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November 1, 2017

Mayor Mark Johnson and Members of City Council
Kalispell City Hall
201 First Avenue East
Kalispell, Montana 59901

Subject: Comments for the Public Hearing on the Downtown Plan

Dear Mayor Johnson and Members of City Council:

On behalf of the 725 members of the Kalispell Chamber/Convention and Visitor Bureau, we would like to offer some comments and overall support for the vision of the Draft Kalispell Downtown Plan. This letter will supplement our letter of July 11, 2017 written to the Kalispell Planning Board for their public hearing on this topic. We continue believe that the City has a historic opportunity to further add to a vibrant downtown that includes new offerings for dining, entertainment, retail, commercial, and residential space. We look forward to supporting the City and advancing this vision for investment, jobs, increased tourism, and livability.

Parking. Our members consistently list parking as an area of needed improvement for downtown. The Plan gives consideration to several alternatives (pages 32-33) for funding a parking structure. These ideas, as well as elimination of obsolete curbs cuts, are worth pursuing.

Residential. Urban residential development should be given a top priority. By increasing downtown residents, the City can help create the demand that will support retail, dining, entertainment, and service retail businesses. Housing demographers say residential products like townhomes, condominiums, and mixed-use developments in city centers will grow in demand in the years ahead. These housing types are in demand for downsizing seniors and younger buyers who enjoy urban amenities. Cities like Los Angeles, Portland, and Spokane are creating incentives to reward developers for building new residential units downtown as a strategy for creating vitality and building the tax base in city centers.

Historic Design Standards. An area of concern for our members are the potential new historic design standards and how they might be implemented (pages 26-28). Kalispell has a significant stock of historic commercial structures, and is classified as a historic district. Nevertheless, overly cumbersome and restrictive historic design regulations have the potential to impede investment in an environment that is already fundamentally more challenging for all the reasons detailed in our July 11 letter.

Streamlining Approval Process. A recent Chamber luncheon speaker, the executive director of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority, cited the City of Denver's efforts to streamline the construction approval process as a key factor in creating a development-friendly

environment at City Hall. We encourage the City to look at ways this might be implemented in Kalispell. Support for streamlining should not be construed as advocacy for ignoring Montana laws and regulations.

Coordinating Plans. The Downtown Plan and the Core Area Plan are different, but inextricably linked. Every effort should be made to coordinate and leverage the two plans for maximum benefit to residents and visitors. Indeed, a recent meeting at City Hall with downtown planning consultants noted that walking/biking traffic expected on the trail is a potential source of new foot traffic for Main Street.

Tourism. Tourism is a strong economic driver for Kalispell and the Flathead Valley. A downtown that has a unique character, inviting aesthetics, and is pedestrian friendly will elevate its viability as a destination. Visitors are attracted to quaint and charming small towns that are active and vibrant. We support the development of amenities such as outdoor and indoor gathering spaces for expanded year-round events, aesthetics such as public art and landscaping, and broader entertainment opportunities available into the evening.

Reconfiguration of Main Street. Perhaps the area of the Plan that has received the most attention is the redesign of Main Street (pages 16-20). Because of its importance to the overall plan and to our membership, we have visited with many of our members most directly impacted by the proposal to reduce the configuration of Main Street from 4-lanes to 2-lanes with a center turn lane. Additionally, we held forums and work sessions on the draft plan, including two luncheons programs attended by nearly 500 members and a presentation to our board of directors on August 29.

Our membership is split on the Main Street reconfiguration proposal. Several businesses are on record as opposed to lane reduction, contending that reducing traffic will reduce their retail sales and negatively impact the City's ability to attract new tenants and retailers downtown. Several commented that they want both a pedestrian-friendly Main Street and steady growth in sales. Still others questioned if the timing is right for the proposed change, suggesting that the south half of the Kalispell Bypass should be widened and the Willow Glen alternative route completed before any changes are made on Main Street downtown. We encourage the City to give further consideration to this issue and the public comment you will receive at the hearing on November 6.

Conclusion. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Downtown Plan and the effort that went into creating a vision for the future of the urban center of Kalispell, and we look forward to hearing from the public Monday night.

Warm Regards,



Joe Unterreiner, President and CEO
Kalispell Chamber of Commerce
Convention and Visitor Bureau

Founded in 1904, the Kalispell Chamber consists of 725 members and has served as the official non-profit tourism organization representing the City of Kalispell since 1987.