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REPORT TO: Kalispell Planning Board
FROM: Jarod Nygren, Senior Planner
SUBJECT: South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan – Airport and 18th Project
MEETING DATE: November 12, 2019

A. BACKGROUND: On January 1, 2015, the City contracted with CTA Architects and Engineers to assist in an update of the City of Kalispell Airport/Athletic Complex Redevelopment Plan (Ordinance 1242). CTA, through an extensive public outreach effort, identified a number of development and redevelopment concepts for which the established Airport Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District could be utilized. Additionally, CTA developed a series of short-term and long-term options for the airport, airport lands, and surrounding neighborhoods within a DRAFT South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan. The Kalispell City Council, after a duly noticed public hearing on July 18, 2016, adopted the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan by passing Ordinance 1774. Ordinance 1774 replaced the City of Kalispell Airport/Athletic Complex Redevelopment Plan as a comprehensive development plan. The City of Kalispell utilizes a TIF District within the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan boundary as part of the overall strategy to provide for appropriate public infrastructure projects in support of the redevelopment of blighted conditions. The plan boundary is generally bounded by 18th Street to the north, Cemetery Road to the south, Airport Road to the West and U.S. 93 to the east.

Since the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan was adopted by the council, there have been a number of new developments that have taken place within the plan boundary, including the construction of Rankin Elementary, which was identified as a project within the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan, and the development of several residential subdivisions and an apartment complex. Accordingly, in order to mitigate impacts associated with these new development and address blighted conditions within the plan boundary, the City contracted with WGM Engineering to facilitate a project that would seek to mitigate the impacts of these projects and benefit the greater neighborhood and the TIF District.

The Kalispell Urban Renewal Agency (URA), which is charged with overseeing the Airport TIF District worked with staff and WGM Engineering to develop a project within the confines and recommendations of the South Kalispell Urban Renewal plan that met expressed neighborhood needs and implemented the goals of the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan by removing blight, improving overall pedestrian accessibility in the Airport TIFD and improving public infrastructure, which would encourage future neighborhood development and vitality. The URA did unanimously recommend for funding the Airport and 18th Street West Project at their August 21, 2019 Board meeting.

B. Project Description: The Airport and 18th Street West Project is described as follows:

1. The closure of 18th Street West from Airport road westerly and replacing it with a new alignment two blocks to the north at 16th Street West connecting Airport Road with 1st Ave. West.
 - This project will eliminate the dangerous off set intersection at 18th Street West and Airport Road.
 - The new 16th street alignment will be built to city standards and contain curb, gutter, sidewalks, landscape boulevard and street trees on both sides.
 - The new alignment will also continue the painted and signed bike lane off Airport Road in place of on street parking.

2. The construction of approximately 7,500 linear feet of sidewalk extending:
 - Along the west side of Airport Road from Rankin School to US 93 South,
 - Along 1st Ave. West From Airport Road and 16th Street west 12 Street West and then westerly along 12 Street West to just past Legends Field,
 - Along the north side of 18 Street from Airport Road east to US 93 South, and
 - Along the south side of Begg Park Drive from Airport Road to Ashley Creek.

This component will provide continuous pedestrian access via sidewalks from Rankin School north to several new subdivisions and apartment complexes and to existing sidewalk which connect the Kalispell Downtown, Legends Field and Flathead High School.

3. Signing Airport Road shoulders as a designated bike lane.
 - The city has officially signed Airport Road shoulders as “No Parking”. This provides an excellent opportunity to designate both sides of this road as bike lanes.
 - This road is a popular commuter and recreational road for bicycle traffic.
 - The initial sidewalk design proposed in 2 above was intended to be an 8 foot wide detached shared path for pedestrians and bikes. With the advent of “no parking” along Airport Road, it makes sense to reduce the width and cost of the sidewalk program (now proposed to be a standard 5 foot sidewalk width) and move bikes out to the Airport Road Shoulders.
 - The Bike Lane would be designated with both signs and painted bike emblems on the roadway shoulders.
4. The conversion of the vacant lot at 18th Street West and Airport Road to an improved public parking facility.
 - The site will accommodate approximately 166 parking spaces, have internal landscape islands, comply with city storm water standards and contain landscape boulevards, street trees and sidewalks along the perimeter.
 - This parking lot will provide a controlled snow storage area during winter months serving the Airport Road neighborhood and will be managed in compliance with our MS-4 requirements.

C. Planning Board Review Authority

Section 7-115-4213 MCA requires that prior to the approval of an urban renewal project, the local governing body shall submit the project to the planning board for review and recommendations as to its conformity to the urban renewal plan and Growth Policy of the city.

D. Planning Board Finding of Conformity of the proposed project to the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan

Staff held several open houses and solicited public comment early in process of developing this project. Through the public process the city identified the following projects, further outlined above:

- 1) The current vacant lot on northwest corner of Airport Road and 18th was a vacant, blighted property owned by the city that had no practical use in the neighborhood due to its location within the airport runway zone. Note that the airport runway zone only allowed this site to be used for agriculture, roads or parking. Converting the blighted city lot (often used for dumping) into a parking facility was a very logical step to find a long-term use for the lot. Converting the vacant lot into a parking facility allowed for multiple uses beneficial to the public. Parking in or near Legends field is non-existent and the site has been historically used for parking for events at the field. The city also lacked an available site to collect and properly store snow through the winter within the Airport TIFD neighborhood. Accordingly, the parking lot could also be used to hold snow in the wintertime and allow parking for Legends Field and general public use the rest of the year. A portion of the blighted lot will also be used to construct road improvements, further outlined in 2) below.
- 2) The City had long identified the intersection of 18th and Airport Road as a hazardous intersection, which impacted the free flow of vehicle and pedestrian movement into the downtown and Airport TIFD. Transportation System Management (TSM) improvements to the intersection were identified within the Kalispell Transportation Plan, accordingly, this project implements that plan and addresses a long-known district transportation deficiency.
- 3) The general pedestrian access in this neighborhood is woefully inadequate, which has become further impacted by Rankin Elementary, the construction of 150 new housing units and the presence of a high school athletic stadium, which was recently improved through school bonds.

Several of the goals of the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan (SKURP) which guides how we are to allocate funds and develop projects, emphasized pedestrian safety and accessibility and improved vehicle and pedestrian connection with the downtown, core area and the Airport neighborhood. Plan statements are referenced below:

Major public support was expressed in the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan for "Creating a walkable community" The Plan summary states –

- *Increasing the quality of livability in the South Kalispell Area that includes connectivity for streets, bike and pedestrian pathways, and increased park and trail use. (Page 9)*
- *Recreational facilities like bike and pedestrian trails or dog parks attract people to an area from nearby neighborhoods. This ideas was widely supported by the public. (Page 11).*
- *Schools – Noted was the importance of quality neighborhood schools, as well as their school’s ability to serve new students in the future. Comments also centered on the school spurring new residential developments which would increase traffic. (Page 11)*
- *Walkability and Connectivity to the South Kalispell and Downtown Core. Attracting neighborhood amenities like local commercial uses complements promoting bike/pedestrian facilities in creating a well-connected, walkable environment. (Page 12)*

Under Development Recommendations and Strategies the Plan states:

- *This plan will incorporate smart growth policies such as promoting infill development, mixed use developments, protecting the natural resources, encouraging walkability and redevelopment opportunities. (Page 42)*

Under Development Guidelines, the Plan states:

- *Providing the Highest Level of Public Services and Facilities. Growing without subsequently expanding public infrastructure impairs the City’s ability to provide a high level of public service to Kalispell’s taxpayers. Within their limits, the City should make decisions based upon the impacts a project has on their ability to provide services such as water, sewer, emergency services, roads and other customer services. (Page 43)*
- *Promote a Transportation Network that is Safe for Pedestrians, Bikes, and Vehicles. Increased traffic volumes related to urban development have raised significant concerns about vehicular and pedestrian safety. Public officials and agencies should strive to provide a network of streets that are safe and accessible for all modes of travel, and where possible, implement urban design elements that encourage reduced speeds in high traffic areas. (Page 43)*

Under Improvement Projects and Opportunity Sites (page 45) provides a “list of some examples of high level projects intended to implement the long term development vision expressed in this plan.

- *New elementary School (Rankin) was listed as an example project (Page 45). The school was constructed in 2017. The SKURP states, “Significant components of the site plan include a perimeter road around the school and accessibility to future residential areas. (Page 48)*

E. Planning Board Finding of Conformity of the proposed project to the Kalispell Growth Policy Plan-It 2035

As mentioned previously, prior to approval of an urban renewal project, the local governing body shall submit the urban renewal project plan and project to the planning commission of the municipality for review and recommendations as to its conformity with the growth policy. Accordingly, the Planning Board is tasked with reviewing the project in conformance with the City of Kalispell Growth Policy Plan-It 2035 and making such a recommendation to the City Council.

The Kalispell Growth Policy Plan-It 2035 supports the proposed project and the project can be found to be in compliance with the following plan provisions:

Chapter 8, Transportation – Goal 1, *Provide a safe, efficient, accessible, and cost effective transportation system that offers viable choices for moving people and goods throughout the community.*

Chapter 9, Storm Water Management – Goal 5, *Meet all requirements of the MS4 permit including effluent limits, storm water management program and special conditions for impaired waters and monitoring recording, and reporting requirements.*

Chapter 3, Community Growth and Design – Policy 8, *Encourage the design of urban streets to provide for convenient circulation, safe pedestrian access, and avoid excess road width that encourages speeding and makes pedestrian crossing difficult.*

In summary, developments have increased traffic and pedestrian pressure in the area and corrective measures are needed to mitigate those negative impacts, as it is expected that there will continue to be exponential growth on the south side of town. TIF monies will be used to provide safe walkable routes for all pedestrians via sidewalks where ever they were missing in the Airport TIF District. The goal would be to connect, using existing public R/W Rankin School, the adjacent neighborhoods along Airport Road and Flathead High School/Legends field thus allowing improved pedestrian access throughout the district and into our Downtown. The project will also eliminate blight by converting a city, unkempt vacant lot into a landscaped parking facility allowed for multiple uses beneficial to the public. Those projects will mitigate existing traffic issues, increase pedestrian connectivity, improve public event parking, and undertake a storm water project in accordance with state regulations.

F. CONCLUSIONS: The Airport and 18th Street West urban renewal project does comply with the expressed intent and the goals, policies and recommendations of the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan and the Goals and Policies Kalispell Growth Policy Plan –It 2035.

G. RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Planning Board, based on the findings in this report, determine that the Airport and 18th Street West Project is supported by the South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan and is in conformity with the Kalispell Growth Policy Plan-IT 2035 and that the Board forward this recommendation on to the Kalispell City Council.

H. ALTERNATIVES: Deny the request.

ATTACHMENTS: South Kalispell Urban Renewal Plan

