

Friends of Park County

Promoting thoughtfully planned growth in order to protect and enhance Park County, Montana's vibrant communities, sustainable working lands, and healthy natural resources.

May 2023

As we predicted: A wave of subdivisions and commercial sprawl may be headed toward Park County and the City of Livingston.

In the winter of 2021, newly formed Friends of Park County testified to the County Planning Board that it was only a matter of time before the wave of subdivisions spreading across the Gallatin Valley would wash over the pass and into Park County: We needed sensible land use regulations to avoid the fate of Bozeman and Gallatin County.

But the County Planning Board and planning staff dismissed those concerns as alarmist, pointing to the low number of recent subdivisions and the County's low population growth rate.

Friends followed up by presenting county and state data showing the steady volume of septic systems and domestic wells being approved on existing lots, without any subdivisions, and called attention to the fact that development was occurring without population growth.



Above: Rural residential subdivision in Gallatin County. (Google Earth)

Once again, our concerns were waved away.

Now the wave of development we predicted is starting to materialize.

Two residential subdivisions with a total of 27 homes are proposed within the two-mile belt around Livingston city limits called the “Extraterritorial Jurisdiction” or “ETJ” or the “donut.” The City’s Growth Policy applies to the ETJ but until it adopts implementing regulations those policies are mostly advisory.

Also proposed for the ETJ are a 100-space RV park and two storage units developments that together will contain 300 mini storage units. Two minor subdivisions are proposed in the Shields Valley.

But that may be only the beginning. There have been preliminary conversations about potentially very large residential subdivisions close to Livingston, including one with hundreds of homes in multiple phases.



If these proposals materialize, the County has no zoning to regulate them. It will have to rely only on the toothless state subdivision law.

The city’s June 2021 Growth Policy called for most of the ETJ to be designated Pastoral Open Space to prevent the city from being ringed by a belt of low-density residential sprawl. (Here are links to Friends of Park County’s testimony on development in the ETJ.)

Unfortunately, in the two years since the Growth Policy was adopted, the City and the County have not taken any steps to implement that policy.

In addition, the Growth Policy erred in designating large areas in the ETJ for intense residential and commercial development, areas much bigger than the historic downtown. These lands are in addition to the large areas (again, bigger than the downtown) inside city limits zoned “Highway Commercial” which allows a full range of urban style commercial development.

Action is needed now by the City and the County to cooperate on the implementation of the City’s Growth Policy and to adopt sensible land use regulations which the polls show, have the support of a majority of voters in Park County.