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# PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release through February 28, 2018

## City, County seek input on the future of open space via online poll

Residents are invited to share their vision for the future of open space in the Missoula Valley through an online questionnaire hosted by Missoula Parks and Recreation and Missoula County Parks, Trails, and Open Lands.

The [Missoula Open Space public opinion questionnaire](#) will allow City and County residents to identify their priorities for the next decade of open space conservation in the Missoula Valley, and is part of a collaborative City-County planning effort to chart the next 10 years of parks and recreation service to residents. The questionnaire is a follow-up to a February 6 Open Space Open House hosted by the City and County, and will be available at [www.missoulaparks.org](http://www.missoulaparks.org) through February 28.

The Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan was written in 1995 and last updated in 2006. City and County planners agree that it's time to update the open space plan with today's growth, development and community priorities in mind, says Elizabeth Erickson, the City's Open Space Acquisitions Attorney. "The past 20+ years of open space conservation in Missoula has been highly successful, due to the commitment of Missoulians who deeply value their open spaces. Because of the support of landowners, partner organizations and City and County residents, we've made great strides toward realizing our community's initial goals for conserving open space in Missoula. We are now looking ahead to the next decade and want to hear from citizens about their priorities for the future of open space conservation in the greater Missoula area," Erickson said.

To launch the new planning project, the City and County are engaging in a multi-faceted public process that will provide residents a variety of opportunities to participate in the plan development. The new Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails plan (PROST) will replace the 2004 Master Parks and Recreation Plan for the Greater Missoula Area and the 2006 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan Update, although relevant components of those plans will carry forward, says city Parks and Recreation Director Donna Gaukler. "The earlier parks and open space plans have effectively guided the work and efforts of citizen boards, staff and elected officials and were developed through public input from focus groups, open houses, and surveys," Gaukler said. "Both previous documents contain essential planning strategies and benchmarks to be integrated into the new PROST plan, which will guide City and County parks and open space programs throughout the next decade."

The online survey and interactive map are available at [www.missoulaparks.org](http://www.missoulaparks.org). For more information about the PROST planning process, visit [www.missoulaparks.org](http://www.missoulaparks.org) or [www.missoulacounty.us/parks-trails](http://www.missoulacounty.us/parks-trails), or phone 721-PARK (7275).

Media Note: Please see attached PROST project overview and planning area map.

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## 2018 Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan (PROST)

### *January, 2018 Project Overview*

#### Who

Missoula County Parks, Trails, and Open Lands and the City of Missoula Parks and Recreation Department, plus stakeholders, elected officials, advisory boards and the general public.

#### What

We're drafting a new master Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails (PROST) plan for the greater Missoula valley and urban area or Open Space planning region, including the City of Missoula and portions of Missoula County. This new, integrated plan would replace the 2004 Master Parks and Recreation Plan for the Greater Missoula Area and the 1995 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan with 2006 Update, and will stand as a blueprint for the next 10 years of parks and recreation service to residents.

#### When completed, the plan will include:

- Public involvement processes and facilitation, including timely communications with citizens and elected officials through web updates, presentations and news releases.
- A statistically valid Citizen Survey
- Identification of potential inter-agency and public/private partnerships
- Consultant services for evaluation of land, facilities, and program needs, maintenance services, park management, operations funding, as well as recreation program evaluations
- Review of operational efficiency and program service delivery
- GIS Mapping

#### Why

##### 1) Parks, recreation, open space and trails are important to citizens.

Parks, trails, and open spaces are an essential part of each day for residents of the Missoula Valley, as they provide opportunities for recreation, transportation, connecting with nature, and help maintain a healthy environment. Access to parks and recreation is an important right of every citizen in the community, and proximity to these resources is an important factor in increasing physical activity which results in healthier population. In addition, the natural resources conserved by open lands help provide clean air and clean water in the valley, as well as wildlife habitat and agricultural land that provides local food for communities.

In Missoula, our love of, and desire to provide parks, trails and open space has been expressed repeatedly by citizens and civic leaders for generations.

The City of Missoula has a long standing goal of “providing a high quality environment and protecting land which is vital to the total ecological picture of the Missoula Valley,” Missoula’s Policy Guide for Urban Growth (City Growth Policy 2035, adopted November, 2015.)

The PROST plan would help ensure current and future delivery of cost-effective services and facilities that meet the needs, demands, and expectations of citizens for parks and recreation services such as trails, open space, new parks, and recreational programs.

## **2) It's time to update and integrate existing plans**

In the Missoula Valley, two primary plans guide the development of parks, trails, and open space. The Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan was adopted in 1995 by the Missoula City Council and the County Commissioners. This plan, which was updated in 2006, provided the community with a coordinated guide for open space planning. The City and County adopted the Master Parks and Recreation Plan for the Greater Missoula Area in 2004. This plan provided a coordinated vision for delivery of park and recreation services in the Missoula Urban Area.

In the years following these original drafts and updates, the City of Missoula has adopted a number of new land use plans and guidance documents. The Missoula community has also made significant progress on many of the goals identified in both the Open Space Plan and the Master Parks and Recreation Plan, and trends in planning have changed for reasons ranging from environmental factors and new science to economic swings which impact our communities. At the same time, Missoula County's undeveloped land is coming under greater pressure to accommodate new growth, and the existing parks, trails, and open spaces are experiencing increasing recreational use.

On November 5, 2012, the City signed its Climate Action Plan, which provides an ambitious plan for carbon neutrality by 2025. Missoula County adopted its Master Parks and Trails Plan in 2012, which provided guidance for County Parks and trails located outside of the Urban Area. Most recently the City adopted the Activate Missoula active transportation plan update in 2017 All of these plans have set goals and priorities pertaining to parks, trails, and open space.

## **3) Our community is growing, and we have new levels of understanding.**

Since 2004, Missoula County’s population has increased (from 100,757 in 2004 to 116,130 in 2016.) Other changes include new research on level of service by neighborhood; new science showing Missoula as an important linkage in a network of regional cores, corridors and buffer zones that provide wildlife movement between larger complexes of protected land; changes to technology; emphasis on environment, health, and social equity; and changing demographics and related needs.

It is our responsibility to be responsive to these changes, and in order to better serve the needs of the community our guiding plans need to reflect the needs of our community and their vision for the future. Accordingly, the City of Missoula, in conjunction with Missoula County, endeavors to create a single plan that will update the 2004 Master Parks Plan, and the 1995 Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan with 2006 Update.

## **4) Missoula's goals and needs are changing.**

Many of the goals in the 2004 Master Parks Plan have been accomplished in the past 13 years. Also, while the need for, and rationale behind, open space conservation in Missoula endures, the success of the 1980, 1995 and 2006 open space bonds and the 2014 parks and trails bond means the undeveloped land available for protection and the

geographic priorities continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of Missoula. The new PROST plan will help Missoula realize its goals while supporting environmental stewardship and sustainable, long-term growth.

## When and How

### Phase 1

To launch the project, City and County are engaging in a multi-faceted public outreach process that will provide City and County residents a variety of opportunities to participate in the plan development.

On January 23 and 30, City and County are hosting several focus groups with key community stakeholders including representatives from business and industry, non-profits, neighborhoods, health, education and social welfare sectors, disability community, religious communities, minorities, local land use, wildlife and recreation experts, and City and County residents at large.

The first PROST plan open house, with a focus on Open Space, is scheduled for Tuesday, Feb 6, 6:30-8:30 p.m., at Hellgate Elementary, 2385 Flynn Lane.

The City and County will engage the services of a community planning consultant to design a scientific public opinion survey to determine the needs and priorities of residents county-wide. The survey will provide statistically valid data through a random sample of County residents. Additionally, citizens will have an opportunity to participate via a voluntary online opinion survey.

Throughout the spring, City and County staff, advisory boards and consultants, will review, collate, and summarize data from all surveys and meetings and begin drafting the plan. The Open Space Chapter of the PROST will likely be completed first.

Findings and draft plan chapters will be presented at a public open house in late spring.

### Phase 2

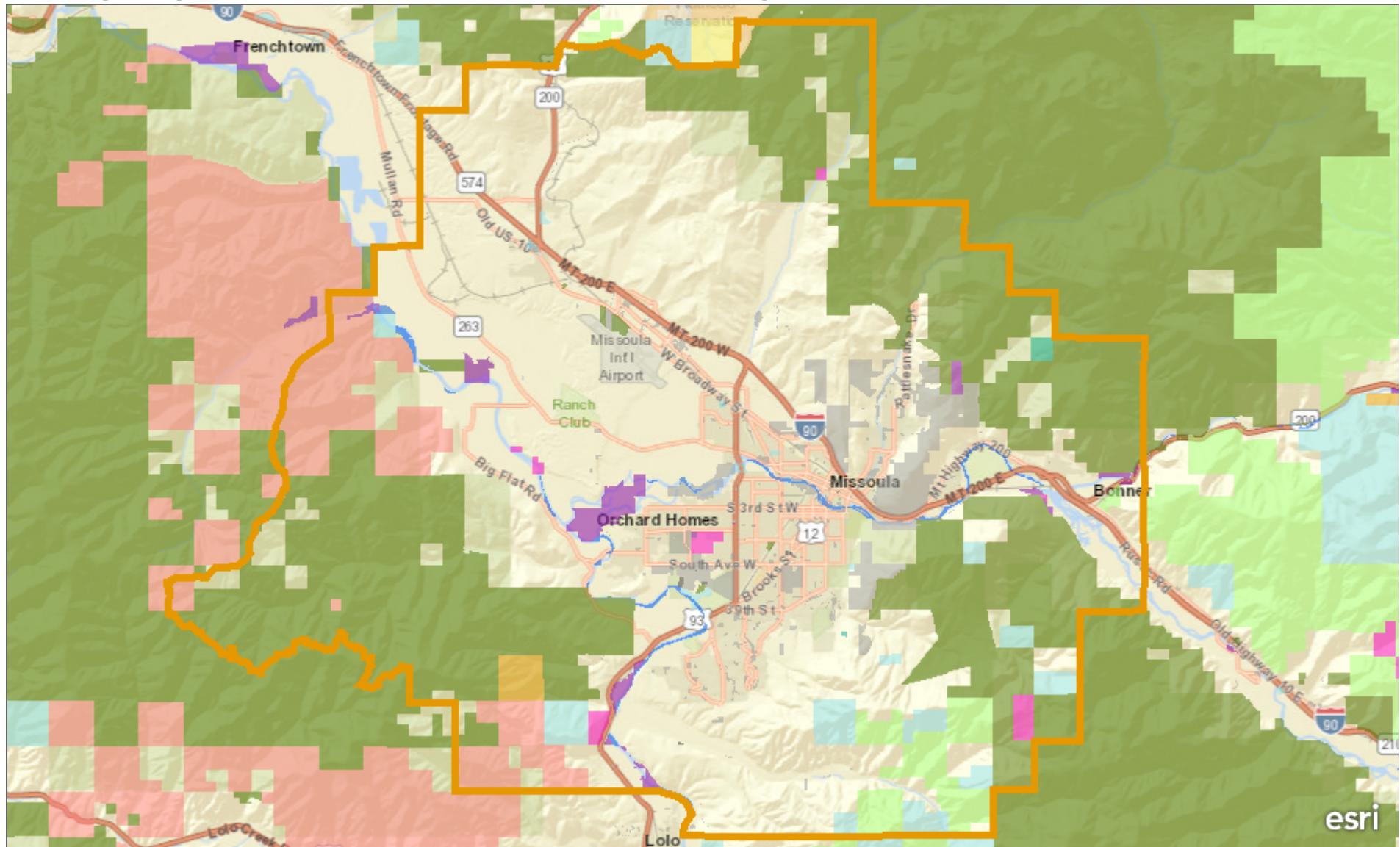
Work will be completed as resources permit. Phase 2 is slated for completion by spring 2019 and will include the following:

- Identification of potential inter-agency and public/private partnerships
- Evaluation of land, facilities, and program needs, maintenance services, park management, operations funding, as well as recreation program evaluations
- Updated GIS Mapping providing a visual reference for Level Of Service, Open Space Cornerstones, and other goals as determined by the process.

## Funding

Funding for the Scientific Public Opinion Survey is provided through Missoula County Parks, Trails and Open Lands Program. Funding for facilitation and related public process is through the Missoula Parks and Recreation existing operating budget.

## 2017 Open Space Parks Trails Master Plan Discussion Map



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