

OVERVIEW

1. History of Hamilton

Originally the Bitterroot Valley was the home of the Salish (Flathead) and Pend d'Oreille Indians. It was claimed for the United States in 1788 in the Oregon Country Acquisition and explored by Lewis & Clark during their 1805/1806 expedition. The St. Mary's mission in Stevensville was the first permanent white settlement in Montana, founded by Jesuit priests in 1841. In the 1880's, the copper mining magnate Marcus Daly came to the Bitterroot Valley in search of timber to supply his mines. He needed a mill to serve the timber operations and a town to serve the mill. He made the area his summer home and in 1887 acquired large tracts of land now known as the Bitterroot Stock Farm, which was dedicated to his hobby of breeding and racing thoroughbred horses.

Marcus Daly began development of an irrigation network that eventually gave rise to the "Big Ditch Boom" that ran from 1906 through 1915. Speculators from the East and Midwest fueled the irrigation and land development scheme, investing substantial sums to build the Big Ditch irrigation system. Slick salesmen with misleading literature who promised fertile land and a good climate for growing fruit trees fueled the subsequent "Apple Boom" that, in turn, brought many unsuspecting farmers to the region.

The Anaconda Copper Mining Lumber Company Mill closed down in 1915 after running out of easily accessible timber. By 1917, financial problems plagued the ditch builders and the boom went bust. The orchard farmers became disillusioned and many moved away. Although the economy went into decline, the town survived through farming and timber production. Truck gardens produced fruit, berries and vegetables, dairies were known for their butter and ice cream, and farmers grew celery, sugar beets and potatoes. The U.S. Forest Service employed others in their stewardship of thousands of acres of government owned timber land.

Hamilton's period of economic decline did not fully recover until 1927 when the Rocky Mountain Laboratory was established to research the cause of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Unlike other parts of the nation, Hamilton enjoyed considerable growth during the Depression years of the 1930's until World War II.

From 1990 to 2000, Ravalli County (36,070 residents as of the 2000 Census) has undergone a period of unprecedented growth as some of the nation's population shifted from urban cities to the non-urban "New West" in search of a better quality of life. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, immigrants are drawn to the Hamilton area because of the clean air and water, the open space, and the recreational opportunities offered by the mountains and the water resources.

Figure 1: Old Hamilton City Hall



2. Vision

Mission Statement

“The mission of the City of Hamilton is to provide for the public health and safety and promote the economic prosperity and environmental well-being of its citizens.”

(adopted February 1994 by the Hamilton City Council.)

Vision Statement

“Hamilton will remain a friendly, safe place that values diversity and a spirit of community while continuing to preserve its natural beauty, history and culture.

(adopted July 1994 by the Hamilton Vision Committee.)

Growth Policy—Guiding Principles

- 1. The Growth Policy must be developed by the same citizens it seeks to serve if it is to be effective.** It cannot be imposed artificially on the citizens. The effort leading to this Growth Policy builds a series of Planning Board meetings, interviews conducted with key department heads, focus group meetings, community meetings, and a community survey.
- 2. The Policy must reflect the uniqueness of Hamilton.** Throughout this document, the Growth Policy has been written to recognize and reinforce the same characteristics that make Hamilton unique and which have shaped Hamilton physically and socially.
- 3. The Policy must be easy to understand.** Technical terms have been explained in the document and policies have been tied to a specific goal.
- 4. The Policy must be technically competent.** Upon completion, the Growth Policy will meet the minimum requirements of Montana State Law.

3. What Is a Growth Policy?

“A growth policy is an official public document adopted and used by a local government as a general guide for decisions regarding the community’s physical development. It is not a regulation; rather, it is an official statement of public policy to guide growth and manage change for the betterment of the community.”

(Montana Department of Commerce, “Montana’s Growth Policy Resource Book”, 2007)

In 1999, the Montana Environmental Quality Council report, “Planning for Growth in Montana”, identified several benefits of community planning:

- Reduces increases in taxes and fees through more efficient provision of services;
- Fosters wise and thoughtful investments in major public facilities, such as roads, water and sewer systems, solid waste, and fire protection;
- Makes communities safer and healthier by encouraging well-designed streets, protecting water quality, and deterring development in unsuitable areas such as floodplains, wetlands, fault zones, and unstable slopes;
- Helps to make a community more attractive to investment by businesses and industries;
- Protects special community values, such as historic, cultural, scenic and natural features, or rural, agricultural character.
- Builds public consensus and greater understanding of issues within the community;
- Promotes affordable housing;
- Identifies growth patterns that minimize the cost to provide local services and infrastructure;
- Maintains property values for residential, commercial, and industrial properties by preventing nearby incompatible or degrading uses; and
- Ensures that adequate amounts of suitable land are available for residential, commercial, and industrial growth;

Hamilton adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 1998 and updated this document as a Growth Policy in 2003. This 2003 Growth Policy recommended that the document be reviewed and updated every five years. This Growth Policy is the result of a planning process that was undertaken in 2008 to revise the 2003 Growth Policy.

The Montana Code Annotated Section 76-1-601 through 76-1-060 describe the required elements of a growth policy and the process for adopting a growth policy.

4. Planning Process

The planning process relied heavily on community input. Focus groups and workshops were conducted throughout the process. An on-line community survey was another method to solicit input. The Implementation Element details the public process techniques while the Appendix has a list of all the meetings that were conducted as part of the Growth Policy.

In addition to the elements that are required by the Montana Code Annotated. The Hamilton Growth Policy includes a Park and Recreation Element and a Planning Area Element to address issues specific to these topics. Each element contains a description of existing conditions, a discussion of trends, and examples of best practices and resources that may be used to help implement the Growth Policy. At the end of each element are the goals and policies to address the issues that are documented throughout the Growth Policy.

Figure 2: Planning Process



5. Relationship to Other Planning Processes

In addition to the Growth Policy, there are a number of other planning process that the City and County have undertaken. The diagram on the next page depicts the interrelationships between these documents. The diagram groups these various planning efforts into three categories.

- **Inputs**—The Growth Policy relies on an extensive compilation and analysis of data and trends. There are many documents that provides the information necessary to develop a Growth Policy. Many of these other planning documents also contain policies that should be incorporated into the Growth Policy or should be reviewed for consistency with the goals of the community.
- **Growth Policy Elements** - These are required elements of the Montana Code Annotated. The Transportation Plan and Parks Elements are normally addressed in the Public Facilities element. These items are being have been identified as separate elements to devote more detail to these issues.
- **Implementation Tools**—The Growth Policy will contain an Implementation element. A number of items that were recommended in the 2003 Growth Policy have already been adopted are in the process of being implemented. The implementation tools will be reviewed as part of the growth policy.
- **Planning Area**—The 2003 Growth Policy included a planning area that extended approximately 2-miles around the city. The planning area generally coincides with the planning area that has been used for infrastructure and transportation planning. This Growth Policy includes the same area. To implement many of the policies, however, there must be intergovernmental coordination with the County. Typically, an intergovernmental agreement describes planning responsibilities in the extra-territorial area.

Figure 3: Growth Policy Concept Map

