



2015 Legislative Session

Organizational Statement

The Montana Association of Planners (MAP) is Montana's only state-wide organization of professional planners. With membership representing both the public and private sectors, we strive to achieve a sound professional, objective approach to land use and community development issues. MAP works to provide solid, experience-backed information to any discussion regarding amendments to any portion of the Montana Code Annotated that deals with land use or community development, and works with citizens and land owners to inform these discussions.

We support long range planning that lays the foundation for logical, efficient, and fiscally sustainable land use and community development. Community long-range planning efforts are embodied in growth policies, which provide an overall comprehensive vision for future development, and can call for more specific plans that address capital improvements, transportation, parks, downtown revitalization, and neighborhoods. Implementation of long-range plans takes place in a variety of ways, including the building of infrastructure, and provision of land use policies and regulations such as annexation criteria, zoning codes, and subdivision standards. These policies and regulations, adopted through highly inclusionary and participatory public processes that tie them to long-range planning, promote decisions based on objective standards and reduce the potential for disjointed, arbitrary, and ad hoc decision-making.

Montana is a diverse state, with great variation in its communities from rural to urban....from tiny towns to large cities. All of these communities have evolved as reflections of their economies, local geography, and the culture and values of their respective citizenry. As these communities were built, many different approaches to physical organization were used to address local circumstances, issues, and concerns. Because of this high degree of complexity and local diversity, questions of land use and community development are best addressed at the city and county level, within the broader parameters of state law and the context of best practices for land use planning and management.

MAP supports careful analysis at the state-wide level anytime amendments to subdivision, zoning, annexation, or growth policy statutes are proposed, so that isolated incidents in one community do not drive wholesale amendments to the law that may not be needed, or may actually do harm, in other communities. And while laws will always change as society evolves, amendments to state laws governing land development should be carefully and comprehensively thought out so that they do not create inconsistency, ambiguity, and uncertainty for administrators, land owners, and the general public.

In summary, MAP:

- Works to provide sound professional, objective approaches to land use and community development

- Supports long-range planning as the foundation for local government land use policies and regulations
- Supports broad, inclusionary public processes in government decision-making
- Believes in local flexibility to plan and manage growth and development within the broader parameters of state law
- Urges careful and comprehensive analysis prior to amending Montana's state land use and community development laws, and consideration of the effects on local government and associated costs to the public