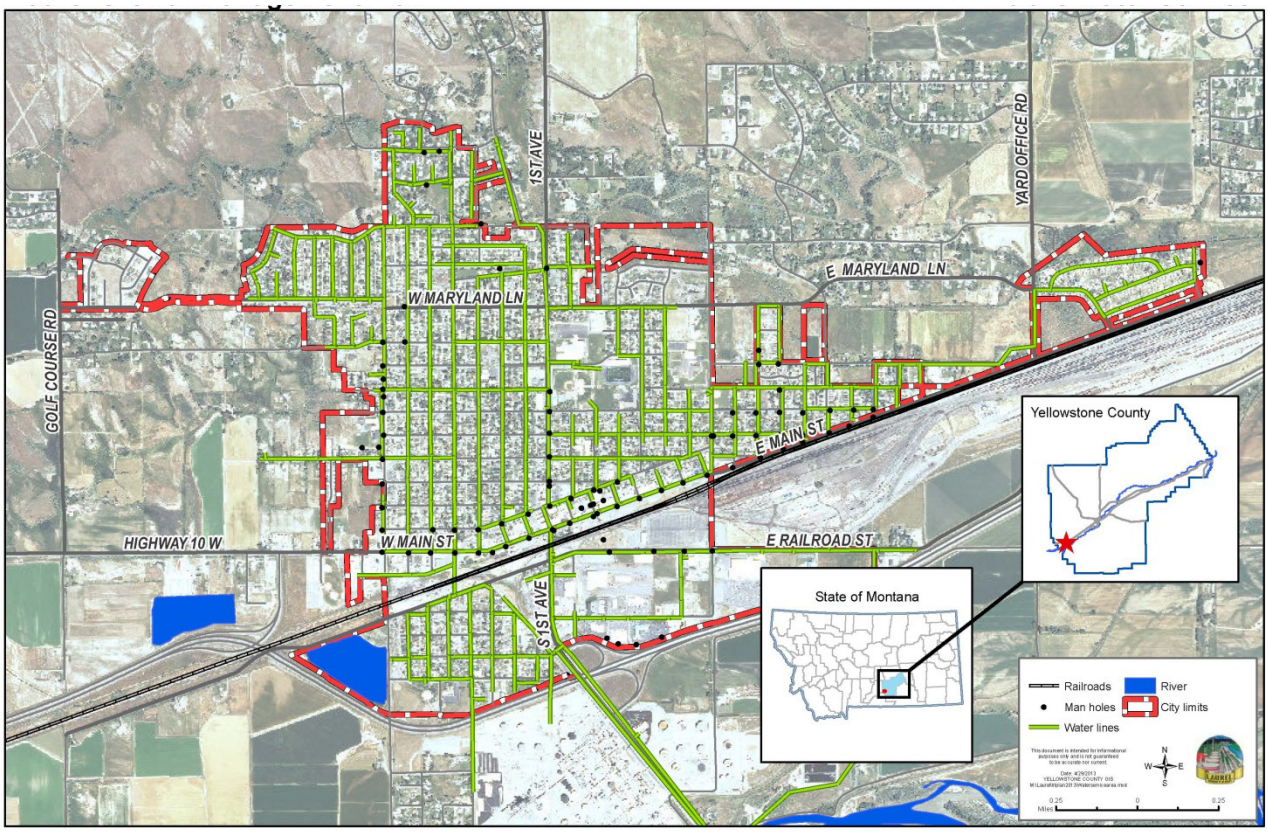
The City provides water to all areas within the City Limits; however, there are 82 residential connections and one industrial connection outside the City boundary. Mapping of all City line locations is available in the Public Works Department. The party desiring the connection must make all necessary excavations and pay for all materials necessary for connection. The City's Development Regulations require developers to extend utilities.

The City recognizes that its water infrastructure is aging and will need substantial upgrades to ensure opportunities for future growth. In the coming years, the City would like to replace the sedimentation basins, which would ultimately allow for expanded services. Furthermore, a second water reservoir should be constructed. This would ensure for future opportunities to expand the City boundary.

Sewer

The City of Laurel's Wastewater Treatment Plant is located at 5310 Sewer Plant Road. It is manned by three operators and one relief. The facility was first constructed in 1908 and underwent substantial upgrades in the 1930's and 1986. No substantial upgrades have occurred in the last 25 years. Currently, the reclamation system is a conventional rotating biological contactor that will be converted to an activated

Map 6.1 | Water Service Area



The City water distribution system is shown on Map 6.1. A few sites that are served by City water have not been annexed. The map does not depict the existing lines serving Elena Subdivision.

sludge plant per DEQ regulations in 2013 and 2014. The activated sludge plant will reduce the levels of nitrogen and phosphorus being discharged into the Yellowstone River. Additionally, capacity will increase. The current system has a 1.12 MGD capacity.

Storm Water

Storm water is collected and managed to prevent flooding, erosion and contamination of water sources. Storm water includes rain and snow melt that runs off surfaces such as rooftops, paved streets, highways and parking lots. As water runs off these surfaces, it can pick up pollution such as oil, fertilizer, pesticides, soil and trash. From here, the water might flow directly into the Yellowstone River or go into a storm drain and continue through infrastructure until it is released into the Yellowstone River. Storm water management is a concern for two main reasons. They are the volume and timing of runoff water, as well as the potential contaminants the water is carrying.

Historically, the City of Laurel has experienced problems with flooding in the downtown neighborhood. Most flooding activities in the City Limits do not happen because of the Yellowstone River, but runoff from heavy rain.

Currently, storm water removal is not available to all areas of the City. Storm drains are located in the downtown area on East and West Main Street, as well as East and West First Streets. Additionally, the City has three storm water retention ponds located in the Elena, Iron Horse and Foundation Subdivisions. While the City recognizes there is a need to increase storm water infrastructure, there are no plans for expansion at this time.

Solid Waste

The City of Laurel provides exclusive solid waste collection services in the City Limits. At this time, the City does not provide any of these services beyond the City's boundary. In the event of future annexations, City garbage services will not be required to be exclusive to those parcels per Montana Code Annotated. Also available to the citizens of Laurel is the City's transfer station, located at 175 Buffalo Trail Road, which is manned by one employee. The transfer station is an asset to the community since some items are not collected by refuse trucks. Large, bulky items, tree branch collection and more take place at the transfer station. Laurel does not have a landfill facility; instead they utilize the Billings Regional Landfill located in Billings, Montana.

Summary of Trends

- The City has increasingly aging infrastructure.
- Flooding, particularly from ditches, could present future challenges without storm water upgrades.
- The City has only one water source.

References

- Water Systems Preliminary Engineering Report, Great West Engineering, April 2008.
- City of Laurel Water Facilities Plan, Morrison & Maierle, November 2006.
- Laurel Wastewater Facilities Plan Update, Morrison & Maierle, February 2009.

Goal 1: Utilities

Maintain an efficient, adequate and safe drinking water system that meets the long-term needs of the community residents, industries and visitors.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Facilities that keep pace with community needs.
- Proactive in meeting future infrastructure needs.
- Link water system upgrades and expansions with comprehensive plan goals and economic development strategies.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Complete a water modeling study.	M	Public Works
2	Develop and implement a water leak detection program.	H	Public Works
3	Develop conservation measures for periods of drought.	H	Planning & Public Works
4	Identify mitigation measures to ensure periods of drought and low-flow do not affect the City's water supply.	Ongoing	Public Works
5	Develop and maintain a long range infrastructure replacement plan.	Ongoing	Public Works & Planning

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing =These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

Goal 2: Utilities

Maintain a safe and efficient wastewater collection and treatment system that meets the long-term needs of community residents, industries and visitors.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Facilities that keep pace with community needs.
- Proactive in meeting future infrastructure needs.
- Approve wastewater system upgrades and expansion based on the Growth Management Plan's goals.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Continue to seek funding for upgrades to the Laurel Wastewater Treatment Plant.	M	Public Works
2	Collect connection fees to cover the cost of new hook-ups.	H	Public Works
3	Develop a long range infrastructure replacement plan.	M	Public Works & Planning

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing =These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

Goal 3: Storm water

Manage storm water runoff to protect residents, property and water resources.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Facilities that keep pace with community needs.
- Proactive addressing in floodplain challenges.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Limit encroachments in watercourses, floodplains and wetlands.	Ongoing	Public Works
2	Develop programs to correct or mitigate existing development that is subject to periodic flooding or storm water damage.	M	Public Works
3	Plan public spaces to use floodplains, water courses, natural water basins and wetlands for greenways and passive recreation uses, thereby protecting them.	L	Public Works & Planning
4	Develop and implement a flood mitigation plan.	M	Public Works & Planning
5	Set and apply design standards for roads and public investments that assist in storm water management.	M	Public Works
6	Create a Storm Water Maintenance District	H	Public Works
7	Routinely update facility and system plans.	Ongoing	Public Works

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing = These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

Goal 3: Solid Waste

Maintain a solid waste program that protects public health, public safety, the environment and natural resources.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Reduce the amount of residential, commercial and industrial solid waste.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Develop and implement a curbside recycling program.	M	Public Works
2	Work regionally in the development of a solid waste plan.	L	Public Works

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing = These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

Introduction

Communities provide a variety of services to its residents and businesses. Services include fire and police protection, park and recreation programs, libraries and emergency services. These services are often carried out in community owned buildings. Diversity in community facilities allows for thoughtful community collaboration, design, maintenance and administration. A community can take the initiative to bring people together to service a community's best overall long-term interests.

Community services typically require significant expenditures of public funds and have tremendous impact on residents' quality of life. Services such as recreation, public safety, street maintenance, snow plowing, libraries, waste collection and other general government services represent a significant portion of the budget. This chapter inventories the City's community facilities and identifies any future needs or deficiencies.

Relationship to Other Plan Elements

Demographics	Demographic trends are a critical component in service planning. Health care and housing are a growing concern as the median age of residents creeps upward. Nevertheless, as the population ages, the City is also concerned with keeping and attracting youth and families. Community services respond to the changing needs of people. Recreational and educational services will vary greatly depending on the makeup of the population.
Economy	By providing links between public services and amenities, people are better connected and a sense of community is built. This benefits residents, but these connections also meet business needs and interests.
Transportation	The kind and location of services provided by the City can have a dramatic effect on transportation needs and goals. The location and type of services provided by the community influences the mobility and accessibility of people, particularly elderly and people with disabilities. Transportation access to basic services is a growing concern as communities spread out in less dense patterns and have increasing numbers of people with disabilities.
Land Use	The relationship between land use decisions and public services is a close one. The location of facilities, the efficiency with which emergency services can be provided, and the ease of collecting waste are directly linked to land use patterns, policies and regulation. Land use plays a key role in determining where a facility is located. A community facility, in turn, can affect the character of a neighborhood, downtown, or area. The same is true for how a service is provided.

Municipal Services

City Hall

Laurel City Hall is located at 110 West First Street. The aging facility houses the water, building, planning and public works departments, as well as the administration. The City has a Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer.

Water Treatment Facilities

For more information regarding the Water Treatment Plant and Wastewater Treatment Plant, see Chapter 6, Utilities and Infrastructure.

Public Safety

Police Department

Early Town records indicate that in 1939 Laurel's police force originated with two officers. Today Laurel has 13 sworn police officers, paid entirely by the City. The department is full service and serves the community 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Services provided include patrol for criminal activities, patrol for traffic violators, accident investigation and misdemeanor and felony crime investigation. The service area of the Laurel Police Department is within the City Limits, unless otherwise requested as backup by another law enforcement agency.

Officers must attend and pass a 12 week police officer basic course at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy located in Helena, Montana. Additionally, communication officers must attend and pass a one week basic course. Reserve Officers must attend and pass a basic course as well. The state of Montana requires a minimum of 88 hours. The Laurel Police Department hosts its own basic reserve course each year.

Presently, the Police Department is housed in the City facility known as the FAP building, which also houses the Fire Department and Emergency Services. The facility was constructed in 1976 and has had an addition since then. At this time, the facility is adequately meeting the needs of the department.

Laurel Volunteer Ambulance

The primary mission of the City of Laurel Volunteer Ambulance Service is to provide quality pre-hospital emergency medical service and transportation in a prompt and safe manner to those residing, visiting or traveling through our area of coverage in Laurel and Yellowstone County.

The City of Laurel Volunteer Ambulance Service (LVA) provides pre-hospital emergency care to the community and surrounding area at a Basic Life Support (BLS) with endorsements level. The department is made up of a full-time Director and volunteer EMT's and drivers. Currently, there are 27 Volunteers on the roster. Five members are

volunteer Fire Department personnel that have been trained to be emergency drivers for the service. Of the 22 remaining volunteers, all are National Registered Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) and are licensed by the State of Montana. Two crew members are NREMT-Paramedics and 17 are NREMT-Basics with endorsement from the State of Montana to provide certain services at an Advanced level of care. The remaining crew members are currently in training for their endorsement levels.

The Service is housed at the FAP building. It has bay space for 3 ambulances, 2 restrooms, a crew lounge, office, small kitchen and 2 storage rooms. Also attached to the building is a Community Room and storage room for the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department. At the current time, there are no plans for any upgrades to the building.

Laurel Fire Department

Founded in 1909, the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department has proudly served its community by always answering the call. LVFD's main purpose is to provide firefighting and rescue emergency response for the community.

The department currently has 45 members that serve the City and surrounding fire districts. The fire districts include Districts 5, 7 and 8, the Laurel Urban Fire Service Area, Laurel Airport Authority, Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch and Cenex Harvest Refinery offices and buildings. Additionally, the department has mutual aid agreements with the surrounding fire departments in Park City, City of Billings and CHS Refinery. There is also a signed mutual aid contract with all the participating fire departments of the Yellowstone County Fire Council. Laurel also has a great working relationship with Stillwater and Carbon Counties, assisting each other when needed.

The State of Montana requires firefighters to complete a minimum of 30 training hours per year. Many Laurel Volunteer Fire Department firefighters complete over 100 hours per year. Firefighters are afforded the opportunity to travel to specialized schools to bring information back and share with the department.

The department also prides itself on civic engagement and being active in the community. Each year the department sponsors a Fire Prevention Week and Safety Day. Additionally, they host the fireworks display for the Fourth of July. This event is well known in Montana and brings awareness to the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department and its dedication to the Laurel community.

The Fire Department is housed at the FAP building. The Fire Department has 3.5 bays to store equipment, with an additional 2 bays at the City Shop. At this time, there is no plan for expansion, however, expansion will be necessary in the coming years and plans should be set in motion to provide adequate space for the department. Long-term expansion goals include not only building improvements but staff improvements as

well, which include, but are not limited to, living quarters, equipment storage facilities, increase in bays and additional office space for full-time shift staff.

Additional Facilities

Laurel Public Library

The Laurel Public Library (LPL) is located at 720 West 3rd Street. The mission of the library is to provide a "place where community members can grow, teach and interact in mutual benefit with others."

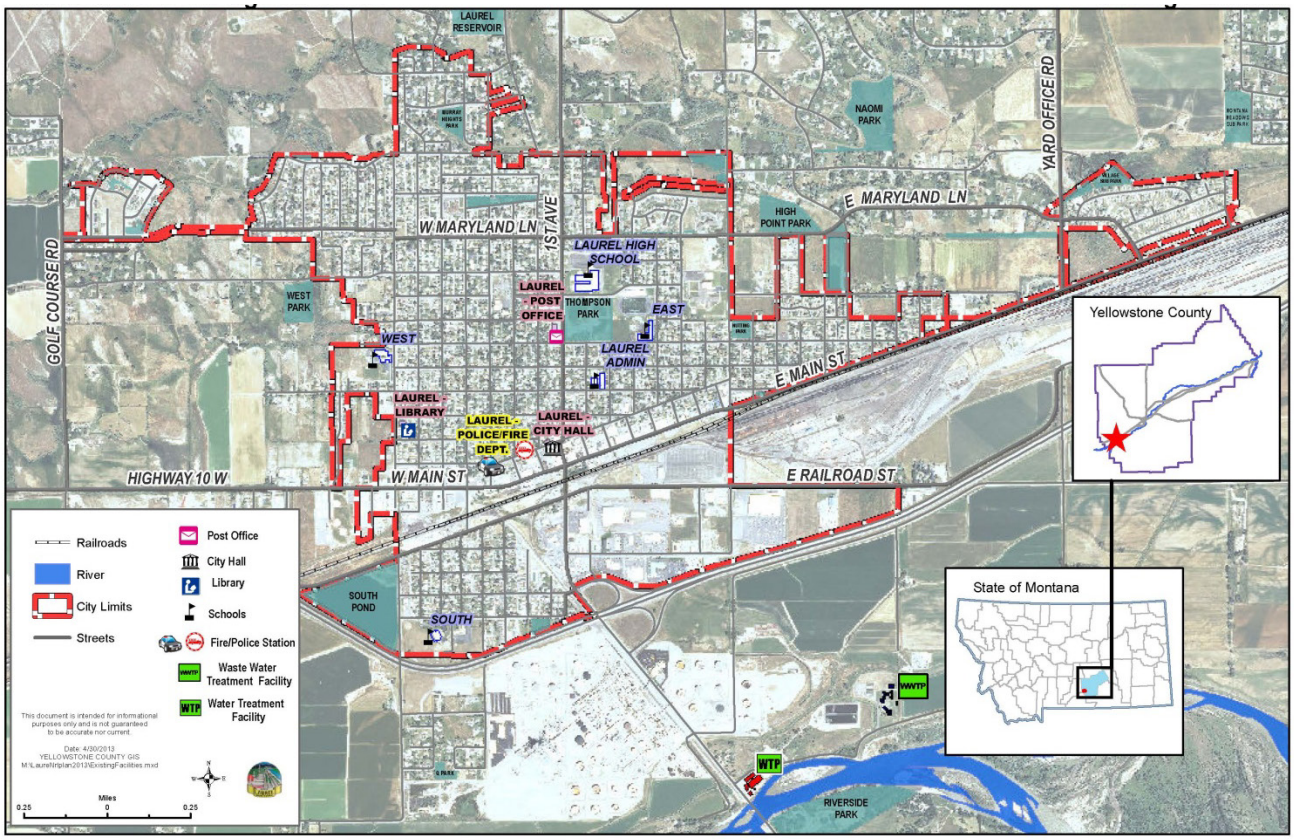
The Laurel library was created by ordinance in 1916 and opened its doors to the public on July 18, 1918. The library was originally located at 115 West 1st Street in what is now the City Council chambers and council meeting room. The library moved to its current location at 720 West 3rd Street in July 1989 after much fundraising by the Board and other volunteers.

By resolution, LPL serves those citizens that reside within the city limits. Additionally, Yellowstone County residents are served without cost. Stillwater and Carbon County residents can apply for (and receive) a library card in Laurel for a fee of $5.00 per quarter/$20.00 per year. Residents that own property in Laurel but live outside the county will be granted a library card as a courtesy since they pay property taxes that contribute to the City's tax base.

The current location is 6,000 square feet spread out over four "wings". At this time, the facility is 'adequate' at best but there are some serious improvements that could be done in the future. The need for a storage room, a medium-sized meeting room, and small study rooms has become obvious over the last few years. More residents are using the library for their study and meeting needs, but there is not enough space for everyone to use the library when they would like it to be available.

At this time, there are not any agreements between the Laurel Public Library and Parmly Billings Library. The question has been raised about creating such an agreement, but no arrangements have been made at this time. LPL has an agreement with the Montana State Library to be part of the Montana Shared Catalog Consortia. The Consortia is currently made up of more than 140 libraries across the state consisting of public, academic, school and special library types.

Map 8.1 | Existing Parks and Community Facilities



Parkland and community facilities including public facilities, city facilities and schools are shown on map 8.1.

Recreation and Open Space

A well-planned park and open space system is an essential part of any sound community development plan. Open space serves a number of functions for the community in addition to the role of safe, convenient, and well-equipped recreation areas.

The City of Laurel contains a variety of recreational facilities.

- Thomson Park
- Russell Park
- Nutting Park
- Kiwanis Park
- Murray Park
- South Pond
- Riverside Park
- Numerous undeveloped acreage

Summary of Trends

- The City provides a variety of essential community services that are carried out within a number of public facilities. The Capital Improvement Plan should include necessary improvements and maintenance of these facilities, as well as equipment to accomplish required tasks.
- The availability and accessibility of community facilities has a tremendous impact of quality of life.

Goal 1: Community Facilities

The City of Laurel will meet the facility needs and maintain a high quality of service to the community.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Invest in its public facilities and services that bring people and functions of the community together to make the community a more desirable place to live.
- Respond to changing demographics and community needs.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Plan the location of public facilities so that they do not stress the capacity of roads or other infrastructure.	Ongoing	Planning
2	Consider the public services needed to support residential, commercial and industrial developments before they are approved.	Ongoing	Planning Board and City Council
3	Recognize and provide for multiple purposes and functions of all City facilities.	Ongoing	CAO's Office
4	Develop a comprehensive recreation, open space and greenways plan.	M	Planning & Public Works
5	Develop and maintain a long range infrastructure replacement plan.	Ongoing	Public Works & Planning
6	Develop and implement maintenance program for City park land.	H	Public Works
7	Encourage and seek funding for a community center facility.	M	Planning

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing = These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.

What is Land Use?

Land use generally refers to the manner in which parcels of land, or the structures on them, are used. Land use planning focuses on making good choices about how growth occurs in the community over a period of time.

Managing land use is a means to achieve the visions and goals of the community. This includes managing the type, quantity and quality of development or redevelopment that occurs. The type is generally expressed in broad land use categories like residential or commercial. The quantity of development considers how much development is appropriate for the community. This is primarily expressed in the future land use map along with the location of development. Quality seeks to make a public statement of the standard of development that is expected in the community including open space, landscaping and building requirements.

Role of the Land Use Plan

This Land Use Plan, which covers the period from 2010 to 2030, is the guide for the future physical development of the community. Many factors must be considered in this attempt to envision an optimum pattern of development. Residential, commercial, and employment opportunities must be balanced with the desire to preserve the natural environment and character of Laurel.

The Land Use Plan consists of two parts:

1. A written explanation of policy guidelines in relation to development; and

2. The Land Use Map, which shows the general location of anticipated land uses within the growth area.

The specific purpose of this Land Use Plan is to help citizens, City officials, and businessmen make sound development decisions. It attempts to delineate a pattern of land use that should encourage and accommodate orderly growth, minimize long-range public development costs, and result in a healthy and attractive community.

The Land Use Plan should not be confused with the City's zoning map and zoning ordinance. As a policy guide, it focuses on general areas suitable for broad use categories. In contrast, the zoning map shows exact locations by tax parcel for specifically defined land uses. The zoning ordinance and zoning map are intended to be the primary means of implementing the general policies outlined in the Land Use Plan.

Relationship to Other Plan Elements

Natural Resources	The quality of the natural environment is directly affected by land uses and patterns.
Housing	Housing should be connected to jobs, schools, parks and services and should meet the needs of people and families.
Economy	Some parts of the City's economy may need to be clustered and separated from residential areas. Other parts may be neighborhood or central attractions. The land use element can help accommodate conflicting land uses and reduce them.
Transportation	Transportation, transit and pedestrian and bicycle facilities connect people and businesses to the community. Transportation resources need to be located in a way that makes key connections between land uses while preserving and protecting the City's amenities.
Community Facilities	The location of a community's facilities should be determined by the services to be provided, the location of clients and accessibility to those locations.

Area Covered

The area covered by this Land Use Plan is the current City Limits boundary, and the Laurel Zoning Jurisdiction, which extends 1 mile beyond the City boundary. On an even broader scale, the City must consider the growth and development of the greater Laurel-Yellowstone County area. While the entire area is not shown on the land use map, the Analysis and Goals & Objectives section of this Plan serve to describe some of the City's concerns and goals for the development of the Laurel City/County Planning Area.

Desired Growth Rate

The City wishes to grow, but not at the expense of its small-town atmosphere and quality of life. Essentially, the City wishes to maintain its status as a community center within the general area of southwestern Yellowstone County. Its growth rate would be linked closely to the overall factors that will attract new residents and businesses to the area. This policy recognizes the need to coordinate policies with Yellowstone County and Billings to work together for the best overall growth pattern. The annual growth rate from 2000 to 2010 averaged .75 percent, which represented a period of limited growth for the City. For the coming decades, the City can expect a mixture of limited growth potential in the traditional borders and high growth potential in the planning area because of the sizeable amount of vacant land present there.

For the current planning period, the City has chosen a desired growth rate of .75 percent per year. Using the 2010 Census population as a base (6,718), this rate would result in a population of 6,974 by 2015 and 7,801 by

2030, an increase of 1,089 people, or approximately an average of 55 people per year. With the smaller sizes of families, this rate could not be achieved unless approximately 22 dwelling units were added each year. The City recognizes a .75 annual growth rate is an aggressive model and actual growth is anticipated to be slightly less.

Factors in Achieving a Growth Rate

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- *A DESIRE TO GROW.*
- *A DESIRE TO PRESERVE THE CITY'S ATMOSPHERE.*
- *THE NEED TO ENHANCE COMMERCIAL, RESIDENTIAL AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.*
- *THE NEED TO ACCOMMODATE THE VARIED HOUSING NEEDS OF ALL CITIZENS.*
- *THE NEED TO DEVELOP A STRONG ECONOMIC BASE.*
- *A DESIRE TO PROVIDE INFRASTRUCTURE TO EXPAND COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL GROWTH.*

Many of the factors that will determine how fast and in what manner development occurs will be outside of the City's control. Such factors can include economic conditions, distance or proximity to the interstate, natural features, and the actions of individuals. Nevertheless, the City must attempt through the Growth Management Planning process to recognize the steps that it can take to provide incentives or disincentives that will help result in the level and type of development desired. This Land Use Plan is particularly important as the foundation of the zoning and subdivision ordinances and other City policies that directly affect development proposals.

Plan Considerations

The policies affecting vacant tracts will be crucial to the long-term development of the City. For example, if the land is developed rapidly in a low density pattern, the City will have used up many of its options for future development. On the other hand, the higher intensity options that would accommodate greater population in the long run would have to be considered carefully. Because much of the vacant land in Laurel is in large tracts outside of City Limits, it is especially important that the community has deliberated on the appropriate uses of the land, because a change in ownership or decision to develop can come suddenly and the impact on the City can be substantial.

The Growth Management Plan Committee agreed upon a number of principles to serve as guidelines as the Land Use Plan was being developed. In addition, where appropriate, the City-County Planning Board considered the many goals and objectives listed in the following section, to the extent that they relate to land use.

The primary way for the City to grow is for construction to occur on previously undeveloped land. Redevelopment, although not likely, should still be encouraged. However, it is important to ensure that this land is developed in responsible ways that take into account the current and future needs of the community. Certain factors in particular should be considered in determining the Land Use Plan and reviewing prospective development. Some of these factors are described below.

Development Factors

Slope	Slopes in excess of 25 percent are generally not appropriate for intensive development.
Infrastructure & Utilities	Many private investments, particularly industrial and commercial establishments and coordinated residential developments, cannot be expected to occur without adequate public water and sewer. Conversely, it should be recognized that poorly planned or executed private or public development can result in increased costs to the public.
Other Infrastructure	Demographic changes trigger changes among the housing market. For instance, the needs of a community change as its population ages. This is the same for housing; as the housing stock ages, so do needs. Also, as the age of a structure increases, so does the need for maintenance.
Floodplain	Federal programs restrict the construction of residences within the 100-year floodplain unless the structure is properly flood-proofed. Intensive development of all kinds should generally be discouraged in the floodplain. Appropriate uses for floodplains include agriculture, forestry, recreation, and open space.
Drainage	Storm water runoff causes problems in some areas of Laurel and additional development can be expected to increase potential for flooding and standing water. Furthermore, pollution of groundwater supplies may also occur in drainage areas when oils, fertilizers, topsoil, and other pollutants are washed into water supplies. Means of preventing these problems should be addressed at the time of development.

Land Use Classifications

The following land use categories describe the types of land uses that are desired in the City of Laurel. These descriptions correspond to the Future Land Use Map developed as a part of this Growth Management Plan. The policies that follow each description are intended to be general guidelines for development or redevelopment of the City by land use classification.

Residential

1. **Low-Density Residential (Residential Tracts Zoning Designation).**

   These areas of single-family detached dwellings are designated in order to maintain the existing character of established neighborhoods and to provide traditional areas for home ownership.

   Low-Density Residential Recommendations:

   - Maintain residential areas of single-family, low-density development.
   - Infill lots within these areas should be used for single-family residential development.
   - Encourage the provision of single-family residential units which are affordable by all segments of the population.

2. **Medium Density Residential (Residential 7500 Zoning Designation).**

   This category is intended to provide more flexible residential development alternatives, while at the same time preserving the basically quiet nature of a residential neighborhood.

   Medium-Density Residential Recommendations:

   - Provide an alternative to conventional single-family dwellings while protecting the character of the residential neighborhood from encroachment of commercial and industrial uses.
   - Encourage the development of attractive low to moderate density dwellings with adequate open space and off-street parking while limiting the development density to a maximum of five (5) residential living units per acre.

3. **High-Density Residential (Residential 6000, RLMF, RMF Zoning Designations).**

   These areas encompass medium-to-high-density residential development. The densities in these areas can accommodate townhouses, two-to-three-story apartment buildings, and multi-story, family-type apartments. These areas should provide a suitable environment for persons desiring the amenities of apartment living and the convenience of being close to shopping and employment centers.

High-Density Residential Recommendations:

- Encourage high density residential development in designated areas.
- Provide for higher density development suited to the needs of the population.

4. Planned Unit Development (PUD)

This category includes a variety of dwelling types, developed in clusters to make the most efficient use of the land. This type of development allows for the sharing of open space, security systems, utilities, and maintenance structures. Single-family homes, townhouses, and two-to-three-story apartment buildings can be accommodated in this area, as well as businesses that would serve these residents.

PUD Recommendations:

- Encourage developments with a diversity of dwelling types and layout within designated areas.
- Encourage planned unit developments with smaller lots surrounded by common open space as a means to hold down site development costs.
- Provide expanded community facilities to encourage these developments.
- Encourage mix of land uses compatible with adjoining residences.
- Encourage pedestrian access and links to other development.

Commercial/Industrial

5. Downtown Commercial (Central Business District, Community Commercial and Residential Professional Zoning Designations).

Commercial uses include retail, wholesale, or service functions. The downtown business areas should be diverse and well balanced, offering business, commercial and residential uses.

Downtown Commercial Recommendations:

- Encourage a central shopping area of diverse, but compatible, uses.
- Accommodate residential uses, but give priority to commercial uses.
- Promote the downtown business district.
- Keep development regulations flexible to encourage the reuse of older buildings and the development of infill lots.
- When establishing additional zoning districts, the Planning Board and City Council should weigh carefully the impact that additional areas zoned for commercial development could have on the downtown area.

6. **Highway Commercial (Highway Commercial Zoning Designation).**

   Intended for businesses oriented to car traffic, this category addresses the need for road access, ample parcel size, and off-street parking.

   Highway Commercial Recommendations:

   - Provide development guidelines to reduce negative impacts on traffic and on aesthetics.
   - Facilitate a growth corridor.

7. **Industrial (Light Industrial and Heavy Industrial Zoning Designations).**

   Industrial areas are designated to permit certain industries that do not detract from residential desirability.

   Industry Policies:

   - Encourage additional industrial jobs within the area.
   - Seek industrial firms which are compatible with the City's goals for maintaining a quality environment for its citizens.

8. **Public (Public Zoning Designations).**

   Public areas are lands primarily used for public active recreation activities improved with developed park land. Additionally, public areas can be used for institutional uses for schools and governments.

   Industry Policies:

   - Encourage space that can be enjoyed by residents and visitors in the community

Additional Land Use Policies

Residential:

- Infill development that complements existing neighborhoods should be encouraged.
- Redevelopment for conversion of residential uses to other uses should only be considered for large tracts, such as entire blocks, rather than permitted on a piecemeal basis.
- When conversion of single-family houses to multifamily is permitted, appropriate off-street parking should be required. Converting front yard areas to parking lots is not in the best interest of the area.
- Require sidewalks for streets in new developments.
- Plant trees along major residential streets.
- Prevent the encroachment of commercial uses in the predominately residential areas.

Mixed Use:

Downtown Center. New development or redevelopment should enhance the positive qualities of downtown. Redevelopment of the downtown should follow policies below:

- A healthy land-use mix should be retained, including a variety of retail, office, financial and professional and institutional uses.
- Residential uses add to the vitality and customer base of downtown and should be encouraged where they do

not compete for retail space.

- Suburban-type uses such as big-box development should not be permitted.

Corridor Commercial. Targeted areas along arterials or major collectors that are intended to provide for a mix of small to medium-sized retail, office, institutional and residential uses.

- Roads should be pedestrian-friendly.
- Sites should be designed to move vehicles, both motorized and non-motorized.
- The corridor commercial areas serve as the gateway or front door to the City. Therefore, buildings should be unique and well-designed.
- Gateway streetscape should be installed along Highways 310, 212 and Highway 10.

Industrial uses such as manufacturing, assembling, research and development provide tax revenues and jobs for the City of Laurel. Industrial uses should follow the principles below:

- These uses will be continued and expanded upon in a planned manner so as to minimize the impact on public infrastructure.
- Industrial uses will be located along major highway corridors or in industrial or business parks.
- Wherever possible, these uses will be located away from residential uses.
- When potential conflicts between land uses occur, buffering and landscaping will be provided to minimize the impacts.

Recreation:

- Parks should be retained.
- Recreation areas should enhance the enjoyment and quality of residents and visitors.
- Recreational areas should be accessible.
- The design of spaces and facilities should encourage an efficient utilization of land and consider the needs, desires and opinions of intended users.
- Existing plans should be routinely considered and integrated into the decision-making process of private landowners, civic organizations, the business community, recreational interests and other area agencies to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated system of public areas and preserved natural resources.

Additional Development Guidelines

Land use planning does not have to be limited to the designation of uses for individual parcels. It can also incorporate other important development guidelines that have major ties to land use. Topics such as walkability, historic preservation and transportation can be included as integral elements of a land use plan. These common growth management topics in combination with a future land use map create a very effective land use plan that a community can use as a guide for the future development of zoning, subdivision control and other land development regulations.

Community Identity

Sense of place is the common feeling or attitude people share about a place with which they identify and relate. It naturally brings people tighter as a community. Sense

of place is created from characteristics of a location that make it readily recognizable as being unique and different from its surroundings. An area's sense of place can be enhanced by good planning and excellent design. But above all, sense of place and identity is bound up in the enduring presence of the City's historic environment and physical qualities. For Laurel, these qualities include the following:

- The Yellowstone River
- City's Collection of Historic Buildings
- Chief Joseph Battlefield and the Historic Nez Perce Trail
- Lewis and Clark Trail
- Veterans' Cemetery

These five attributes make Laurel a memorable place. These unique physical qualities, natural settings, parks and buildings can be used to strategically enhance each and to improve relationships between them.

Landmarks are sites, buildings, structures or natural features that have visual, historic or cultural significance. These features are important to its identity and to that of the various neighborhoods in which they are located.

Policy recommendations:

- Ensure that the City's small town characteristics are reinforced in new development and redevelopment.
- Find ways to strengthen the image and character of the City.
- Continue to develop a riverfront that is accessible, developed and appreciated as a major amenity of the community and region.
- Landmarks should be preserved, unless it is clearly in the public interest to do otherwise.
- If the uses for which landmark buildings were designed are discontinued or become obsolete, the City or owner should seek appropriate new uses for these buildings.

Description of Planning Areas

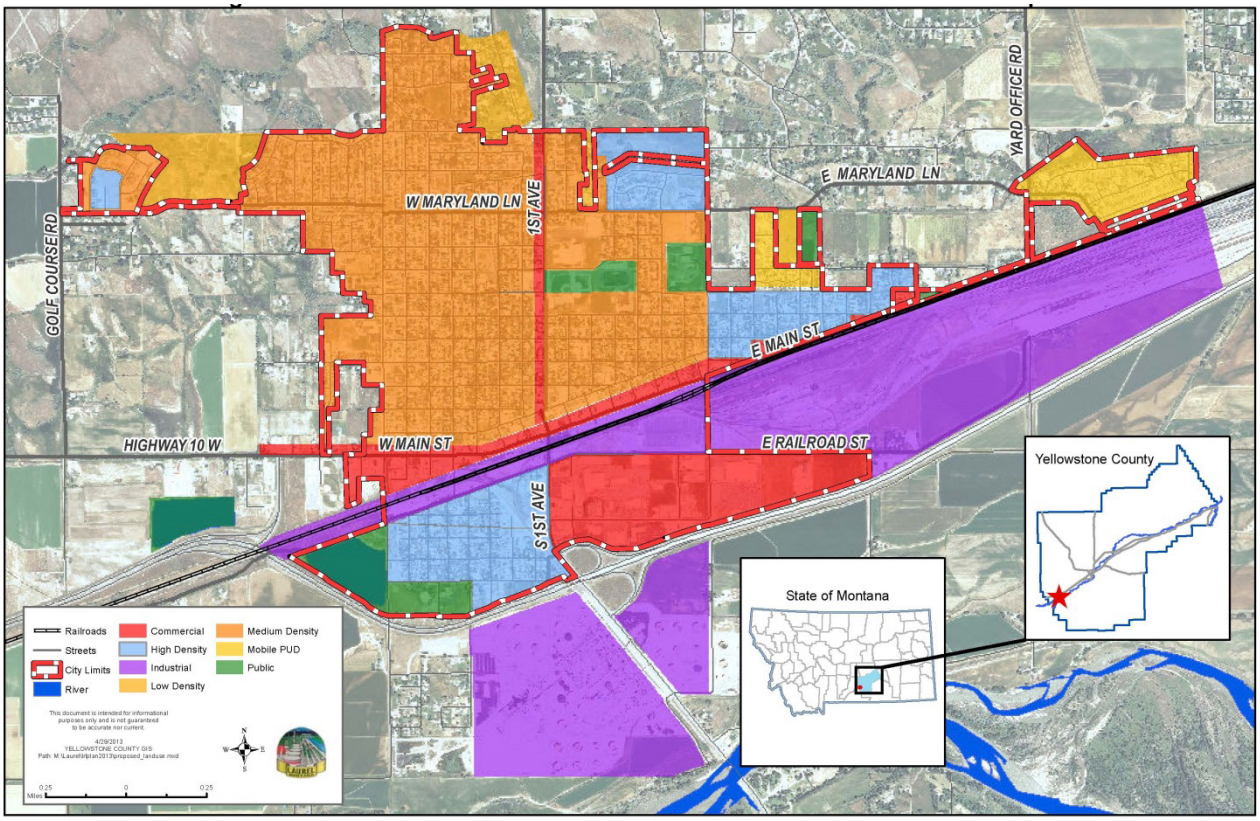
East Side: This portion of the City is currently developed and holds much of the older housing stock. It is mostly developed with single-family homes with pockets of manufactured homes.

Main Street/1st Avenue/SE 4th: This portion of the City is currently developed. Main Street houses several aging buildings with specialty boutique type stores and services. SE 4th Street houses much of the newer box development. This area is part of the Tax Increment Finance District.

South Side: This portion of the City is primarily residential. Some of the oldest dwellings in town are located in this area.

West Side: This portion of the City houses some of the newest residential neighborhoods in the City. This planning area has the most potential for future residential growth.

Map 9.1 | Proposed Land Use



Goal 1: Land Use

The City of Laurel will be a community with a mix of land uses that maintains a diverse tax base and supports a high quality of life.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished.

- Integrate key land use elements.
- Implement land use policies that provide a balanced tax base.
- Use remaining land resources efficiently.
- Improve attractiveness to existing and prospective businesses and residents.
- Maintain a balance of development and environmental protection.
- Approach making major land use decisions with caution, avoiding those that might have serious, irreversible consequences.
- Ensure that any proposal to develop land or extend public services respects the goals and follows the policies of each plan element.
- Preserve, develop and enhance a unique sense of place.
- Preserve and enhance the quality of the City's physical environment.

		Priority	Responsibility
1	Systematically adopt land use policies that implement the elements of the Laurel Growth Management Plan.	H	Planning, Planning Board and City Council
2	Follow the general guidelines for development and redevelopment as set forth in the Laurel Growth Management Plan.	Ongoing	Planning Board and City Council
3	Establish transition zones between commercial and low density residential uses.	L	Planning
4	Encourage corridor trail and park development that links natural and community-centered areas of the river.	Ongoing	Planning and Public Works
5	Enhance downtown and SE 4th as a center for activity.	Ongoing	Planning
6	Seek funding to implement streetscape improvements.	M	Planning & Public Works
7	Develop GIS to create a central repository for land use data, including parcel, zoning and infrastructure data.	H	Planning & Public Works
8	Develop and implement zoning districts to preserve the character of the City of Laurel.	H	Planning
9	Partner with businesses and community organizations to implement the land use element of the Laurel Growth Management Plan.	Ongoing	City Government, Private Sector & Community Groups

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-10
Low (L) = Years 10-20
Ongoing = These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the plan.