

FALLON COUNTY

Growth Policy

April 2024



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Chapter 1: Purpose and Introduction

Purpose

A Growth Policy assists a community in embracing a vision for the future and planning for future growth. It offers an opportunity to evaluate nearly all facets of a community and document successes and challenges. During the preparation of a Growth Policy the members of a community are given the opportunity to be involved in the process of planning for a better future. An update of a Growth Policy allows a community to evaluate existing conditions and issues, as well as formulate goals, objectives and policies to address the existing conditions and issues.

The 2023 Fallon County Growth Policy is a full replacement of the 2017 update of the 2012 Growth Policy. The 2012 Growth Policy provided goals, objectives and policies to guide or provide direction for the community and addressed all content areas of a growth policy. The 2017 Growth Policy update provided new data and information to reflect the changing reality of the oil boom and bust cycle. The purpose of the 2023 Growth Policy is to provide community leaders with a working plan that will facilitate decision making on the wide range of topics contained in the growth policy. This is accomplished by establishing broad goals, measurable objectives, specific policies to promote the achievement of objectives, and strategies to implement the growth policy.

COMMUNITY VISION

The 2023 Growth Policy is a vision-based planning document. The community vision statement provides an overall expression of the community's values and interests and provides the framework from which all content in the 2023 Growth Policy is based. It is a forward focused statement of what Fallon County citizens want for their future. Based on a wealth of public input, the planning board and the planning consultant worked to create the following visions statement for the 2023 Growth Policy:

Fallon County has become a thriving, welcoming, and resilient home for people of all ages and a broad spectrum of businesses by:

- Maintaining close communication and collaboration between local government entities, and actively listening to all the residents of the county
- Making wise decisions for infrastructure investment and capital improvements
- Supporting the agricultural industry that remains a critical element of the local economy
- Encouraging business growth by supporting local economic development organizations and streamlining development approval
- Using creative approaches to support attainable housing development and redevelopment
- Providing adequate facilities and services to meet public safety needs, and supporting effective mental, behavioral, and physical health services
- Maintaining or facilitating a strong array of amenities and services to make the County an attractive place to live, work and play
- Working with other community organizations to provide a healthy atmosphere for young people to learn and grow and contribute to our community

Introduction

PROCESS

A six-step process was followed to create this Growth Policy. The Planning Board and planning consultant met to develop a communication plan that established a detailed process for public engagement. Then the planning consultant developed a project website and prepared public engagement materials and compiled background information for the development of the new Growth Policy. This included reviewing existing plans for information and data on existing conditions, ongoing trends,

and goals. The third step involved extensive outreach and public engagement activities by the county staff and Planning Board, and development of the vision statement. The planning consultant next prepared a partial draft of the new Growth Policy based on evaluation of the public input and analysis of the background information. The planning consultant led a workshop with the Planning Board to review and revise the partial draft and obtain feedback for continued development of the document. The goals and objectives adopted for the 2017 Growth Policy Update were reviewed, and in many cases retained, in the 2023 Fallon County Growth Policy. The fifth step in the process included expansion of the draft Growth Policy and development of the implementation strategy by the planning consultant. The full draft Growth Policy was then reviewed and refined in a second workshop with the Planning Board. The final step in the process was preparation of materials for a series of public hearings with the three jurisdictions, and approval of the final document.

This Growth Policy is intended to serve Fallon County for 10 years with updates every 5 years. Public input is important for identifying needed changes from the last Growth Policy and preparing a fresh vision statement for the future of Fallon County. Involvement from the public was provided through several opportunities. The county planning commission hosted three public listening sessions in early 2023. The county staff also conducted stakeholder interviews, provided local media reports, updated the governing bodies, and provided opportunities for the public to participate individually in person and online. The county provided an interactive website and a presence on social media platforms. County staff also presented information and solicited input from high school students.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

The 2023 Growth Policy was prepared consistent with the growth policy content requirements contained in Section 76-1-601, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) and is intended to apply to and be adopted by Fallon County, the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna. As specified in Section 76-1-605, MCA, after adoption of the growth policy, the governing bodies subject to the growth policy are to be guided by, and give consideration to, the general policy and pattern of development set out in the growth policy in the 1) authorization, construction, alteration or abandonment of public ways, public places, public structures or public utilities, 2) authorization, acceptance or construction of water mains, sewers, connections, facilities or utilities, and 3) adoption of zoning ordinances or resolutions.

It is important to note that the MCA also specifies that a growth policy is not a regulatory document and does not confer any authority to regulate that which is not otherwise authorized by law or regulations adopted pursuant to the law. Furthermore, a governing body may not withhold, deny or impose conditions on any land use approval or other authority to act based solely on compliance with an adopted growth policy.

JURISDICTION

The 2023 Growth Policy covers Fallon County as well as the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna. The City of Baker and the Town of Plevna are located within Fallon County, and each municipality has a jurisdictional planning area, which is their corporate limits. Montana Law 76-1-501 through 76-1-508, allows the county to establish jurisdictional planning boundaries by resolution and an inter-local agreement and up to 4.5 miles from the limits of the cities. MCA 76-3-601(2) b.

Chapter 2: Public Engagement and Vision

Overview

The strategy for public engagement for the 2023 Fallon County Growth Policy involved identifying stakeholders who need to be engaged, defining the process for engagement, and assigning responsibilities for the public engagement activities. The overall process and discussion of stakeholders and methods of engagement was discussed at the November 7, 2022 Planning Board meeting. The project contractor created a project website and provided outreach materials to support the public and stakeholder engagement activities undertaken by Fallon County. Three listening sessions were publicized and held early in the project process. Additionally, the Planning Secretary interviewed a large number of key stakeholders to gain insights into issues and opportunities which should be addressed in the Growth Policy. The following subsections of this chapter summarize the process and highlight key findings from the plan.

Listening Sessions

Although many invitations were sent out throughout the month of January for the listening sessions, advertisements were made in the newspaper and on Facebook, and it was announced on KFLN each week; the attendance was less than 1 percent of the population of Fallon County. Interesting enough, one of the main issues that came up at each listening session was the lack of involvement and volunteers from the community and how to get that turned around. This issue is causing difficulties with the Fire Department, ambulance, nonprofit boards, government boards, etc.

The Fairgrounds Exhibit Hall Listening Session was held on January 12, 2023 in a town hall format. Fifteen people attended the meeting. Discussion centered around the following topics:

- Need for volunteers
- Quality of life topics such as lack of mental health services for ranchers and youth
- Housing issues and potential solutions
- Economic development issues such as how to attract people to the communities and the difficulty of hiring people
- Vision for the future
- Positive aspects about the Fallon County area

The Plevna Community Center Listening Session was held on January 19, 2023. Invitations had been sent throughout the Town and to surrounding ranchers, but only fifteen people attended. People were divided into two groups for round table discussions on the following topics:

- Examples of great things in other communities that are desirable to see in Fallon County, Baker and Plevna
- People's vision for the future of the County and its communities
- Existing conditions that are desired to remain
- Biggest concerns about the future of Fallon County, Plevna, and Baker
- Key issues to be addressed
- Future changes that need to be targeted
- Opportunities that should be taken advantage of and make our communities a better place to live

The Garage Showroom Listening Session was held on January 26, 2023. Twenty-four people attended. There were three round table discussion groups. Discussion focused on the following topics:

- Future tourism options and opportunities for the Fallon County area
- Issues and potential solutions to the lack of registered and licensed daycare
- Thoughts on the value of having an adopted Capital Improvements Plan for each jurisdiction
- Concerns pertaining to infrastructure in the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna
- Need for a strengthened connection with the elected officials of the jurisdictions
- Need for and decline in availability of social services, CPS, welfare, human services, etc
- Traffic concerns, railroad difficulties, and the potential for a truck bypass in Baker
- Things that the Planning Board should focus on

- Concerns about law enforcement related issues like the rise in juvenile crime, security in the schools, mental health related issues, and staffing needs
- Housing needs and roadblocks to improving housing in the Fallon County area
- Problems and potential solutions to the volunteer shortage
- Road maintenance problems and the need for better addressing for emergency response
- Issues pertaining to recreation services now that the recreation department was eliminated
- Effectiveness of intergovernmental coordination
- How green energy may affect Fallon County ranchers and farmers

Additional Key Stakeholder Interviews and Public Input

The following community stakeholder conversations or interviews were completed to more fully understand issues and opportunities pertaining to a variety of topics:

- Melissa Higbee, Chamber of Commerce Director
- City of Baker Mayor Zachmann and City Clerk Dukart
- Fallon County Board of County Commissioners Chair
- Fallon County Fairgrounds Manager Jennefer Wheeler
- Senior Center/Council on Aging Coordinator Carla Brown
- Fallon County Extension Agent/4-H Assistant Amanda McWilliams and Kodie Olsen
- Baker High School Students Listening Session
- Eastern Montana Economic Development Corporation Director Beth Epley
- Director of Library Services, Beth Meggers
- Fallon County Museum Curator, Melissa Rost
- Southeast Montana Area Revitalization Team Executive Director Vaughn Zenko
- Fallon County Sanitarian Rich Menger
- Fallon County Sheriff, Trenton Harbaugh
- Weed Control Coordinator, Sara Berger

Additionally, a community survey was conducted from early January through late May in 2023. The survey included questions about:

- What people liked best about living in the Fallon County area
- What opportunities for people living in the area should be preserved or enhanced
- Adequacy of existing public or community services
- What the most significant issues were for the jurisdictions

A copy of the survey and the results are included in Appendix X.

Vision

The Planning Board reviewed the public input and developed a vision statement for the Fallon County area as portrayed on the following page.

Fallon County has become a thriving, welcoming and resilient home for people of all ages and a broad spectrum of businesses by:

- Maintaining and strengthening close communication and collaboration between local government entities, and actively listening to all the residents of the county
- Making wise decisions for infrastructure investment and capital improvements
- Supporting the agricultural industry that remains a critical element of the local economy
- Encouraging business growth by supporting local economic development organizations and streamlining development approval
- Using creative approaches to support attainable housing development and redevelopment
- Providing adequate facilities and services to meet public safety needs, and supporting effective mental, behavioral, and physical health services
- Maintaining or facilitating a strong array of amenities and services to make the County an attractive place to live, work and play
- Working with other community organizations to provide a healthy atmosphere for young people to learn and grow and contribute to our community

Chapter 3: Goals and Objectives

Overview

The 2023 Fallon County Growth Policy is intended to serve as a guide to assist local officials and members of the community in making decisions to move the community nearer to its vision for the future. In effect, the Growth Policy is a road map providing direction on how to move forward to achieve a sustainable future for the community. The Growth Policy goals and objectives provide a planning framework that further defines the community vision and provides a more refined path forward to realize the community vision. Through adoption of the 2023 Fallon County Growth Policy, the community has an agreed-upon means to determine if it is moving in the appropriate direction and, make decisions that support, and are consistent with, the community's goal and objectives.

Goals are overarching statements expressing the values and interests of the community describing desired community conditions and characteristics. Objectives describe desired outcomes of a goal's achievement, enabling the community to evaluate whether goals have been achieved.

The goals and objectives are intended to provide local officials a reference that can be used to evaluate alternative decisions or courses of action. They provide a community compass to assist in determining if a specific decision or action is in the community's best interest. Due to the general nature of the term "public interest", what is in the best interest of a community can be interpreted in a number of different ways, often depending on the perspective of the decision maker. The Growth Policy goals and objectives provide more specific meaning to the term "public interest." When a decision or action is contrary to or in conflict with Growth Policy goals and objectives, local officials and the community have a valid basis to conclude the decision is not in the public interest. Conversely, when a decision or action is clearly consistent with stated Growth Policy goals and objectives, local officials and the community can take comfort in making a decision that has the overall support of the community.

At times making decisions consistent with Growth Policy stated goals and objectives may be challenging. A specific decision may support or be consistent with some goals and objectives and be contrary to others. In such situations, whenever possible, the aspects of the decision that are contrary to goals and objectives should be addressed or mitigated to make the decision more aligned with the Growth Policy. Finally, there may be situations where it is not possible or practical to make a decision consistent with all applicable goals and objectives. In such cases, local officials and the community need to make an informed determination regarding those goals and objectives that outweigh or carry more significance than others and make the decision accordingly.

The Growth Policy is a planning tool that should be used in daily decision making. In regularly using the tool, elected and appointed officials will come to realize it reduces the burden of governance.

Community support for a decision or action will no longer need to be gauged on a case-by-case basis. The Growth Policy clearly expresses the interests of the community and the decisions and actions they will support.

Finally, the goals and objectives should be referenced in making all decisions that apply to the content of the Growth Policy. Reference to the goals and objectives should not be reserved for only major decisions that have community-wide implications; they should be referenced on all matters of policy.

In summary, the Growth Policy goals and objectives provide the means to evaluate alternative courses of action and monitor the community's expressed interests and values in achieving a sustainable future. It will serve the community only to the extent which it is used to facilitate decision making.

Community Goals and Objectives

As discussed in Chapter 2, Public Involvement and Vision, the community goals and objectives listed below were established directly from public and community stakeholder input obtained from a variety of means. The extensive interaction with members of the community gave the planning consultant an opportunity to learn from the community. The community

shared their values and concerns over existing conditions and goals for the future of the community. The input was the substantive basis for the following Growth Policy goals and objectives.

LAND USE

Goals

- Promote orderly development that meets the needs of current and future residents and businesses.
- Plan for sustainable population growth in Fallon County.
- Provide necessary infrastructure to support development in planned future growth areas.
- Protect agricultural land, which is a valuable county resource.
- Enhance the community's aesthetic quality and preserve county landmarks.
- Promote health & safety in flood hazard areas.

Objectives

- Ensure developable land is available to accommodate anticipated population increases.
- Accommodate future growth in areas that can be efficiently served by public services.
- Implement land use policies and strategies to promote investment in downtown Baker and development of commercial uses in the Town of Plevna.
- Establish land use compatibility policy in planned future growth areas, including policy to limit incompatible development in existing agricultural areas.
- Establish an annexation policy for Baker and Plevna encouraging coordination with the County.
- Improve the physical appearance of existing neighborhoods and high visible properties to retain a clean and safe sense of place.
- Educate and encourage property owners about flood hazard areas and to go through proper permitting processes in order to protect the health and safety of citizens.

HOUSING

Goals

- Strive to create affordable housing options for households in all income ranges.
- Provide housing for the community's special needs population.
- Improve the quality of housing in existing neighborhoods.
- Provide sufficient housing opportunity for temporary energy sector workers.
- Encourage utilizing housing opportunities in the downtown area.

Objectives

- Increase availability of housing choices for all people, including low- and fixed-income residents, senior citizens, homeless and persons with disabilities.
- Increase available housing in the community, with special emphasis on increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing.
- Reduce the number of substandard housing units by securing outside funding for repair and rehabilitation.
- Make targeted public investments in neighborhoods to stimulate private investment.
- Establish minimum standards for temporary worker housing.
- Increase housing opportunities within the core of Baker for a more walkable community.
- Explore development incentives to encourage new housing.

TRANSPORTATION

Goals

- Reduce truck traffic levels in the City of Baker.
- Maintain safe streets and roads.
- Minimize disruption of traffic circulation caused by barriers such as the railroad.
- Plan for street and road extensions and preserve adequate right-of-way for such extensions.
- Protect Baker Municipal Airport's air space.

Objectives

- Improve traffic safety and maintain existing streets and roads.
- Reduce disruptions to traffic circulation resulting from railroad operations.
- Identify and secure scoria and gravel resources for future maintenance of county roads.
- Plan for new streets and roads in future growth areas by preserving right-of-way for street and road extensions.
- Maintain existing and future operations at the Baker Municipal Airport.
- Explore alternative methods to truck traffic such as a truck by-pass.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Goals

- Maintain existing water, sewer and storm water infrastructure.
- Plan infrastructure improvements to support future growth.
- Pursue all available outside funding sources for infrastructure projects.
- Improve drainage in the Town of Plevna.
- Maintain and update existing wells in the City of Baker and Town of Plevna
- Maintain existing city and county roads in an efficient and effective manor for public use.
- Pursue options for cheaper broadband internet access.

Objectives

- Maximize the functional life of existing water, sewer, storm water and solid waste facilities.
- Coordinate infrastructure planning with future land use policy and future growth areas.
- Establish policies that clearly define financial responsibilities for infrastructure improvements associated with existing and new development.
- Establish policies and plans to improve drainage in the Town of Plevna which may include engineering proper drainage.
- Establish a maintenance plan to update and improve the existing wells in the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna
- Develop a Public Road Comprehensive Plan for maintaining road and bridge infrastructure.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goals

- Increase overall economic activity in the County.
- Enhance the quality of life in the County to attract new households and businesses.
- Promote a diversified local economy that is not overly reliant on the energy sector.
- Coordinate multi-faceted economic development efforts that promote small business start-ups and business recruitment, retention and expansion.
- Increase the median annual income of households and develop a highly- skilled labor force.
- Support the development of secondary value-adding industry.

- Promote a diversity of food and drink establishments.

Objectives

- Develop economic development strategies that create a diverse local economy with employment opportunities for all ages.
- Enhance the quality of life in the community as a way to stimulate private investment.
- Maximize the use of outside economic development funding opportunities.
- Ensure existing job training services provide skills needed by existing and targeted businesses.
- Support the development of agriculture in the community.
- Explore financing strategies such as tax increment financing (TIF) to spur economic development in the City of Baker.
- Increase the amount of restaurants and other food and drink establishments relative to bars

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Goals

- Maintain adequate public facilities to protect lives and property in the community.
- Create equitable community program opportunities and services for all County residents.
- Maintain sanitary and safe conditions for public and private property.
- Focus on the adoption of a Capital Improvements Plan for all three (3) entities.

Objectives

- Maintain acceptable levels of service in developed areas as the City of Baker and Town of Plevna grow.
- Improve effectiveness and efficiency of government programs and services.
- Provide responsive public services that improve the health, welfare and safety of County residents.
- Enhance public involvement and timely/accurate notification of City, Town and County projects.
- Effectively adopt a Capital Improvements Plan with timely/accurate notification, public involvement and procedures related to the improvements necessary to update infrastructure and public improvements.

RECREATION

Goals

- Meet the recreational needs of all Fallon County residents, including the provision of adequate open space in the City of Baker for active and leisure recreational activities.
- Provide year-round recreational opportunities.
- Maintain and enhance Baker Lake as a valued recreational resource.
- Provide more opportunities for youth activities and destinations in the county.

Objectives

- Identify unmet recreational and cultural needs of Fallon County residents of all ages, including youth, and provide solutions to meet needs.
- Maintain and enhance existing parks and recreational facilities.
- Maintain and enhance the water quality of Baker Lake and its shoreline to encourage continued recreation activities associated with the lake.
- Identify areas for Pedestrian Trails through a Countywide Trails Plan.
- Promote and help develop a movie theater in Baker.
- Promote and help develop other recreational places for under 18 residents

SOCIAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Goals

- Promote access to safe, convenient, and affordable healthcare.
- Promote access to mental health services.
- Provide more affordable childcare.

Objectives

- Work with healthcare providers to expand affordable healthcare access to all residents.
- Increase awareness of mental health issues and promote available resources.
- Work with state agencies to provide scholarships and other resources for children in need of childcare.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Goals

- Protect water resources to maintain a sustainable, clean water supply.
- Preserve native vegetation and wildlife habitat.
- Protect urban areas from wildfires.
- Encourage cleanup of brownfield properties and other potential contaminated sites.

Objectives

- Improve the quality of all water resources in the county and ensure construction activities implement measures to protect water quality and minimize erosion.
- Effectively control weed populations to improve agricultural productivity, preserve native vegetation and reduce wildfire risks and soil erosion.
- Enhance the community's ability to suppress wildfires from spreading to urban areas.
- Encourage and facilitate cleanup of environmental contaminated sites in the county.
- Ensure construction activities implement measures to protect water quality and minimize erosion.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

Goals

- Improve communication and level of coordination between Fallon County, Baker and Plevna elected officials.
- Increase the level of coordination between Fallon County, Baker and Plevna and regional, state, and federal agencies.

Objectives

- Increase collaboration between Fallon County, the City of Baker, and Town of Plevna on matters of mutual interest and maintain open lines of communications to effectively manage conflict when disagreements arise.
- Proactively inform regional, state, and federal agencies and the State Legislature of funding needs that arise as a result of growth pressures.
- Use the Growth Policy goals & objectives as a guide for decision making.
- Provide and obtain funding to implement the Growth Policy and strategies which include but are not limited to writing and putting into place written policies, procedures, plans, and agreements surrounding the growing needs and declines of our community.

IMPLEMENTATION

Goals

- Use the Growth Policy goals and objectives as a guide for decision making.
- Provide and obtain funding to implement Growth Policy policies and strategies.

Objectives

- Use the Growth Policy as a guide for decisions concerning land development applications, capital improvements and establishing/implementing community programs.
- Monitor the Growth Policy on an annual basis to evaluate the success of meeting goals and objectives and revise objectives and policies based on changes in priorities or circumstances.
- Establish a Capital Improvement Program to fund projects identified in the Growth Policy.
- Annually budget funds to implement Growth Policy policies and strategies.
- Dedicate staff resources to identify and apply for outside funding sources to implement Growth Policy policies and strategies.

Chapter 4: Community Profile

Overview

The profile for Fallon County summarizes several types of data that illustrate current trends, economics, housing, cultural opportunities, and other planning-related topics for the county and its two municipalities. These statistics provide a basis for other aspects of the plan including future land use, housing needs and numerous city services. In general, Fallon County is a very rural county, with an overall population density of 1.9 people per square mile. Of the 56 counties in Montana, 20 have lower population densities than Fallon County as of 2020.

Demographic Trends and Characteristics

POPULATION CHANGE

Fallon County has experienced a fluid pattern of growth and decline in population over the past one hundred years. The county has experienced an increase of 5.5 percent in population within the most recent decade from 2010 to 2020. The City of Baker grew by 3.5 percent and the Town of Plevna grew by 10.5 percent over the same time period. Table 4.1 displays the change in population ranging from 1920 to 2020. For comparison, the State of Montana grew 9.6 percent from 2010 to 2020.

	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Fallon County	4,548	4,568	3,719	3,660	3,997	4,050	3,763	3,103	2,837	2,890	3,049
Baker	1,067	1,212	1,304	1,772	2,365	2,584	2,354	1,818	1,695	1,741	1,802
Plevna	241	258	291	247	263	189	191	140	138	162	179
Montana	548,889	537,606	559,456	591,024	674,767	694,409	786,690	799,065	902,195	989,415	1,084,225

Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 Census

Population projections from the Montana Census and Economic Information Center were compared with data from Woods and Poole, a nationally recognized firm that specializes in economic and demographic data analysis and projections. The projections were compatible and support the expectation that Fallon County’s population will continue to grow slowly over the next three decades. The overall population of Fallon County is expected to grow to 3,126 by 2030, 3,290 by 2040, and 3,340 by 2050. During the same time period, Baker is expected to grow to 1,858 by 2030, 1,915 by 2040, and 1,974 by 2050. And Plevna is anticipated to grow to 204 by 2030, 232 by 2040, and 264 by 2050. Population projections can be seen in Table 4.2.

	2020	2030	2040	2050
Fallon County	3,049	3,126	3,290	3,340
Baker	1,802	1,858	1,915	1,974
Plevna	179	204	232	264

RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN

The vast majority of Fallon County remains non-Hispanic White, at 94.7%. In 2010, this number was 97.4%. Other race categories generally track with the statewide ratio, with the exception of American Indian. Breakdowns by race and Hispanic origin can be seen for Fallon County, Baker, Plevna, and Montana in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Race and Ethnicity, 2020

	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna	Montana
Percent White	94.7%	94.5%	92%	84.5%
Percent Black	.1%	.1%	1.1%	.5%
Percent American Indian and Alaska Native	.9%	1.3%	0%	6.2%
Percent Asian	.2%	.3%	0%	.8%
Percent Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	.09%	.05%	0%	.08%
Percent two more races	3.5%	3.3%	6.7%	1.3%
Percent Hispanic or Latino origin	2%	2.2%	2.2%	4.2%
Percent White Non-Hispanic	97.3%	97.8%	97.8%	95.8%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 Census

AGE

According to the 2020 US Census, the median age in Fallon County was 39 years, compared to 40.5 years for Montana as a whole. In 2010, the median age for Fallon County was 42.9 years, while Montana’s was 39.8. While Montana has gotten older in the last decade, Fallon County has trended slightly younger in that same time period. Age groups under 15 years of age have a greater share of the total population in Fallon County than in Montana. People aged 0-14 are 22.3% of Fallon County’s population while in Montana, that number is 18.9%. This illustrates the needs for quality schools and childcare. However, the share of 20–24-year-olds in Fallon County (3.8%) is lower than in Montana (6.2%). These same trends generally hold for Baker and Plevna as well as the county as a whole. Breakdowns of population by age group are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Population by Age, 2020

	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna	Montana
Total population	3,049 (100%)	1,802 (100%)	179 (100%)	1,084,225 (100%)
Under 5 years	198 (6.5%)	135 (7.5%)	10 (5.6%)	69,161 (6.4%)
5 to 9 years	235 (7.7%)	153 (8.5%)	13 (7.3%)	66,297 (6.1%)
10 to 14 years	247 (8.1%)	154 (8.5%)	24 (13.4%)	69,137 (6.4%)
15 to 19 years	180 (5.9%)	105 (5.8%)	13 (7.3%)	66,565 (6.1%)
20 to 24 years	117 (3.8%)	70 (3.9%)	2 (1.1%)	66,992 (6.2%)
25 to 29 years	188 (6.2%)	129 (7.2%)	14 (7.8%)	66,827 (6.2%)
30 to 34 years	189 (6.2%)	118 (6.5%)	18 (10%)	69,952 (6.5%)
35 to 39 years	204 (6.7%)	135 (7.5%)	10 (5.6%)	69,884 (6.4%)
40 to 44 years	167 (5.5%)	96 (5.3%)	12 (6.7%)	63,227 (5.8%)
45 to 49 years	147 (4.8%)	79 (4.4%)	7 (3.9%)	58,223 (5.4%)
50 to 54 years	157(5.1%)	85 (4.7%)	10 (5.6%)	60,225 (5.6%)
55 to 59 years	178 (5.8%)	107 (5.9%)	13 (7.3%)	72,729 (6.7%)
60 to 64 years	275 (9%)	140 (7.8%)	14 (7.8%)	79,544 (7.3%)
65 to 69 years	185 (6%)	90 (5%)	4 (2.2%)	74,081 (6.8%)
70 to 74 years	195 (6.3%)	94 (5.2%)	12 (6.7%)	57,852 (5.3%)
75 to 79 years	77 (2.5%)	62 (3.4%)	4 (2.2%)	37,911 (3.5%)
80 to 84 years	60 (1.9%)	48 (2.7%)	1 (.6%)	23,556 (2.2%)
85 years and over	87 (2.8%)	77 (4.3%)	1 (.6%)	21,883 (2%)

Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 Census

HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES

There are 1,213 households in Fallon County, with the majority of these being family households. Households refer to the person or group of people living in any one housing unit. Families, for census purposes, are groups of related people who live together. The number of nonfamily households in Fallon County decreased since 2010, from 423 to 395. Households in Fallon County are shown in Table 4.5.

	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna
Total households	1,213	738	65
Family households (families)	818	453	54
With own children under 18 years	274	213	31
Husband-wife family	684	367	41
With own children under 18 years	274	158	26
Male householder, no wife present	54	29	4
With own children under 18 years	34	19	2
Female householder, no husband present	80	57	9
With own children under 18 years	43	36	3
Nonfamily households	395	285	11
Householder living alone	351	256	11
Average Household Size*	2.51	2.44	2.75

Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 Census, *Average Household Size Calculated

EDUCATION

Educational attainment in Fallon County generally mirrors levels for the state for high school graduates but is significantly lower for bachelor's degrees or higher. Approximately one third of Montanans over 25 years of age have a bachelor's degree or higher, while only one in five of Fallon County residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. This difference in higher education levels likely reflects limited opportunities in the area for employment requiring a college degree.

	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna	Montana
Percent of population aged 25 and over with high school education	95.5%	93.5%	89.9%	94.4%
Percent of population aged 25 and over with bachelor's degree or higher	19.2%	9.7%	36.7%	33.7%

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021

Economic Trends and Characteristics

INCOME AND POVERTY

Income in Fallon County is generally higher than the state. Estimates from the 2021 American Community Survey place the county’s median income at \$83,000, considerably higher than Montana’s \$60,500. Household income for Fallon County, Baker, and Plevna by income bracket can be seen in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Household Income			
	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna
Households	1,184	664	90
Less than \$10,000	79 (6.7%)	52 (7.8%)	0 (0%)
\$10,000 to \$14,999	68 (5.8%)	66 (9.9%)	1 (1.1%)
\$15,000 to \$24,999	86 (7.3%)	54 (8.1%)	0 (0%)
\$25,000 to \$34,999	75 (6.3%)	62 (9.3%)	8 (8.9%)
\$35,000 to \$49,999	64 (5.4%)	46 (6.9%)	18 (20%)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	144 (12.2%)	44 (6.6%)	16 (17.8%)
\$75,000 to \$99,999	144 (12.2%)	50 (7.5%)	7 (7.8%)
\$100,000 to \$149,999	347 (29.3%)	234 (35.2%)	36 (41.1%)
\$150,000 to \$199,999	62 (5.2%)	48 (7.2%)	3 (3.3%)
\$200,000 or more	115 (9.7%)	8 (1.2%)	0 (0%)

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021

Poverty rates in Fallon County have risen since the previous growth policy and since the 2010 census. The county’s poverty rate among all people of 12.8% is comparable to the state rate of 12.5%. Approximately one third of families with single female heads of household with children in Fallon County is experiencing poverty according to the estimates. Related poverty figures can be seen in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Percentage of Families with Income Below Poverty Level			
	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna
All families	8.7%	14.7%	10.0%
With related children under 18 years	16.0%	27.3%	16.7%
Married couple families	5.2%	10.9%	0%
With related children under 18 years	8.2%	21.6%	0%
Families with female householder, no spouse present	26.2%	27.5%	0%
With related children under 18 years	33.3%	35.5%	0%
All people	12.8%	18.6%	7.2%
People Under 18 years	10.8%	17.8%	9.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is very low in Fallon County, according to recent Census estimates, it was zero percent. Montana’s rate during the same time period was four percent. Labor force participation rates can be seen in Table 4.9.

	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna
Population 16 and over	2,361	1,385	183
In labor force	1,637 (69.3%)	863 (62.3%)	154 (84.2%)
Civilian labor force	1,637 (69.3%)	863 (62.3%)	154 (84.2%)
Employed	1,637 (69.3%)	863 (62.3%)	154 (84.2%)
Unemployed	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Not in labor force	724 (30.7%)	522 (37.7%)	29 (15.8%)

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021

Workers in Fallon County are employed across various sectors. The oil and gas industry along with agriculture (categorized together as Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, Mining) remains a large employer in the area with 32.1% of the employed population. This is still much larger than the state figure of 6.2%, representing the enduring strength of agriculture and resource extraction in the county. Employment by sector can be seen in Table 4.10. There is no known projection for future job growth over the next decade or more. In the short term, based on demographic trends, job growth is not anticipated to occur. On the other hand, the longer-term outlook for jobs should see a slight increase consistent with the anticipated population growth. A Resiliency addendum to the 2022-2027 Eastern Plains Economic Development document highlights the fact that the lack of workforce availability is a major concern in the region. Based on comments from local stakeholders, it seems likely that until affordable housing and workforce training issues are addressed this lack will continue. Oil and gas production continue to be heavily influenced by international demand and prices. A major spike in prices or the emergence of new production technology could both lead to a significant uptick in the oil and gas industry of Fallon County.

Industry Sector	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, Mining	525 (32.1%)	245 (28.4%)	10 (6.5%)
Construction	181 (11.1%)	115 (13.3%)	25 (16.2%)
Manufacturing	43 (2.6%)	43 (5%)	0 (0%)
Wholesale Trade	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Retail Trade	166 (10.1%)	144 (16.7%)	0 (0%)
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	167 (10.2%)	78 (9%)	25 (16.2%)
Information	12 (.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (1.9%)
Finance and Insurance, and Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	3 (.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management	74 (4.5%)	29 (3.4%)	1 (0.6%)
Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance	303 (18.5%)	111 (12.9%)	72 (46.8%)
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services	58 (3.5%)	22 (2.5%)	0 (0%)
Other Services, Except Public Administration	41 (2.5%)	16 (1.9%)	18 (11.7%)
Public Administration	64 (3.9%)	60 (7%)	0 (0%)

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021

Fallon County workers generally drive to work, and usually alone, comparable to the rest of Montana and the nation. These trends have changed little since 2010. Detailed means of transportation to work can be seen in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Means of Transportation to Work			
	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna
Workers 16 years and over	1,632	1,385	152
Car, truck or van -- drove alone	1,200 (73.5%)	677 (78.4%)	92 (63.2%)
Car, truck or van -- carpooled	161 (9.9%)	123 (14.3%)	3 (2%)
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	2 (0.1%)	2 (0.2%)	0 (0%)
Walked	106 (6.5%)	38 (4.4%)	39 (25.7%)
Other means	2 (0.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Worked at home	161 (9.9%)	23 (2.7%)	14 (9.2%)
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	18.6	22.7	16.9

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021

Housing Trends and Characteristics

HOUSING OCCUPANCY CHARACTERISTICS

Affordable housing is a known issue in Fallon County, similar to many communities across the country. Lack of affordable housing creates issues for retaining workers. Much of the housing stock in Fallon County is single family detached housing, which tends to be older than the rest of the state. One in five homes in Fallon County were built before 1940. Older homes in the county were generally built with affordable materials at the time of construction, making maintaining them for future generations an often cost-prohibitive burden. Housing stock age can be seen in table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Year Structure Built		
Year Housing Unit Built	Fallon County	Montana
Built 2020 or later	5 (<1%)	1,241 (0%)
Built 2010 to 2019	94 (6%)	45,239 (9%)
Built 2000 to 2009	114 (8%)	73,012 (14%)
Built 1990 to 1999	173 (12%)	70,227 (14%)
Built 1980 to 1989	152 (10%)	57,036 (11%)
Built 1970 to 1979	246 (17%)	86,349 (17%)
Built 1960 to 1969	172 (12%)	41,745 (8%)
Built 1950 to 1959	128 (9%)	45,960 (9%)
Built 1940 to 1949	111 (8%)	23,206 (5%)
Built 1939 or earlier	289 (20%)	68,538 (13%)

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021

Despite issues with affordable housing, twenty percent of housing units in Fallon County are vacant, according to the 2020 census. Vacancy rates have increased since 2010, when the county's vacancy rate was 16%. Occupancy rates for Fallon County, Baker, and Plevna are listed in Table 4.13. Census estimates place most residents (52%) as having moved into their current housing unit in 2000 or later. Breakdowns of move-in years can be seen in Table 4.14.

	Fallon County	Baker	Plevna	Montana
Housing units	1,526	930	84	514,803
Occupied housing units	79.5%	79.4%	77.3%	86.9%
Vacant housing units	20.5%	20.6%	22.7%	13.1%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 Census

	Fallon County
Total Population in Occupied Housing Units	2,990
Moved in 2019 or later	213 (7%)
Moved in 2015 to 2018	540 (18%)
Moved in 2010 to 2014	799 (27%)
Moved in 2000 to 2009	879 (29%)
Moved in 1990 to 1999	193 (6%)
Moved in 1989 or earlier	366 (12%)

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021

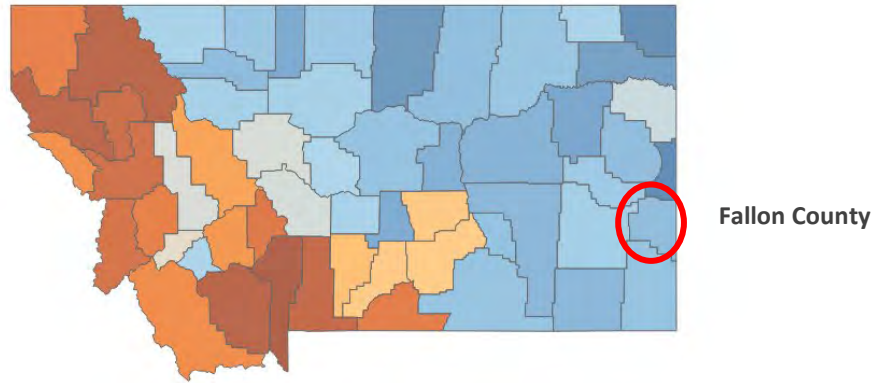
HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

The issue of affordable housing is national, and certainly evident in Fallon County. The gap between the cost of housing and average income is especially acute in Montana. In western Montana especially, the rise in home prices and rent is increasingly outstripping any rises in wages since 2020.

The Montana Department of Labor and Industry's Labor Market Information (LMI) produces a housing affordability data dashboard available online¹. One metric created by the dashboard is the ratio of median home values to median household income. A higher ratio means that home prices are high relative to area median household incomes. For 2022, the highest ratio in Montana was found in Gallatin County, with median home values of \$526,700 and median household income of \$83,434, a value to income ratio of 6.3. The lowest ratio in the state was found in Wibaux County, with a ratio of 1.7. According to the dashboard, Fallon County's ratio of 2.9 ranks 43 out of 56 Montana counties in the ratio of median home values to median household income. While housing affordability is in issue in Fallon County, the problem is less severe than other parts of the state. See Figure 4.1 for a comparison of other counties in Montana.

¹ <https://lmi.mt.gov/Home/Home-Prices>

Figure 4.1: Median Home Value - Fallon County



Housing Affordability Depends on Home Values and Incomes

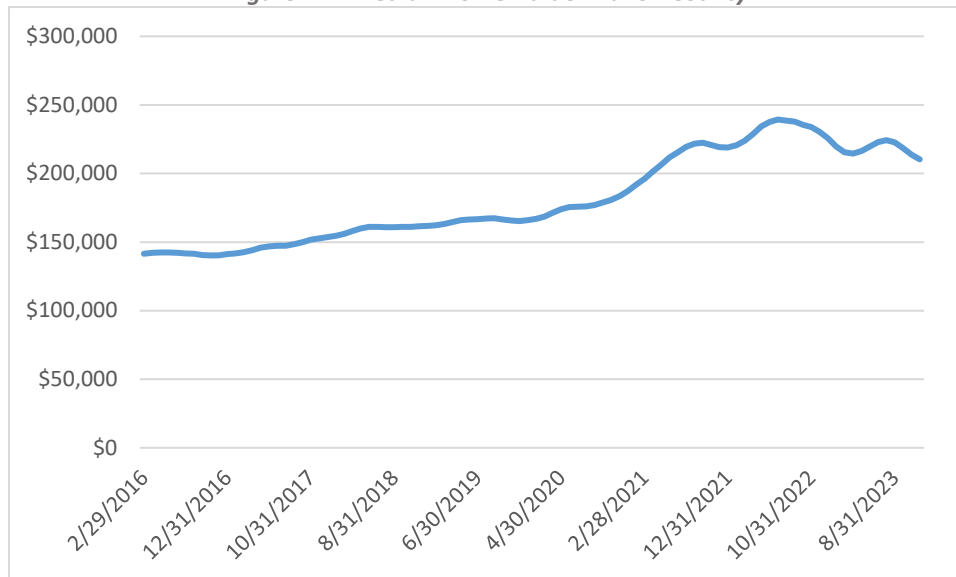
(Orange represents values higher than the U.S. average, while blue represents lower than the U.S. average)

Ratio of Median Home Values to Median Household Income Varies by County

with housing affordability being a larger issue in western Montana than other parts of the state

The housing affordability dashboard also tracks median home values as gathered by Zillow (see Figure 4.2). While the data only goes back to 2016, the surge in home values in recent years is evident. However, home values have begun to dip since their height during the COVID pandemic. Figure 4.2 shows median home values in Fallon County 2016-2023.

Figure 4.2: Median Home Value - Fallon County



Additional housing issues were outlined in the latest Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) put out by the Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) which covers Fallon, Prairie, Dawson, Wibaux, and Carter counties. The latest CEDS was produced to cover the years 2022-2027. Among other topics, the document addresses housing in the region. The CEDS identifies increasing vacancies in housing caused by demographic shifts. Often, these vacant homes are not sufficiently maintained and cannot provide housing for new occupants. The CEDS also identifies seasonal occupation of housing during the summer and hunting seasons as limiting supply to year-round residents.

Although Table 4.12 identifies a significant percentage of vacant housing units in Fallon County, many of these units are seriously dilapidated and need either to be rehabilitated or torn down to be able to use the lots for new housing construction.

Infill development of this sort is an attractive approach because it avoids the need to invest in new infrastructure. The SMART agency in Fallon County is leading an initiative to create the Southeast Montana Real Estate Investment Cooperative to put local dollars to work solving the local affordable housing issue. According to SMART Executive Director Vaughn Zenko, “The purpose of the co-op is to identify underutilized properties to revitalize, renovate and generally improve the real estate stock in Fallon County.” While this concept is one tool to help address the affordable housing issue, it is important to continue to develop other strategies and take advantage of regional or national funding mechanisms to help address the issue.

At the state level, the Montana Legislature passed - and the governor signed - the Montana Land Use Planning Act in April and May of 2023. Among many changes, this bill makes Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) legal throughout the state. ADUs provide an option for homeowners and others to create additional housing on their property, an example being a family renting out the basement of their home. The act also makes it legal to be able to build a duplex on any piece of land that is zoned for single family homes. However, the act is being challenged in court. Should the act survive court challenges, it may create additional opportunities for housing in Fallon County.

Chapter 5: Existing Land Use

Overview

The Fallon County Land Use Plan was prepared in coordination with the Growth Policy as required by Montana State Statutes. The Land Use Plan is an update from the 2017 Land Use Plan and addresses existing land use conditions and development constraints. Chapter 7 builds on the existing land use evaluation of this chapter and provides future land use designations and recommendations to assist County Commissioners, officials, staff and residents on how the County can grow.

The Plan is intended to be used as a positive guide for growth and development. The nature and intent of the Land Use Plan is to protect the customs and cultures of Fallon County citizens through protection of private property rights while supporting economic ventures. In addition, the Plan stresses proactive development measures, such as minimizing incompatible uses while maximizing efficient placement of infrastructure, transportation and other public services, to mitigate growth impacts that may occur within the County.

While the planned crew camp along US 12 west of Baker did not come to fruition, other development is occurring. One example is the new Runnings store west of Baker. By locating uses along this corridor, future land uses can be planned to use existing infrastructure, are compatible with each other and have high-quality design elements that support growth policy goals and objectives.

Since the previous plan update, the youth center has continued its operations and has added appropriate fencing for a small basketball court adjacent to US 12. Continued support of the youth center by the community will help retain this valuable asset.

Trends

As noted in the Population and Employment Chapter (Chapter 5), population is expected to remain steady because of recent downturn in the energy extraction sector. Previous pressures on surrounding Montana communities, including Fallon County, due to the development of the Bakken oil region have eased as the oil industry enters a “bust” cycle. The County’s aging population will need to be accounted for when preparing future land uses so as to encourage easy travel and amenities for senior citizens.

In addition, supporting youth activities and spaces as well as preserving Fallon County’s natural resources need to be balanced with economic development as future land uses are designated.

Existing Land Use

Existing land uses were analyzed throughout the entire County and were tabulated to show the percentages and locations of uses throughout Fallon County, Baker and Plevna. Land use analysis was performed using Montana Cadastral parcel data with additional input from previous plans, community input, and validation with aerial imagery. Table 6.1 shows the distribution of land uses by category for each jurisdiction.

Table 6.1: Existing Land Use Distribution

Land Use	Unincorporated Fallon County		City of Baker		Town of Plevna		Total	
	Acres	Percent of Total	Acres	Percent of Total	Acres	Percent of Total	Acres	Percent of Total
Agriculture	841,019.9	81.2%	0	3.8%	226.6	62.0%	841,246.5	81.1%
Commercial	82.1	0.0%	65.2	12.5%	4.9	1.4%	152.3	0.0%
Industrial	1,068.1	0.1%	34.4	6.6%	0.2	0.0%	1,102.7	0.1%
Parks	61.1	0.0%	129.5	24.7%	0.0	0.0%	190.6	0.0%
Public/Civic	191,595.3	18.5%	53.4	10.2%	37.7	10.3%	191,686.4	18.5%
Residential	3.8	0.0%	194.1	37.1%	27.8	7.6%	225.7	0.0%
Rural Residential	2,382.0	0.2%	0.0	0.0%	32.5	8.9%	2,414.5	0.2%
Vacant	0.0	0.0%	46.9	5.2%	35.6	9.8%	82.5	0.0%
Total*	1,036,212.3	100.0%	523.5	100.0%	365.4	100.0%	1,037,101.2	100.0%

Source: Montana Cadastral 2023

*Does not include right of way parcels

FALLON COUNTY (RURAL)

The dominant land use in Fallon County is agriculture, which includes farmsteads, ranches and public owned land that is also farmed or ranched. Approximately 841,000 acres or 81 percent of the total land is agriculture.

Public lands account for more than 190,000 acres of land or 19 percent of the total land in the County. However, some public lands are also used for agricultural and ranching purposes with farmers and ranchers adopting the multi-use concept for publicly owned lands. The other land uses shown in Table 5.1 identify the remaining acreage spread across Fallon County, Baker and Plevna. Figure 5.1 shows the existing land uses for the County.

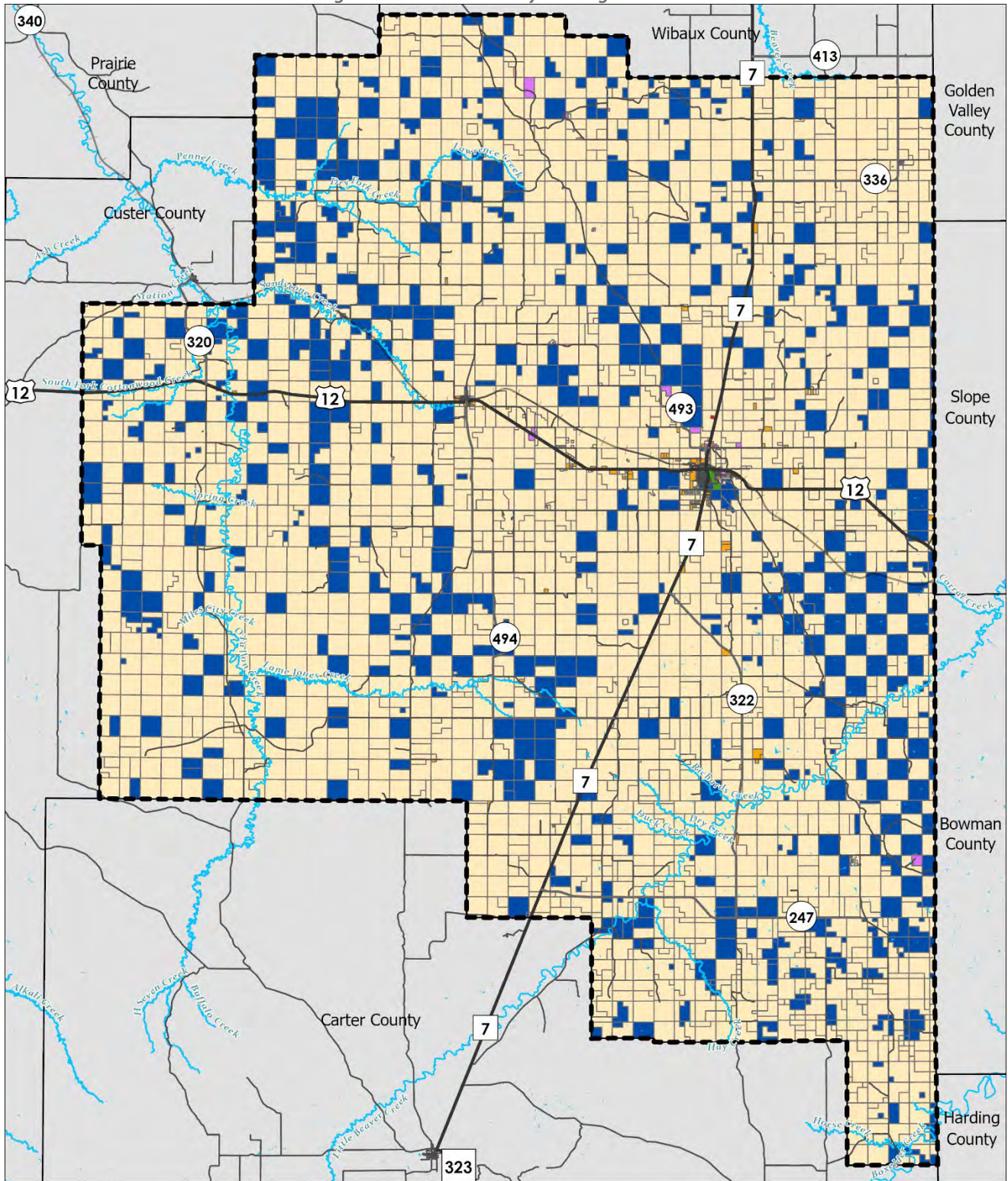
Agriculture

Farming, ranching and other agricultural uses are a staple to the local economy for Fallon County residents. As noted in Table 5.1, agricultural land uses account for the vast majority of land throughout the county. The 2022 Census of Agriculture will not be released until 2024. Therefore, the 2017 Census of Agriculture is the most recent available. According to the 2017 Census for Agriculture, 907,969 acres were used for farmland and ranching, which is an eight percent decrease from 985,078 acres in 2012. Most agricultural land in Fallon County is used for pasture and ranching, which comprises 79% of agricultural land; the remaining 21% is cropland. Farm consolidation has remained a trend in Fallon County. The median farm size in 2017 was 1,435 acres, a 12 percent increase from 2012; however, the number of farms dropped two percent from 295 in year 2012 to 289 in year 2017. Increasingly large farms tend to use increasingly large equipment which still relies on the county's public road infrastructure.

Forage – land used for all hay and haylage, grass silage and greenchop – was the top crop item with Fallon County ranking as the 16th highest producing county in the state. Wheat was the dominant grain produced, although the county ranked high among Montana counties for corn, with acres harvested second only to Yellowstone County. Table 5.2 shows the 2017 quantities produced and state rankings for selected agricultural items. Livestock inventory was dominated by cattle and calves, with Fallon County ranking 22nd among counties within the state.

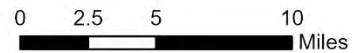
Agriculture and especially ranching are still contending with seasonal water shortages and lack of quality water supply in the northern part of the county. Unincorporated parts of the county receive their water through ground water wells. Landowners have previously expressed a need for public rural water systems.

Figure 5.1 – Fallon County Existing Land Use



Existing Land Use

- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Parks
- Public/Civic
- Residential
- Rural Residential
- Vacant
- Fallon County Boundaries



June 2023

Table 5.2: Selected Agricultural Statistics		
Crop	Quantity (acres)	State Rank
Forage	56,533	16
Wheat, all	21,530	31
Corn for grain	5,442	2
Corn for silage	3,848	6
Lentils	3,776	23
Peas	3,093	25
Livestock	Quantity (number)	State Rank
Cattle and calves	46,066	22
Sheep and lambs	2,201	31
Horses and ponies	649	41
Layers	539	31

Source: USDA Agriculture Census 2017

Commercial

Commercial uses make up less than one percent of total land for the entire county, yet commercial land uses play a critical role for a majority of residents. Businesses such as retail and grocery stores, pharmacies, banks, restaurants, hotels and a myriad of other small businesses are classified as commercial uses. These services are vital to many community residents, and developers should strive to expand commercial uses in Baker and Plevna to take advantage of existing infrastructure.

Rural commercial uses, which are defined as uses located outside an incorporated town, are just as important as urban areas are to the overall economic health of the county. However, since the majority of commercial uses are within Baker or Plevna as are most of the residents, commercial expansion should be targeted in both Baker and Plevna. The City of Baker and the Town of Plevna have existing and potential commercial properties that could be rehabilitated or expanded to accommodate future growth. Planning for adequate commercial land allows urban and rural towns to attract shovel-ready businesses. The County, Baker and Plevna should continue to work together and coordinate with SMART and EPEDC to attract businesses that benefit all residents by ensuring adequate commercial land is available.

Public

More than 18 percent of Fallon County land is classified as public/civic. Public and civic uses include land owned by federal, state, county and city government as well as land uses for public purposes such as parks, airfields, religious institutions and schools. The Bureau of Land Management, US Department of Interior, US Forest Service and US Department of Agriculture own a majority of the public land throughout the County. The State of Montana is also a significant landowner. The State's public land includes school trust land that has been leased to oil and gas companies for drilling. The County receives royalties from the arrangement and should continue to pursue such agreements into the future.

While the federal government owns a majority of the public land, the agencies do allow local residents to lease land for ranching and farming purposes, which is known as the multi-use concept. The arrangement should continue into the future as it allows Fallon County residents to generate income and maintain the land. If an opportunity arises in which local residents or the County is able to acquire federally owned land, the County should establish a plan for the property to achieve highest and best use. The plan does not need to be complex, but it should address future uses and who will be responsible for maintaining the property.

The crew camp site west of Baker is now a substantial parcel of public land. The entire parcel (of which the crew camp is only a portion) is nearly 600 acres. While it's intended use may have been more residential (or commercial), it is currently vacant and part of public lands. The County is preparing the former crew camp for sale.

Residential and Rural Residential

Residential land is classified into two different categories, residential and rural residential. Rural residential land comprises less than one percent of all property throughout the county and contains nearly all residential properties not included within Baker or Plevna boundaries. While a significant amount of residential land is rural, a majority of county residents live in those two incorporated municipalities (City of Baker and Town of Plevna).

Zoning guidelines may need to be updated to limit incompatible land uses and to ensure compatible land uses surround residential land. An example of incompatible land uses would be constructing a residential subdivision next to a chemical processing plant or heavy industrial businesses. The County, Baker and Plevna should coordinate planning efforts for future residential needs where town boundaries abut County property. While farming and ranching are compatible with both rural and residential properties, people moving into new subdivisions located adjacent to farming or rangeland properties should understand that agricultural and ranching uses have certain attributes associated with them including dust, loud machinery, animals, smells and other items that are intrinsic to farm and ranch uses. It is important to note this trend because future residential development is likely to occur on the fringes of Baker where open land exists.

Major changes to Montana Statutes during the 2023 legislative session affect planning and zoning for counties and municipalities. Fallon County regulations have been updated to align with these new laws. Plevna and Baker regulations are being similarly updated.

An Annexation Plan is encouraged for the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna. Fallon County should coordinate with these two municipalities to coordinate planning efforts. It is in the best interest of the municipalities, with their needs to provide public services, and with the help of the county encourage annexation to ensure public health and safety and appropriate infrastructure needs are met.

Vacant Land

Vacant or undeveloped land is virtually non-existent in the rural portions of the county, with the exception of the essentially vacant crew camp site. Where not developed and not otherwise prohibited, rural land is used for agricultural purposes. Vacant land within Baker is critical for planning purposes because these are areas located within the city which are likely ready for immediate development if infrastructure exists to serve them. These vacant lands can be targeted for future infill development, thus reducing the need to expand infrastructure and infringe upon farmstead and agricultural lands, and essentially containing the capital maintenance costs of the City.

Transportation

While Figure 5.1 only illustrates major highways in the County, the highways and local roads are part of the transportation land use in the County. Fallon County has 7 State Highways and 1 US Highway: US 12, Highway 336, Highway 494, Highway 320, Highway 322, Highway 493, Highway 347, Highway 7. Fallon County is responsible for approximately 679.15 miles of off system roads and 76.65 miles of secondary roads outside of Baker and Plevna that provide access to public lands, transportation to schools, routes for emergency response and for ranchers and farmers to haul livestock and harvest produce, and multiple other purposes.

Infrastructure

Damage to county roads during the oil boom continues to need to be addressed with the creation of a road plan which the county has plans to create along with GIS mapping of county assets. The county commission expressed the difficulty of maintaining so many miles of roads with a tight budget relative to other eastern Montana counties.

The County Road Department has addressed the concerns of dust from gravel roads in some instances to help certain residents with specific needs, however the cost to apply anti-dust treatments to more gravel roads would be prohibitive.

The County has completed a bridge maintenance program, currently all bridges in the County are in good or great condition.

The County should continue to make roads, bridges, and infrastructure a high priority for the transportation needs of residents and emergency responders.

Senior citizens in the county are in need of transit. Currently, demand response transit is available in Baker and to Plevna on a limited basis. There are also rides to Miles City and Dickinson once per month. However, there is no demand response to rural parts of the county.

Capital Improvement Plan

While the county, the City of Baker, and the Town of Plevna all have capital improvement plans, none of them have been adopted and so are not official or readily accessible to the public. An adopted plan would foster more input from the public and allow the three governing entities to better coordinate needed improvements.

CITY OF BAKER

Most Fallon County residents live in Baker (59.1 percent in 2020), where the dominant land use is residential. Parks and commercial land are the second and third most common use (in terms of acreage). Current development patterns suggest that there is adequate land for industrial and commercial space outside of city limits. Residential subdivisions have also been built beyond city limits. Figure 5.2 shows the existing land use map for Baker.

Agriculture

Baker has no agricultural land use within city boundaries.

Commercial

Currently, the city has 65 acres of land (12 percent) dedicated to commercial uses. The allocation of commercial uses is centered along Highway 7 and US 12, which are both major thoroughfares and ideal locations for commercial businesses because they attract high amounts of foot and vehicular traffic. Several commercial uses are located outside of Baker along Highway 7 and US 12 and while not physically in Baker, they do contribute to the local economy.

Industrial

Industrial uses account for six percent of total land within Baker and are located along the railroad and US 12. The greatest numbers of industrial uses are located north of Baker along Highway 7 and tend to cater toward the energy extraction industry.

Parks

Baker has 129 acres dedicated toward parks, including Baker Lake. The parks include Eastside Park, Senior Citizen's Centennial Park, Steve McClain Memorial Park, Triangle Park, Iron Horse Park, and Coldwell Field. The golf course is not included in the parks acreage because users must pay a fee for usage, thus it is included in the public/civic category. Parks are located around and near Baker Lake making them a natural and compatible use along the lake. No park is located north of the railroad or in southwest Baker for residents to use.

Public/Civic

Public and civic uses include all land owned by the City or County as well as land owned by schools, religious institutions and not-for-profit entities like museums, hospitals and libraries. The Baker Municipal Airport is considered a public use and has the single largest public/civic acreage. The rodeo grounds are the second largest public use with the golf course ranking third.

This is important because the airport, rodeo and golf course are situated next to each other and present unique challenges for expanding the airport while preserving rodeo grounds and the golf course.

Other public and civic uses include Baker Public Schools, City Hall/Fallon County Courthouse, Baker Rural Fire Department, Fallon Medical Complex and Baker Lake.

Baker has three schools: Lincoln, Longfellow, and Baker High School (including 7th and 8th grade). The school district will need to continue to budget adequate funding to maintain the aged school facilities including addressing any drainage issues.

Hospice care is not available in the community; however, Fallon Medical Complex is a clinic, home care, critical access hospital and long-term care facility and Superior Care is a locally owned assisted living facility.

Public Safety Services are provided by City of Baker Police Department and The Fallon County Sheriff's Department. The City patrol cars are maintained/repared by the city mechanic.

Residential and Rural Residential

As noted earlier, residential uses account for the majority of land within Baker (37 percent of land); rural residential uses are not included in Baker as these uses are limited to residences outside municipal and town boundaries. Single-family homes account for the largest residential use and apartment complexes account for the least amount of residential use.

Vacant Land

Vacant land accounts for five percent of land within Baker and is classified as having no associated land use. Most of the parcels have no building on the lot and are privately owned. They may also have a dwelling unit that is uninhabitable making it a nonviable residential use. The areas identified in gray (vacant lots) in Figure 5.2 show the most potential for infill development and new housing construction.

Housing Affordability

A recent survey confirmed that housing affordability remains one of the most important issues to community members as it was in the last two growth policies. Housing affordability is generally defined as spending no more than 30 percent of gross income on housing and basic utility costs. The Montana Board of Housing provides assistance in the development of housing for persons with special needs.

Additionally, special needs housing is needed to meet the needs of an aging population and low-income families. Baker has one low-income housing facility, known as Prairie Manor. This is an apartment complex with one- and two-bedroom units available for Section 8 housing assistance.

An option for the City of Baker is to implement several land development strategies to incentivize affordable units. These incentives can be encouraged through zoning by encouraging smaller lot sizes.

Urban Renewal

EMEDA created a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District within the city of Baker in 2018, which will remain in effect for 15 years. The TIF includes the downtown core of Baker. The TIF may encourage development in downtown Baker. It currently has no projects and has two years of funding.

Annexation

The City of Baker has adopted an annexation plan. Fallon County and the City of Baker need to work together to ensure compatible development to efficient uses of infrastructure that avoids costly improvements through retrofitting septic and well water systems. Compatible development standards will make annexations more palatable and allows Baker and the County to plan for transition.

Water Supply & Storage

The City of Baker's water supply comes from six wells. The City of Baker has a new well East of Baker maintains the existing wells. Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) and the City of Baker successfully applied for a grant to update the preliminary engineering report for the city's water system.

Infrastructure

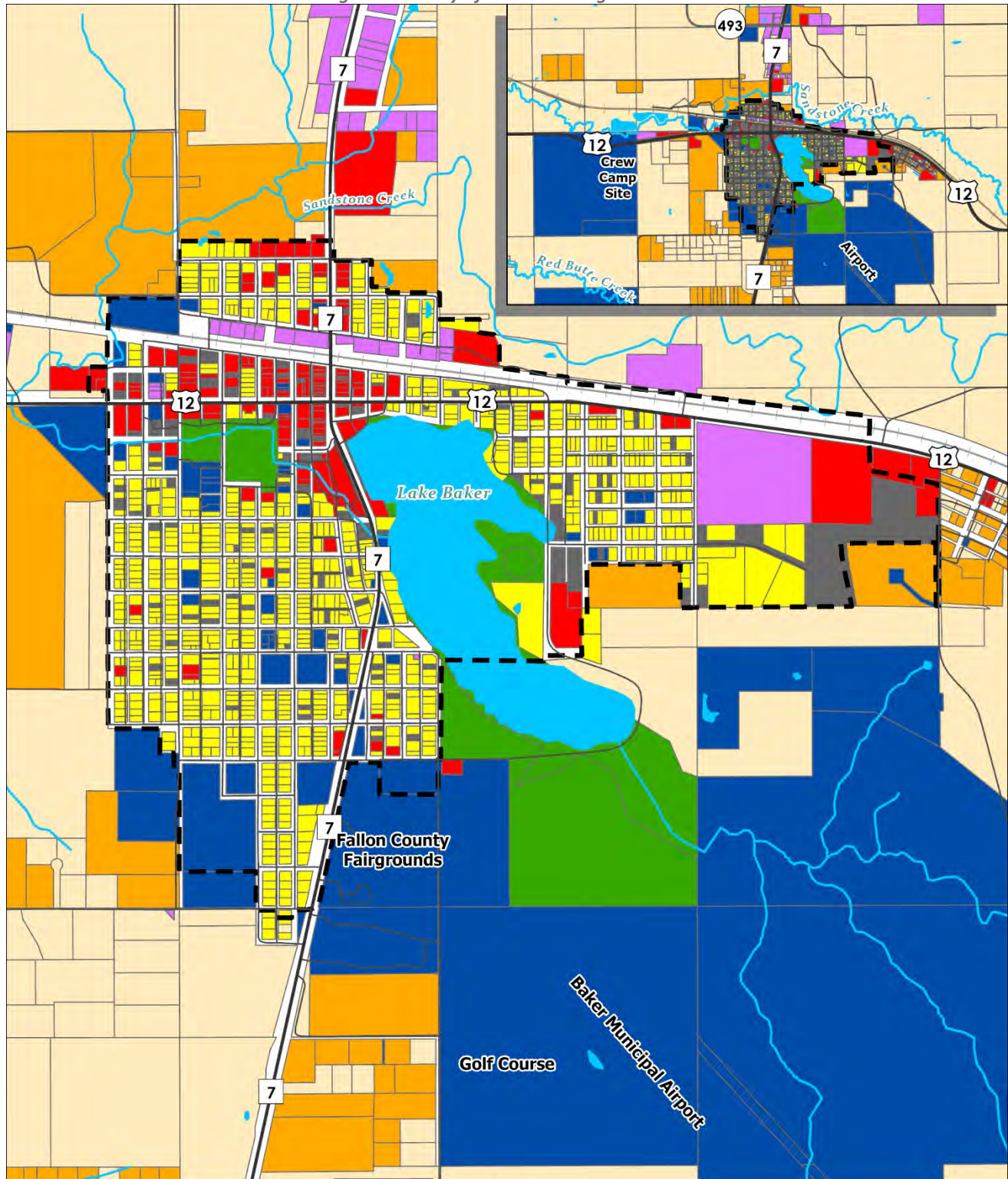
The City of Baker is in need of replacement of streets and curb and gutters in many areas with proper drainage running through town as well. The drainage issues coming from the Football Field, which was causing some infrastructure problems on George Ave and John Ave, have been addressed with help from the county since the last growth policy update. Additionally, most of the City's sewer lines were lined with PVC in the last ten years and operate sufficiently unless heavy rains occur. Public Works have identified most of the sources of extra water entering the sewer and will continue to do so until all are found.

Transportation

Two primary highways bisect Baker; Highway 7 runs north-south and US 12 runs east-west. I-94 is approximately 43 miles north of Baker.

BNSF operates the rail line that passes through Baker but does not offer public transportation. Baker is also home to a municipal airport.

Figure 5.2 – City of Baker Existing Land Use

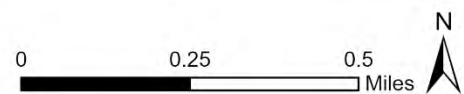


Existing Land Use

- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Industrial

- Parks
- Public/Civic
- Residential
- Rural Residential

- Vacant
- Baker City Limits



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TOWN OF PLEVNA

Figure 5.3 shows the existing land use for Plevna. The town has minimal industrial land and its commercial businesses are located along major roads, thus providing adequate traffic and access management. Plevna has no glaring land use incompatibilities and if the town plans for future growth, it can continue to avoid land uses that do not complement each other.

Agriculture

Plevna, unlike Baker which has no agricultural land within city boundaries, includes approximately 226 acres of land used for agriculture. This is 62 percent of its total land.

Commercial

Approximately five acres of land is dedicated to commercial uses in the Town. The allocation of commercial uses is clustered near the intersection of Main Street and US 12. The southeast corner of the intersection was the site of an automotive garage, and with a little site cleanup has potential to become the central economic hub for the town.

Industrial

The telephone coop building and equipment were the only property in Plevna considered industrial by this land use analysis.

Parks

Plevna has one park located east of Main Street and north of the railroad; however, land east of town and north of Callin Street offers residents a place to recreate although the land is privately owned. The only other public area for people to recreate is the Plevna school.

Public/Civic

Public and civic uses include all land owned by the Town or County as well as land owned by schools and religious institutions. The school and several churches account for the majority of public/civic land in town.

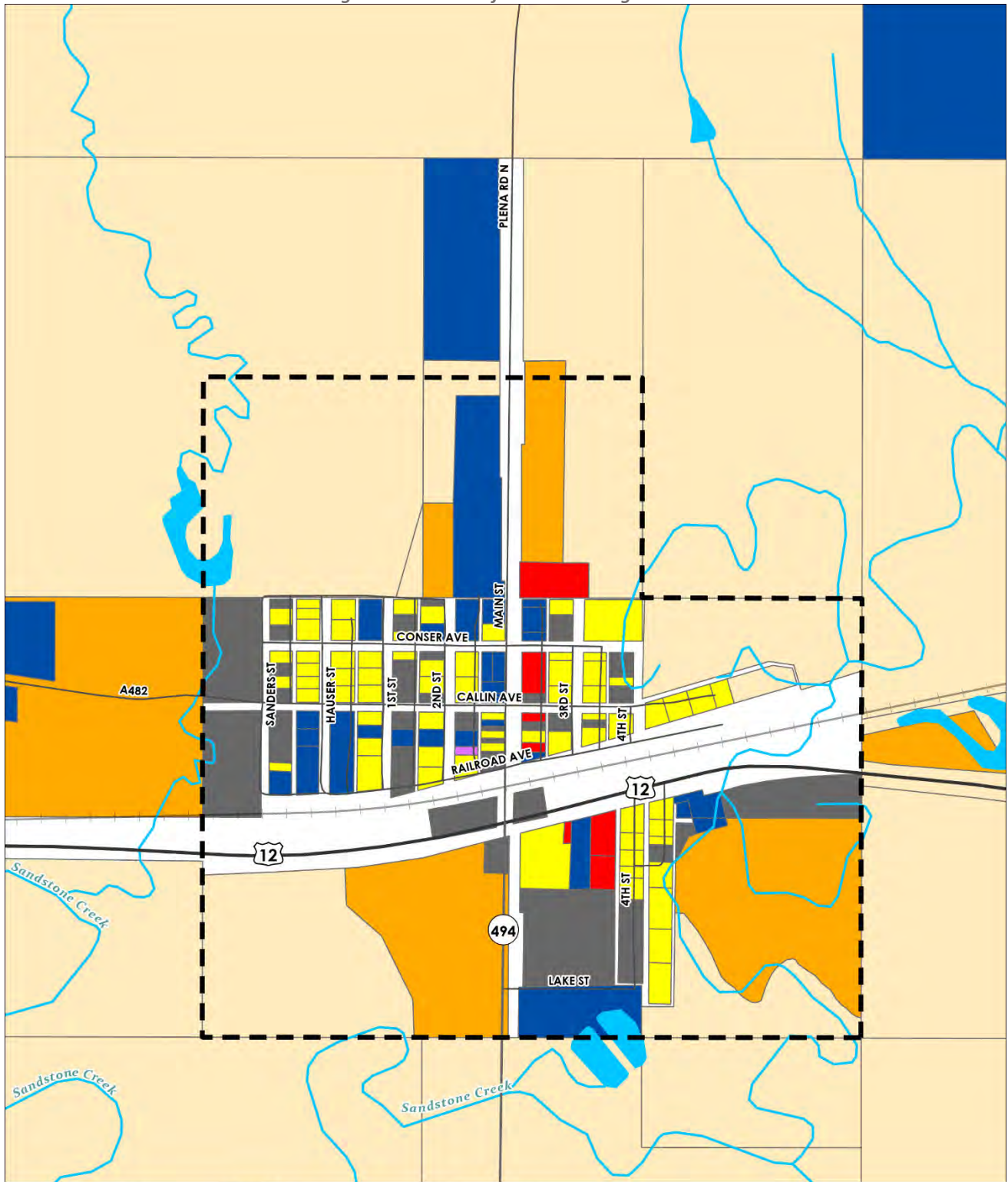
Residential and Rural Residential

Residential uses account for nearly 24 percent of land in Plevna. The vast majority of structures are single family homes while mobile homes or manufactured homes account for the remaining housing units. Plevna lacks an apartment complex or multifamily housing.

Vacant Land

Vacant land accounts for 10 percent of land within Plevna and is classified as having no associated land use. Most of the parcels have no building on the lot and are privately owned. They may also have a dwelling unit that is uninhabitable, making it a nonviable residential use.

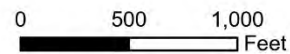
Figure 5.3 – Town of Plevna Existing Land Use



Existing Land Use

- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Parks
- Public/Civic
- Residential
- Rural Residential

- Vacant
- Plevna Town Limits



Chapter 6: Future Land Use

Overview

The Future Land Use Plan is intended to help guide growth within the County, Baker and Plevna as well as to assist county and city staff, developers and builders on where to locate uses for potential future development. Although this is a five-year plan, a 2033 planning horizon has been used for the Plevna and Baker future land use maps to support future development within the five-year planning period and to achieve compatible land uses. A future land use map was not created for the County; instead, guidelines and policies outlined in the Implementation Chapter will guide growth within the County. This will help achieve consistency between future updates of this plan, while allowing each entity the flexibility to respond to dynamic circumstances.

The housing and population projections presented in the community profile chapter were used to evaluate the need for developable land to accommodate the forecasted growth in housing units and population. For the 2030 horizon, these population projections show county-wide growth of approximately 2.5 percent from 2020.

Future land use for this plan was designated based strictly on existing parcel boundaries. Feasible future land use areas have been carried over from the previous growth policy where applicable. However, since the growth in jobs and population has likely plateaued after the decline of the area oil industry, it is unlikely that all areas identified on the future land use maps will be developed during the planning window. Should growth accelerate, these future growth areas may become more likely to be developed.

Constraints

A constraints map was created for Fallon County, Town of Plevna, and City of Baker to assist with identifying parcels of land that could be developed with fewer difficulties. Constraints mapping is intended to identify parcels with relative ease of development, however other factors may affect the likelihood of development. Since the constraints are parcel-based, some parcels may have constraints on only a portion of the parcel. Constraints include:

- Wetlands and large bodies of water
 - Parcels with the majority of their surface area covered in water or wetlands
- FEMA-established flood hazard zones¹
 - Includes the regulatory floodway and 1% chance annual flood zone
- Montana Public Lands
 - Although these lands are often in use by private entities and individuals for agricultural or oil extraction purposes, their ownership can present hurdles to development.
- Steep slopes
 - Parcels with the majority of their land at a slope greater than 20%
- Access to water and sewer infrastructure
 - Parcels in the vicinity of Baker and Plevna which likely have access to water and sewer infrastructure, based on best available data

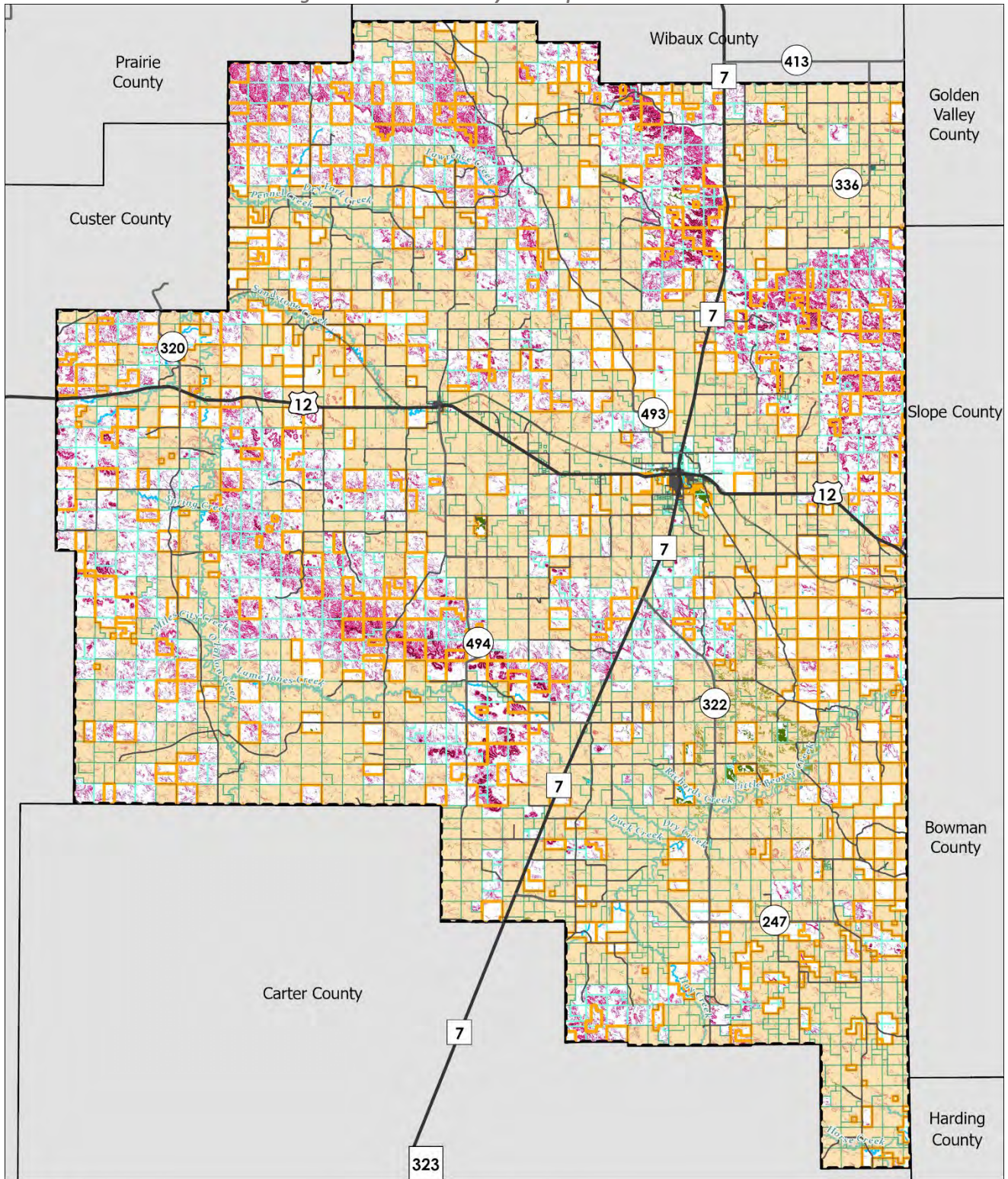
Parcels not falling under any of the above categories have been identified as developable.

FALLON COUNTY

In terms of total acreage, Fallon County has ample developable land. Major constraints in the rural portions of the county include areas with significant topographic slope, a checkerboard of publicly held land, and lack of access to infrastructure needed for high intensity development. Constraints can be seen for the county in Figure 6.1.

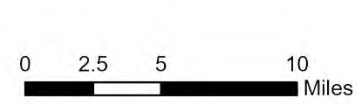
¹ Flood zones have been established for the Baker area only.

Figure 6.1 – Fallon County Development Constraints



- Fallon County Boundaries
- Parcel Boundaries
- Likely Developable Parcels (Where not already developed)
- MT Public Lands
- MT Wetlands

- Steep Slopes (Greater than 20% grade. Darker color = steeper slope)
- 20 - 30%
 - 30 - 50%
 - 50 - 100%
 - Greater than 100%



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CITY OF BAKER

The City of Baker faces significant challenges to development based on constraints mapping. Significant portions of the city and its surroundings along Sandstone Creek and the outlet from Lake Baker are FEMA-designated floodplains, largely prohibiting development in those areas. Large areas of public land use including the airport create barriers for development as well.

Another significant constraint is access to city infrastructure, specifically water and sewer service. Urban development will be difficult for areas beyond city limits which rely on well water and/or septic systems. However, this constraint can be mitigated by working closely with the county to collaborate on development on the urban fringe of the City of Baker. Constraints for the City of Baker can be seen in Figure 6.2.

TOWN OF PLEVNA

The Town of Plevna has relatively few constraints on development both within and beyond town limits. Since there is no FEMA mapping for Plevna, floodplains have not been established. Sandstone Creek and other streams may pose unknown flooding risks. As with Baker, water and sewer infrastructure can be a serious constraint. Constraints for the Town of Plevna can be seen in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.2 – City of Baker Development Constraints

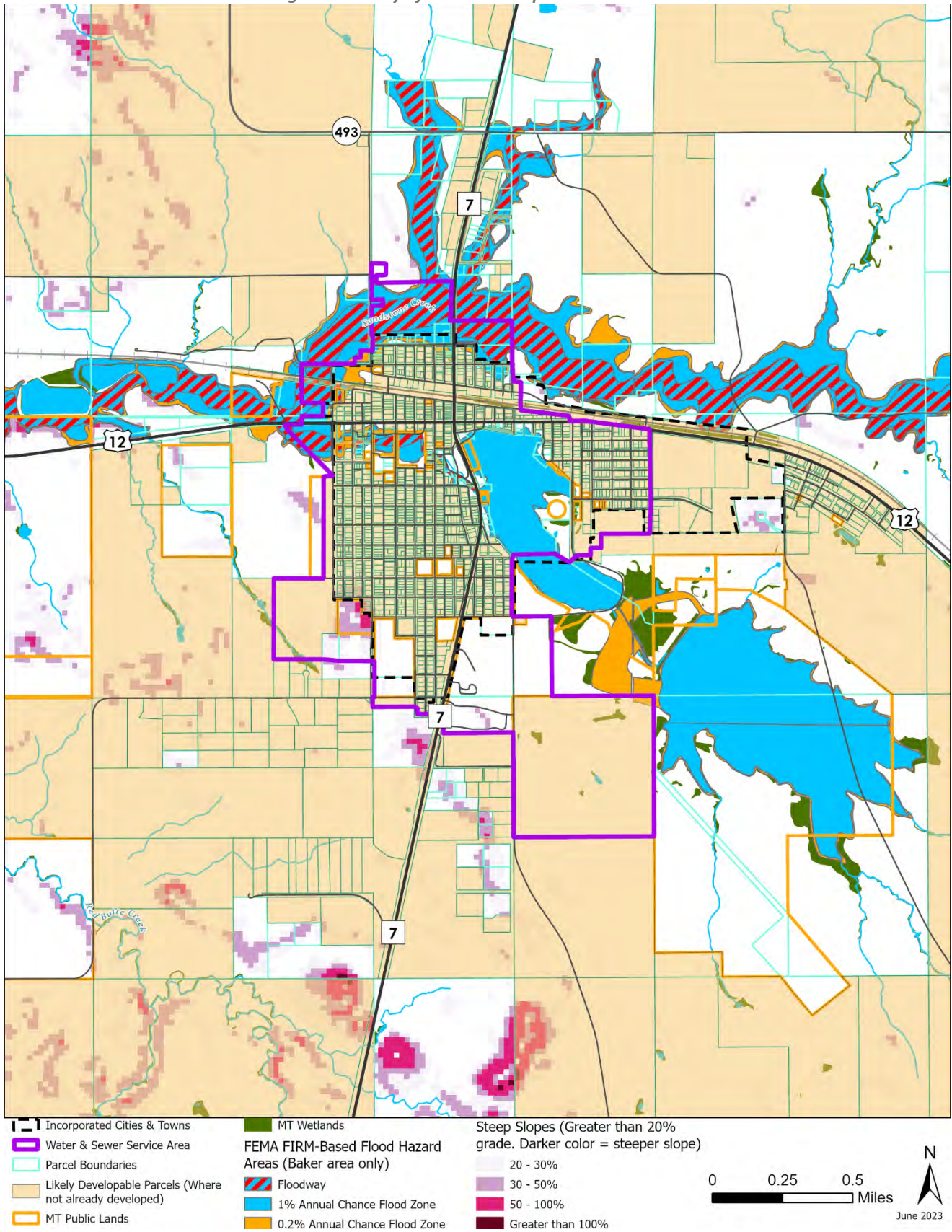
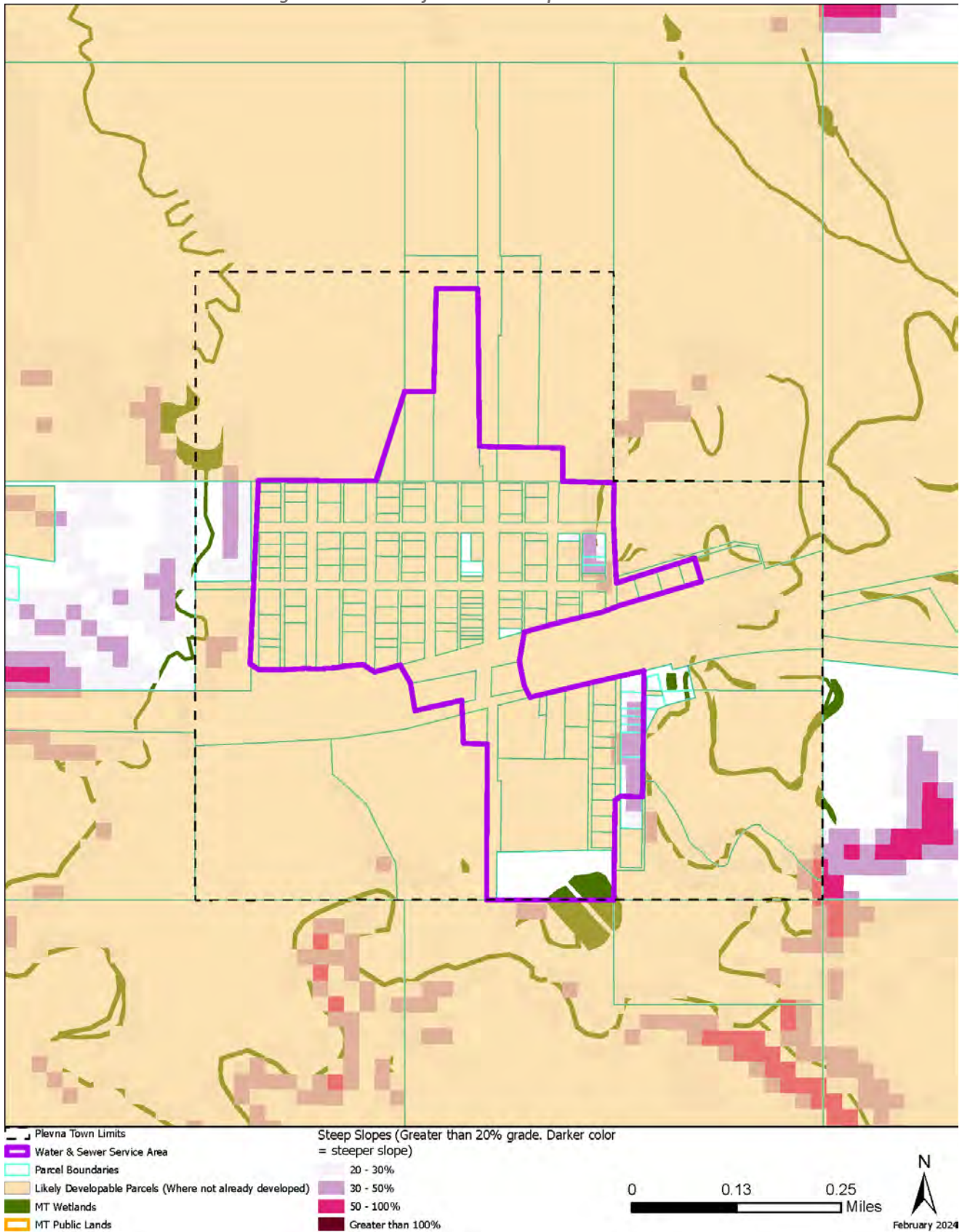


Figure 6.3 – Town of Plevna Development Constraints



Future Land Use

FALLON COUNTY

The ability for the County to accommodate future population increases depends upon the availability of land for constructing new housing and creating new businesses. While the County does own acreage, future land swaps or sales should be approved only where infrastructure currently exists or is planned in the near future. The previously planned crew camp west of Baker has the potential for development as the county has put much of the needed infrastructure in place already.

Agricultural

Since ranching and farming are an important economic benefit and way of life for many County residents, preserving open land for agricultural purposes should be a high priority. To ensure existing uses are preserved, people moving into new residential subdivisions located adjacent to farming or rangeland properties need to understand that agricultural and ranching uses have certain attributes associated with them. The attributes include dust, loud machinery, animals, smells and other items that are intrinsic to farm and ranch uses.

The County should continue to encourage and promote the “multiple use” concept of allowing farmers and ranchers to use federal, state and county land for farming, ranching and agricultural activities. In addition, no changes in federal or state land use should be allowed without the County receiving adequate notice, having the opportunity to comment on any proposed plan or land use activity.

Commercial and Industrial

The County should continue encouraging businesses to expand in Baker and Plevna, where existing infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer can provide immediate services to a business.

Developments north of Baker along Highway 7 may be stressing North Baker’s Water and/or Sewer District capacity. Moreover, as future development occurs along this corridor, the County should work with Baker to establish standards for development so that businesses are not inversely impacted by either building in Baker or in the County. If the County were to enact zoning regulations, it could include such standards as setbacks, lot coverage, building height, subdivision regulations, landscaping and access requirements. Ideally, these standards would be similar to the city’s. By having agreed upon standards, it removes confusion from businesses and developers about where it is best to develop.

Future development should be encouraged where infrastructure currently exists or can be easily extended without significant costs to the County. If a developer wants to extend infrastructure by paying for the improvements, the County should analyze the capacity of existing systems to accommodate the new improvements.

Parks

While the County has three (3) established parks, residents have noted they would like additional parks in Baker and in Plevna. The County should coordinate with future developers about the potential for dedicating park land to either the County or Baker/Plevna as well as what options exist for land swap for future park lands.

Public/Civic

Public and civic land uses should be preserved, especially the rodeo grounds and airport facilities south of Baker. Planning for future uses around these two landmarks should be a top priority so as not to disturb air-traffic operations. Other community landmarks including the museum, library and schools should be planned for future expansion as the community grows. Recent museum attendance has increased, illustrating the need for such assets. While not all public/civic facilities may require expansion, planning for compatible land uses around these facilities should be incorporated.

County facilities including the landfill and maintenance shops may need to be expanded with potential population increases. While the landfill currently has capacity to accommodate more than 60 years of waste, planning for future expansion should be identified so as not to design residential subdivisions near potential expansion areas.

Public Safety Services are provided by the Fallon County Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Department currently has four sworn officers. The Sheriff's Department has nine employees in total, including deputies, detention officers, and others. The jail may have some capacity issues as some cells are currently double bunked. Insufficient parking for employees along the south side of the building remains an issue.

Residential and Rural Residential

Rural residential development should be encouraged when septic systems can be developed to adequately handle the size of development; however, planning for rural residential uses on the fringe of Baker should be discouraged as these developments may cause issues when the City needs to expand its boundaries and public services. Transitioning from septic systems to sewer systems is the biggest challenge for both the homeowner and City. The County and Baker need to coordinate future residential developments near Baker to ensure if residential uses are planned, they either tie into Baker's existing water and sewer system (when capacity and pressure are feasible) or are developed in such a way that they can be easily linked to City services when capacity and pressure are available.

Should oil activity increase and the need arise in future, crew camps should continue to be planned within the County and outside Baker and Plevna boundaries. When these facilities begin to transition from crew quarters to other potential uses, having them clustered makes redevelopment easier because it allows for large-scale development or section-by-section development, both of which are advantageous to developers and investors. The County should also continue to consider the potential for infrastructure be left in place after the crew camp facility leaves so future uses can quickly and cost-effectively reuse the land and make it an attractive use for a variety of different developments.

Vacant Land

Vacant land located near Baker and Plevna offers the best opportunity for the County to coordinate future growth with these communities. The future land use maps for each community show that all vacant land is assigned a new use, even land that is near Baker and Plevna boundaries. However, not all vacant land in the County has been assigned a new use. Some vacant parcels cannot be developed because of terrain, lack of infrastructure or other issues. As such, only parcels near Baker and Plevna have been assigned future uses.

CITY OF BAKER

During the oil boom period of the Bakken oil play, Baker's growth was generated mostly from the oil and gas extraction business. As the boom has waned, Baker's growth is likely to slow. As noted in the Community Profile Chapter, the County is not expected to add significant numbers of jobs per year through year 2030. The city is expected to add approximately 56 new residents between 2020 and 2030. Figure 6.4 shows the future land use plan for Baker.

Future growth will be directed toward north and west Baker where land and infrastructure can accommodate development. The development of industrial uses north of Baker should continue; however, the City and County should develop landscaping and screening standards to improve the aesthetic appearance of the corridor.

Developing south of Baker presents some difficulties as water pressure becomes low and sewer requires lift stations to move effluent. As such, rural residential and low-density residential are the best options for planning future uses south of Baker. East of Baker presents possible opportunities for commercial and residential development, although the airport, Baker Lake and several oil and gas wells limit significant development.

The use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) presents a funding source for improvement projects within the city. To utilize TIF, it is necessary to determine specific bounded districts that will be subject to the funding mechanism. The future land use map in Figure 6.4 can be used to guide the location of future TIF boundaries and other general economic redevelopment areas. More information regarding the use of TIF can be found in the Implementation Chapter (Chapter 15).

Agricultural

When planning for future uses, Baker needs to coordinate with the County on bringing in existing agricultural land into City boundaries. No agricultural land should be annexed unless the land will be developed into a higher use such as residential, commercial or industrial. Avoiding such large tracts of open land saves the existing property owner tax money and helps eliminate land speculation. Moreover, because agricultural land is highly valued and residents wish to preserve prime agricultural parcels, agricultural land on the periphery should be acquired first to avoid large swaths of agricultural land between more intense uses.

Commercial

Future commercial development should occur along Highway 7 and Highway 12 to maximize access onto the transportation corridors including downtown Baker. While development will likely occur north of Baker along Highway 7, future opportunities exist to expand commercial businesses in downtown Baker as well as east and west along Highway 12. Recent commercial developments immediately to the east and west of Baker along highway 12 illustrate this potential. Vacant land east of 10th Street E, west of Pleisner Street and south of Highway 12 has filled in somewhat in recent years with commercial development and a few residential lots, however some vacancy remains.

The Highway 12 corridor has the potential to set an example of what the community values in terms of building design and landscaping, whereas Highway 7 has some difficulties in creating new design elements along an established corridor. However, Highway 7 south of town can be developed to look better than the northern section by encouraging commercial uses along the highway frontage with industrial uses behind the commercial properties.

Several different businesses can be accommodated in commercial sites including offices, retail, restaurants, professional services (dentists, doctors, attorneys, insurance and engineers), hotels and other small businesses that drive Baker's local economy. As such, downtown also offers new and existing businesses the ability to expand or rehabilitate their buildings. The City and County should coordinate with SMART and the EPEDC in securing grants for improving downtown facades as well as for bringing in new businesses into abandoned store fronts.

Industrial

The area north of Baker along Highway 7 has become the City's industrial park and a major economic hub for the County. The City and County should continue to encourage future industrial developments to locate in this area as it could be developed into an attractive yet functional industrial park.

The City already has a large industrial use on the east side of town and it would be beneficial to encourage commercial or light industrial (storage buildings) next to the site instead of heavy commercial, which would be incompatible with the Stanhope Addition. Planning for future industrial uses south of Baker presents some challenges with water pressure and compatibility issues.

In general, industrial uses should be clustered near each other so as to share access. If industrial development does occur along Highway 12 west of Baker, the City and County should coordinate and develop standards for having commercial uses front the corridor and having industrial uses behind commercial business. The buffer will create an attractive and inviting corridor; however, if a developer or builder wants to construct an industrial use along the highway it should be allowed albeit with significant landscaping and buffer standards.

Parks

Future park land is needed north of the railroad as it presents a barrier for many residents to get to existing parks south of Highway 12. A neighborhood park could be established south along Sandstone Creek that would serve residents north of the railroad. Since this area is prone to flooding, it may be an appropriate use of otherwise idle land. As future growth occurs west of Baker, a new park should be planned to accommodate future residents in this area as well as those in southwest Baker.

In addition to outdoor spaces, several ideas were floated at the listening session for an indoor park of some kind including amenities such as trampolines and/or roller skating.

Public/Civic

Public and civic uses should be encouraged throughout the City and not focused in one general area. Libraries and religious institutions are generally located in residential areas where people can walk. City and County buildings may need to expand to accommodate staff increases and the County and City should coordinate their efforts to expand buildings and facilities on land they already own.

However, the county and City of Baker should coordinate plans for potential commercial use along Highway 12 with the potential for residential development behind the commercial.

Residential and Rural Residential

As mentioned above, the City is expected to add approximately 56 new residents between 2020 and 2030 based on the growth rates provided in the community profile. Residential land is the key for accommodating growth and ensuring Baker can create affordable housing. Not planning for enough residential land can raise land prices as housing becomes a premium, while too much land can drive down home and land values.

Baker has 47 acres of vacant land within the City and the majority of this is suitable for residential development. Unsuitable parcels either have land use compatibility issues or are not viable options for development based on lot size.

New residential developments should incorporate more housing choices for people including multifamily units such as apartments and townhomes. The land identified on the future land use map for Baker shows new residential land in several areas:

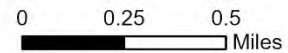
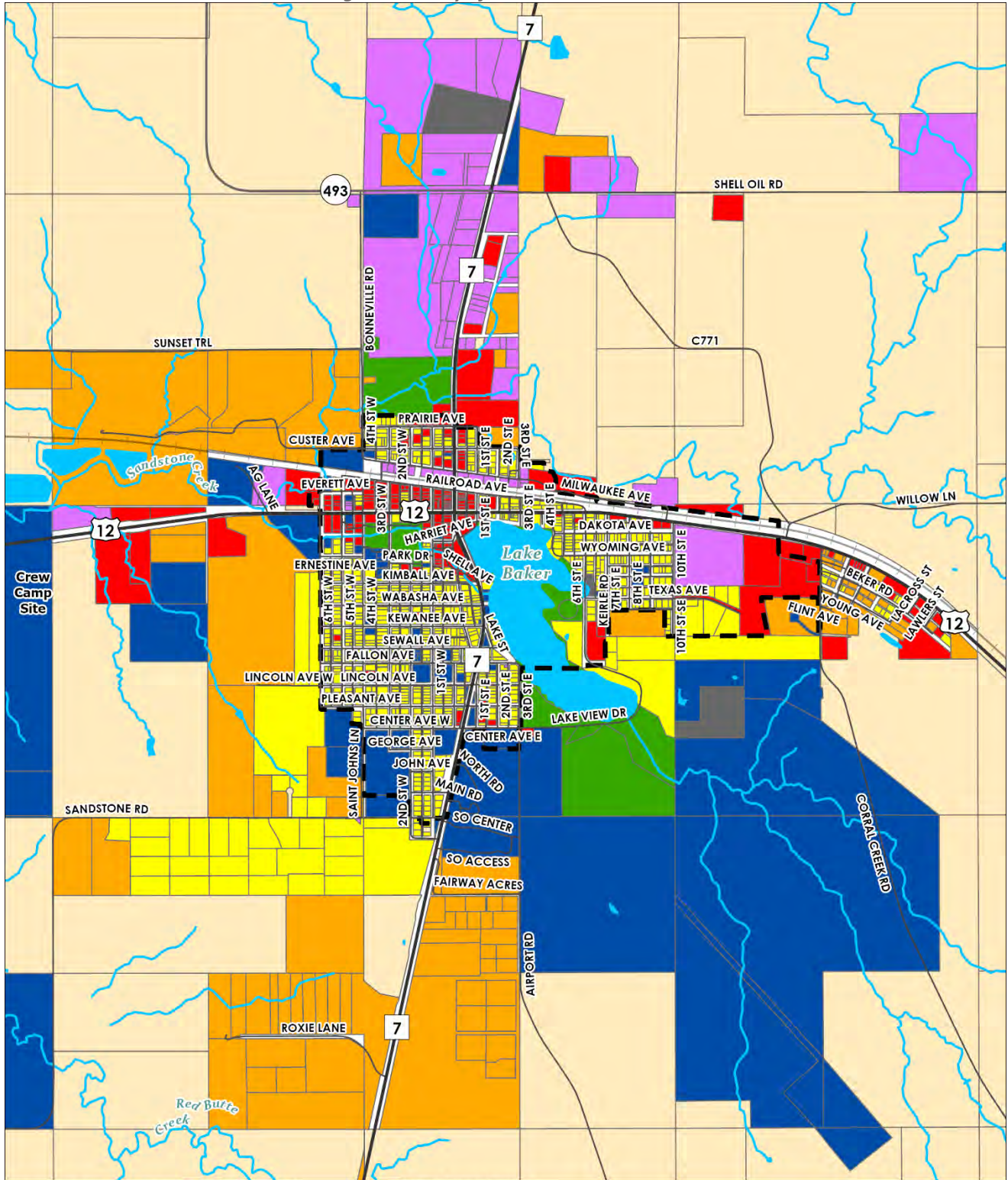
- 6th Street SW from Kimball Avenue southwards. This area should be developed with single family urban-style lots with a mix of housing choices including single family, multifamily apartments and townhomes. Rural residential has already been established on the western edge of this area.
- Continued rural residential uses should be planned for the area west of the residential development described above.
- Sandstone Road - Residential and rural residential should continue along Sandstone Road.
- East Baker should continue to fill in residential uses along 8th Street SE and 10th Street SE and eastward to the Stanhope subdivision. Single family homes would be best suited for the area, although multifamily units might also be compatible. Rural residential uses would also be suited for the southeastern section of this development. Commercial uses should predominate on the frontage to Highway 12.
- Between Sandstone Creek and Sunset Trail – Where development will not encroach on floodplain designated areas, rural residential uses are indicated on the future land use map between the creek and Sunset Trail to the north, extending west from Bonnievale Rd.

Residential development in northeast and southeast Baker is limited because of oil and gas wells and the Baker Municipal Airport. Therefore, the city needs to keep the west and southwest open to residential development opportunities. Baker and Fallon County should continue to work together to plan future uses for this area so the city can avoid becoming landlocked and can avoid extending infrastructure in an inefficient manner. Ongoing rural residential development in recent years south and west of Baker threatens to produce this landlock scenario.

Vacant Land

The vacant parcels within Baker offer several existing residents the ability to make a profit by selling the current land or developing it into rental properties. By encouraging infill development – development within Baker city limits – the city can maximize its infrastructure capabilities while decreasing the need for future extensions. As shown on the future land use map, all vacant parcels within city limits are eliminated as they have a better use rather than sitting idle with no development.

Figure 6.4 – City of Baker Future Land Use



June 2023

TOWN OF PLEVNA

The Town of Plevna is expected to grow by approximately 25 residents between 2020 and 2030, based on the growth rate established in the community profile chapter. Figure 6.5 shows the future land use plan for Plevna.

Agricultural

While agricultural uses are important to the County and Plevna residents, agricultural land within Plevna's boundary can be developed to accommodate new residents and businesses that wish to begin operating in Town. Agricultural land on the periphery of the town should be preserved for such uses, while land closer to existing homes and buildings should be developed first.

Commercial

Future commercial development should occur at the intersection of Highway 12 and Main Street and along both corridors. Since most existing development near the southeast corner of Highway 12 and Main Street has been removed, it presents a prime opportunity for redevelopment. The parcel is owned by a Plevna resident and currently has residential use on part of the parcel. The old repair shop could be leveled, making room for new development. However, the perception is that the site is contaminated and may require significant funds to clean up. As such, the County should pursue brownfield redevelopment grants from Montana's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Both DEQ and EPA offer site assessment grants to determine the level of, if any, contamination on site as well as clean-up funds.

Other potential commercial sites include the parcels on the southwest corner of Highway 12 and Main Street. This area could capture other businesses that require highway access such as a grocery store or farm implement store.

Industrial

Industrial development should be located along Highway 12 or on Main Street. These areas have access to major transportation corridors, which are usually essential for industrial businesses. Industrial land has been identified for future development south of Highway 12. The town's water upgrades should allow for capacity for new development.

Parks

While no additional parks are currently needed, park facility upgrades should be planned and coordinated with the County. However, if population increases beyond the forecasted estimate, new park space may be required. Two areas offer inviting areas that could be transformed into a quality park. The area east of town and north of Callin Avenue offers a stream that could have a trail built next to it as well as areas of lush green space for passive recreation. The other area is located west of Sanders Street. In addition to parks, the town could consider multi-use trails throughout town for ease of walkability and recreation.

Residential and Rural Residential

The Town of Plevna will likely need to add new residential units by the year 2030 based on the growth rate established in the community profile. The Town has capacity to accommodate additional residents as the water system has been upgraded and the sewer lagoons have capacity. Moreover, another lagoon cell could be designed if population warrants it.

Currently, single family homes and mobile homes are the only housing units in Plevna. An apartment complex or multifamily housing units such as townhomes or duplexes would offer potential residents with an affordable housing option. Not all residents can afford single family homes and some residents may not prefer mobile or manufactured homes. As such, townhome and/or apartment style developments offer a mix of autonomy with affordability. Multifamily housing should be constructed near the school or on the west side of Plevna as these two areas offer amenities for multifamily units with the school nearby and a potential linear park on the west end.

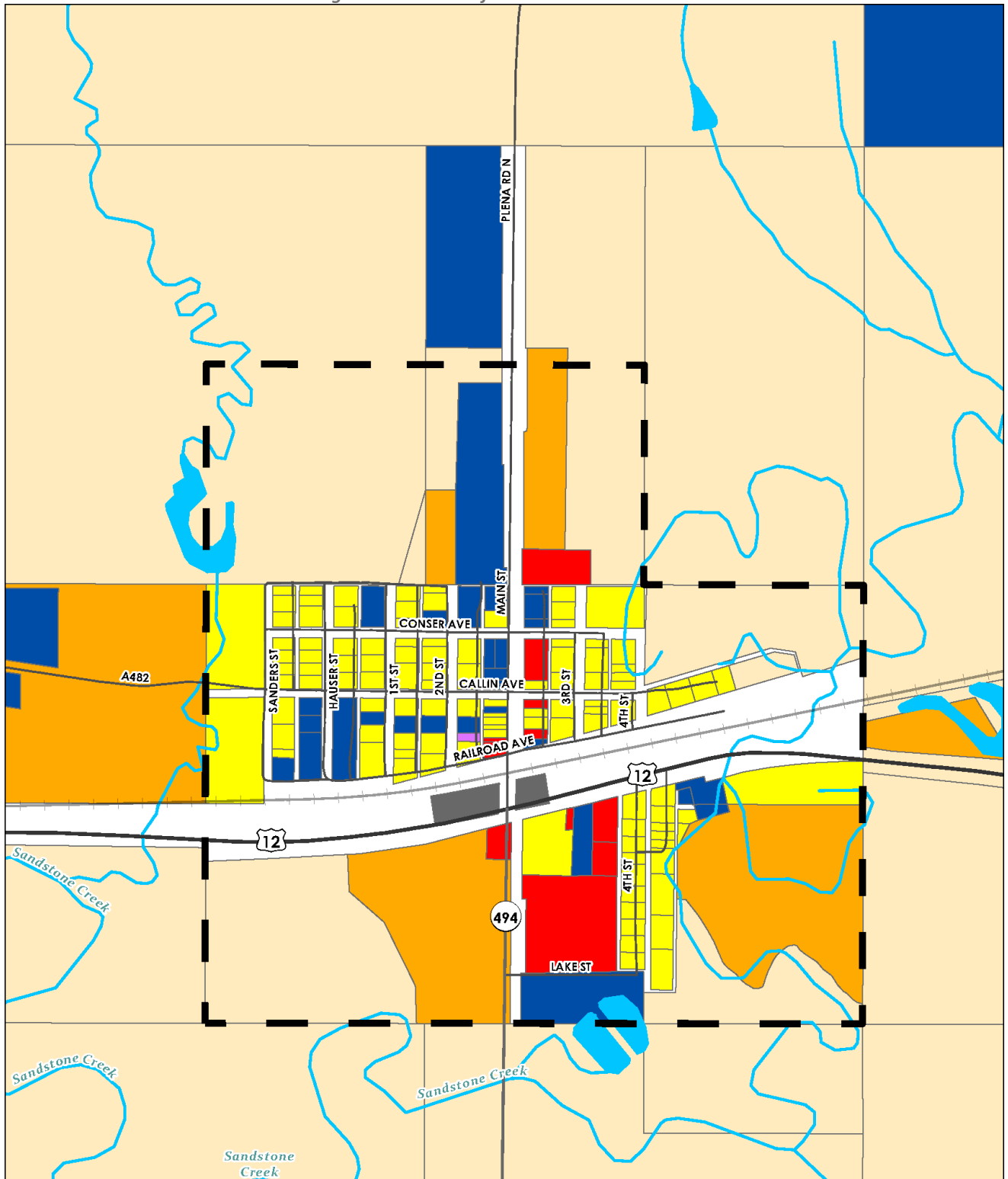
Rural residential development can accommodate families as well; however, the Town should consider limiting large lot developments within town boundaries as it is not an efficient use of existing infrastructure. Large lot subdivisions would be

favorable south of town as they could be developed with septic systems, whereas traditional town lots are better suited north of the railroad to take advantage of gravity sewer flows.

Vacant Land

By encouraging infill development on vacant parcels – development within Plevna town limits – the town can maximize its infrastructure capabilities while decreasing the need for future extensions.

Figure 6.5 – Town of Plevna Future Land Use



Future Land Use

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Agricultural | Industrial | Rural Residential |
| Commercial | Parks | Vacant |
| Public/Civic | Residential | Plevna Town Limits |

0 0.13 0.25 Miles



February 2024

General Provision

General guidelines and provisions are provided to help the County of Fallon, the City of Baker, and the Town of Plevna achieve compatible land uses and prepare for changing economic conditions, especially with regards to the area's oil industry.

ANNEXATION

Fallon County along with the City of Baker need to establish an annexation plan that establishes common goals. This would allow for compatibility in development and for the City of Baker to annex contingent land and collect city taxes to help fund infrastructure in an efficient way. It is strongly encouraged that both Fallon County and the City of Baker adopt an annexation policy to make sound minded decisions and to keep landowners and developers informed regarding their property through a consistent plan. This plan would help avoid costly retrofitting of infrastructure including wells and septic systems when property is annexed into the city.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Compatible development standards will make annexations more palatable and allows Baker and the County to plan for transition areas between urban and rural boundaries. Commercial developments in recent years along Highway 12 beyond Baker's city limits illustrate the need for the two entities to work together. Examples of compatible development standards include setbacks, building height, lot coverage, density, zoning, landscaping and buffer requirements. Implementing landscape and buffer requirements along the gateway corridors (Highway 7 and 12) will greatly enhance aesthetics along these roadways and will make Baker a more inviting town. In addition, implementing similar standards in Baker's downtown area will improve businesses and may help spur further economic development.

EXTRATERRITORIAL ZONING

The City of Baker should consider extraterritorial zoning, which assists with implementing development standards and streamlines annexation policy. Extraterritorial zoning (ETZ) is defined as a municipality having jurisdictional control to enforce its zoning regulations beyond the current municipal boundary. Current Montana State Code allows the City of Baker to adopt a one-mile extraterritorial zone boundary in which the City can enforce its zoning regulations. However, the County must agree to the extraterritorial zone before it can be adopted.

The benefits of an ETZ are that it gives all developers the same opportunities as they only need to abide by one set of development regulations. It also makes land uses along the urban fringe compatible with development on either side of Baker's boundary, thus reducing future costs of retrofitting infrastructure. Lastly, it allows both the County and City to plan for future uses outside Baker's existing boundary while giving developers insight into what uses will be allowed and where they can be built, thus reducing confusion among all parties involved.

INFRASTRUCTURE EXTENSION

Through adopting the above recommendations, the County and City of Baker can effectively plan where new infrastructure will be needed and where it is cost prohibitive to develop. It also informs developers and investors about the direction the community wants to go and where certain uses may be permitted and where they are prohibited based on available infrastructure capacity. In addition, all parties involved can efficiently extend infrastructure while avoiding inconsistent development or incompatible connections (changing from a septic system to city sewer service). Residents and taxpayer monies are also spent more efficiently and effectively by extending services gradually and avoiding costly extensions for a single use.

Chapter 7: Transportation

Overview

Transportation is a key element for the economic success and well-being of Fallon County. The county is crossed by two major highways: State Highway 7 runs north-south through Baker and links county residents with I-94, the town of Wibaux to the north and Ekalaka to the south; and US Highway 12 runs east-west and bisects both Baker and Plevna. BNSF operates the rail line that passes through Baker and Plevna, although the train does not offer loading/unloading access in Baker or Plevna. The County provides transit through a dial-a-ride service which operates four vehicles.

The County road department provides year-round service. The department has excellent equipment and has no current needs for equipment and storage. Currently, the department owns four snowplow trucks and six blades for snow plowing. Other department equipment includes seven belly dump trucks, five end dump trucks, two crawlers and one large scraper.

The County leases one scoria pit, which is permitted by the County and subject to DEQ review.

Functional Classification

Functional road classifications are a hierarchy of streets and roads that help County officials and residents plan routes for moving vehicles. In addition, the functional class of roads also provides guidance on limiting access for arterial roads while local roads generally have full access to land.

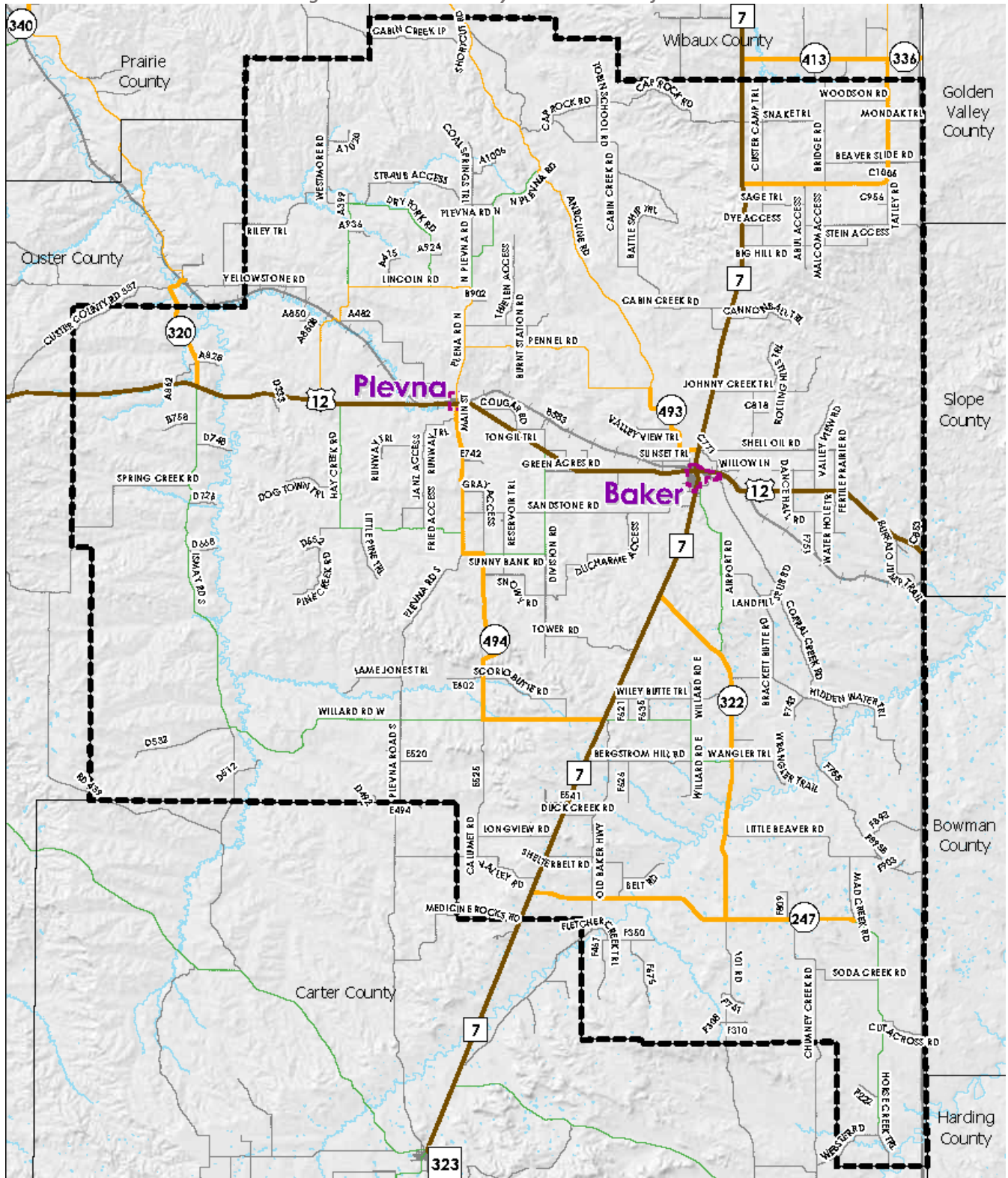
The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) also defines functional classification as the process by which streets and highways are grouped into classes, or systems, according to the character of service they are intended to provide. Basic to this process is the recognition that individual roads and streets do not serve travel independently in any major way. Rather, most travel involves movement through a network of roads. Figure 7.1 shows the existing functional classification system for Fallon County. A brief description of each class is provided below:

- Arterial Roads - the highest level of the hierarchy and provide limited access to land. They are designed to move traffic at high speeds and have few access points. Arterials also have sub-categories consisting of major and minor arterials. Major arterials are designed to move large volumes of intrastate and interstate traffic across long distances at speeds up to 80 mph. An example is I-94. Minor arterials are designed to supplement major arterials by moving traffic intrastate and between large geographic areas at speeds ranging from 25 – 70 mph. An example is State Highway 7.
- Collector Roads - provide more access to land than arterials while balancing movements at moderate speeds ranging from 25 – 45 mph. Major collectors gather and distribute higher volumes of traffic than do minor collectors, which have more access to local streets and adjacent lands. An example of a collector is Plevna Rd south of Plevna.
- Local Roads - provide full access to adjacent lands and are designed to handle slow speeds up to 25 mph. Most city streets are local roads.

County and Local Roads

The County has approximately 900 miles of county roads, which includes driveways, it must maintain. As noted in the Natural Resources chapter, Fallon County has scoria and gravel resources that can be used on county and local roads; however, because of the low quality of the resources, the scoria and gravel cannot be used to repair state roads and highways. Few roads are paved and are maintained with chip and seal. The vast majority of county roads are gravel or scoria (red clay-like material), with scoria being used for only low volume roads. Maintaining county roads is essential for local residents as well as businesses, oil and gas companies for transporting energy products, and farmers and ranchers. The County should continue to pursue finding adequate sand and gravel resources to supplement the existing stockpile of road maintenance materials. Moreover, where feasible, the County, Baker and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) should work together to implement cost-sharing and cost-saving strategies to enhance county, state and local road maintenance.

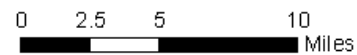
Figure 7.1 – Fallon County Functional Classification



Fallon County Boundaries
 Incorporated City Limits

Functional Class
 Minor Arterial
 Major Collector

Minor Collector
 Local
 Railroads



Baker and Plevna Roads

Truck traffic along Highway 7 and Highway 12 is ongoing concern for many residents in both communities. However, truck traffic has declined since peaking in 2016 on Highway 7 and Highway 12 through both towns. The Baker Corridor Study in 2015 looked at the potential for a truck bypass around the city to connect Highway 7 and Highway 12 in order to prevent trucks from having to go through downtown. In the study, the potential for a bypass was listed as a long-term potential project. However, the project did not score very high statewide in the grade separating. At the time of the study, other options were listed regarding safety including limiting parking on the street corners where the two highways intersect.

The previous Growth Policy of 2017 indicated routes for future roads in Baker and Plevna as development occurs. Planning for future road extensions will also help Baker and Plevna make targeted infrastructure investments. When planning future uses and road extensions, the County, Baker and Plevna should continue to reference those maps to help ensure adequate right-of-way is preserved. Moreover, the maps will assist developers and builders in knowing where potential extensions may occur and thus reduce potential dead-end and narrow streets.

Maintenance

The cost of gravel continues to increase. The county does not build roads but will maintain roads that are built by a landowner and are approved by the county. However, the department has no formal road maintenance program. Roads with heavy traffic are maintained more frequently and remaining roads are maintained based on current conditions, although a top priority is to maintain access to the hospital and the route from the hospital to the airport. The department generally relies on sand that is applied on county roads during snow/ice storm events.

PROGRAMMED IMPROVEMENTS

Fallon County, the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna should all take steps to prepare a capital improvement program (CIP) that contains a pavement management program and a county road maintenance program. The pavement management and county road programs outline the life expectancy of roadways and provide a schedule for resurfacing and replacing pavement/gravel as needed. The benefit of a CIP is that residents and County officials can strategically program and fund improvements on a set schedule rather than improving a road that could have waited for improvement. Moreover, the maintenance programs streamline capital spending by prioritizing improvements and helps plan projects in succession, thus reducing disturbances to residents. The programs would also assist the County road department in maintaining roads as well as planning for new equipment.

It is encouraged that Fallon County, the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna take steps to prepare a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) that contains a pavement management program and a county road maintenance program. The benefit of a CIP is that residents and County officials can strategically program and fund improvements on a set schedule rather than improving a road that could have waited for improvement. Moreover, the maintenance programs streamline capital spending by prioritizing improvements and helps plan projects in succession, thus reducing disturbances to residents. This program would assist the County Road Department and the Public Works Department in maintaining the streets and roads. They would also be able to plan for new equipment to do so.

Recent programmed improvements include rehabilitation and pavement to gravel conversion on portions of Plevna Rd south of Plevna. There is a MTDOT project involving the replacement of a bridge on Highway 7 North next to the radio station in 2025. The project will help to reduce the flooding and be certain that water flows as needed.

FUNDING SOURCES

Fallon County and City of Baker have funding options available to implement programmed road extensions and a potential truck bypass should the need still exist. Grant funding opportunities exist and are outlined in the Implementation chapter.

State Highways

Eight state highways run through Fallon County. Highway 7 and 12 are primary highways while Highways 247, 320, 322, 336, 493, and 494 are secondary highways that connect to the primary highways as well as county and local roads. MDT maintains more than 85 miles of state roads and highways throughout the county.

Level of Service

Service levels on state highways are well within acceptable levels. Service is calculated by counting average daily traffic (ADT) and is measured on a scale of A (free flow) to F (gridlock) as well as by capacity. Capacity below 80 percent is acceptable, 80-100 percent indicates a need to begin managing traffic with stop signs, stop lights or create additional lanes. Capacity over 100 percent, which is achieved when more vehicles are using the road than what the road was designed to handle, indicates an immediate need to manage traffic.

According to MDT’s most recent ADT data, all state highways throughout Fallon County are operating well within their designed capacity. Highway 7 and 12 were both designed to handle approximately 14,000 ADT depending upon speed limit and grades. Traffic levels in the county generally peaked in 2014-2016 and have tapered off in recent years. ADT data on state highways in the county is shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Annual Average Daily Traffic for State Highways in Fallon County

Count Site ID	Location	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
13-1-007	MONTANA 7 0.5 mi N of S-493	1,090	1,320	1,380	1,150	1,030	918		886	914		921
13-2-002	MONTANA 7 0.5 mi N of S-322	670	550	530	650	867	651		584	431		489
13-1-004	US 12 6 mi SE of S-494 Plevna	990	1,230	1,260	1,000	1,280	876		921	762		820
13-1-018	US 12 btwn 6th & 7th E (Baker)	2,280	2,350	2,690	2,340	2,174	1,718		1,872	1,605		1,697
13-1-012	ROUTE 493 1.5 mi NW of MT 7	260	270	270	260		194		206			
13-2-003	ROUTE 322 0.5 mi SE of MT 7	320	190	190	150		156		223			

Source: Montana DOT 2023

Public Transportation

Public transit in Fallon County via a dial-a-ride service for elderly people, who do not have access to a vehicle to run errands and go to appointments. While the service only provides limited access mostly during weekdays, the county should consider expanding dial-a-ride services and/or begin funding a public transportation system. As the county’s population continues to age as a result of aging baby-boomers, transportation for elderly residents will be a challenge. Moreover, if the county, Baker and Plevna want to accommodate and retain elderly residents, providing accessible transportation services to grocery stores, medical appointments and entertainment venues should be a priority.

Railroad

BNSF currently owns and operates the railroad that passes through Plevna and Baker, although it does not provide loading or unloading services at either location. Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) data tracks train movements at crossings. Approximately six trains per day pass through Baker as of 2019. However, the data does not indicate any delays the train may

cause. Currently there is not enough demand to warrant a stop in Baker. As a result, trucking is the only way to get pipe and other oil industry materials into the county and this has led at times to increased traffic and impacts to county and local roads.

REGULATIONS REGARDING DELAY TIMES

The FRA does not regulate the length of time a train may block a grade crossing. However, FRA rail safety rules do address standing (idling) trains that unnecessarily activate grade crossing warning devices such as flashing lights and gate arms. The federal rule specifically prohibits standing trains, locomotives or other rail equipment from activating warning devices unless it is part of normal train movements or switching operations. If the FRA were to file a violation against a railroad it would be through the railroad's own rules. The General Code of Operating Rules (GCOR) item 6.32.6 Blocking Public Crossings states: when practical, a standing train or switching movement must avoid blocking a public crossing longer than 10 minutes.

While BNSF does not offer services in Baker, the train does periodically stop along the tracks in Baker to either wait for passing trains or to switch cars. Current state regulations allow up to 15 minutes for a train to be blocked at railroad intersections outside of incorporated cities and towns (MCA 69-14-626). The law does not say how long a train can block such an intersection. Previous public input and stakeholder interviews suggest that the train sits idle for longer than 15 minutes at the Highway 7 intersection. The delays do cause issues with respect to firefighting and medical emergencies as the hospital does not allow doctors to live north of the tracks. Moreover, the Baker Fire Department should store equipment north of the tracks in the event a fire breaks out when the train is blocking the highway.

DOCUMENTATION

Fallon County and the City of Baker could document the locomotive number, date and time, and duration of blockage (actual stop time, rolling train doesn't constitute time), and any other observations that may be helpful (i.e. second train approached 5 or 30 minutes later, crew member ran over to do a quick stop, track crew working, etc.). The documentation along with pictures and video could help the FRA, BNSF and MDT assess the issue and determine if an overpass or bypass may solve the problem.

In addition, the County and City of Baker could pass an ordinance prohibiting extended blocking of crossing to show it is an important issue to the community.

Airport

The Baker Municipal Airport (BHK) had 7,050 operations during 2010; local operations (aircraft that take-off and remain within 20 miles of the airport) accounted for 5,300 operations while itinerant (all operations that are not local) accounted for 1,400 operations. Air taxi and military aircraft accounted for the remaining operations in 2010. According to the BHK Master Plan, operations are forecasted to increase 12 percent (7,890 operations) by 2019; moreover, by 2024 operations are expected to increase 22 percent (8,650 operations).

Improvements to the airport runway help ensure that this vital link remains a viable transportation opportunity for the community.

To help ensure the airport can achieve its future development potential, the County should continue to use the zoning regulations surrounding the airport. Regulations limit the height and location of buildings and other objects that may interfere and cause harm to aircraft, pilots and passengers. Moreover, the County should support and plan to preserve land surrounding the airport for future expansions. Proper planning will help eliminate future land use incompatibilities and interruptions with air service.

Chapter 8: Local Services

Overview

Public services and associated facilities are an important factor that defines the quality of life in a community. Public services address the needs of a community in many ways. Education, public safety, public health and the operation and maintenance of public infrastructure are just a few of the important public services a community provides.

Some public services are provided by the state and federal government, such as the State Highway Patrol and US Postal Service. In addition, there are several private utility companies providing energy and telecommunication services essential for modern life. However, because a local community has little influence on the provision of state, federal and private utility services, the Growth Policy focuses on those services the community can directly control.

Each service will be described in terms of the type and scope of services that are provided, the facilities and in some cases the equipment that supports the delivery of the service, and staffing level for each service provider. Issues will be identified that either limit or constrain the provision of a service, which in some cases result in underserved members of the community. In other cases, issues will be identified that relate more to how a service is provided or the facility needs of a service provider.

Public Education

Public education in the community is provided by two school districts. The first is the Baker School District, a Class B school district providing education for grades kindergarten through grade 12. The Baker School District is designated by the state as District 12. The second is the Plevna School District, a Class C school district that also provides education for grades kindergarten through grade 12. The Plevna School District is designated by the state as District 55.

BAKER SCHOOL DISTRICT

The district has three (3) schools and organizes school grades as follows:

Table 8.1: Baker School District Schools		
School	Grades	Year Constructed
Lincoln School	K-3	1956
Longfellow School	4-6	1968
Baker 7-8*	7-8	1968
Baker High School*	9-12	1961

Source: Growth and Enhancement of MT Students (GEMS)

**Baker 7-8 and Baker High School are a single campus*

Baker schools were constructed between 55 and 67 years ago. The school district will need to continue to budget adequate funds to maintain the relatively old school facilities despite decline in the local oil and gas industry. School bus service is provided for students who reside outside of the City of Baker.

Table 8.2 lists school enrollment for Baker School District for the past seven years.

Year	Lincoln	Longfellow	Baker 7-8	Baker High School	Total
2016-2017	109	152	71	155	487
2017-2018	129	142	71	133	475
2018-2019	124	139	63	127	453
2019-2020	126	140	70	129	465
2020-2021	119	128	83	130	460
2021-2022	127	155	69	132	483
2022-2023	113	158	58	128	457

Source: Growth and Enhancement of MT Students (GEMS)

Total school enrollment in the district has fluctuated between the 2016-17 and 2022-23 school years. During the period, middle school and high school enrollment has trended down and the enrollment in the K-6th grades has remained fairly stable. The decline in district enrollment from 2021-22 to 2022-23 was the single greatest year over year decline in enrollment for the period, this could mean continued declines in enrollment are coming with the most recent year being an indication of future trends. However, enrollment for the most recent school year is still significantly higher than enrollments before the oil boom. District enrollment for Fall 2005 was 388.

Open enrollment between schools is supported by mutual agreements between Baker, Plevna, Wibaux, and Ekalaka. Bussing is provided by the receiving school. School bus service is provided for students who reside outside the City of Baker. Currently, a total of 70 students utilize the bus service. Based on information provided by the Baker School District Superintendent, the district’s schools have adequate capacity for the foreseeable future (the next five years). Based on state educational standards, the district currently has moderate classroom sizes. The district currently does not own land for the construction of a new school.

The district employs 35-40 teachers, 8-9 administrative staff and 16-17 other staff members (aides, librarians, custodians, cooks, bus drivers, etc.). Teacher turnover has increased in recent years due to a relatively large cohort of teachers retiring and the effects of COVID.

Over the past few years and continuing to the present, the school district has made significant investments in school facilities. Building projects completed since the 2012 growth policy include:

- A new football field and track including bleachers and stadium lighting at the high school
- A new gymnasium and auditorium at the Longfellow School
- Drainage improvements at the football field

Building projects in Baker have been funded by oil production tax revenue, which is a significant revenue source for school districts in high oil producing counties in the State of Montana. In FY 2023, the Baker School District is scheduled to receive a total of \$4 million in oil and gas production tax revenue distributions from the state.

In the 2011 Legislative Session Senate Bill 329 was enacted that significantly revised the formula for distributing oil production tax revenues to school districts. The law limits school district distributions to 130 percent of the maximum school district budget. Oil production tax revenue distributions that exceed 130 percent of the maximum school district budget are retained by the state and not distributed to the school district. Since the 2011 legislative session, Baker School District has had to increasingly rely on property taxes and levies to make up for lost revenue due to the overall decline in oil revenue and the change in state tax rules.

PLEVNA SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Plevna School District has one school and organizes grades by K through 6th grades, 7th and 8th grades and 9th through 12th high school grades. In the 2022-23 school year, the district had a total enrollment of 99 students. Table 8.3 shows the enrollment for the last seven years.

Year	Total
2016-2017	86
2017-2018	81
2018-2019	100
2019-2020	107
2020-2021	112
2021-2022	103
2022-2023	99

Source: Growth and Enhancement of MT Students (GEMS)

The total school district enrollment has remained relatively high since a sharp increase in the 2017-2018 school year. If enrollment should decline as recent years suggest, the district may return to its “baseline” enrollment which hovered around 80 students between 2009 and 2017. For the 2022-23 school year, Plevna had 60 students in grades K-6 and 39 students in grades 7-12. As noted earlier, some high school students have been transferring to the Baker School District to participate in Class B athletic programs.

The school district employs 13-14 teachers and 9-10 other staff members including administrative and other roles. The low teacher to student ratio has resulted in the district outperforming statewide averages on several test scores.

The school district has history of positive engagement with the community. The district retains ownership on four houses, three for teachers and one for the superintendent, in Plevna to support teacher retention and recruitment. The district rents the houses to district staff.

With starting teacher salaries at \$32,000, the lack of affordable housing exacerbates the existing teacher retention/recruitment problem. The district owns approximately 12.5 acres of undeveloped land north of town. Previous plans to sell the property for \$1 in exchange for having affordable housing built on the site have not come to fruition, largely due to constraints with the water system. With recent updates to the water system including the water tower, water service to the area may become more viable. An RV park directly east of the school still had residents in 2021, illustrating the continued overall need for housing in the area.

The district’s 130 percent of maximum budget threshold for FY 2023 was \$1.8 million, of which the district was distributed \$1.2 million. Similar to Baker school district, Plevna has had to supplement revenues with local sources including levies due to overall decreased oil revenue from decline in production and changes in state law. Any levies raised by the school district must be authorized each year per state law.

Environmental Health Services

Environmental health services are provided by a part-time county sanitarian who works in similar capacities for both Fallon and Wibaux Counties. Responsibilities of the sanitarian include food safety, public accommodations, drinking water protection, wastewater treatment, air quality, storm water management and public health complaints.

The sanitarian performs DEQ reviews of subdivisions under 160 acres under the auspices of the Sanitation in Subdivision Act, reviews subdivisions for compliance with the Fallon County subdivision regulations, and licenses food establishments, hotels and motels, and tattoo parlors. Other duties include investigation of abandoned/derelict properties after the city identifies

the problem and forwards a request to investigate. If the property is determined to be a public nuisance from a building or fire perspective the sanitarian has authority to bring the matter to municipal court. The City of Baker has a “decay” ordinance that regulates the exterior appearance of a property that the city enforces.

The county in cooperation with EPA has done much work in recent years regarding Baker Lake. The restoration has been completed and the administrative order is likely to be lifted in 2024 or later. Improvements to the lake included new boat docks, fishing docks, restored wetlands, diffusers, and waterfalls. These improvements were paid for through grants.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Many commercial properties north of the railroad tracks and commercial properties on the east and west side of the city have failing or inadequate septic systems. The properties are served by city water. Annexation of these properties should be considered to provide sewer service so the septic systems can be decommissioned.

City water service cannot be extended beyond the airport due to lack of water pressure. The Fairway Acres subdivision beyond the fairgrounds is served by private wells. If the city extends water service to the subdivision, a new or taller water tank will be needed to extend water service to the area.

The septic systems in the Stanhope Addition east of the city limits which in the past did not function properly have now been connected to the municipal sewer system. In addition, the city water service to the subdivision does not have adequate water pressure for fire suppression. To correct the situation, the city should consider annexing the subdivision to enhance the water service and provide sewer service.

County Extension Services

The Fallon/Carter County Extension Program extends Montana State University knowledge to the people of Fallon and Carter Counties. Extension gives every Montanan access to useful information and expert help via workshops, demonstrations, community meetings, publications, videos, the internet, and other sources and connects farmers and ranchers with residents via farmers markets and other venues.

SERVICES

The extension office serves as an information clearinghouse, provides pesticide applicator licensing and education, and administers the Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage program to help prevent the spread of noxious weeds in the county. The extension office provides information on soil testing, feed analysis and forage nitrate testing as well.

Homeowners and landowners can receive well water test kits through the local extension office and can receive help with estate planning, horticulture, insect, spider and plant identification, range management, soil health and much more. Furthermore, the extension office is the facilitator of the 4-H Youth Development program and has youth participating in project areas from livestock to sewing to woodwork, etc.

The extension office also offers the Master Gardener program with the goal being to help the community work together on a community gardening project while educating youth and citizens about gardening and food quality.

WEED CONTROL

A five-member Fallon County Weed Board oversees the county weed control program. The program is funded by taxpayers and other revenue. The county employs one full-time weed control coordinator. During four months each summer, seasonal workers are employed to perform weed control activities.

Equipment supporting the weed control programs includes four (4) pick-up trucks and three (3) side-by-side vehicles.

The program only sprays listed noxious weeds. The priority of the program is weed control along roads. The County has contracts with MDOT, BLM and the State of Montana to provide weed control services. Normally County Weed Control programs do not spray on private land; however, because there are limited commercial applicators in the county the state

Department of Agriculture has given the county permission to spray private property. The program will spray private ranch and grazing land upon request and payment. When a noxious weed is observed by staff in the City of Baker or Town of Plevna, staff will contact the property owner to coordinate the spraying of the weed.

The Montana County Noxious Weed Control Act requires that all property owners have and submit a management plan to the county. Management plans are required for any major ground disturbance such as a pipeline construction or a gravel pit. Fallon County weed control receives annual reports from pipeline companies.

WEED CONTROL ISSUES

Seasonal staff is difficult to find. The larger weed control vehicles must be operated by someone 18 years or older due to their weight.

County Library

The current 3,600-square foot library was constructed in 1970. The library has between 20,000 and 22,000 volumes, as well as books on CD, DVD videos, newspapers and magazines. An inter-library book loan service is provided. The library has five public access computer stations, one of which is reserved for catalog searches, and is wired to accommodate four additional computers. The library has a media room that can be reserved for public meetings. The room has equipment to facilitate meetings. The library also hosts various programs such as children's story time and summer reading program. The library has recently partnered with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library to provide free books for children 5 and under.

The library staff includes the library director and three library aides. The library is overseen by the five-member Fallon County Library Board of Trustees which meets monthly. Library hours are Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.

The library has a dedicated county millage (1.5 mills) to support its operations. The library currently has approximately 1,500 library card holders and this level of patronage has remained steady in recent years.

LIBRARY ISSUES

The library has very limited space available to expand services or the number of volumes. It would be beneficial to physically separate the computer stations from the collection area. A closed room for the Story Time and Books and Babies programs would eliminate the auditory impact on library patrons.

Museum

Fallon County is served by the O'Fallon Historical Museum located in six building along Main Street in Baker. The museum features several exhibits relating to the county's history. The museum is open 10am to 4pm Monday through Friday and Sunday afternoon. In the Summer, the museum is also open on Saturdays. In the last five years, the museum has begun conducting several areas of programming including monthly school programming, summer camps, Heritage Fest, and Night at the Museum.

The museum is county funded but seeks donations and grants. The curator views the county funding as applicable to upkeep and maintenance of the buildings, while donations and grants may be used for more programming or other discretionary spending. One recent grant involved working with SMART to obtain a grant for building facades. The museum has also done restoration and maintenance work on buildings. There are two staff members, a curator, and one part time employee. Recently, more opportunities have been made available for volunteers. There is also a county museum board with five members.

The museum has seen growth in patronage since 2018. Patronage records indicate that patronage was fairly stable at about 500 per year until an upswing in 2019 when there were 2,276 visitors. Patronage has remained high through 2022, which had 2,634 visitors. The museum's success points to a willingness in community members to take pride in local history and their eagerness for connection with their community. The county should continue to fund the museum and work with the board and curator to increase opportunities for learning and connection in the community, both for school students and all residents.

Youth/Community Organizations and Recreation

STAFFING, FACILITIES AND FUNDING

After the Baker Recreation Department has been eliminated and the Baker Chamber of Commerce took over much of the recreational needs of the community. The city department and County partnered together in the past to administer the community's recreational programs. The Chamber's program offers classes for sports and other activities and sponsors and organizes events and activities in the community. The chamber employs a director who oversees the program.

The chamber's recreation program makes use of the Recreation Center and other facilities in the community including school gyms and outdoors facilities. Programming includes:

- Preschool
 - Tumbling
 - Music and Dance
 - Playtime at the Museum
 - Preschool arts and crafts
 - Preschool Sports
- K-6
 - Soccer
 - Flag Football
 - Volleyball
 - Martial Arts
 - Track
 - Basketball
 - Dance
- RAAU Football for grades 5 & 6

The recreation center, which is an annex to the Baker High School building, is the primary recreational facility in the community. The recreation center facilities include a 25-meter indoor pool, weight room, three racquetball courts and a cardio/fitness room. Since it is a school district facility, the facility is primarily used by students. Recreational and fitness programs open to the public are accommodated to the greatest extent possible.

The strong demand for recreational programs exceeds the availability and space of the recreation center. As a result, recreational program activities are scattered throughout the community and create logistical and programmatic challenges. The one key recommendation provided in this chapter is for the community to centralize recreational program activities in one location. In addition to addressing the existing logistical and programmatic challenges, one community-wide recreational facility could become a safe community hub or gathering place for residents of all ages and enhance the community's indoor recreational amenities. Communities that have invested in recreation centers have witnessed membership increases far exceed goals.

The funding or contribution to the community's recreational programs is provided from chamber members, user fees, and from donations.

In addition to the Baker Recreation Center, the Community Center in Plevna has a small recreational facility for the public to use.

Recreation and Fitness Programs – Recreation Center

The recreation center swimming pool is open to the public each day of the week. The current program hours are as follows:

Swimming Pool:

- Open swim from 6:00 am to 8:00 am Monday through Friday, 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm Mondays and Tuesdays, and 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm Sundays, as scheduling and staffing allows.

After School Program

The Baker Chamber of Commerce supports an after-school program for grades K-6. The program is held at the Lincoln school.

Community Sponsored Recreational Events

There are several annual community sponsored recreational events that bring members of the community together. Some of the major community events include the Fallon County Day on the 4th of July, Youth Rodeo Play Day, Fall Festival, and Parade of Lights parade and festivities.

Religious Institutions

Fallon County is served by several churches in Baker and Plevna, and some in unincorporated parts of the county. Several churches provide regular community service in addition to regular church service.

Baker Churches

- Baker Community Church – United Church of Christ
- Assembly of God Church – Assemblies of God Pentecostal
- First Baptist Church - Baptist
- Lakeview Baptist Church - Baptist
- American Lutheran Church - Lutheran
- St. John's Church - Catholic

Plevna Churches

- Emanuel Evangelical Free Church – Evangelical
- Plevna First Baptist Church – Baptist
- Peace Lutheran Church – Lutheran
- Saint Anthony's - Catholic

In addition to church activities, the Baker Youth Center is a nonprofit organization that is open to youth of all ages affiliated with the Assembly of God Church. The youth have a place to go and someone to talk to. The Center runs on donations only and is looking at ways to get grant funding as this ties into the need for social services in our community.

Civic Organizations

- 4H
- American Legion
- Boy and Girl Scouts
- Cattlewomen
- Chamber
- EMEDA
- Sororities
- FFA – Baker and Plevna Schools
- Homemaker Groups
- PTA
- Red Cross

Chapter 9: Natural Resources

Overview

Fallon County values natural resources such as agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, water resources including wetlands and native vegetation as evidenced in the goals and the community survey. However, additional resources such as oil and gas should also be emphasized as these have provided the County with substantial income and economic development opportunities. While the most recent oil and gas boom has waned, Fallon County is still producing both commodities in significant quantities. The County has several natural features scattered throughout its boundaries including Baker Lake, numerous oil and gas wells, and prime agricultural lands.

Agricultural Land

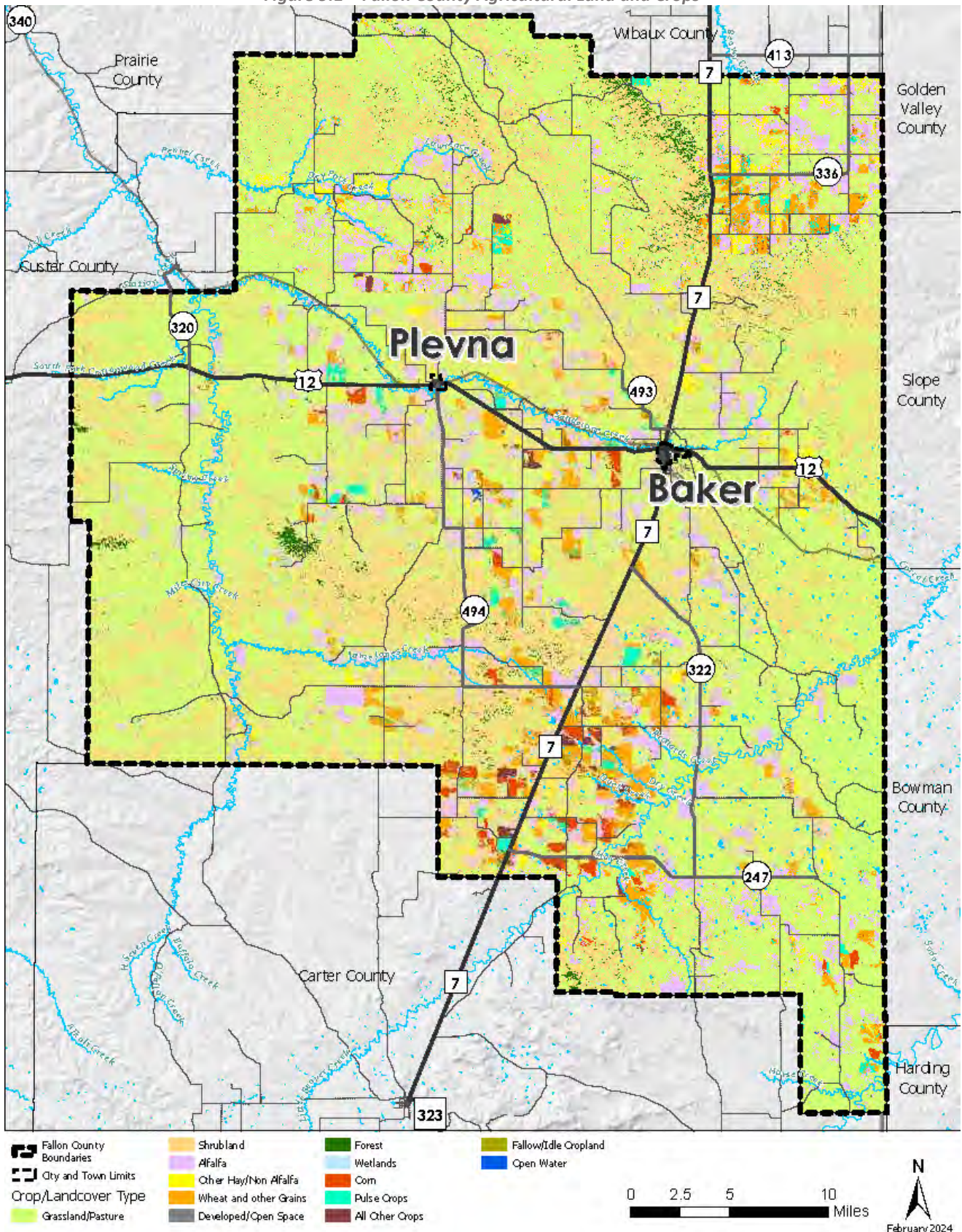
In 2017, the vast majority of land (87 percent) within Fallon County is classified as agricultural and rangeland, with more than 900,000 acres used for farming or ranching as noted in the 2017 Agricultural Census (AC) and shown in Table 9.1. A portion of the agricultural land comes from publicly owned land that is used for ranching or grazing purposes. The agricultural multiuse agreement concept allows local ranchers and farmers to lease and use public lands for grazing and farming, while a federal or state agency owns the land. The benefit is that local residents maintain and use the land that would otherwise sit vacant and unused. The State of Montana and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) administer the land management and multiuse system, which currently has 12 agreements totaling 4,160 acres that are up for renewal by February 2024. Animal grazing accounts for 88 percent of leased public land.

Table 9.1: Fallon County Agricultural Census Data			
	2017	2012	% Change
Number of Farms	289	295	-2.0%
Land in Farms (acres)	902,019	979,692	-7.9%
Average Size of Farm	3,121	3,321	-6.0%
Market Value of Products Sold (\$1000)	45,288	56,373	-19.7%
Crop Sales (\$1000)	6,812	12,047	-43.5%
Livestock Sales (\$1000)	38,476	44,326	-13.2%
Average per Farm	\$156,706	\$191,096	-18.0%

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2017

The average size of a farm was 3,121 acres according to the 2017 census with the market value of products sold totaling \$45.3 million: 15 percent for crop sales and 85 percent for livestock sales. Cattle were the highest grossing livestock with sheep and lambs a distant second. Forage – land used for all hay and haylage, grass silage and greenchop – was the dominant crop item with more than 55,000 acres dedicated to this use. Wheat was the second largest crop produced, followed by corn and pulse crops. The USDA Cropscape program provides satellite-generated maps of agricultural land by type of crop grown and also shows non-agricultural land. Cropscape is less definitive than the Census of Agriculture, however it largely corroborates census data. Figure 9.1 clearly shows the predominance of grassland and pasture in the county in 2017.

Figure 9.1 – Fallon County Agricultural Land and Crops



Soils

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (s), a department of USDA, completed a comprehensive soil study for Fallon County in 2003. The study identifies all soil types found throughout the county as well as a detailed analysis of each soil classification. The study determined soils based on their suitability for farming, with 24% of soils classified as farmland of statewide importance, 3% as prime farmland if irrigated, and 72% not prime farmland.

Cropland and rangeland limitations are essential to the preservation of soil health. The 2003 study suggests a combination of several practices should be implemented to control soil blowing and water erosion including conservation tillage, strip cropping, windbreaks, tall grass barriers and contour farming. Proper grazeland management also leads to healthier livestock, ensuring future generations can continue to ranch. No single grazeland management system suits all circumstances; a diversified approach is best including developing livestock watering locations, fencing, properly locating salt and mineral supplements, seeding, rotating grazeland and using no more than one-half of the current year's growth for grazing.

Water and Wildlife Habitat Rivers, Streams, and Lakes

Fallon County has no major rivers, but it does contain several streams and small creeks that feed into lakes and dams. Little Beaver, O'Fallon and Sandstone Creeks are the largest streams in the County, followed by Cottonwood and Red Butte Creeks. Baker Lake is the largest freshwater lake that serves as a recreational opportunity for area residents.

The Baker Watershed Dam was completed in July 1975 under the SCS Small Watershed Protection Program for Fallon County and the City of Baker. This structure provides for flood control and sediment reduction to Baker Lake and the stream below it, the Baker Lake Tributary.

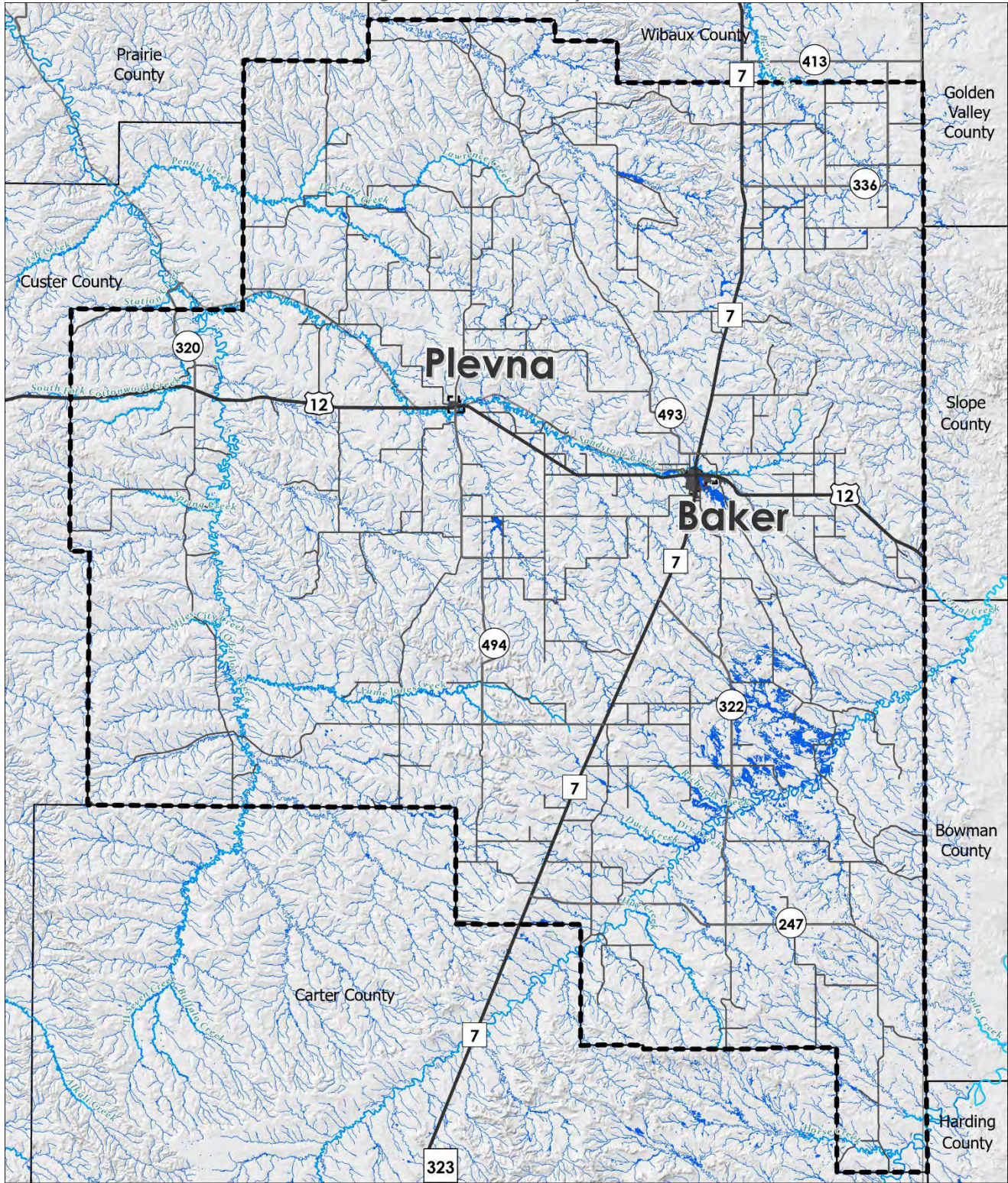
Baker Lake, located below the Baker Watershed Dam, was formed by an earth fill dam constructed by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad in 1908. This was located below a spring and was used to provide water to the railroad.

Wetlands

Wetlands play an integral part for supporting wildlife and livestock. Without wetlands, several bird species, fish and mammals including beaver, muskrat, mink and small mammals would not be able to survive. Moreover, wetlands improve water quality by filtering sediments, pollutants and chemicals while recharging groundwater. Restoring wetlands can also be an economic resource when done as part of reserve easement.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offers the wetlands reserve program (WRP), whereby landowners can receive financial incentives to restore, protect and enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agricultural uses. In Montana, the types of WRP restoration projects most often fall into the following categories: pothole restoration, floodplain restoration and riparian corridors. In Fallon County, wetlands are primarily the floodplain wetlands along riverine systems. Figure 9.2 shows the identified wetlands in Fallon County, provided from State of Montana.

Figure 9.2 – Fallon County Wetlands



- Fallon County Boundaries
- Incorporated Cities & Towns
- Montana Wetlands



Wildlife Habitat

Fallon County has no designated critical habitat for federally listed endangered or threatened species nor does the county have any threatened plant species, according to a review of the Endangered Species Project and supplemental research on habitat. The 2003 soil study produced by NRCS identifies numerous wildlife species and habitat in Fallon County. Pronghorn antelope, mule deer and white-tailed deer can be found throughout the county. Several bird species including ring-necked pheasant, Hungarian partridge, sage and sharp-tailed grouse also occupy lands in the County. Other animals found in Fallon County include beaver, mink, muskrat, badger, bobcat, coyote, fox, mountain lions, elk, moose, and small mammals.

Although there is no critical habitat for listed species, the State of Montana does work with private landowners to manage the Sage Grouse Program. This program also requires obtaining a permit for various types of development including gravel pits and subdivisions. Additional game stewardship is provided by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP). FWP administers the Upland Game Program and the Block Management Program, which help control wildlife numbers.

The County also has several habitat areas suited for wildlife including prairie grasslands, bushy draws, rough breaks, cropland, rangeland, ponds and bottomlands, which are located along Little Beaver, O'Fallon and Sandstone Creeks. Areas of ponderosa pine are also scattered throughout Fallon County.

The 2003 soil study produced by NRCS study identifies recommendations for preserving wildlife habitat, which include development of odd or irregularly shaped areas in and adjacent to farmland to provide food and cover, protection of habitat from fire or grazing, and establishment of woody vegetation to provide winter shelter. Wildlife habitat may also be enhanced through application of commonly employed conservation practices including minimum tillage, planned grazing systems, pond construction, and shelterbelts and field windbreaks.

Oil and Gas Resources

Fallon County has an abundant number of oil and gas wells located in a roughly NW-SE swath from the border with Wibaux County, MT to Bowman County, ND. The majority of wells are situated on the Cedar Creek Anticline. The oil boom in western North Dakota and eastern Montana increased oil and gas production in Fallon and other neighboring counties. Oil production in Fallon County peaked in 2006 with 7.8 million barrels produced that year. During that same year, Richland County produced 20 million barrels. Natural gas production in Fallon County has remained relatively high even after the boom ended. Fallon County produced over 22 million MCF of natural gas in 2006 and produced 4.4 million MCF in 2022. Fallon County also produces large amounts of associated gas, which is often flared.

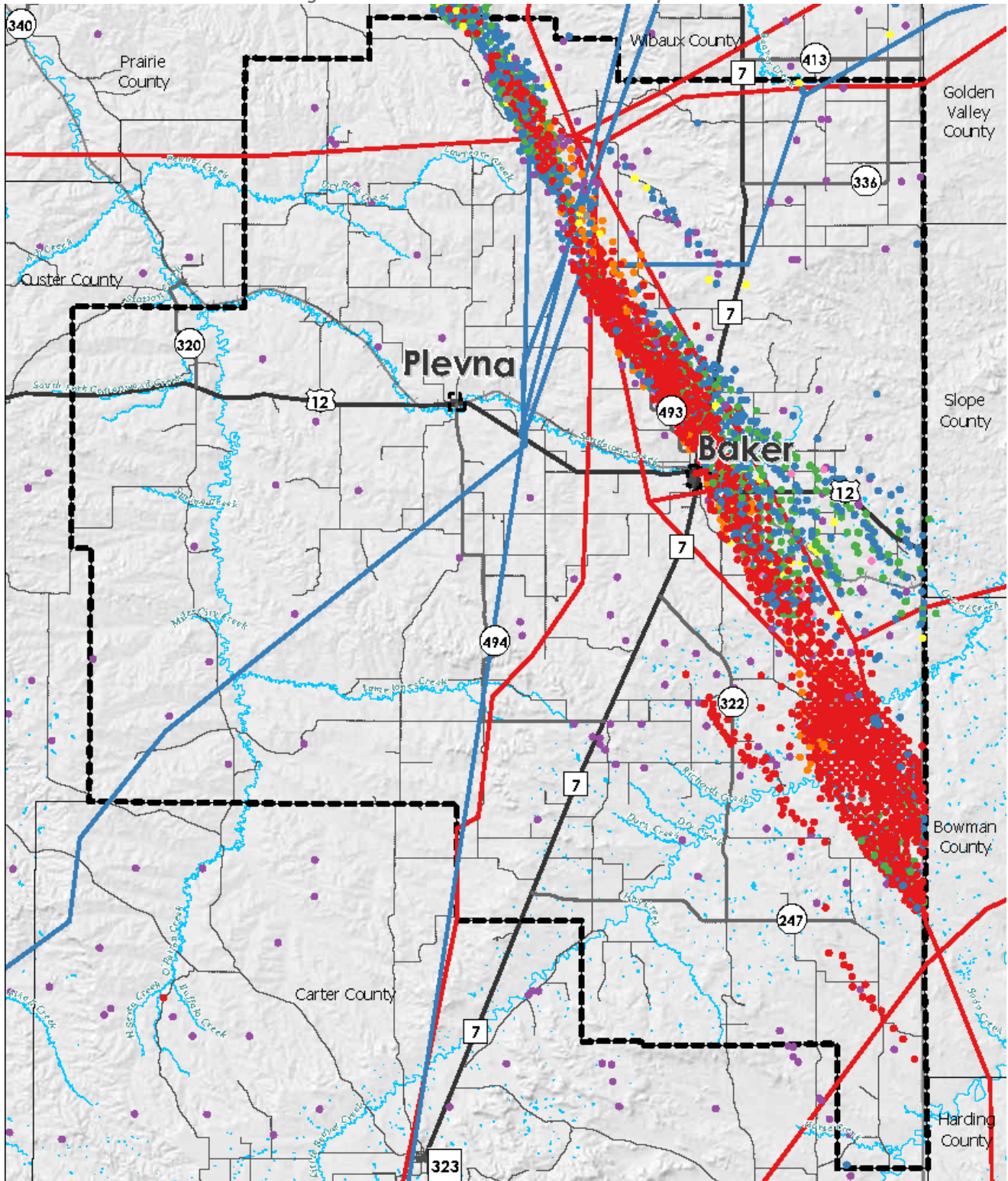
Some oil and gas wells are situated on public trust lands. According to the DNRC Trust Land Management System, in 2023 there were 26 active oil and gas leases on trust lands in Fallon County. The County should continue to support and develop these natural resources as the energy sector can help spur economic development throughout the County and will continue to give the County a viable source of economic security. Oil and gas wells and associated pipelines can be seen in Figure 9.3

Scoria and Gravel Resources

Scoria and gravel are an integral part of Fallon County's road maintenance program as well as the building and development industries. Without sufficient scoria and gravel resources, the County would be unable to provide maintenance for County and local roads. Fallon County continues to lack sufficient scoria and gravel pits that contain the minimum soil quality needed for state and federal roads, however, they are acceptable and utilized for county purposes.

Montana DEQ maintains a database of mining permits. In Fallon County, there are 38 permits for opencut mining. Opencut permits are for materials including gravel and scoria. One active pit/permit is associated with the Fallon County Road Department. There are six pits that are reclaimed and waiting for state release. Additional scoria and gravel resources may be available in areas of the county with the right soil conditions. USGS soil surveys for Fallon County indicate geologic units with potential for gravel. Figure 9.4 shows existing opencut mining sites and potential areas that may have gravel resources that the County can use for local road maintenance.

Figure 9.3 – Fallon Oil and Gas Wells and Pipelines



FS Fallon County Boundaries
 — Oil Pipelines
 — Natural Gas Pipelines

Wells by Type (MT Only)

- Gas
- Oil
- Injection, EOR
- Dry Hole
- Gas Storage
- Injection - Disposal
- Injection, Indian Lands
- Water Source
- Monitor/Observation

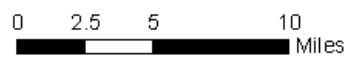
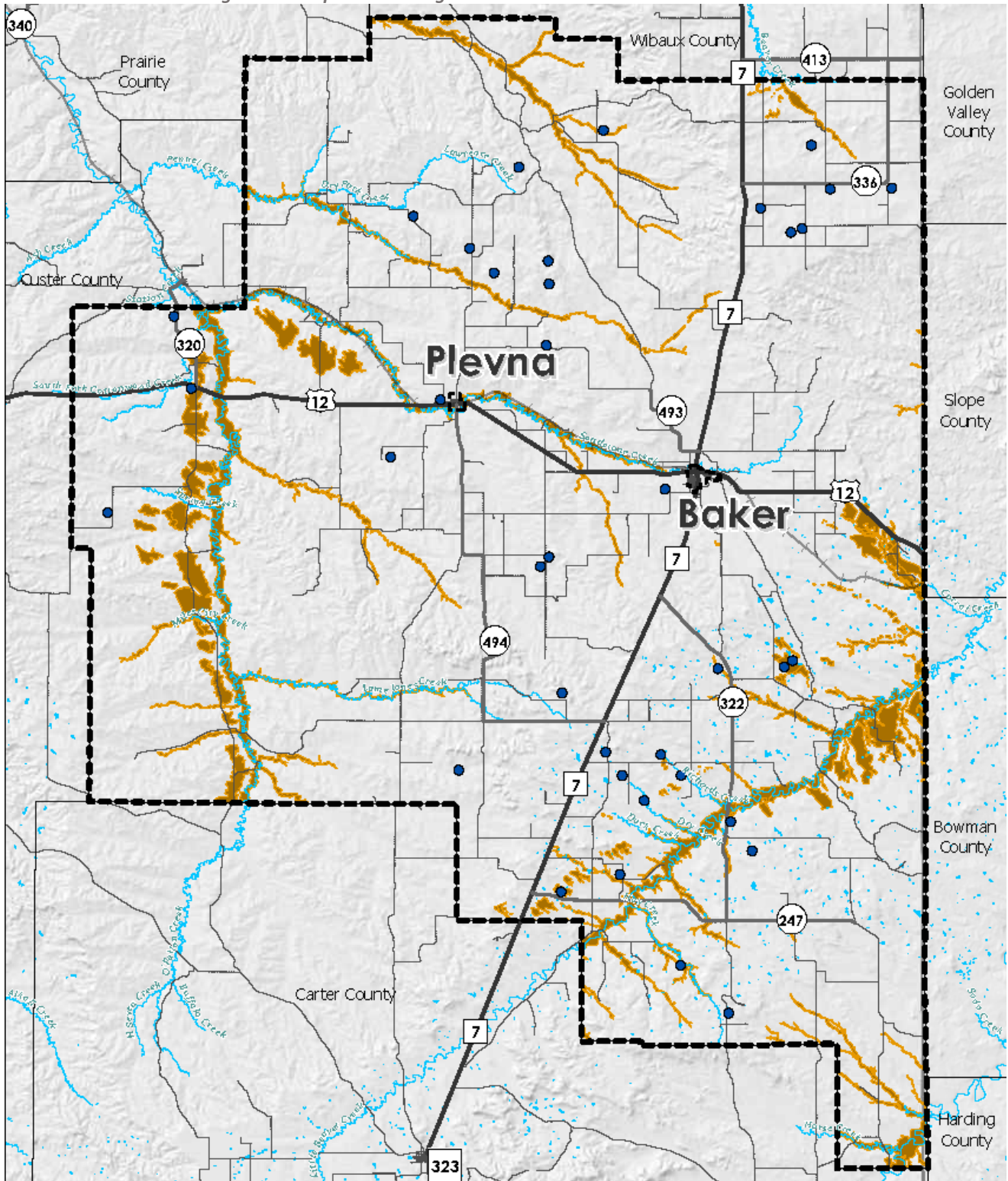




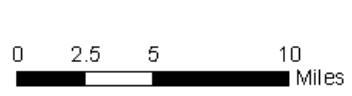


Figure 9.4 – Opencut Mining Sites and Potential Gravel Resource Areas



-  Fallon County Boundaries
-  City and Town Limits
-  Potential Sand and Gravel Resource Areas
-  MT DEQ Opencut Mining Sites



The National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals (NALGEP) is also a good resource for technical assistance and funding sources although this group serves communities nationwide, whereas DNRC and DEQ serve Montana communities only.

Leaking Underground Storage Tanks

Montana DEQ maintains a database of Leaking Underground Storage Tanks (LUST). Leaking tanks present hazards by releasing petroleum and other hazardous substances. Fallon County has 25 leaking underground storage tanks, 16 of which are listed as resolved. The remaining nine sites currently need some form of remediation and/or removal.

Wildland-Urban Interface

The State of Montana requires communities to analyze the wildland-urban interface (WUI) as part of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), which is the area surrounding an urban or municipal boundary containing forests, grasslands and other vegetation that are at a risk to wildfire. Montana counties varied in their method of identifying WUI. Fallon County identified all parcels as either being in or out of the WUI. This process was completed in 2011. Figure 9.6 shows the wildland-urban interface boundary for the county.

Fallon County can help eliminate potential wildfire risks by adopting the Guidelines for Development within the Wildland-Urban Interface, 2009, produced by the Montana DNRC. The Guidelines provide information on a range of topics including:

- Wildland Fuel Mitigation
- Site Development Recommendations
- Fuel break and Greenbelt Spacing
- Access and Water Supply Considerations
- Alternative Development Examples

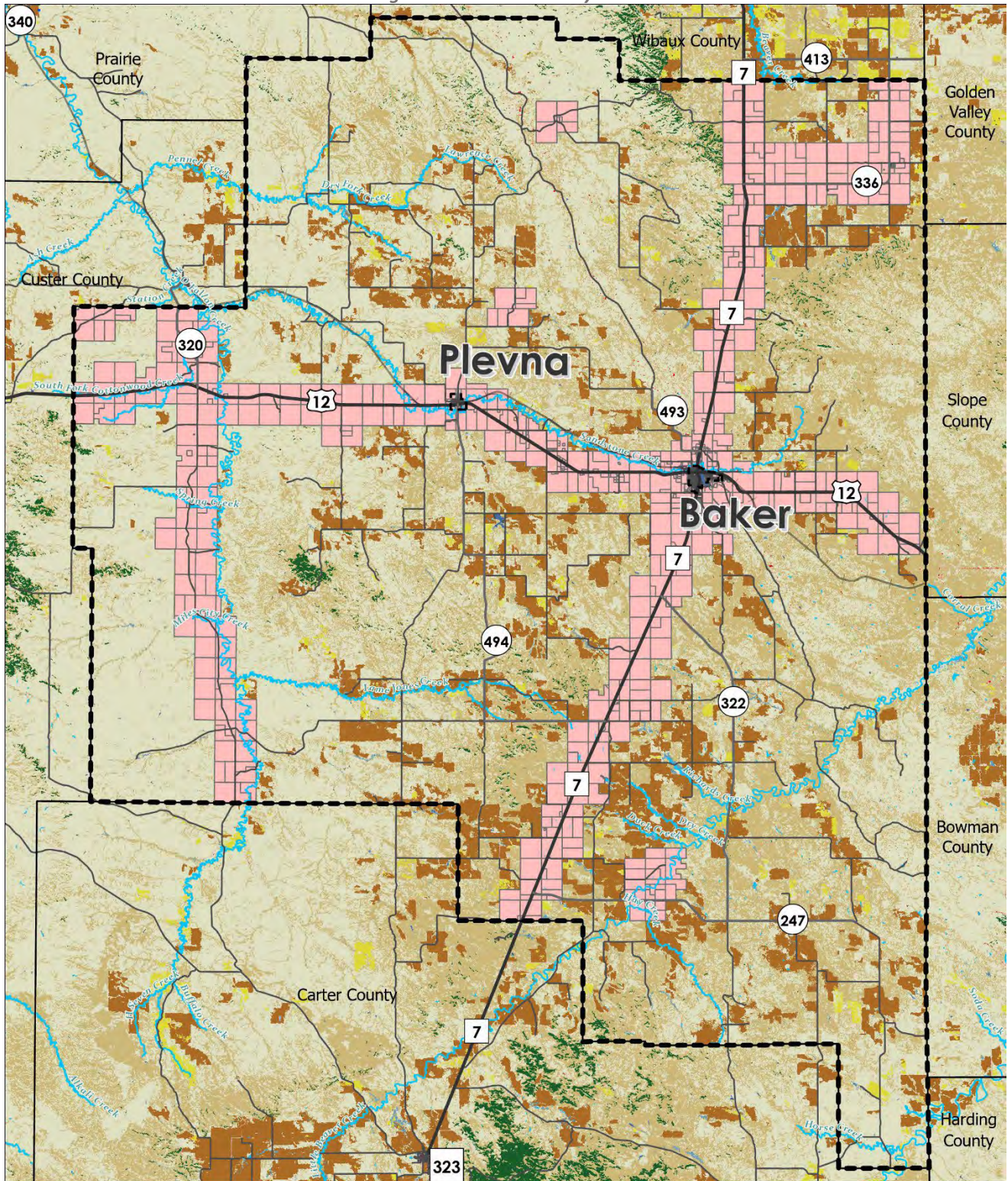
The Guidelines also offer recommendations for zoning such as clearing vegetation within five feet of public roads and driveways, providing at least two access points into a subdivision, ensuring fire apparatus can access a building within 150 feet and constructing “break away” gates for emergency vehicles. In addition, information is provided for homeowner responsibilities that include recommendations for how residents can help prevent damage to property and guidelines for establishing defensible space standards.

The goal of the Guidelines and county-wide adoption is not to limit property rights or future development. The goal is to:

- Protect life and property
- Reduce the potential for a fire on improved property from spreading into wildland fuels, and from a fire in wildland fuels from spreading into improved property or structures
- Provide safe working areas for emergency responders fighting fire
- Maintain important native plant communities and reduce the potential for loss of native vegetation and crops

A multi-hazard mitigation plan for the southeast region, including Fallon County, is in progress. This plan will help address WUI issues.

Figure 9.6 – Fallon County WUI



- WUI Parcels
- Fallon County Boundaries
- City and Town Limits



Chapter 10: Infrastructure and Public Facilities

City of Baker Water and Wastewater

Among other services, the City of Baker Public Works Department is responsible for maintaining and operating the solid waste, sewer and water systems/programs. The public works shop provides office space for the Public Works Director and parking/storage of vehicles and equipment. The department has six employees including the director. All staff members are involved in water and wastewater as needed.

Department vehicles and major equipment includes a loader, backhoe, mini-excavator, excavator, skid steer, hydro-vac and several work pickups.

CITY OF BAKER POTABLE WATER SYSTEM

Water Supply and Storage

The City of Baker provides potable water through six wells and three storage tanks. All the wells pump water directly into the distribution system. The water in each well is treated by injecting sodium hypochlorite directly into the well. The wells pump about 160-200 gallons per minute. Assuming an average of 180 GPM, operating the wells 18 hours per day would yield a water production of approximately 1.2 million gallons per day. A list of wells in use by the city and their stated yields are available in Table 10.1. The wells’ nominal yields differ from the estimate provided by public works. For the purposes of estimating daily water production, this chapter uses yield estimates from City of Baker Public Works.

Assuming a water use of 100 gallons per day per person, the maximum population that could be served by the wells is 12,204. This figure should be refined to account for commercial water users. Absent that information, it clearly appears that the city has sufficient water production to accommodate growth in the foreseeable future.

Potable water is stored in three tanks: two on tank hill and one on the east side of town. There are approximately 800,000 gallons of storage. The tanks on tank hill were inspected and repaired/upgraded in 2023. Their exact age is unknown, but they are believed to be in good shape. The tank on the east side of town is about 10 years old. Public works recently opened it up to inspect and replace anodes, and the tank is in good shape.

Well Number (GWIC ID)	Year Drilled	Depth	Yield (GPM)
#3 (1624)	1956	650	150
#4 (1622)	1952	650	140
#5 (1621)	1969	600	205
#6 (1625)	1934	650	135
#7 (1623)	1962	510	200
#8 (298580)	2018	740	300

Source: Montana Ground Water Information Center (GWIC), 2023

Water Distribution System

The existing distribution system is primarily comprised of mostly six to eight-inch Asbestos-cement pipe installed in the late 1950s with some four-inch pipe. As the system is aging, repairs and replacements are common. When making repairs, public works replaces any pipe with T600 PVC. In the last five years, the pipe going from the wells to the main line and also the mainline going through Montana Avenue have been replaced. Concerns are the age of the pipe, and the corpse valves are starting to fail creating leaks, also hydrants are old and starting to fail. Given the age and condition of the distribution system, the City is working on updating for a major system update in the next 10 years.

Water pressure in the city averages 45-55 psi. Some isolated areas near the storage tanks and other higher elevation areas have somewhat lower water pressures. There are no booster pumps in the system to increase water flow and pressure.

The 2022 Consumer Confidence Report from Montana DEQ for the Baker Water System states the city's water supply was not in violation for any of the regulated contaminants.

Water System Updates

In the last five years, the City of Baker has added an additional well to replace one which could not be rehabilitated, rehabilitated two others, and determined the remaining wells do not need rehabilitation. The city has also been adding water lines from the wells. However, much of the water line infrastructure in the city is aging and shows serious signs of disrepair. The city is working on replacing water mains as possible in coordination with street repair. The county and a grant funded a large portion of the funding toward water infrastructure. The tanks on tank hill are being resealed.

CITY OF BAKER WASTEWATER SYSTEM

The City of Baker wastewater treatment system is designed for flows from a population of approximately 2,600 people. Based on the 2020 US Census, the city population was 1,802. The wastewater treatment system should have capacity to accommodate a future population increase of approximately 800 persons. Most of the system has been recently updated. In addition to the City of Baker, its wastewater treatment system also serves an area located north and east of the city. The remaining capacity of the wastewater treatment facility may also be impacted by new high water use businesses. The crew camp west of Baker was integrated into the sewer system but never put into operation, so it has no current impact on capacity.

The City of Baker sewer system has a facultative lagoon treatment system comprised of four cells. The total area of all four cells is approximately 50 acres. There is a lift station at the lagoon site to pump water up into the clay lined lagoons. Sodium hypochlorite is added to disinfect the wastewater that is discharged to the golf course.

Wastewater from the lagoons is pumped into a one-million-gallon pond at the golf course and then used as irrigation water for the golf course. The city charges no fee for the use of the irrigation water on the county-owned golf course. Montana DEQ has continued concerns over the irrigation of the golf course using wastewater effluent. As of February 2023, the plan to irrigate the golf course was not approved by DEQ, citing lack of compliance with Public Water Supply Laws. The City of Baker and Fallon County will need to work to address these issues in order to utilize wastewater for irrigation.

With the fourth lagoon cell in operation, wastewater is now rarely dumped into Sandstone Creek. The director of public works estimated that wastewater has been discharged into the creek twice in the last five or six years. Before the fourth lagoon was constructed, discharges were estimated to occur about once or twice per year.

Most of the city's aging sewer lines have been lined with PVC in the last 10 years. Under normal operation, the sewer system is adequate for the city's need. However, during heavy rainstorms the system can overflow. Public works continues to search for and mitigate points of infiltration into the sewer system, with some success.

SEWER AND WATER SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

Sewer system responsibilities include operation of the wastewater treatment facility, maintenance of pumps, annual flushing of the sewer lines and inspection of sewer lines with the camera truck. Water system responsibilities include operation and maintenance of the city water well pumps, booster pumps and chlorinators. Recent maintenance work replaced water mains on Main St, portions of 6th St W and the intersection at Kimball Ave and 2nd St W.

Town of Plevna Water and Wastewater

TOWN OF PLEVNA POTABLE WATER SYSTEM

Water Supply and Storage

Plevna water is supplied by two active wells. Compared to the City of Baker wells, the Town wells were drilled more recently and at much greater depths. The Town wells were drilled in 1960 and 1974 at a depth of 1,070 feet and 1,030 feet, respectively.

Well No. 2 can produce 80 gallons per minute. Well No. 3 can produce 135 gallons per minute, but the water produced contains much silt. Well No. 1 is listed as inactive, and its water is not disinfected. The water produced by Well Nos. 2 and 3 is treated and pumped into a 200,000-gallon above ground storage tank. The above ground storage tank has replaced the underground cistern.

Water Distribution

Water is pumped from the storage tank into pneumatic tanks that provide water pressure for the community. Water pressure at the pump house is between 60 to 80 psi. The distribution system is entirely comprised of two-inch poly pipe. Because of the size of the water lines, there are marginal water pressures in portions of the town.

Water supply for fire protection in the town is provided by a dedicated well for use by the fire department. The fire protection well was drilled in 2013 to a depth of 110 feet and has a yield of 100 gallons per minute. This water is not intended for human consumption.

TOWN OF PLEVNA WASTEWATER SYSTEM

The existing treatment system is a two-cell clay lined lagoon. The system relies exclusively on evaporation for the disposal of wastewater. As such, the town does not discharge wastewater and a DEQ discharge permit is not required. Wastewater flows to the treatment facility by gravity; the system has no lift stations.

The Town's population in 2020 was 179, and the current system has sufficient capacity to treat the wastewater flows. The wastewater treatment facility had sufficient capacity to accommodate its peak population of 291 persons in 1940. Therefore, it is assumed the facility has sufficient capacity to accommodate more than 100 new residents, which is a population increase greater than expected in the foreseeable future.

The sewer collection system consists of eight-inch clay tile pipe. There does not seem to be a problem with infiltration. It is believed some basement sump pumps discharge into the sewer system.

Given the age and type of sewer lines, the town should coordinate with the City of Baker Public Works Department to view the condition of the lines with the city camera truck. The town should also measure the volume of wastewater entering the treatment facility and compare the volume against metered water consumption during the same period to determine the extent of infiltration. The town should use the infiltration estimate and the results of the visual sewer line inspections to formally evaluate the condition of the wastewater collection system. The city will be completing a visual inspection in the spring of 2024. Additionally, the city intends to update valves in the system in the spring of 2024.

Target Rates

Both the Town of Plevna and City of Baker have set their combined water and sewer utility rates below the state threshold identified by Montana Department of Commerce. To qualify for certain types of grants including Community Development Block Grants, utility providers must have utility rates set high enough to meet a certain threshold. The threshold is determined by US Census population, household, and income data and target percentages reviewed biennially by Montana Department of Commerce.

In 2022, Baker’s combined water and sewer rate was \$94.50 compared to the threshold of \$108.10. The Town of Plevna’s combined water and sewer rate was \$92.25 compared to the target rate of \$121.35. These target rates have made applying for infrastructure grants onerous for Baker and Plevna. The communities should consider raising rates or pursuing alternative sources of funding.

Rural Fallon County Water

Water is provided in the unincorporated areas of the county by individual ground water wells. Based on data from the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, Groundwater Information Center there is currently a total of 2,522 water wells in the county. Wastewater in the county is handled with privately owned and maintained septic tanks.

Table 10.2: Fallon County Wells		
Use	Number	% of Total
Fire Protection	1	0.0%
Industrial And Commercial	17	0.7%
Test Well	23	0.9%
Irrigation	25	1.0%
Public Water Supply	30	1.2%
Unused	69	2.7%
Geotech	77	3.1%
Unknown or Undocumented	90	3.6%
Monitoring	127	5.0%
Domestic	592	23.5%
Stockwater	1,471	58.3%
Total	2,522	100%

Source: Montana Ground Water Information Center (GWIC), 2023

Solid Waste Collection

Solid waste collection service varies by area in the county. In the City of Baker, weekly curbside collection is provided by the city. The city has one garbage collection truck, and residential solid waste collection is provided on a weekly basis. It takes approximately three days to serve all the residential properties in the city. Solid waste collection for commercial properties in the city is provided on a daily basis, Monday through Friday. G&G Garbage Company also has a weekly solid waste collection route that serves residential and commercial customers roughly within a five-mile radius of the City of Baker. County residents and businesses located beyond the city’s five-mile radius are responsible for the disposal of their own solid waste. Those property owners either burn or haul their solid waste to the landfill or a county container site on Coral Creek Road, about one mile outside the City of Baker.

The Fallon County landfill is located approximately eight miles southeast of the City of Baker on Coral Creek Road. The county landfill serves Fallon County, Wibaux County, Carter County and the Cities of Beach and Bowman, ND. The landfill receives approximately 12,000 tons of waste per year. Based on current usage and the design of the landfill, it is projected that the landfill has capacity for approximately another 60 years of service. The Coral Creek Container Site is for residential use only and accepts only household waste and yard debris.

Streets and Roads Maintenance

CITY OF BAKER

Street maintenance activities include street repair and maintenance, snow removal, street sweeping and grading of the few city gravel streets and all city alleys. The department is responsible for maintaining approximately 14 miles of paved streets, a one-quarter mile section of a gravel street and all city gravel alleys. Potholes in the streets are repaired every summer. All city streets are chip sealed every five years. The City of Baker's streets were chipped sealed in 2023.

During heavy snowfall winters, the city needs a snow blower and a large dump truck to effectively remove snow from the streets. The city should purchase these items, or preferably, establish an arrangement with the county roads maintenance staff to share the two county snow blowers and one or two of the county's large dump trucks.

Pavement conditions on Baker streets remain an issue for residents. Residents perceive maintenance to be largely reactive in nature and responding to emergencies as they arise. It is strongly recommended that the city approve and adopt a maintenance plan for the City Streets and include this in an approved and adopted Capital Improvements Plan. SID 36 completed Fall 2023

FALLON COUNTY

The Fallon County Road Department is responsible for maintenance of approximately 900 miles of county roads including public access easements. Nearly all county roads are gravel or scoria. Scoria surface is used for roads with low volumes of traffic. There are relatively few paved county roads that are maintained with chip and seal.

The department has a crew of 12 workers that provide year-round service. Department equipment includes seven belly dump trucks, five end dump trucks, one large scraper, two crawlers, and four snow plow trucks and six blades for snow plowing.

There is one existing scoria pit in the county. The pit is on private property leased by the county. The county usually buys gravel in bulk, 100,000 cubic yards at a time. A private company crushes the gravel and scoria and it is then stockpiled at the pit.

There are mutual aid agreements between the County and the City of Baker and Town of Plevna to respond to emergency situations that impacts travel on roads. The department has no formal road maintenance program. Roads with heavy traffic are maintained more frequently and the remaining roads are maintained based on their condition. During the winter months, the department's top priority is to keep vehicular routes open to the hospital and from the hospital to the airport.

Construction of roads is the responsibility of the property owner. If the new road is accepted by the county the road department will maintain it. An approach permit, approved by the County Commission, is required for any access to a county road.

Obtaining good gravel in the county is becoming increasingly difficult and the cost of gravel has increased significantly in recent years. In the last several years the cost of scoria has increased from \$0.40 per yard to its current price of \$1.00 per yard to landowners, not including the crushing costs.

The gravel and scoria resources have been largely depleted and it is hard to obtain permits. The crusher that has been used has become heavily regulated, which adds to the lack of resources for the road maintenance. Bonnievale was replaced and all other county bridges have been updated. Highway 7 Bridge, which is a state project, is considered functionally obsolete, is scheduled for replacement in FY 2025.

Road maintenance is a must for public health and safety. It is strongly recommended Fallon County develop and adopt a road maintenance plan that coincides with an approved and adopted Capital Improvements Plan.

Public Facilities

PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and recreational facilities significantly contribute to the quality of life in a community. They provide opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy recreational and aesthetic pursuits. Parks and recreational areas also provide open space in an urban environment that makes a community a more desirable place to live, work and play.

The City of Baker is the population center of Fallon County with more than 60 percent of the county population residing in the city. The city's percentage of the total county population is even greater when nearby subdivisions outside the city limits are considered. It should be no surprise most of the recreational programs and facilities are provided in or adjacent to the City of Baker.

For a community of its size, Fallon County and the City of Baker offer a significant number of recreational amenities and programs. Including the fairgrounds and County golf course, the community has nine outdoor recreational facilities. The approximate total land area of the facilities is 232 acres, not including outdoor recreational facilities at the several schools in the community. Relating the total outdoor recreation land area to the county population is an established way to evaluate a community's recreational "level of service". A common level of service communities seeks to achieve is 10 acres per 1,000 persons. For Fallon County, the existing recreational level of service is approximately 80 acres per 1,000 persons and 34 acres per 1,000 persons excluding the fairgrounds and the County golf course. The community far exceeds the commonly accepted national standard with the existing outdoor recreational facilities.

Potential Additions

Southeast Montana Area Revitalization Team (SMART) in coordination with Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) recently secured grants for both a visitor center and pocket park to be located in downtown Baker. The visitor center is planned to occupy the Baker State Building (also known as the old insurance store building).

Fairgrounds

The fairgrounds are the community's recreational centerpiece. The 52-acre facility is located along Highway 7 just on the south side of the City of Baker. The fairgrounds include an exhibit hall, a livestock barn and various outdoor areas that support a wide range of community and recreational activities. The county fair is held the third full weekend of August. The 4-H and FFA programs make regular use of the fairground facilities. A sample of the events sponsored by these programs include livestock and horse judging, team roping, shooting sports, youth rodeo play day and program meetings. The fairgrounds are also used by the community for bull sales, rough stock rodeo, outdoor concerts and many other activities. Fallon County Fairgrounds also has a motor sport park for bump 'n run races and motocross racing.

The exhibit hall is the county's largest indoor assembly and is regularly rented for public and private events. Private events include but are not limited to weddings and receptions, luncheons and reunions. Public events include auctions, rummage sales, and public meetings.

Parks and Golf Course

Triangle Park/Lake Park

This park is west of the south end of Baker Lake. Easiest access to the park is via East Center Avenue. The park includes covered picnic shelter/gazebo that provides sheltered eating area for 50 people with an adjacent restroom facility. Other amenities at the park include public boat ramps and docks, sand volleyball courts, a horseshoe pitching area, play equipment for ages 5 to 12 years, a beach area, two large grills, an amphitheater with potential seating for 100 people and plenty of parking. A concrete walkway with lighting around the lake connects Triangle Park with Iron Horse Park.. During the summer months Shakespeare in the Park is performed in the amphitheater. When the lake freezes, the park supports ice fishing and snowmobiling activities.

Mangold Sports Complex

This recreational complex is located directly south of Triangle Park. The facility is approximately three acres in size and has two little league fields and one softball field, a basketball court and a concession stand and restroom. There is plenty of parking at the facility.

Iron Horse Park

Iron Horse Park is located on the east side of Baker Lake. Amenities in the park include a splash pad with several water features and shaded areas, restrooms, public docks, bike pump track, and a beach area. A skate park was constructed in 2014 which included a bank, bowl, and volcano features.

Baker Lake

Baker Lake is a county-owned recreational resource that is valued and enjoyed by members of the community. Baker Lake provides the following recreational opportunities for the community: fishing and ice fishing, boating, skiing, jet skiing and ice skating. A County Commission appointed Lake Board provides advisory recommendations concerning recreational issues and opportunities and maintenance of the lake's water quality and the shoreline.

County Golf Course

The community has a par 36, nine-hole public golf course. The 80-acre golf course is located between Airport Road and the Baker Municipal Airport. The golf course is on City-owned land but the County maintains and operates the golf course facility. The golf course clubhouse is privately operated.

Eastside Park

The park is located in the eastern portion of the city, south of Texas Avenue. Its size is approximately equivalent to four city lots. Amenities in the park include a picnic shelter with seating for 50 persons, playground equipment for children aged two to five years, and a restroom. All facilities in the park are ADA compliant. On-street parking is available for users of park.

Senior Citizen's Centennial Park

This park is located on 1st Street West near the post office. A picnic shelter with one table is the only amenity provided at this park.

Steve McClain Memorial Park

This park is located on 3rd Street West just north of the Fallon Medical Complex. Amenities in the park include a picnic shelter with seating for 40 persons and grills and a large playground facility with equipment for children aged five to twelve years.

Coldwell Field

Coldwell Field is located across the street from the Steve McClain Memorial Park with access to the facility from 3rd Street West and Park Drive. Amenities at the facility include a lighted baseball field with a fenced outfield, scoreboard, bleachers, concession stand and restrooms. Babe Ruth and American Legion baseball is played at this field. The facility also has a batting cage, horseshoe pits and an ice-skating rink with a warming house.

In addition to the above park facilities, the Town of Plevna has one town park located near the town center. Finally, the County owns, operates and maintains a gun club, which includes cowboy action targets, bow targets, trap shooting range, indoor range, and outdoor range, that is open to the public. A motor sport park for bump n run racing and motorcross racing is also located at the gun range.

AIRPORT

Fallon County is served by the Baker Municipal Airport, a general aviation airport. The Baker Municipal Airport (BHK) had 7,050 operations during 2010; local operations (aircraft that take-off and remain within 20 miles of the airport) accounted for 5,300 operations while itinerant (all operations that are not local) accounted for 1,400 operations. Air taxi and military aircraft accounted for the remaining operations in 2010.

The airport runway was lengthened by 1,000 feet from 4,900 feet to 5,900 feet beginning in 2011. This longer runway allows for heavier aircraft to use the airport. Previously, larger aircraft had to take off without full fuel tanks to accommodate the shorter runway's weight restrictions.

To help ensure the airport can achieve its future development potential, the County should continue to use the zoning regulations surrounding the airport. Regulations limit the height and location of buildings and other objects that may interfere and cause harm to aircraft, pilots and passengers. Moreover, the County should support and plan to preserve land surrounding the airport for future expansions. Proper planning will help eliminate future land use incompatibilities and interruptions with air service.

Private Utilities and Services

Fallon County is served with natural gas and electricity by Montana-Dakota Utilities (MDU), a utility company serving parts of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Goldenwest Electric Cooperative and Southeast Electric Coop Inc., also serve parts of Fallon County.

Chapter 11: Health and Welfare

Overview

Health and Welfare access is critical to the wellbeing of any community but is especially important in rural communities. In Fallon County, the backbone of the local healthcare system is the Fallon Medical Complex (FMC). Healthcare needs in Fallon County mirror those of similar counties in eastern Montana: a rural service area, a generally aging population, difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff, and limited available funding. Of particular note since the last growth policy has been the impact of COVID-19.

Public Health and Medical Services and Facilities

FALLON MEDICAL COMPLEX (FMC)

Fallon Medical Complex is not formally affiliated with any other healthcare provider or system; it is a completely independent sole community provider of primary care services in its service area. Accordingly, it provides family practice, preventative health, routine hospital and fully digital diagnostic services, 24-hour emergency services, long-term care, dental services, home-based skilled and personal care, and physical and occupational therapy. Any escalation in a level of care requires the patient to be referred to a larger facility. Being equidistant from three major cities – Billings, MT, Bismarck, ND, and Rapid City, SD – patients transferred out of Baker are afforded a choice in their destination.

Fallon Medical Complex is anchored by a Critical Access Hospital with 25 beds that can be used for either acute care patients or long-term care swing beds. FMC provides 24-hour emergency care, fully digital diagnostic imaging, and a full complement of lab services with microbiology and blood transfusion capabilities. In an effort to provide comprehensive medical care to the community, various providers from neighboring communities routinely offer services to patients at FMC. For instance, FMC hosts visiting providers that offer dental, chiropractic, obstetric, podiatric, orthopedic, and hearing clinic services locally.

FMC decertified its attached 15-bed skilled nursing facility in 2016 and added the space to its critical access hospital. During that same year, FMC began to work with Avera Healthcare in Sioux Falls, SD to implement eEmergency and ePharmacy, two telehealth programs. FMC has also been a long-standing participant in the Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network through Billings Clinic, offering local access to a host of specialty providers located in Billings.

FMC ISSUES

FMC, similar to other rural facilities its size, has had an ongoing issue with securing adequate funding. Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates – which provide a large share of funding for FMC – are inadequate to sustain operations. Unfortunately, private payers typically follow suit and demand greater discounts to make their plans competitively priced. These conditions make it difficult to predict whether cash flow will cover the facility's fixed expenses. FMC does not have the capability of capturing additional patients, since the size of its market area is limited, so it needs to either raise rates or cut expenses.

Recruiting staff, especially professional staff such as nurses and doctors, is a struggle because of the facility's location and the perceived lack of community amenities, including options for entertainment. It has been increasing difficult to recruit permanent staff due to a lack of affordable housing, relative proximity to big-box store shopping (such as Wal-Mart), and access to an airport that hosts commercial flights.

FMC, like many healthcare facilities across the nation, are increasingly reliant on travel nurses and providers who come to work on a temporary basis. Travel staff often command a higher wage, plus FMC must pay an additional fee to the hiring agency who finds them. The railroad tracks also present a challenge when patients are being transported to FMC, as areas north of the tracks experience delays due to regular train traffic.

FMC states that every part of its facility has been renovated in the past 25 years. Many of these renovations have been funded via a mill levy, which was not renewed by the voters in 2021. Equipment needs at FMC have been prioritized, however there is no guaranteed ongoing funding source. Equally important, the federal requirement to store all medical records electronically has placed a significant burden on rural hospitals to dedicate more and more of their resources to purchasing

and maintaining information technology, such as hosted applications, computers, network equipment, servers, etc. These types of purchases are typically considered to be part of the cost of doing business, which isn't something that grants prefer to fund. That means that more money will have to be taken out of patient care to put towards this purpose.

FMC is often perceived as a county-run facility. In reality, the medical business is operated by a private non-profit corporation under contract with the county. Although Fallon County does provide meaningful support to FMC to maintain the county-owned building complex, reimbursement of expenses typically only accounts for less than 5% of the facility's gross revenue.

Lastly, there seems to be a general perception that patients are better off seeing a specialist out of town, and therefore travel to Miles City, Glendive, or Billings to receive treatment. This translates into lost revenue as most cases could be seen by a general practitioner at FMC.

FALLON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The Fallon County Health Department promotes health and wellness to clients in the county. Services include immunizations, family planning, WIC, health screening, blood pressure testing, aging services (home visits, medication set-up, and bathing assistance), equipment loans, assistance to schools with kindergarten round-up/preschool screening and athletic pre-physicals along with other health issues and Public Health Emergency Preparedness. There is no charge for services. Health insurance companies are billed for immunizations and family planning services. If a prescription is needed, the client is referred to a physician. Home visits are provided only to Fallon County residents. The Health Department has clients from outside the county; the typical service provided for these clients is immunization.

The public health department services are used by a significant portion of the community. There were 9,875 visits to the health department in the last five years, including off-site vaccinations.

The facility includes five offices and two examination rooms. The public health department staff includes two registered nurses, an administrative assistant and the County Emergency Services Coordinator. A mental health counselor visits the facility twice a week and a drug and alcohol counselor visits once a week.

Funding sources for the public health department include tax dollars, fees for services, federal grants including WIC, Maternal Child Healthcare Grant (for woman under the age of 40 and infants and children to the age of 21), Immunization action program, emergency preparedness and vaccines for children.

The Healthy Montana Kids program provides health insurance via CHIP to households with incomes below 250 percent of the poverty level and Medicaid to children of families with incomes up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. This program has helped to reduce the Health Department client load.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES

A major issue facing the community is a perceived lack of strong mental health services. Input from listening sessions and from stakeholders identified an ongoing need for mental health intervention. Suicide rates in Montana are higher than the national average, and county residents have relatively few resources to seek help. Baker has mental health services offered through Eastern Montana Community Mental Health Center which provides outpatient therapy and substance abuse services.

In addition, some area organizations are working with public health to address the lack of accessible mental health care. Southeast Montana Area Revitalization Team (SMART) and Eastern Montana Economic Development Association (EMEDA) have successfully secured grants for various projects in Baker and may seek a grant to revitalize a space in downtown Baker as a place for teens to hangout and to provide connections with mental health via telemedicine. The county should continue working with area organizations to help bolster mental health resources for residents.

Other social services which once existed in Fallon County are no longer offered including family child services and a local social worker.

Senior Citizen Services

The Fallon County Council on Aging provides a wide range of services for senior citizens in the community. The Glendive Action for Eastern Montana Area Agency on Aging has a 17-county jurisdiction including Fallon County. The agency administers state and federal funds and distributes funding to Fallon County based on service records.

The Fallon County Council on Aging staff includes a council coordinator, a program assistant, and bus drivers. The council office is located in the Baker Senior Center. The Baker Senior Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm and the facility is also open during evenings to support organized activities. The center offers a variety of social activities and a daily exercise program. Paid membership to the center is not required. The Plevna Senior Center is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 11:00 am.

In recent years, the transportation program was expanded to include 220-mile radius from the City of Baker. This has meant greater mobility for seniors with regular trips to Miles City.

The following are programs offered by the Fallon County Council on Aging:

- Transportation for medical, nutritional, social, recreational, shopping or other needs
- A daily meal for those who visit the congregate meal site
- Meal delivery
- Basic housekeeping services
- Foot care clinics, both in Baker and Plevna
- Legal services, as prescribed in the Comprehensive Older American Act Amendments of 1987 to persons age 60 or older.

FACILITY AND EQUIPMENT ISSUES

The Council buses are currently parked in the county shop. As a result, more time than would ordinarily be needed is required to clean the buses. A Council bus garage would eliminate this issue, and transportation logistics would be simplified if the garage would be located closer to the Baker Senior Center. However, Fallon County does not own appropriate property to make this happen.

Child Care and Preschool Resources

Currently there are no state approved daycares in Fallon County. In-home daycare providers may be providing services. However, Montana's childcare provider dashboard website does not list any childcare providers in Fallon County. Community input generally shows there to be a lack of childcare in Baker and Fallon County.

A county-wide survey done in 2019 identified a need for daycare facilities in Fallon County. At that time a bond vote was taken which would have created a daycare facility to serve 96 children; this bond vote failed. A more recent approach undertaken by SMART/EMEDA has been to try and fund two 20-slot daycare facilities – one for the general public and one for Headstart. A vote is scheduled for June 4, 2024 on a Mill Levy ballot regarding funding methods for the proposed daycare strategy. The daycare facility for the general public had been anticipated to be operational by June of 2024 with Headstart to be operational by August of 2024.

Chapter 12: Public Safety and Protection

Overview

Public safety and protection are an essential need for Fallon County and the communities of Baker and Plevna. Residents have a need to feel safe and have a reasonable expectation to be protected from crime. Residents also feel that aid in the event of emergencies should be prompt and effective. Fallon County's public safety concerns have eased since the height of oil activity, however recurring issues continue to affect the response capacity. There has been difficulty in recruiting and retaining law enforcement and fire staff and volunteers. EMS recruitment has been very successful lately and has held a class and plans for another class.

Public Safety – Law Enforcement

Public safety services are provided by the Fallon County Sheriff Department and the City of Baker Police Department. The Sheriff Department currently has 9 employees total including 4 sworn officers and 4 detention officers. The Sheriff has deputized the 4 city police officers as well as police officers in Slope, ND. The City of Baker currently has 4 sworn officers and no administrative staff.

The City Police Department and the Sheriff's Department share a public safety facility. The facility includes office space, a detention center and the multi-county dispatch center. The detention center has an estimated capacity of 14 full-time prisoners, 4 female and 10 male. Major renovations to the law enforcement facility were done in 2014. However, the facility lacks a conference room.

There is no 24-hour patrol coverage for either the City of Baker or Fallon County. Baker police currently have the capacity for 19 hours of coverage, with the remainder on-call. The presence or absence of detention officers at the detention facility has a large impact on sworn officers' ability to patrol. When detention officers are available, sworn officers are free to patrol.

The sheriff states the department's equipment is kept up to date with semi-regular purchases provided by grants. The sheriff department has 4 patrol cars and 1 spare backup vehicle. It is recommended that Fallon County include vehicle rotation costs in and adopt a Capital Improvement Plan to adequately prepare for vehicle expenses. The vehicles are being maintained by the county road department which has saved the sheriff department's budget. The City of Baker has 5 patrol cars which are maintained through the city's general fund.

In 2014/2015 the 9-1-1 Dispatch Center was updated and remodeled. The work area was doubled in size, and new equipment was purchased. A kitchen was added to help with feeding of the inmates. Fallon County, along with most other Montana counties has implemented Text to 911 and the Integrated Public Alert Warning System (iPaws) to issue warnings and alerts to residents via smart phone.

Fallon County, along with other southeastern Montana counties, is currently coordinating with the state to transition to Next Generation (NG) 911. NG911 will be a digital Internet Protocol (IP) based system. NG911 will improve success and reliability of the 9-1-1 service and allow for voice, photos, videos, and text messages to transmit from the public to dispatchers.

RECENT TRENDS IN CRIME

In recent years, the Sheriff and Police Departments have observed an increase in drug-related crimes, assault, and sexual assault. The number of home invasions rises and falls year over year. The departments have also noticed an increase in crime among juveniles and young adults. In 2022 there were 22 felony arrests and 48 misdemeanor arrests. Table 12.1 shows the most recent detention center statistics compared with 2011 when crime activity in the county was generally higher.

Year	Total Days Served	Average Number of Inmates
2011	1,320	3.62
2022	909	2.49

Source: Fallon County Sheriff's Office

Due to a move to a new RMS system in 2023, statistics about previous year traffic arrests and criminal arrests is not available. The new system in the future will be able to provide detailed statistics for law enforcement activity in Fallon County.

PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES

The police and sheriff department both see a need for 24-hour patrol service in the community, particularly if the community grows.

The city police department has a problem with the retention of police officers. The police department loses an officer to turnover about once every two years. The succession of new police officers has an impact on public safety because it takes up to one year for a new officer to become acquainted with the community and feel comfortable on the job.

Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services

There are three volunteer fire departments in Fallon County: one in the City of Baker, one in the Town of Plevna and a Rural Fire Department. For information regarding the Wildland-Urban Interface and related fire hazards, refer to Chapter 9: Natural Resources.

BAKER RURAL/CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT

Both the city fire department and Baker Rural Fire Department share the same facility which was built in 2010. The city fire department does not handle wildland or hydrocarbon calls, while the rural fire department handles all kinds of calls. Both fire departments conduct outreach in the community throughout the year, including events for children. The departments conduct and host training both within Fallon County and occasionally in neighboring counties and in North Dakota.

City and rural fire departments have several vehicles, which they position either in the City of Baker or distributed among the rural parts of the county. Table 12.2 shows the location of response units located throughout the county.

North Units		
Unit Number	Type	Assigned To
Unit # 418	Wild Land Unit	D. Koenig
Unit # 424	2,000 Gallon Tender/Pumper	T. Stark
Unit # 440	Wild Land Unit	K. Rustad
Unit # 445	Wild Land Unit	B. Steen
Unit # 489	Wild Land Unit	M. Stark
Unit # 496	Wild Land Unit	C. Follmer
City Units		
Unit # Rescue 7	Light Rescue	Fire Station
Unit # 409	Command (50/50 Rural & City)	Fire Chief
Unit # 416	75 ft Aerial	Fire Station
Unit # 417	Support Pickup (2nd Command)	Fire Station

Unit # 420	3,500 Gallon Tender	Fire Station
Unit # 426	1,000 Gallon Pumper	Fire Station
Unit # 438	Wild Land Unit	Fire Station
Unit # 446	Wild Land Unit	Fire Station
Unit # 460	1,000 Gallon Pumper (City)	Fire Station
Unit # 475	Wild Land Unit	Fire Station
Unit # 476	Wild Land Unit (DNRC)	Fire Station
Unit # 478	6,500 Gallon Tender	Fire Station
Unit # 481	Drag Queen	Fire Station
Unit # 484	Wild Land Unit	Fire Station
Unit # 490	2,000 Gallon Tender	Fire Station
	John Deere Side-by-Side	Fire Station
South Units		
Unit # 411	Wild Land Unit	B. Burdick
Unit # 415	Wild Land Unit	C. Meccage
Unit # 433	2,000 Gallon Tender/Pumper	P. Rusley
Unit # 442	Wild Land Unit	D. Hayden
Unit # 483	Wild Land Unit	S. Strangford

Source: Baker Rural Fire Department

Fire response time is generally not an issue for either fire service. However, spacing of volunteers remains a problem because of train delays along Highway 7. The rural fire departments need to have equipment stored and sufficient volunteers living north of the railroad in the event of trains blocking the crossing. Table 12.3 lists the types of calls Baker Rural Fire Department has responded to in the last five years and Table 12.4 lists the same for Baker City Fire Department.

Year	Structure	Wildland	MVA	Hydrocarbon	False	Other	Total
2018	3	18	3	1	2	1	28
2019	1	13	10	0	2	3	29
2020	1	25	7	0	5	2	40
2021	2	28	7	1	4	4	46
2022	2	7	5	1	2	3	20

Source: Baker Rural Fire Department

Year	Structure	Wildland	MVA	Hydrocarbon	False	Other	Total
2018	2	0	1	0	5	5	13
2019	1	0	1	0	2	2	6
2020	3	0	0	0	0	5	8
2021	2	0	0	0	1	2	5
2022	3	0	1	0	1	5	10

Source: Baker City Fire Department

PLEVNA FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Plevna Fire Department (PFD) has approximately 24 volunteers within one company. Firefighting equipment includes one class “A” pumper, two tankers, one command vehicle and 11 wildland trucks strategically placed around the county on private property.

PFD expects recruiting to become more difficult as residents age. The department is exploring ways to attract and retain volunteers; new housing would help with attracting new recruits.

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Fallon County has a paid, county owned ambulance service which operates three ambulances. All ambulance service equipment is owned by the county. The ambulance service complies with Section 50-6- 322, MCA that contains provisions that specify staff qualifications for nonemergency ambulance transports. The statute specifies that transports in rural areas require one trained driver and one emergency medical technician licensed at an emergency medical technician (EMT) basic level or higher.

The ambulance service has eight EMTs, two intermediate EMT (AEMT), and five EMR Drivers who are drivers and provide assistance to the EMTs. The ambulance service has a severe shortage of volunteers, which places a significant time and activity burden on the volunteers. Community stakeholders familiar with the ambulance service report that people don’t want to make the significant time commitment with little compensation. To get certified a volunteer needs to take 130-150 hours of classroom and practical instruction and take out of town written and practical skills tests. Then every two years a volunteer needs to get recertified by taking 72 hours of instruction. In compensation for the education and service time commitments, volunteers receive on average a stipend for each ambulance run that delivers a person to a medical facility.

FIRE AND AMBULANCE ISSUES

Both the fire departments and EMS have noted difficulties in finding volunteers to meet their needs. This issue was raised at several public listening sessions and was gathered via public comment. It was noted that volunteerism is down generally, and that the barriers to becoming a volunteer have grown.

Emergency Services

Fallon County has two emergency services, a 911 Center and a full-time emergency services coordinator. The 911 Center provides dispatch service for Fallon, Carter, Wibaux County, which represents an approximate service area of 8,000 square miles. The center is owned and operated by Fallon County. The center has five full-time and one part-time county employed dispatchers. The existing 911 system is in the process of being upgraded to the Next Generation 911 system.

The Fallon County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) was last updated in 2017 and is the EOP for the City of Baker and Town of Plevna. The update of the five-year Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan was in the adoption process during the preparation of this Growth Policy and is currently under state and FEMA review. The Pre- Disaster Mitigation Plan very thoroughly assesses risks associated with potential hazards and evaluates the vulnerability of critical facilities in the community. The plan also includes a community wildfire protection plan. Finally, the plan identifies a series of hazard mitigation strategies. A total of 12 hazard mitigation goals with accompanying objectives and policies/strategies are provided. Each policy/strategy is ranked according to priority. A total of eight high priority policies/strategies have not been implemented.

The Fallon County Emergency Operations Center is located in the courthouse. It has three telephone lines, radio communications equipment and cell phone boosters. The county has not designated a back- up emergency operations center that could be used in the event a disaster renders the courthouse non- operational.

The primary emergency shelter in the community is the Fair Grounds Exhibition Hall. Pet emergency shelters are at the Fair Grounds barn. Back-up emergency shelters are at city public schools and at church facilities. The Longfellow School has a large generator and has the capacity to shelter and feed residents in the event of an emergency.

One recent significant disaster in the county occurred in 2016 when an EF-3 tornado injured seven people, destroyed two homes, and damaged several other structures in Baker. The estimated damages from the tornado were \$1.5 million.

Flood Protection

Flood protection in Fallon County is performed mainly through enforcement of floodplain regulations. Both the City of Baker and the county regulate floodplains. A Flood Insurance Study was done for incorporated areas of the City of Baker and rural areas of Fallon County surrounding Baker in August of 1988. The flood hazard areas are regulated by the City of Baker and the County of Fallon Flood Plain Manager. Any work done in these regulated areas requires communication with the Fallon County Floodplain Coordinator to evaluate whether a permit is needed. Any Flood Hazard area that is sold should be disclosed to the purchaser at time of sale. Available Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) are shown in Figure 12.1 through Figure 12.4.

Figure 12.1 – FIRM – City of Baker

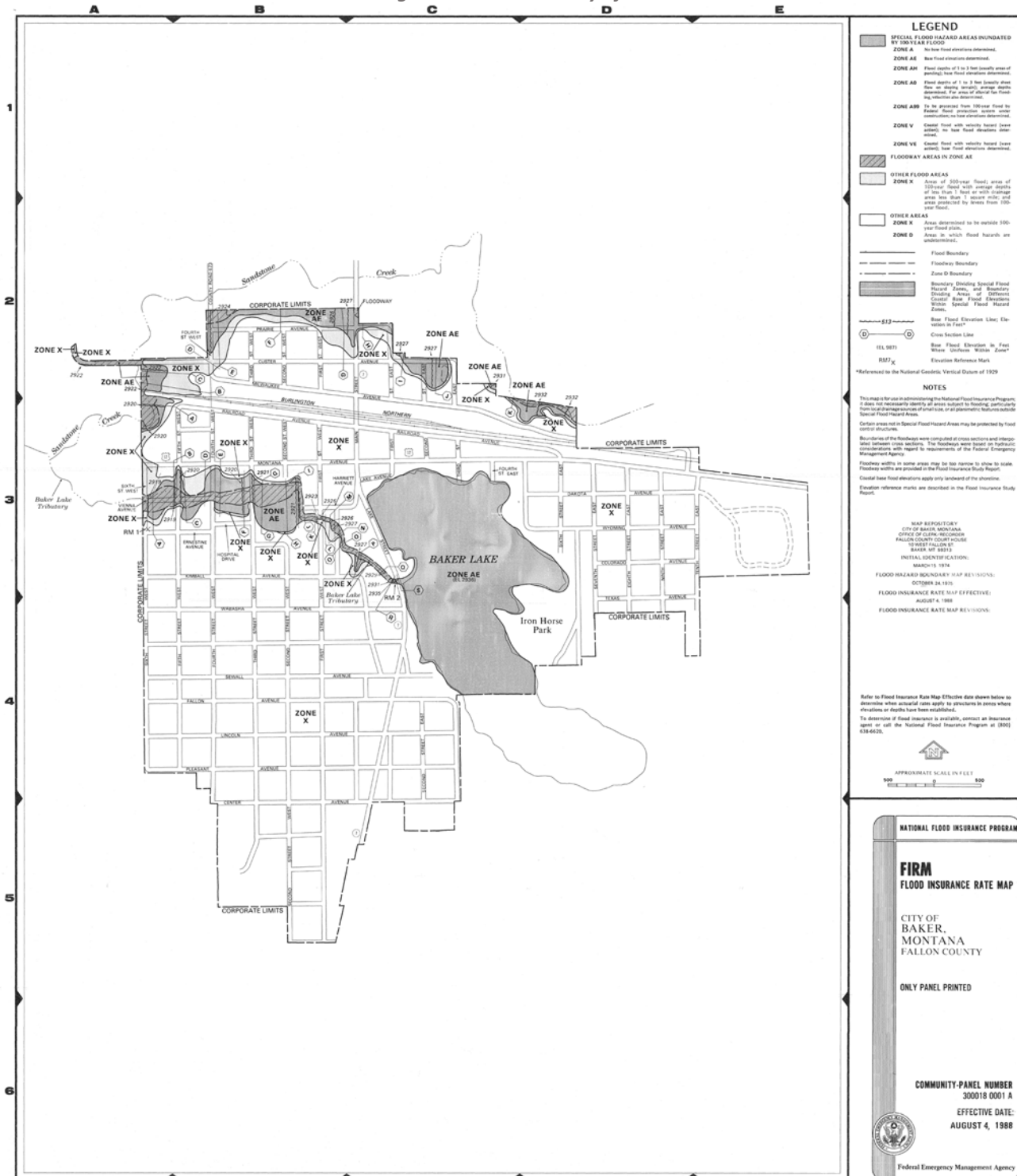


Figure 12.3 – FIRM – Unincorporated Areas (Panel 3001490266A)

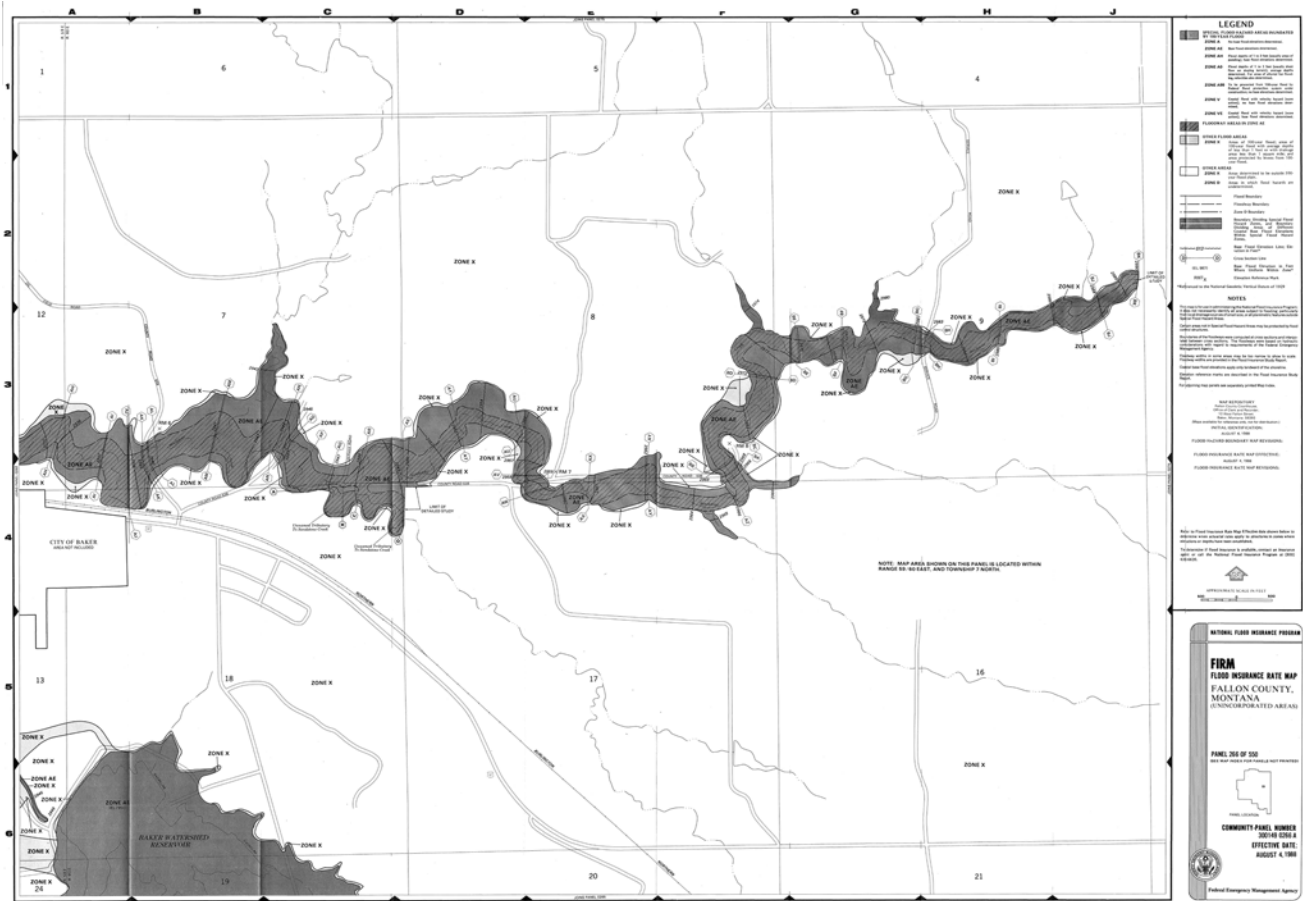
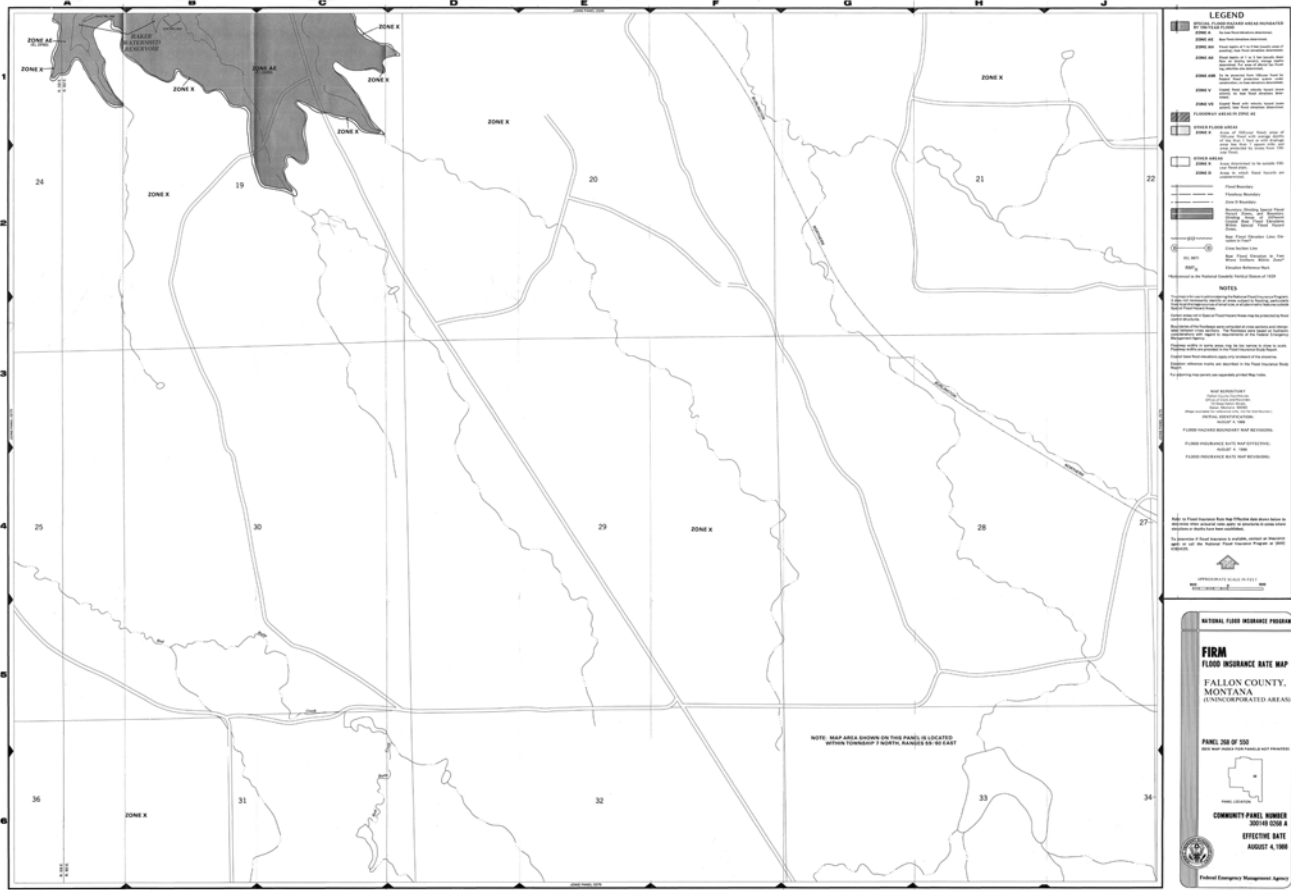


Figure 12.4 – FIRM – Unincorporated Areas (Panel 3001490268A)



Chapter 13: Intergovernmental Cooperation and Coordination

State law requires that a Growth Policy include a statement explaining how the county will coordinate with the incorporated municipalities on matters related to the Growth Policy. Fallon County has a demonstrated history of coordination with the City of Baker and Town of Plevna. However, in recent years, coordination and cooperation have lapsed somewhat between the three entities. In order to build on past success, this plan recommends the following:

- Establish quarterly joint City Council, Town Council and County Commission meetings.
- Identify collaborative measures that will enhance the level of local services such as joint-use facilities and the sharing of staff and equipment.
- Establish shared policy to facilitate coordinated and well-planned annexations.
- Continue with joint agreements between the County and Baker regarding shared office space at the courthouse as well as the airport.
- Share responsibility between governments to maintain and enhance community appearance.
- Fallon County and the City of Baker should work together to incorporate extraterritorial zoning to assist with streamlining annexations.
- Implement annexation plans for the City of Baker and Town of Plevna that include development standards.
- Assign community representatives to regularly attend selected regional, state and federal board or leadership meetings.
- Extensively document community impacts and needs to support funding requests.
- Modify the emergency mutual aid agreements so that the agreements do not need to be renewed with any changes in the membership of the Board of County Commissioners.

Chapter 14: Implementation

The 2023 Fallon County Growth Policy is a significant update of the 2017 Growth Policy. The 2017 Growth Policy was essentially a minor update to the 2012 Growth Policy. However, most of the implementation strategies in place in the 2017 plan remain valid for this 2023 update. The community profile and changes in community services have been updated to reflect the current context of Fallon County, the City of Baker, and the Town of Plevna. The significant public engagement fueled the new vision for Fallon County, the City of Baker, and the Town of Plevna. Thus, this implementation chapter carries offers ways to best address existing and emerging issues.

Implementation Tools

This section identifies several types of Growth Policy implementation tools. Generally, there are five types of tools at a local government’s disposal to help implement a growth policy. The types of tools include regulations, policy, government finance, education and coordination. The policies and strategies recommended in this chapter include each of the tools.

Regulatory tools are implemented with regulations authorized by Montana Code Annotated (MCA) and are adopted into law by local government. The Growth Policy and other adopted plans contain policies that express a community’s interest in pursuing a course of action on particular topics or issues. Unlike regulations, local government has discretion in the implementation of policy. Government finance tools represent a community’s financial commitment to fund the implementation of policy and strategies contained in the growth policy. Education tools, such as the growth policy itself, include a number of activities to inform the public, appointed officials and elected officials that facilitate effective decision making. Finally, coordination tools are voluntary measures with a local government or between a local government and other local governments and regional, state and federal agencies that result in more efficient delivery of services or a shared response to a common concern.

Provided below is a discussion of each of the types of growth policy implementation tools. The tools described are not all inclusive but rather are intended to provide examples of tools that are commonly used by communities in Montana. Several of the tools are currently being used by Fallon County and the City of Baker. The tools currently not in use should be considered as additional means to advance the implementation of the Growth Policy.

Implementation Tools

SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

The MCA requires counties to adopt subdivision regulations that comply with the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act. Subdivision regulations control the creation or modification of the division of land into new parcels or tracts. They also control the design of subdivisions and provide standards for adequate provision of infrastructure without adversely impacting public services and natural resources.

Fallon County has adopted subdivision regulations that are enforced in the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna. The Fallon County subdivision regulations are currently being updated to be consistent with the last State of Montana legislative sessions.

ZONING REGULATIONS

Zoning regulations are a common regulatory tool to control land use. One of the primary purposes of zoning regulations is to minimize land use incompatibility. Zoning regulations also establish standards that limit the density or intensity of development as well as other characteristics of development such as off-street parking, signs, lighting, site layout, etc. Zoning regulations are supplemented to a zoning map that establishes zoning districts in the jurisdiction. The zoning map provides the means to separate incompatible land uses and zoning regulations mitigate potential land use incompatibilities at the boundaries separating different zoning districts.

The City of Baker adopted zoning regulations in 1979. New regulations were adopted in 2014 and again in 2022. Pursuant to the MCA, the City of Baker can establish extraterritorial zoning jurisdiction one mile beyond the city limits. To do so the

city is required to adopt its own subdivision regulations and have the Fallon County subdivision regulations amended to exclude the City of Baker.

Workforce Housing Zoning is applicable in all of rural Fallon County. It exists to address such facilities like the Keystone workforce facility that the County is looking to sell. The Town of Plevna adopted Zoning Regulations in 2017.

DESIGN STANDARDS

Design standards are most often contained within zoning regulations but can also be established in subdivision regulations. The purpose of design standards is to enhance the appearance and functionality of a development. Overly restrictive design standards can impede development. If properly crafted, design standards can significantly enhance the built environment without placing undue burden on a developer.

FLOODPLAIN REGULATIONS

Floodplain regulations are intended to regulate the use of land located within an officially designated 100-year floodplain in order to protect buildings and its occupants from the risks associated with flooding. Floodplain provisions are contained in the Fallon County subdivision regulations. Both the City of Baker and Fallon County have adopted Floodplain Regulations. Fallon County and Baker's current effective maps are both dated August 4, 1988. Some communities choose to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System (CRS). CRS is a voluntary incentive program that recognizes and encourages community floodplain management activities that exceed the minimum NFIP requirements. Any community in compliance with the minimum requirements of NFIP may participate. Participation in the CRS will result in discounted premiums for flood insurance policy holders; between 5 to 45 percent discounts are provided depending on the rating of proposed floodplain management activities and will reduce the likelihood or magnitude of damage resulting from a flood.

ZONING COMPLIANCE PERMITS

Zoning compliance permits are a tool to ensure that development activities are in compliance with a jurisdiction's zoning regulations. The City of Baker requires the issuance of zoning compliance permits for most types of improvements to private property. Fallon County and the Town of Plevna do issue zoning compliance permits.

BUILDING PERMITS

Building permits are a tool to ensure that construction of building is in compliance with the State of Montana Building Code. A State of Montana Building Inspector issues building permits for Fallon County, including the City of Baker and Town of Plevna, and 13 other counties in the region. Building permits are required for all non-residential buildings and residential buildings with five or more dwelling units. The State Building Inspector issues a letter of completion when the construction of a building is complete and ready for occupancy. For residential buildings with four or less dwelling units only state issued electrical and plumbing permits are required.

Policy Tools

NEIGHBORHOOD OR AREA PLANS

The Growth Policy can be further implemented by more detailed neighborhood or area plans. With the adoption of this Growth Policy, plans may be prepared that provide a greater level of detail for specific areas or issues.

ANNEXATION POLICY

A city expands its boundaries and its jurisdictional authority through the process of annexation. There are six different methods for annexation authorized by state statute (Parts 42 through 46 of Title 7, Chapter 2, MCA). Part 46 authorizes an annexation resulting from a petition from private property owners. Cities use two tools to facilitate and guide future annexations.

The first is a “Limits of Annexation” map that delineates the areas surrounding a city that can be reasonably supported by urban services and infrastructure. The map is prepared in coordination with the preparation of a capital improvements program described in the government finance tool section, below. The second is the use of annexation agreements. Entering into an annexation agreement with a property owner prior to the submission of development plans gives a local jurisdiction the opportunity to assign infrastructure and other costs associated with development of the annexed property.

URBAN PLANNING AREA

Designation of an urban planning area is a tool to plan for the extension of urban services as a jurisdiction grows. It delineates the geographic extent of how far outside the city limits the jurisdiction is prepared to extend urban services within a 10-year planning horizon. This is often accomplished by establishing an urban service area boundary beyond the city limits. The urban service area boundary is established in coordination with planned growth areas identified in the Growth Policy as well as the city’s capital improvement program. This tool helps a city plan for future growth outside the city limits and puts property owners outside the city limits on notice of what areas will and will not be supported by the extension of urban services.

URBAN RENEWAL DISTRICTS

The establishment of urban renewal districts is an implementation tool that facilitates redevelopment of selected areas in a city. Title 7, Chapter 15, Part 42 of the MCA, gives municipalities authority to establish urban renewal districts in areas that meet the statutory definition of “blighted” areas and authorizes the municipality to expend funds in the area to stimulate private investment. Tax increment finance districts are often used to recapture a city’s expenditure of funds for public improvements in the redevelopment area. Prior to establishing an urban renewal district, the municipality is required to prepare and adopt an urban renewal plan.

Government Finance Tools

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

City and county governments often program capital improvements on an annual basis. This is a reasonable practice for communities experiencing no or low levels of growth. However, for communities anticipating or experiencing high levels of growth, the use of multi-year capital improvement programs is an important tool to plan for public expenditures associated with growth. In such cases, a local government will establish a five-year capital improvement program. As noted above, a multi-year capital improvement program can support the establishment of urban service areas and facilitate negotiation of an annexation agreement.

FEE INCENTIVES

The reduction or full waiver of municipal fees is a tool to support implementation of specific growth policy goals and objectives. Often the financial incentive is used to support affordable housing or redevelopment projects. The tool can also be used to support specific economic development policy.

IMPACT FEES

An impact fee is a charge on development assessed at the building permit or zoning compliance permit stage of a project to assist the funding of new or expanded facilities that are needed to accommodate the development. Impact fees are used by communities anticipating or experiencing high levels of growth and are intended to maintain existing or minimum levels of service with minimal costs to existing property owners. Impact fees can be assessed to a wide range of community services including but not limited to public safety (EMS, police and fire), public works (sewer, water, transportation and drainage facilities), recreation, libraries, etc. Those assessed impact fees need to receive benefit from impact fee expenditures within a reasonable period of time, which most often is considered five years.

The City of Baker adopted Ordinance No. 351 in May, 2012 which reiterated the city’s authority to establish impact fees and established a process for preparation of impact fees. The ordinance further established an Impact Fee Advisory Committee to research the subject and implement an impact fee program. The city has yet to determine which public facilities/services would be the basis for an impact fee.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OWNED LAND

Land that is owned by local government, including school districts, is a valuable resource that can be used to implement growth policy goals and objectives. Undeveloped public land can be used to financially leverage private development that meets a community's high demand need. By reducing or eliminating land acquisition costs the jurisdiction provides a significant financial incentive to facilitate development that supports the implementation of land use, housing or economic development policy. When this implementation tool is used the local government should enter into a development agreement to ensure the developer provides the desired outcome.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF)

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) was first authorized by the Montana legislature in 1974. It is a locally- driven funding mechanism that allows cities and counties to direct property tax dollars that accrue from new development, within a specifically designed district, to community and economic development activities within that district. It is intended as a tool that can encourage and support investment in areas where growth has been hindered by a lack of sufficient infrastructure and/or the presence of blight. TIF does not increase property taxes for individuals and businesses located within a designated district.

Rather, it only affects the way that taxes are distributed after they have been collected. A base taxable value is determined upon the establishment of a TIF district, and any additional tax revenue that accrues due to new development over a specified time frame is used to finance a variety of district improvements. Eligible improvement activities include:

- Land acquisition
- Rehabilitation and renovation
- Demolition and removal of structures
- Planning, marketing and analysis
- General redevelopment activities
- Constructing, improving and connecting to infrastructure

Education Tools

PLANNING STUDIES AND DATA COLLECTION

This Growth Policy provides a great deal of information and data on the community's various characteristics. It also provides an extensive list of policies and strategies to implement growth policy objectives. In most cases the information and data contained in the growth policy will be sufficient to justify and implement the policies and strategies. However, there may be cases where the community will need to conduct more detailed follow-up planning studies and collect additional information to support an implementation activity. Establishing impact fees or an urban renewal district are two examples of implementation measures that require additional study and data collection. In addition, as discussed below, the ongoing collection of data will support monitoring of the Growth Policy.

GROWTH POLICY MONITORING

The recommended policies and strategies contained in the Growth Policy are based on an assessment of current information and data. The policies and strategies will remain relevant so long as conditions in the community are aligned with current trends. However, unanticipated circumstances or opportunities may likely arise that will warrant a re-evaluation of recommended policies or strategies whether they have been implemented or not. To support a re-evaluation of policies or strategies, data that is applicable to various planning topics should be collected and reported on an annual basis. The data will, in effect, provide community indicator information allowing the community to identify emergence of new trends.

The planning consultant recommends preparation of an annual community indicator report that can be used to support an evaluation of the level of success in achieving community goals and objectives, and an assessment of the need to implement or revise selected policies and strategies contained in the Growth Policy. Annual community Indicator reports will provide valuation information that can be used in the next update of the Growth Policy. The reports can also be used to justify need when requests for outside funding are made.

The community indicator reports should provide information that can be compared to information contained in the Growth Policy so change can be measured. The community indicator reports should include, but not be limited to, the following information:

- Building permits for new housing
- Volume of sales of residential property
- Crime statistics
- Client caseloads for Council on Aging supported programs
- The number and type of new or expanded businesses
- The number and type of new jobs created
- School enrollment
- Levels of participation in various recreational programs
- Remaining capacity of sewer treatment facilities
- Remaining capacity of the landfill
- Measurements of activity in the oil and natural gas industries, such as number of new wells
- Updated population projections prepared by the Montana Department of Commerce
- Annual departmental budget reports/requests

Coordination Tools

INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

The functions of local government are logically divided into departments. The departmentalization of local government services tends to discourage the sharing of information and coordination between departments. Too often synthesizing information from the various departments to get a holistic view of the community is solely the responsibility of the elected officials and most often occurs during preparation of annual budgets. The planning consultant recommends department reports be shared with one member of staff who is responsible for overseeing implementation of the Growth Policy.

In addition, individual departments should be assigned the task of implementing or evaluating the need to implement recommended policies and strategies. This is an excellent way to spread ownership of the Growth Policy. Annual department reports should provide information on implementation activities and the need to initiate implementation of policies and strategies. To formalize or institutionalize the community's commitment to Growth Policy implementation, the planning consultants recommend each local government's budget include a Growth Policy Implementation section.

Intra-governmental coordination is also an effective tool to more efficiently deliver services. The leaders of each department should meet periodically to share information and service delivery challenges. The meetings will provide an opportunity to enhance coordination between departments and identify ways that staff, equipment and other departmental resources can be shared to mitigate service delivery challenges.

INTER-GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

The same principles discussed in the previous section apply to coordination between local governments and between local governments and regional, state and federal agencies. Inter-governmental coordination provides an opportunity to regularly share information about plans and programs and enhance working relationships. Both the City of Baker and Fallon County have established floodplain regulations. This is a good example of where inter-governmental coordination is valuable. It is especially important that development in the floodplain of one jurisdiction which could impact land in the other jurisdiction be evaluated for impacts within both jurisdictions.

The planning consultant recommends establishing a semi-annual meeting schedule with regional, state and federal agencies and a quarterly meeting schedule for local governments in the county. Individual County Commissioners and City and Town Council members can be designated as the liaison for each agency and local government. The intangible benefits of this coordination will be maintaining open lines of communication and a greater mutual understanding of the perspectives and needs.

Evaluation of Fallon County Subdivision Regulations

An evaluation of the administration and standards contained in the Fallon County subdivision regulation is required as part of the Growth Policy. There are three items that need to be evaluated per Title 76, Chapter 1, Part 6, 76-1-601(3)(h), MCA.

The evaluation concerns how the local governments define the various impacts assessments specified in 76-3-608(3)(a), how local government decisions with respect to the impact assessments are made and how public hearings for proposed subdivisions are conducted.

Fallon County, the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna have all just completed new subdivision regulations to include new changes required by the 2023 Montana Legislature and have completed the analysis noted above.

Impact Assessments: Definitions and Evaluation Factors

Local government subdivision regulations are required to review proposed subdivision in accordance with the following criteria provided in 76-3-608(3)(a):

- The effect on agriculture
- The effect on agricultural water user's facilities
- The effect on local services
- The effect on the natural environment
- The effect on wildlife and wildlife habitat
- The effect on public health and safety

For each of the above criteria, applicable definitions and evaluative provisions contained in the Fallon County subdivision regulations will be identified.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is defined as all aspects of farming or ranching including the cultivation or tilling of soil; dairying; the production, cultivation, growing, harvesting of agricultural or horticultural commodities; raising of livestock, bees, fur-bearing animals or poultry; and any practices including forestry or lumbering operations, including preparation for market or delivery to storage, to market, or to carriers for transportation to market.

The effect on agriculture is evaluated by the following provisions:

- Is the proposed subdivision or associated improvements located on or near prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance as defined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service? If so, identify each area on a copy of the preliminary plat.
- Describe whether the subdivision would remove any agricultural or timber land from production.
- Describe possible conflicts with nearby agricultural operations (e.g., residential development creating problems for moving livestock, operating farm machinery, maintaining water supplies, controlling weeds or applying pesticides; agricultural operations suffering from vandalism, uncontrolled pets or damaged fences).
- Describe possible nuisance problems which may arise from locating a subdivision near agricultural or timber lands.
- Describe effects the subdivision would have on the value of nearby agricultural lands.

It should be noted that:

- North of Fallon County has had a lack of water for ag operations and would benefit from public rural water systems. The lack of water may impact the Sage Grouse.
- The large landowners would like to see a centralized facility for garbage collection. As it is now, they must truck this to the land fill.
- There is concern with dust control on the roads, and perhaps controlled speed limits would help with this.
- The BLM lands are being closed off, and they are not issuing grazing permits.
- A priority on roads and infrastructure is requested to promote safe travel for ranchers hauling their livestock and produce.

AGRICULTURAL WATER USER FACILITIES

Agricultural water user facilities are defined as those facilities which provide water for irrigation or stock watering to agricultural lands for the production of agricultural products. These facilities include, but are not limited to, ditches, head gates, pipes and other water conveying facilities.

The effect on agricultural water user facilities is evaluated by the following provisions:

- Describe conflicts the subdivision would create with agricultural water user facilities (e.g. residential development creating problems for operating and maintaining irrigation systems) and whether agricultural water user facilities would be more subject to vandalism or damage because of the subdivision.
- Describe possible nuisance problems which the subdivision would generate with regard to agricultural water user facilities (e.g. safety hazards to residents or water problems from irrigation ditches, head gates, siphons, sprinkler systems or other agricultural water user facilities).

LOCAL SERVICES

Local services are defined as any and all services that local governments, public or private utilities are authorized to provide for the benefit of their citizens.

The effect on local services is evaluated by the following provisions:

- Describe the additional or expanded public services and facilities that would be demanded of local government or special districts to serve the subdivision.
 - Describe additional costs which would result for services such as roads, bridges, law enforcement, parks and recreation, fire protection, water, sewer and solid waste systems, schools or busing, (including additional personnel, construction and maintenance costs).
 - Who would bear these costs (e.g. all taxpayers within the jurisdiction, people within special taxing districts, or users of a service)?
 - Can service providers meet the additional costs given legal or other constraints (e.g. statutory ceilings on mill levies or bonded indebtedness)?
 - Describe off-site costs or costs to other jurisdictions that may be incurred (e.g. development of water sources or construction of a sewage treatment plant; costs borne by a nearby municipality).
- Describe how the subdivision allows existing services, through expanded use, to operate more efficiently, or makes the installation or improvement of services feasible (e.g. allow installation of a central water system, or upgrading a country road).
- What are the present tax revenues received from the un-subdivided land?
 - By the County \$
 - By the municipality, if applicable, \$
 - By the school(s) \$
- Provide the approximate revenues received by each above taxing authority if the lots are reclassified, and when the lots are all improved and built upon. Describe any other taxes that would be paid by the subdivision and into what funds (e.g. personal property taxes on mobile/manufactured homes are paid into the County general fund).

Would new taxes generated from the subdivision cover additional public costs?

- How many special improvement districts would be created which would obligate local government fiscally or administratively? Are any bonding plans proposed which would affect the local government's bonded indebtedness?

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Natural environment is defined as the physical conditions which exist within a given area, including land, air, water, mineral, flora, fauna, sound, light and objects of historic and aesthetic significance.

The effect on the natural environment is evaluated by the following provisions:

- Describe and locate on a plat overlay or sketch map known or possible historic, paleontological, archaeological or cultural sites, structures or objects which may be affected by the proposed subdivision.
 - How would the subdivision affect surface and groundwater, soils, slopes, vegetation, historical or archaeological features within the subdivision or on adjacent land? Describe plans to protect these sites.
 - Would any stream banks or lake shorelines be altered, streams re-channeled or any surface water contaminated from sewage treatment systems, run-off carrying sedimentation, or concentration of pesticides or fertilizers?
 - Would groundwater supply likely be contaminated or depleted as a result of the subdivision?
 - Would construction of roads or building sites require cuts and fills on steep slopes or cause erosion on unstable, erodible soils? Would soils be contaminated by sewage treatment systems?
 - Describe the impacts that removal of vegetation would have on soil erosion, bank or shoreline instability.
 - Would the value of significant historical, visual or open space features be reduced or eliminated?
 - Describe possible natural hazards the subdivision could be subject to (e.g., natural hazards such as flooding, rock, snow or landslides, high winds, severe wildfires, or difficulties such as shallow bedrock, high water table, unstable or expansive soils, or excessive slopes).
 - How would the subdivision affect visual features within the subdivision or on adjacent land? Describe efforts to visually blend the proposed development with the existing environment (e.g. use of appropriate building materials, colors, road design, underground utilities and re-vegetation of earthworks).

WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

Wildlife is defined as those animals that are not domesticated or tamed, or as may be defined in a Growth Policy, and wildlife habitat is defined as the place or area where wildlife naturally lives or travels through.

The effect on wildlife and wildlife habitat are evaluated by the following provisions:

- Describe what impacts the subdivision or associated improvements would have on wildlife areas such as big game wintering range, migration routes, nesting areas, wetlands or important habitat for rare or endangered species.
- Describe the effect pets or human activity would have on wildlife.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

Public health and safety is defined as the prevailing healthful, sanitary condition of wellbeing for the community at large. Conditions relating to public health and safety include but are not limited to: disease control and prevention; emergency services; environmental health; flooding, fire or wildfire hazards, rock falls or landslides, unstable soils, steep slopes and other natural hazards; high voltage lines or high pressure gas lines; and air or vehicular traffic safety hazards.

The effect on public health and safety is evaluated by the following provisions:

- Describe any health or safety hazards on or near the subdivision, such as: natural hazards, lack of water, drainage problems, heavy traffic, dilapidated structures, high pressure gas lines, high voltage power lines or irrigation ditches. These conditions, proposed or existing, should be accurately described with their origin and location identified on a copy of the preliminary plat.
- Describe how the subdivision would be subject to hazardous conditions due to high voltage lines, airports, highways, railroads, dilapidated structures, high pressure gas lines, irrigation ditches and adjacent industrial or mining uses.
- Describe land uses adjacent to the subdivision and how the subdivision will affect the adjacent land uses. Identify existing uses such as feed lots, processing plants, airports or industrial firms which could be subject to lawsuits or complaints from residents of the subdivision.
- Describe public health or safety hazards, such as dangerous traffic, fire conditions or contamination of water supplies which would be created by the subdivision.

In addition to the above factors required to be evaluated in the review of a proposed subdivision, the Fallon County subdivision regulations also require preparation of a community impact report on the following public services and facilities.

- Education and busing
- Roads and maintenance
- Water, sewage and solid waste facilities
- Fire and police protection
- Payment for extension of capital facilities

Public Hearing Requirements and Procedures

The Fallon County subdivision regulations contain several sections that specify the procedural requirements for the following types of subdivision applications.

- Divisions of land exempt from subdivision review
- Review and approval procedures for minor subdivisions
- Review and approval procedures for major subdivisions, including review and approval of preliminary and final plats
- Expedited review of a first minor subdivision
- The Fallon County subdivision regulations apply to all jurisdictions in the county. The County is in the process of updating the subdivision regulations for consistency with all applicable enacted amendments to the MCA during the last three legislative sessions. All procedural provisions, including those applicable to public hearings, are consistent with the current statutory provisions contained in the MCA.

Objectives, Policies, and Strategies

The following are the recommended objectives and policies and strategies for each topic of the Growth Policy. For each policy and strategy, the entity responsible for implementation is identified and a recommended time frame for implementation is provided. The entity listed first for each policy and strategy (in italicized type) is assigned the primary responsibility to initiate and follow-through with implementation measures. In a few cases, multiple entities are assigned the primary responsibility for implementation. Other listed entities for recommended policies and strategies are responsible for supporting the implementation measures. Four implementation time frames are provided:

- Immediate
- Short-term – not later than two years after adoption of the Growth Policy
- Mid-term – between two and four years after adoption of the Growth Policy
- Long-term – prior to the update of the Growth Policy in 2017

Land Use Objectives, Policies, and Strategies

Objective: Ensure developable land is available to accommodate anticipated population increases.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Use the developable constraints map and additional policies in this chapter to guide development in Fallon County.	Planning Board, County Commission, City & Town Councils	Immediate
Retain existing residents. Including the young adult population, and accommodate new people, including energy sector workers and their families, moving into the community.	EMDA/SMART, County Commission, City & Town Council	Immediate

Objective: Accommodate future growth in areas that can be efficiently served by public service.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Establish county land use policies and development standards adjacent to Baker and Plevna that are compatible with city land use and development standards and town land uses and infrastructure.	Planning Board County Commission	Short-term
Investigate the use of an urban service boundary or adequate public facilities ordinance to promote efficient extensions of infrastructure	Zoning Commission City Council	Short-term

Objective: Implement land use policies and strategies to promote investment in downtown Baker and development of commercial uses in the Town of Plevna.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Identify areas in the City of Baker that would meet the MCA criteria for establishing a redevelopment plan.	EMDA/SMART City Council	Short-term
Provide regulatory and financial incentive to promote development of a grocery store, convenience store/gas station or similar commercial uses that provide basic goods and services for the residents of the Town of Plevna.	Planning Board Town Council	Short-term
Review the Town of Plevna code of ordinances to determine if existing regulations are imposing a constraint on new development.	Town Council	Mid-term
Evaluate the interest & feasibility of the Plevna establishing zoning regulations; through an agreement with the City of Baker, the city could assume much of the administrative responsibilities.	Planning Board Town Council City Council Zoning Commission	Mid-term

Objective: Establish land use compatibility policy in planned future growth area, including policy to limit incompatible development In existing agricultural areas.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Establish future land use policy to guide decisions on rezone and future land use map amendment applications.	Planning Board City Council County Commission	Short-term
Enforce zoning standards to mitigate adjacent land use incompatibilities.	City Council Zoning Commission	Immediate
Establish zoning standards that address land use transitions and compatibility with existing rural residential developed properties.	City Council Zoning Commission	Mid-term
Require recordation and notification of buyers of residential properties of the proximity of agricultural land	Planning Board City Council County Commission	Short-term

uses and operations such as harvesting, grazing of animals, etc.		
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Objective: Establish an annexation policy for Baker and Plevna encouraging coordination with the County.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Develop a coordinated city-county policy on the subject of annexation of development properties addressing the transition from rural to urban services and fiscal impacts associated with the annexation.	Planning Board City Council County Commission	Short-term
Establish extraterritorial zoning one mile beyond Baker city limits. To implement this policy the City of Baker will need to adopt its own city subdivision regulations.	Planning Board City Council	Short-term
To facilitate the Stanhope Addition subdivision, the City of Baker should consider an annexation agreement provision that would allow the existing property owners to have horses and livestock on their properties or for the long-term provide assurances to property owners with horses and livestock would be considered a legal nonconforming use that could continue so long as the use is maintained. Alternatively, the Animal Control Authority can authorize and the City Council can amend section 7.04.080(b) of the Code of Ordinances to exempt the Stanhope Addition subdivision.	Planning Board City Council County Commission	Short-term

Objective: Improve the physical appearance of existing neighborhoods and high visible properties to retain a clean and safe sense of place.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Enforce zoning landscaping standards and consider establishing open space requirements for development projects.	City Council Zoning Commission	Immediate and short-term
Establish a street tree/landscaping program for community gateways and selected commercial sites.	Planning Board City Council County Commission Zoning Commission	Long-term
Enhance code enforcement of properties not maintained or in need or repair.	City Council Town Council Zoning Commission	Immediate
Local officials in the county, city, and town need to report the identification of abandoned or derelict properties to the County Sanitarian who has the authority to conduct an investigation and make a determination if a public nuisance exists. If such a determination is made the matter will be brought to municipal court.	City Council Town Council County Commission County Sanitarian	Immediate
Continue to amend the City of Baker zoning ordinance to promote high quality development	City Council Zoning Commission	Short-term
Update and enforce ordinances in City of Baker and Town of Plevna.	Planning Board City Council Town Council Zoning Commission	Short-term

Housing Use Objectives, Policies, and Strategies

Objective: Increase the availability of housing choices for all people including low and fixed-income residents, senior citizens, homeless and disabled persons.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Encourage development of apartment buildings in the Town of Plevna and the City of Baker to provide more housing options for residents with fixed incomes.	EMEDA/SMART Planning Board City Council County Commission	Short-term
Actively pursue Montana Board of Housing (MBH) assistance in the development of housing for persons with special needs. The apartments can be owned and operated by private owners, local government, or private non-profit organizations.	EMEDA/SMART Council on Aging	Short-term

Objective: Increase availability of housing in the community, with special emphasis on increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Use surplus city, county, town and school district owned land to establish public-private partnerships for developing affordable and workforce housing.	County Commission City Council Town Council School Districts	Short-term
Establish affordable housing programs with the Eastern Montana Economic Development Authority, USFA Rural Development and other organizations with sufficient financial incentives to promote and/or implement the programs.	EMEDA/SMART City Council	Short-term
Seek funding from the Montana Department of Commerce annual competitive Home Program grants that can be used to construct, acquire and/or rehabilitate rental housing or develop new affordable housing for homeownership.	EMEDA/SMART City Council County Commission	Short-term
Create a non-profit community land trust with help from	EMEDA/SMART	Mid-term

Neighbor-Works Montana to reduce costs associated with housing and to ensure future low and moderate-income families have affordable housing for homeownership.		
Provide regulatory and financial incentives for affordable and workforce housing development such as a density bonus for development projects that include affordable housing. Density bonuses would be based on the number of affordable units in the projects and would be implemented using a sliding scale (e.g. more affordable units equals higher density).	Planning Board City Council County Commission	Short-term
Implement revisions to Baker’s zoning ordinance to encourage residential development and redevelopment in existing neighborhoods.	City Council Zoning Commission	Short-term
Promote Neighbor Works-Montana housing programs which include but are not limited to home buyer assistance (including income-based loans), foreclosure intervention, home maintenance guides, purchase of mobile homes, etc.	Planning Board City Council County Commission	Short-term
Allow accessory dwelling units on single-family detached properties subject to lot area, height and floor area standards to increase the supply of affordable housing	City Council Zoning Commission	Mid-term
Implement workforce housing zoning in the county and municipalities to promote the health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community.	Planning Board	Immediate
Consider additional mechanisms to help address the need for more affordable lots.	Planning board SMART/EMEDA	Short-term

Objective: Reduce the number of substandard housing units by securing outside funding for repair and rehabilitation

Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Establish a local housing rehabilitation program and seek state and federal funds to support its activities	EMEDA/SMART	Short-term
Apply for Montana Department of Commerce Community Development Block Grant funds that can be used to develop a housing assistance program.	EMEDA/SMART	Short-term
Seek funding from the Montana Department of Commerce Home Program non-competitive homeowner rehabilitation fund	EMEDA/SMART	Short-term

Objective: Make targeted public investments in neighborhoods to stimulate private investments.

Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Seek Montana Department of Commerce Community Block Grant Program funds for public facility projects in neighborhoods.	City Council	Short-term
Establish a City/County grant program to fund neighborhood supported improvement projects.	County Commission City Council EMEDA/SMART	Mid-term
Utilize existing not-for-profit organization such as Neighbor-Works Montana to promote resident owned communities (resident buy-out of mobile home communities)	EMEDA/SMART City Council Zoning Commission	Long-term

Objective: Establish minimum standards for temporary worker housing.

Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Establish zoning and subdivision standards for the appropriate location, size, design standards reclamation procedures and infrastructure for temporary worker housing.	Planning Board, County Commission, City Council, Zoning Commission	Immediate

Transportation Objectives, Policies, and Strategies

Objective: Improve traffic safety and maintain existing streets and roads.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Formalize an adequately funded street and road maintenance program that is responsive to citizen complaints and uses criteria to prioritize street maintenance projects.	City Council County Commission	Long-term
Establish, implement and enforce load limits on streets to reduce damage to streets, truck traffic congestion and noise and visual impacts of heavy truck traffic.	Planning Board City Council County Commission	Short-term
Prohibit hazardous material trucking through the City of Baker.	City Council	Short-term
Establish access management regulations in the City of Baker zoning ordinance and the Fallon County subdivision regulations.	Planning Board City Council Zoning Commission	Mid-term

Objective: Reduce disruptions to traffic circulation resulting from railroad operations.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Document the occurrence, duration and impacts of railroad operations that block rail crossings for more than fifteen minutes.	City Clerk	Short-term
Coordinate with railroad and MDT officials to minimize traffic circulation disruptions caused by railroad operations.	City Council County Commission	Mid-term

Objective: Identify and secure sand and gravel resources for future maintenance of county roads.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Secure long-term contracts and options for properties in the county with existing and potential sand and gravel resources.	County Commission	Long-term

Objective: Plan for new streets and roads in future growth areas by preserving right-of-way for street and road extensions.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Implement the Future Roadway Functional Classification map to coordinate alignment of extended or new streets and in growth areas to maximize connectivity of the street network.	Planning Board City Council	Immediate
Prepare specifications for new roads based on projected overall traffic volume and truck traffic volume, including the expected weight of loads.	City Council County Commission	Mid-term
Document truck traffic impacts and coordinate with MDT and the State Legislature to establish a truck by-pass route.	City Council County Commission	Short-term
Establish street connectivity standards in the City of Baker zoning ordinance.	Planning Board City Council	Short-term

Objective: Maintain existing and future operations at the Baker Municipal Airport.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Require an entity to coordinate with the Baker Municipal Airport when proposed actions may potentially impact airport operations. Require such actions to avoid or, to the greatest extent possible, minimize impacts on airport operations.	Baker Municipal Airport	Short-term
Collaborate with surrounding local airports to oppose expansion of the Powder River Military Operating Airspace designation.	Baker Municipal Airport	Short-term
Enforce existing airport zoning regulations to project airspace.	County Commission	Immediate

Infrastructure Objectives, Policies, and Strategies

Objective: Maximize the functional life of existing water, sewer, storm water and soil waste.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Establish a town inspection and maintenance program for sewer, water and drainage facilities and continue the City Inspection and maintenance programs.	City Council Town Council	Short-term
Preserve natural drainage ways to reduce velocity and increase quality of storm water runoff. The drainage way should be dedicated to public along with access and maintenance easements to allow periodic clearing of obstructions.	County Sanitarian County Commission City Council	Short-term
Consider enhancing the City of Baker wastewater treatment facility to enable the City to sell treated water to oil companies for fracking and establish water rates that could pay back facility costs or support a revenue board.	City Council	Long-term

Objective: Coordinate infrastructure planning with future land use policy and future growth areas.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Coordinate future infrastructure investment with future land use designations.	City Council Planning Board	Short-term
Develop a financially feasible five-year capital improvement plan for infrastructure improvements in designated growth areas.	City Council	Mid-term
Create compatible development standards for streets, roads, water, and sewer in county and municipalities.	Planning Board City Council Town Council	Immediate

Objective: Establish policies that clearly define financial responsibilities for infrastructure improvements associated with existing and new development.

Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Refine policy and regulation on infrastructure cost sharing associated with development by providing preferential terms for development that clearly promote multiple Growth Policy goals and objectives.	Planning Board City Council	Short-term
Monitor funding programs and apply for infrastructure project grant funds. Details on several grant programs that support community infrastructure projects provided below.	City Council Town Council	Immediate

Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund Loan Program

The Montana Legislature established the Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund (WPCSRF) Loan Program for water pollution control projects. The program provides at or below market interest rate loans to eligible Montana entities. Cooperatively, DEQ and DNRC administer the Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund Loan Program.

Eligible water quality projects include wastewater treatment plant improvements, interceptors, collectors and lift stations, lagoon construction and rehabilitation, engineering and project inspection, and land used for disposal purposes. All projects must be included in a project priority list and intended use plan for the fiscal year in which funding is anticipated, and the ability to repay loan funding must be demonstrated.

Eligible applicants are municipalities for wastewater projects as well as municipalities and private entities for nonpoint source projects.

The current interest rate for loans is 2.5 percent. Water Pollution Control loan terms can be extended to 30 years or to the useful life of the project, whichever is less.

The application process begins in June, but applications are accepted year-round. Preliminary engineering analysis must be reviewed prior to submittal of application.

Contact Information:

Paul LaVigne, 406 444 5321, plawvigne@mt.gov

Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program

The Montana Legislature established the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) Loan Program for Drinking Water projects. The program provides at or below market interest rate loans to eligible Montana entities. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is the administering agency and assures the technical, financial and programmatic requirements of the program are met.

Eligible water projects include acquisition of land that is integral to the project, consolidating water supplies, engineering, new sources, treatment, source water protection, storage and distribution.

Eligible applicants are municipalities, public or private community water systems and non-profit non- community water systems.

The current interest rate for loans is 2.5 percent with payment schedules over a 30 year period. Drinking Water Projects qualifying as disadvantaged may receive an additional subsidy on their SRF loans in the form of some principal forgiveness.

The application process begins in June, but applications are accepted year-round. Preliminary engineering analysis must be reviewed prior to submittal of application.

Contact Information:

Sandie Koenig, 406 444 6770, sadie.koenig@mt.gov

Montana Department of Commerce, Community Development Block Grant Public Facilities Grant

This program provides funding for basic community infrastructure improvements including drinking water and wastewater facilities affordable to low and moderate income families.

Eligible applicants are incorporated cities and towns and consolidated city-county governments. A 25 percent match is required for this funding program.

Contact Information:

Mackenzie Espeland, 406 841 2794, mackenzie.espeland@mt.gov

Montana Department of Commerce, Montana Coal Endowment Planning Grants

The Montana Community Enhancement Program (MCEP) is a state-funded initiative aimed at addressing the affordability challenges faced by residents in constructing public facilities. MCEP offers financial support for projects related to drinking water, wastewater, storm sewer or storm drain, solid waste, and bridge infrastructure projects. Funding for the program is derived from interest revenues generated by coal severance tax. The program prioritizes addressing health and safety concerns as well as the financial needs of applicants.

Eligible activities include engineering design and inspection, grant administration, surveying and geotechnical work, and construction.

Eligible applicants include cities and towns, counties, consolidated governments, Tribal governments, county or multi-county water, sewer, or solid waste districts.

The maximum award attainable through this program is based on the user rates being charged in the project area, maximum amounts available range from \$750,000-\$500,000. Although, bridge projects generally are limited to \$500,000. Applications are due in the spring of even number years.

Contact Information:

Not Determined

Economic Development Administration, Public Works Grant Program

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) provides public works investments to support construction or rehabilitation of essential public infrastructure and facilities to help communities and regions leverage their resources and strengths to create new and better jobs, drive innovation, become centers of competition in the global economy and ensure resilient economies. Eligible projects are those pertaining to water and wastewater systems that address national strategic priorities, assist economically distressed and underserved communities, demonstrate a good return on EDA’s investment through job creation or retention, demonstrate or support regional collaboration and employ public-private partnerships to use both public and private resources and/or leverage complementary investments.

Eligible applicants include municipalities, counties and Indian Tribes. The maximum award attainable is 75 percent of project cost.

Contact Information:

Aaron Pratt, 406 599 9795, apratt@eda.doc.gov

US Bureau of Reclamation, WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grant

The WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grants prioritize projects aimed at conserving and efficiency utilizing water resources, increasing hydropower production, and mitigating conflict risk in high-risk water areas. These grants emphasize the long-term sustainability and resilience of water management systems, with a focus on enhancing water supply reliability in the western United States.

Eligible projects include small-scale water efficiency projects, creating a drought program, environmental water resources projects, and planning and project design. Eligible applicants include irrigation districts, water districts, local and regional authorities, Indian Tribes, and states within the *Western United States or Territories* as identified in *the Reclamation Act of June 17, 1902*, or other organization with water or power delivery authority.

A Federal cost share of 50-75% is dependent on type of project and the maximum award attainable is \$5,000,000. The next projected deadline is February 22, 2024.

Contact Information:

Christina Munoz 303 445 3154, cmunoz@usbr.gov

Objective: Establish policies that clearly define financial responsibilities for infrastructure improvements associated with existing and new development		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Extend sewer service to existing developments adjacent to the City of Baker that are on septic systems and are failing to adequately treat wastewater. It is preferred such areas be annexed into the city. If the property owners oppose annexation, establish a sewer improvement district to service the areas.	City Council	Short-term

Economic Development Objectives, Policies and Strategies

Objective: Develop economic development strategies that create a diverse local economy with employment opportunities for all ages.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Develop a marketing brand for Fallon County, Baker and Plevna to market to potential businesses and future residents.	EMEDA/SMART	Short-term
Increase the supply of housing to address the growing problem of public and private sector employee recruitment and retention.	EMEDA/SMART	Short-term
Survey existing business to identify needed skill sets and to identify ways the County or City can provide assistance to improve business operations and productivity.	EMEDA/SMART	Mid-term
Establish a one-stop service center that distributes information about available regional, state and federal technical assistance, loans and grant programs for expanding and start-up business incubator.	EMEDA/SMART City Council County Commission	Short-term
Acquire an existing commercial building or construct a new facility to serve as a business incubator.	EMEDA/SMART	Long-term
Refine existing economic development strategies to target under-represented industries with forecasted high-demand for jobs.	EMEDA/SMART	Mid-term
Capitalize on energy-sector growth and expand businesses to support primary energy industries.	County Commission City Council	Mid-term
Seek state and federal funds to increase telecommunications infrastructure in the community (specifically bandwidth) to increase efficiency of businesses, enhance the technology courses offered at the city high school and attract	EMEDA/SMART City Council EPEDC	Short-term

new businesses that require high-capacity telecommunications infrastructures.		
Support start-up businesses by providing technical assistance and temporary financial assistance such as low-interest guaranteed loans.	EMEDA/SMART EPEDC	Short-term
Establish a limited-term property tax abatement program for new businesses.	City Council County Commission	Short-term
Consider opportunities to expand rural tourism options	EMEDA/SMART EPEDC	Mid-term

Objective: Enhance the community's quality of life as a way to stimulate private investment.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Develop a main street grant program to fund façade and other property improvements to engage visual aspects of downtown Baker.	EMEDA/SMART	Short-term
Establish a business improvement district or special district to fund streetscape improvements in downtown Baker.	EMEDA/SMART City Council	Mid-term
Promote the use of the SMART revolving loan fund that is intended to provide gap lending for business development. The fund has not been used since it was established in 2006.	EMEDA/SMART	Immediate
Enhance the quality of life in Plevna by encouraging development of commercial uses such as a grocery and retail and convenience stores and enhancing recreational and cultural opportunities.	Town Council	Short-term
Promote more downtown special events by the Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations to increase business activity and enhance the community's quality of life.	EMEDA/SMART	Mid-term

Objective: Maximize the use of outside economic development funding opportunities.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Take maximum advantage of existing economic development technical assistance and loan and grant programs offered by USDA Rural Development Corporation, the Montana Community Development Corporation, the Eastern Montana Economic Development Authority and other regional, state and federal agencies. Details on two grant programs that facilitate community economic development efforts are provided below:	EMEDA/SMART City Council County Commission	Short-term

Community Development Block Grant Program

Each year the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allocates grant funding to the Montana Department of Commerce for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Funds are intended to benefit low or moderate income persons, aid in prevention or elimination of slums or meet urgent community development needs. CDBG is broken into five different funding categories: Planning, Public Facilities, Housing and Neighborhood Renewal, Neighborhood Stabilization Program and Economic Development.

Eligible applicants include counties, incorporated cities and towns, and consolidated city-county governments. Deadlines are staggered throughout the year and the grant program reoccurs annually.

Contact Information:

Gus Byrom, 406 841 2777, gbyrom@mt.gov

Montana Department of Commerce, Montana Main Street Program

The mission of the Montana Department of Commerce’s Main Street program is to be a coordinating resource for communities seeking to revitalize their historic downtown commercial districts and to provide technical assistance to communities of all sizes. The underlying premise of the Montana Main Street Program is to encourage economic development within the context of historic preservation. In 2011, the project began being geared toward community development. For several years a subgrant from the Montana State Historic Preservation Office supported downtown planning and capacity building. Although that subgrant is no longer active, the Montana Main Street Program still supports downtown planning and capacity building for member communities.

The deadline for the second quarter of this grant cycle is July 31, 2024

Contact Information:

Mackenzie Espeland, 406 841 2794, mackenzie.espeland@mt.gov

Objective: Ensure existing job training services provide skills needed by existing and targeted businesses.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Modify existing job training programs to be responsive to employment trends, specifically forecasted high-demand occupations.	EMEDA/SMART	Long-term
Promote establishment of a college satellite facility or a trade school or nursing programs in the City of Baker and remote learning programs to reduce transportation costs for college students and increase the number of college aged students who remain the community.	City Council County Commission EMEDA/SMART EPEDC	Short-term
The Baker and Plevna School Districts should expand the number of high school courses that offer college credits and enter into Articulation Agreements with nearby colleges to receive formal acknowledgement of the course credentials.	School Districts	Short-term

Objective: Support development of agriculture in the community.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Support specialized agricultural businesses that produce high-value, high-demand products.	MSU Extension	Mid-term
Encourage continued and expanded use of state and federal land for agricultural purpose.	County Commission	Immediate
Promote community gardening programs in the county to encourage local residents to plant more local produce and increase/expand farmer markets in Baker.	MSU Extension	Short-term

Objective: Develop a TIF District to economic incentives and spur growth in Baker.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Create a TIF District with reasonable boundaries.	City Council EMEDA/SMART	Short-term
Complete Determination of Blight study for selected district.	City Council EMEDA/SMART Planning Commission	Short-term
Work with City of Baker, SMART and other entities to establish who will be responsible for managing various aspects of the TIF.	Planning Commission City Council EMEDA/SMART	Short-term
Create an Urban Renewal Plan in accordance with MCA conditions addressing blight.	Planning Commission	Mid-term
Hold public hearing, adopt plan, and receive certification by the Department of Revenue.	City Council MT Department of Revenue	Mid-term
Determine taxable value of the District and calculate tax increment. Develop financing strategy for tax increment funds.	City Council EMEDA/SMART	Mid-term
Utilize tax increment to implement improvements district.	Planning Commission City Council EMEDA/SMART	Long-term

Objective: Improve effectiveness and efficiency of government programs and services.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Encourage continued and expanded joint-use of public facilities to provide cost effective local services.	County Commission City Council Town Council	Short-term
Develop an improved system to ensure addressing is in place for 911 responders	County Commission	Short-term
Coordinate County, City and Town services, and share facilities/equipment to increase efficiency of providing local	County Commission City Council Town Council	Short-term
Examine feasibility and cost savings associated with consolidating City, Town, and County services.	County Commission City Council Town Council	Mid-term

Evaluate feasibility and cost savings associated with the county purchase of gravel crushing equipment.	County Commission	Mid-term
Require the county mechanics to assume responsibility of maintaining and repairing county sheriff Entity patrol vehicles. Currently, patrol vehicles are maintained by sheriff deputies and repairs are provided by commercial vendors. This strategy would reduce maintenance/repair costs and free up sheriff deputy's time for patrol and other public safety duties.	County Commission	Immediate
Require the property owner to pay for the construction or installation of culverts and aprons within the public easement when an encroachment permit is issued.	County Commission	Short-term
Evaluate effectiveness of the existing differentiated water rates measured by per capita water consumption.	City Clerk City Council	Short-term
Evaluate short and long-term cost effectiveness of establishing a curbside recycling program/service.	City Council County Commission	Long-term

Public Facilities and Services Objectives, Policies and Strategies

Objective: Maintain acceptable levels of service in developed areas as the City of Baker and the Town of Plevna grow.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Establish policies that set minimum levels of service for essential services such as schools, fire, police, water and sewer.	City Council School Districts	Mid-term
If the population of the city and the county increase significantly, provide 24 hour city police department and county sheriff patrol coverage.	County Commission City Council	Mid-term

Objective: Improve effectiveness and efficiency of government programs and services.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Encourage continues and expanded joint-use of public facilities to provide cost effective local services.	County Commission City Council Town Council	Short-term
Coordinate County, City and Town services, and share facilities/equipment to increase efficiency of providing local services.	County Commission City Council Town Council	Short-term
Examine feasibility and cost savings associated with consolidating City, Town, and County services.	County Commission City Council Town Council	Mid-term
Evaluate feasibility and cost savings associated with the county purchase of gravel crushing equipment.	County Commission	Mid-term
Require the county mechanics to assume responsibility of maintaining and repairing county sheriff Entity patrol vehicles. Currently, patrol vehicles are maintained by sheriff deputies and repairs are provided by commercial venders. This strategy would reduce maintenance/repair costs and free up sheriff deputy's time for patrol and other public safety duties.	County Commission	Immediate
Require the property owner to pay for the construction or installation of culverts and aprons within the public easement when an encroachment permit is issued.	County Commission	Short-term
Evaluate effectiveness of the existing differentiated water rates measured by per capita water consumption.	City Clerk City Council	Short-term
Evaluate short and long-term cost effectiveness of establishing a curbside recycling program/service.	City Council County Commission	Long-term

Objective: Provide responsive public services that improve the health, welfare, and safety of County residents.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Create a brochure or marketing materials to increase the number of volunteer firefighters and ambulance services first responders and emergency medical technicians.	Emergency Services Coordinator	Short-term
Provide funding to resolve the unmet high demand for home health services and to provide hospice care in the county while ensuring facilities at the regional hospital remain in good working condition.	Council on Aging County Commission	Short-term
Facilitate expansion of the existing assisted living facility to address the unmet high demand for this housing option for senior citizens.	County Commission	Mid-term
Consider ways to mitigate juvenile crime and related issues	City Council County Commission	Mid-term
Support the establishment of a well-care home visit program that would provide check-in and socialization services for seniors who are isolated in their homes.	Council on Aging County Commission	Short-term
Expand the existing public safety facility shared by the city police department and the county sheriff department to provide additional office space, an evidence room and interview room.	County commission City Council	Mid-term
Continue to support expansion of the Fallon County Council on Aging transportation program to provide a greater level of service for out-of-town medical visits and support the agency's grant applications to replace an existing old bus.	Council on Aging County Commission	Mid-term
Provide a closed room in the Fallon County Library to reduce disruptions to patrons from the	Fallon County Library County Commission	Short-term

Story Time and Books and Babies programs.		
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Objective: Enhance public involvement and timely/accurate notification of City, Town, and County projects.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Continue to educate public participation in decisions on public projects and services.	County Commission	Immediate
	City Council	
	Town Council	
Utilize citizen task forces to research and evaluate the feasibility of new or expanded programs and community enhancement projects.	County Commission	Short-term
	City Council	
	Town Council	

Recreation Objectives, Policies and Strategies

Objective: Identify unmet recreational and cultural needs of Fallon County residents of all ages, including youth, and provide solutions to meet needs.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Institute a Baker Parks and Recreation biannual community survey to assess recreational needs.	City Council	Short-term
Develop a small neighborhood park on the north side of the City of Baker; the area north of the railroad tracks has no park for residents in the area.	City Council	Mid-term
Confirm community support for the following new recreational amenities that can be located at existing parks, evaluate the feasibility and costs of the amenities and program funding for the amenities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paving the ice rink for roller skating/hockey 	City Council	Short-term

Objective: Maintain and enhance existing parks and recreational facilities.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Formalize maintenance programs for City and County parks to enhance the aesthetic qualities of the open space and upkeep of recreational facilities.	City Council	Short-term
Establish a multi-use community center in Baker that can accommodate all recreational program needs and serve as a community gathering place for leisure activities.	Recreation Department City Council County Commission	Mid-term
Expand the recreation center facility to meet the high demand for the facility, provide a central location for the numerous successful recreational programs offered by the City of Baker Recreation Entity, add new recreational facilities such as an indoor track, provide needed office and storage space and provide a more convenient location for restrooms.	Baker School District City Council County Commission Recreation Department	Mid-term
Create a database of potential grants that could be used to fund new playground and recreational equipment at county and city parks and at the Plevna school playground.	Recreation Department	Short-term

Objective: Maintain and enhance the water quality of Baker Lake and its shoreline.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Continue the aeration of lower Baker Lake that has successfully reduced the PH of the lake water to acceptable levels.	County Sanitarian County Commission	Short-term
Create standards so all storm water is adequately treated prior to discharge into Baker Lake.	County Sanitarian County Commission City Council	Short-term

Enhance shoreline vegetation and wetlands adjacent to Baker Lake.	County Commission City Council	Mid-term
Include in the Baker Parks and Recreation Department bi-annual community survey questions related to recreational needs associated with Baker Lake.	Recreational Department	Short-term
Ensure zoning and future uses abutting lake property are compatible with recreation uses.	Planning Board	Short-term

Natural Resource Objectives, Policies and Strategies

Objective: Improve the quality of all water resources in the County and ensure construction activities implement measures to protect water quality and minimize erosion.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Amend the subdivision ordinance to establish best management practices for erosion and sedimentation control for construction projects.	Planning Board County Sanitarian	Short-term
Establish setback and buffer standards to preserve native vegetation along streams and rivers.	Planning Board	Short-term
Create standards so all stormwater is adequately treated prior to discharge to Baker Lake.	Planning Board County Sanitarian	Short-term
Enhance shoreline vegetation and wetland adjacent to Lake Baker.	County Commission City Council	Mid-term
Continue the aeration of lower Baker Lake that has successfully reduced the PH of the lake water to acceptable levels.	County Commission County Sanitarian	Immediate

Objective: Effectively control weed populations to improve agricultural productivity, preserve native vegetation and reduce wildfire risks and soil erosion.

Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Improve communication with 1) local pipeline companies to increase compliance with the Montana County Noxious Weed Control Act requirement to prepare and submit a weed management plan to the county and 2) property owners where pipelines are installed to encourage them to contact the county weed supervisor when a noxious weed infestation occurs as a result of pipeline work.	County Weed Control Department	Short-term

Intergovernmental Coordination Objectives, Policies and Strategies

Objective: Increase collaboration between Fallon County, the City of Baker and Town of Plevna on matters of mutual interest and maintain open lines of communications to effectively manage conflict when disagreements arise.

Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Establish quarterly joint City Council, Town Council and County Commission meetings to enhance working relationships, share information and identify issues that can be addressed in collaborative manner.	City Council Town Council	Immediate
Identify collaborative measures that will enhance the levels of local services such as joint-use facilities and the sharing of staff and equipment	County Commission City Council	Short-term
Establish shared policy to facilitate coordinated and well-planned annexations.	Planning Board County Commission City Council	Short-term
Have Fallon County, the City of Baker and the Baker School District enter into an agreement that addresses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) establishment of an operating budget for the recreation center, 	Baker School District County Commission City Council	Short-term

<p>2) the funding for an expansion of the recreation center and</p> <p>3) the shared use of the recreation center.</p>		
Continue with joint agreements between the County and Baker regarding shared office space at the courthouse as well as the airport.	County Commission City Council	Immediate
Share responsibility between governments to maintain and enhance community appearance.	County Commission City Council Town Council	Short-term
Fallon County and the City of Baker should work together to incorporate extraterritorial zoning to assist with streamlining annexations.	Planning Board City Council	Immediate
Implement annexation plans for the City of Baker and Town of Plevna that include development standards.	Planning Board City Council Town Council	Immediate

Objective: Proactively inform with regional, state, and federal agencies and the State Legislature funding needs that arise as a result of growth pressures.		
Policies and Strategies	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Assign community representative to regularly attend federal board or leadership meetings.	County Commission City Council	Short-term
Extensively document community impacts and needs to support funding requests.	City Council Town Council County Commission	Immediate
Support lobbying efforts to repeal or revise Senate Bull 329 that was enacted in the 2011 legislative session. The new law placed a cap on the amount of oil and natural gas production tax revenue that is disbursed from the state to local school districts. The cap is 130 percent	School Districts County Commission City Council Town Council	Immediate

of the calculated maximum school district budget		
Modify the emergency mutual aid agreements so that the agreements do not need to be renewed with any changes in the memberships of the Board of the County Commissioners.	Emergency Management Coordinator	Short-term