

Gallatin Gateway Situation Assessment

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Introduction

What is a Situation Assessment?

A situation assessment is considered the first step in best practices for understanding the complex issues and shared challenges that face a community, and for exploring the potential for collaborative, equitable solutions. The assessment methodology is deceptively simple, involving background research and a series of in-depth interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders. The primary goals of a situation assessment are to bring clarity to convoluted issues, provide opportunities for voices to be heard, and build trust and mutual understanding among people with differing perspectives.

Need for the Situation Assessment in Gallatin Gateway

In October of 2020, residents of Gallatin Gateway reached out the Gallatin County Commission (County Commission) requesting a moratorium on new development between Cottonwood Road and the mouth of Gallatin Canyon and/or to encourage the adoption of zoning regulations for the Gallatin Gateway area. In response, the County Commission charged the Gallatin County Planning Department (Planning Department) with collecting additional information from community members about whether and how the Planning Department should be involved in future land use planning for the Gallatin Gateway area, including the community's appetite for zoning. Given the community's history of planning-related conflict and the potential for ongoing conflict, the Planning Department determined a situation assessment would be an appropriate and helpful approach to information gathering. This report shares the key findings from the assessment.

Background/Methodology

Situation Assessment Process

During the winter of 2021, Planning Department staff conducted interviews with more than 30 individuals representing a diverse range of stakeholder groups who live and work in the Gallatin Gateway area. The intent of conducting these interviews was to illuminate the diverse perspectives in the community, identify areas of agreement and disagreement between stakeholders, and pinpoint opportunities and challenges related to planning for future growth and development in the area. A list of stakeholder groups represented by interviewees is provided in Appendix A. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix B.

This situation assessment does not strive to capture the perspectives of a statistically significant sample of the population in Gallatin Gateway, in part because available demographic data for Gallatin Gateway often has high margins of error (equal or greater than 10 percent of the total estimate) which makes the data unreliable. Additionally, the geography of Gallatin Gateway is not clearly defined. Perhaps most importantly, situation assessments are ultimately concerned with capturing a *diversity of perspectives* related to an issue, to illuminate where there is common ground.

Summary of Findings

Interview results

To set the stage and provide important background context, interviewees were asked: 1) to identify the area they consider to be Gallatin Gateway, 2) describe the current development patterns and factors influencing growth, and 3) discuss the community's approach to managing future growth.

Interviewees tended to focus on the downtown core of Gallatin Gateway as the geographical area they think of most, but over half of the interviewees extended those boundaries outward on both sides of Highway 191 and south to the mouth of Gallatin Canyon. When discussing current development patterns, most interviewees noted the unplanned nature of development in Gallatin Gateway, using words like "scattered," "haphazard," and "unpredictable," resulting in a built environment that lacks cohesion and a clear purpose. Finally, while all interviewees agreed on the inevitability of growth and development in the area, perspectives on how people felt about this growth and what should be done about it ranged somewhat. Despite this range, most interviewees were situated somewhere in the middle, expressing at least some concern over the impacts of growth, while also seeing opportunities for the community to plan. This optimism around community agency is underscored by the fact that nearly every interviewee agreed that it would be useful for the community to discuss together how to best manage growth.

Interviewees were then asked to revisit the principles of the 2009 Community Plan. The following list is each principle from the Plan, organized by level of interviewees' agreement about its importance and meaning, from greatest to least:

- Compatibility Between Existing Residential and New Commercial
- A Healthy, Vibrant Downtown
- Sufficient Infrastructure, Including Central Sewer and Water for Downtown Gallatin Gateway
- Pride in the Gallatin Gateway School
- Better Transportation
- Protected Natural Resources
- Rural Lifestyle
- Protected Open Spaces and Agricultural Landscapes
- Protected Viewsheds Through the Control of Signage and Billboards
- Property Rights Protection
- Implementation and Results

Each Community Plan principle is discussed in depth in the Interview Results section of this report. Overall, the majority of interviewees shared that most of the Plan's principles remain relevant today, roughly 13 years since the Plan's adoption. The enduring importance of these principles suggests that the Gallatin Gateway community shares a relatively stable set of values.

However, a deeper dive into each principle revealed some inconsistencies in how interviewees perceive and interpret each principle. In other words, there may have been broad agreement about the importance of a certain principle, but the interpretation of the principle and the application of it in a planning context often varied. Competing and conflicting understandings of some of the principles need to be resolved before these principles can be useful to the community.

Growth Management Tools

Interviewees discussed various non-zoning tools for growth management, including federal and state environmental laws, Gallatin County subdivision and floodplain regulations, voluntary mechanisms like conservation easements, and the possibility of municipal incorporation.

The main tool discussed in the interviews was zoning. While a handful of interviewees were outright opposed, and a handful of others were strongly supportive, most interviewees held a tentatively open-minded viewpoint on zoning as a potential growth management tool. While most interviewees showed open-mindedness and interest in zoning, there was general hesitance toward creating a regulatory environment that does not currently exist in the community. Many questions remained about how zoning functions as a land use tool.

Key Questions

During the interview process, interviewees raised a number of important planning-related questions. The full list of questions about zoning, and many other topics, were consolidated by planning staff into the Key Questions section of this report. For brevity, the main topic areas are listed below.

- Planning and Zoning
- Local governance and community agency
- Community infrastructure and service capacity
- Transportation
- Wildlife

Recommendations

Interviewees provided several recommendations on how to begin moving forward on addressing the challenge of how to manage growth. First, nearly every interviewee agreed that, prior to any action that the community might take, the questions that came up in interviews would need to be addressed to help improve the community's baseline understanding of planning in general. As part of the effort to address these questions, most interviewees saw value in holding community conversations around growth, development, zoning, and other planning related topics. They emphasized that there are many unanswered questions about how zoning functions as a growth management tool. Interviewees also offered a range of ideas on how best to engage the community, including what topics to discuss, who to involve, and how to meet.

The Planning Department, an important stakeholder in this process, also provided a handful of recommendations:

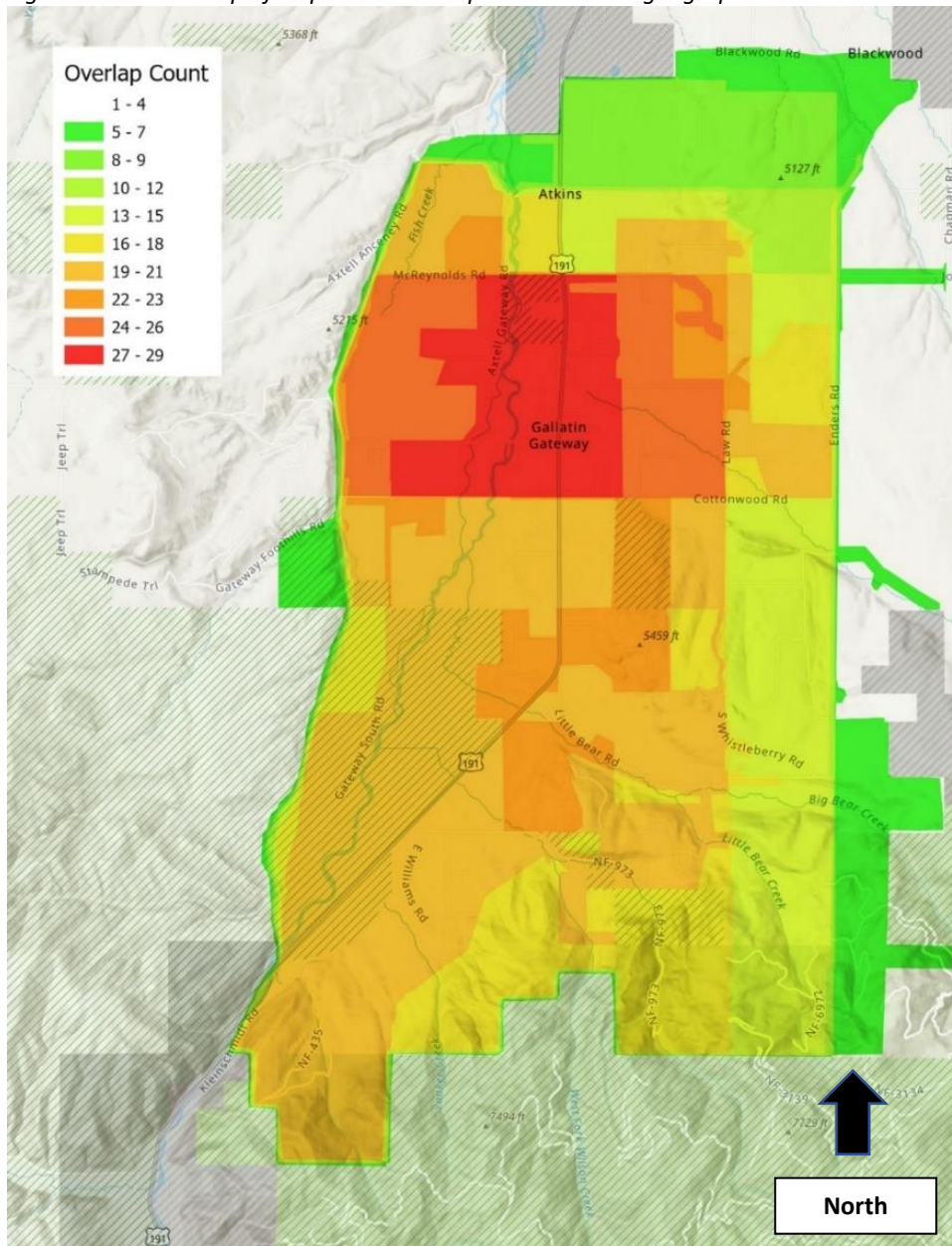
- Present findings of this report to the community.
- Address questions brought up by interviewees.
- Adopt this Situation Assessment as part of existing Community Plan.
- Revisit and refine the Principles of the Community Plan.
- Update Plan map.
- Carefully consider externalities of zoning.

Interview Results, Part 1: Context and Key Themes

The Geographical Extent of “Gallatin Gateway”

As an unincorporated community, there is no formal adopted boundary, like one might find for a city municipality. Various existing boundaries affect the community (e.g. school district, fire district, water and sewer district, and the Community Plan boundary). Because of these overlapping boundaries, it is important to understand how interviewees defined the Gallatin Gateway area. Nearly all interviewees thought of Gallatin Gateway as extending north to McReynolds Road/Zachariah Lane, south to Cottonwood Road, west to Cottontail Road, and east to Law Road. Figure 1.1 below shows this area as red or dark orange in color. A majority of interviewees also thought the boundaries extended further south, to the mouth of Gallatin Canyon along US Hwy 191, which is shown on the map in shades of orange.

Figure 1.1 – Heat map of responses to the question: “What geographic area comes to mind for “Gallatin Gateway?”



Current Development Pattern and Factors Influencing Growth

Interviewees were also asked how they would describe the current development pattern in the area they identified as Gallatin Gateway. The goal of this question was to better understand how interviewees saw growth manifesting in their community via the built environment. Many interviewees emphasized the unplanned nature of development in Gallatin Gateway, using words like “scattered,” “haphazard,” and “unpredictable.” One interviewee summed up the development pattern as “very confused in terms of aesthetics and use.” Some connected this to the area’s lack of zoning regulations. As one interviewee put it, “[a]nyone could come in and build anything, anywhere, without any regard to the future or will of the community.” The result is a built environment that has a “wild west” feel, lacking cohesion and a clear purpose, generating “a whole bunch of other issues such as infrastructure, conservation, and more.”

Many of these concerns about growth have been inspired by high-profile development projects in the Gallatin Gateway area. The catalyst for concerned residents in the Little Bear subdivision was the sale of nearby parcels, and the subsequent commercial development on one of those lots. However, this is not the only project that has garnered community attention. Others include the Riverbend glampground, the Gateway Village subdivision, and the Gallatin Gateway Inn development. Nevertheless, concerns raised in the interviews are applicable to challenges associated with any type of growth across the Gallatin Gateway area, not just these specific projects.

Interviewees frequently connected changes in the Gallatin Gateway area with regional growth. The theme that Gallatin Gateway is increasingly becoming a “bedroom community” that is “built to support Big Sky” emerged in many interviews. Common concerns associated with this type of growth were traffic along U.S. Highway 191 and impacts to the Gallatin River, both of which are discussed in depth in this report. Many interviewees also noted the mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses cropping up along U.S. Highway 191. Additionally, interviewees reported impacts from the rapidly-growing “Triangle” area between Bozeman, Belgrade, and Four Corners spreading south.

Interviewees were united in their perspective that growth is “inevitable,” regardless of the costs and benefits they associated with growth or whether they thought it was possible or appropriate to manage growth. This shared understanding likely results from similar lived experiences. Nearly every interviewee recognized that growth is occurring in the Gallatin Gateway area and saw no signs of it slowing down. One interviewee dryly described it as “what you’d expect, considering it’s close to the Bozeman-Belgrade area.”

Future Growth and Community Involvement

On one end of the spectrum, a few interviewees expressed high levels of concern and anxiety about the future growth of Gallatin Gateway. Of these interviewees, many were specifically concerned with a rapid population increase. They referenced the Gateway Village development as “changing the community” due to its density. One interviewee said, “I’m disappointed they’re going to get to 350 doors on Gateway Village. That’s too dense for Gateway. I don’t think anything about that follows the community plan.”

On the other end of the spectrum, quotes such as “[a] lot of people are kind of scared of that high density. I’m not scared of that” suggest little concern about the impacts from future growth. Interviewees who shared this perspective seemed to be content with letting the market decide what kind of development should take place in the community. As a result, they generally supported a more laissez-faire approach to managing growth. A few interviewees who had this perspective still had some concerns about growth but thought that it may be too late in the development process to change course. “In some ways, it’s too

late in the response to the growth. It has been too late in Gallatin County for quite some time, because there has been so much haphazard development.”

While all interviewees agreed on the inevitability of growth in the area, there was a considerable range as to whether future growth was of great concern or of little concern at all. The majority of interviewees fell in the middle of this spectrum, having at least some level of concern over the impacts of growth but also able to see opportunities for the community to get ahead of the growth and plan for it in a thoughtful way. One resident stated, “With the growth in the valley, more development in Gallatin Gateway is inevitable, we just need to get ahead of it to protect what we have before it is too late. That’s not to say development shouldn’t take place, it should, but it should be planned in a harmonious manner with our surrounding nature.” This sentiment was captured by other comments as well, such as: “What’s going on in Gateway is growing pains, not growing problems” and “We want to support development so people can survive in the valley, but we also don’t want to ruin the place” and “The ongoing influx of people and growth into our community is inevitable...How do we property channel this growth?” These comments reflect desires to welcome growth while at the same time balancing it against the impacts of that growth.

Despite ranging perspectives on future growth and how best to manage it, interviewees all agreed that they should discuss the topic with fellow community members: "I think it’s really important to involve those who want to take the time to share their input." More details about how interviewees thought these conversations could take place can be found in the Recommendations section of this report.

The Gallatin Gateway community has been grappling with these questions and concerns for some time, and there has been a desire to advance those important community discussions around the topic of growth. Evidence of this is supported by the development and adoption of the 2009 Gallatin Gateway Community Plan (Plan). One interviewee emphasized the community conversations that happened during the development of the Plan: “There were about 20 of us on this committee. We had 8-12 who showed up consistently and did the work. It was a long and arduous process, but it was a healthy process. It was a lot of events, a lot of meetings, telephone calls, personal conversations, all kinds of stuff we tried to bring back to the committee and the community.” The following section dives deeper into the Plan’s principles.

Interview Results, Part 2: The 2009 Gallatin Gateway Community Plan

In 2009, Gallatin Gateway community members finalized the Gallatin Gateway Community Plan, which articulates a vision for how the community would like to grow. This Plan and the guiding principles served as the foundation for the development of this Situation Assessment. Interviewees were asked about the relevance of the Plan's 11 guiding principles more than a decade since they were written. They are described below, organized by level of interviewees' agreement about their importance and meaning, from greatest to least.

- Compatibility Between Existing Residential and New Commercial
- A Healthy, Vibrant Downtown
- Sufficient Infrastructure, Including Central Sewer and Water for Downtown Gallatin Gateway
- Pride in the Gallatin Gateway School
- Better Transportation
- Protected Natural Resources
- Rural Lifestyle
- Protected Open Spaces and Agricultural Landscapes
- Protected Viewsheds Through the Control of Signage and Billboards
- Property Rights Protection
- Implementation and Results

To reiterate what was stated in the Summary of Findings, the enduring importance of these principles suggests that the Gallatin Gateway community shares a relatively stable set of values. However, general agreement about the continued importance of these principles belies the complexity of how some of these principles are understood by interviewees. These substantive differences in understanding would currently make it difficult to create a coherent policy based on these principles. Competing and conflicting understandings of some of the Community Plan's guiding principles will need to be resolved before these principles can be useful to the community.

Compatibility Between Existing Residential and New Commercial

The Plan reports that "many residents expressed concern with the compatibility of residential, commercial, and industrial use," and, as such, created this principle. At that time, "residents felt that Gallatin Gateway should primarily be residential and agricultural in the rural parts of the planning area, with most of the commercial development limited to the downtown core, including the area between Gooch Hill Road and Cottonwood Road along Highway 191."

While most interviewees agreed that this principle remains important, interviewees' interpretations of "compatibility" varied. They often described compatibility in terms of their vision for Gallatin Gateway. These visions included: aesthetic harmony (i.e., avoiding "the big ugly" and "eyesores"); uses that "complement what's already there" and/or creating a "cohesive" environment; development concurrent with critical infrastructure; effective transitions between uses; ensuring the availability of "income-based housing the worker bees can afford"; and minimizing development impacts on the natural environment. These considerations are part of the community's broader discussion about what growth might look like and how to manage its impacts.

Many interviewees highlighted commercial growth as a key issue. A couple interviewees offered a vision of "the right type" of commercial growth that "keeps this a rural community, not just a big tourist trap."

Their perspective was that commercial development can provide benefits to those in residential areas, including expanding the tax base. As one interviewee put it: “Having kind of a little downtown commercial core helps everyone in the community, regardless of their proximity to the core.” This comment also highlights the issue of where commercial development should be directed. A handful of interviewees generally echoed the Plan’s desire to site commercial development in the downtown core and along U.S. Highway 191, although no exact locations were identified. A few others expressed a desire to limit development near the mouth of the Gallatin Canyon.

The handful of interviewees who did not express support for this principle largely did so because they were not convinced that compatibility is an issue in Gallatin Gateway. Their responses were based on their experiences of development in the area. A couple interviewees noted that new commercial development is taking place along U.S. Highway 191, away from most existing residential uses. Another identified challenges with interpreting the concept of “compatibility,” stating: “I don’t think Gateway has moved very far over the last 80 years, so the comparisons of compatibility are generational.”

A Healthy, Vibrant Downtown

The Plan expresses “a desire for a safe, walkable, and vibrant town center with adequate services for residents, including appropriate commercial development, a functioning school, a volunteer-constructed community center, central water and sewer, and parks and trails.” Interviewees were generally supportive of this principle, based on their agreement that Gallatin Gateway has a “downtown” and that this area acts as an “anchor” or a “focal point” that helps define the community’s identity.

Some interviewees described the existing downtown as a “mashup” of residential, commercial, and public uses that reflects the “diverse economic realities” of those living and working in the area. Interviewees commonly saw “potential” for investment that could maintain the mixture of residential and commercial uses while expanding amenities. A couple interviewees saw an opportunity to grow Gallatin Gateway into a “destination area where people come to shop or move to.”

Interviewees suggested a number of ways to make the downtown healthier and more vibrant. For example, a handful of interviewees identified grocery stores and coffee shops as types of appropriate commercial development. Others affirmed walkability as being important to the principle. One interviewee noted that sidewalks can increase and direct foot traffic, so “people are walking down the streets, going shop-to-shop and bringing in some tourism and business.” A few thought that the Gallatin River could play a greater role in the downtown’s identity. “Why not make it a central part of the community? This could dovetail with a vibrant downtown, if you could roll out of town onto some nice river trail, where kids could ride their bikes and horses.” One interviewee saw potential in terms of increases to the local tax base that greater economic activity in the downtown area could generate.

Concerns around the realization of this principle centered around an appropriate level of economic activity for the downtown that would maintain its character. A few interviewees saw resort towns in Colorado and Wyoming as potential models for Gallatin Gateway. However, the majority expressed their vision in terms of the discrete, modest improvements described above.

The interviewees differed in the degree to which they thought this principle could be realized. A few interviewees were skeptical of whether a healthy economic atmosphere could be created in Gallatin Gateway’s downtown, citing inadequate infrastructure and lack of capital investment. Others stated they did not see Gallatin Gateway’s downtown core as a priority for developers, and therefore not a priority

for updated infrastructure needed to support growth. Another noted that “[Gallatin Gateway’s downtown] is also in the shadow of Bozeman’s vibrant downtown...Gallatin Gateway is a rundown town.”

A couple interviewees that supported the idea of a healthy downtown also expressed some caution that greater activity in the downtown area would compromise the quiet atmosphere enjoyed by downtown residents and exacerbate issues such as traffic, parking, and disruption from visitors and people attending events. They feared general disorganization and potential for conflict downtown with more motorists looking for limited parking, narrow streets, and very little pedestrian infrastructure.

Sufficient Infrastructure, Including Central Sewer & Water for Downtown Gallatin Gateway

In the Plan, sufficient infrastructure included not only central sewer and water for downtown Gallatin Gateway, but also a “strong, well-funded school,” and a fire department that can provide “efficient and safe services.”

Most interviewees responded to this principal only in relation to water and sewer infrastructure. They thought that the Gallatin Gateway Water & Sewer District (W&S District) was “extremely important” and “makes sense” as a safeguard against ground and surface water pollution because “everyone has very old septic systems” and “all of the homes grouped together don’t need to have individual wells.” As one interviewee put it, “There’s gotta be pollution from so many septic tanks and wells drilled for groundwater. All of that is destroying the river corridor and the river system by a thousand cuts.” A handful also linked the community’s ability to grow while protecting the area’s water resources with the W&S District’s capacity: “[A] community sewer system is important, because a lot of the development that’s happened has been right along the Gallatin River.”

While there was broad support for the W&S District, many interviewees also expressed concern and confusion about its capacity to “handle a lot of new development” and the cost of serving existing and future development. Several interviewees expressed that costs should be “reasonable” and that “the people who benefit from [improved infrastructure] are the ones who pay for it.” It was also generally understood that the W&S District’s capacity is one of several factors limiting growth in downtown Gallatin Gateway. A few interviewees expressed confusion about its current capacity and service area. One noted that “learning what water and sewer infrastructure currently exists in Gateway would be helpful.”

Another point of confusion was related to the W&S District’s name, which implies that it provides “central water to grow commercially and residentially.” As of this report’s publication, the W&S District does not provide water service. One interviewee applauded the creation of the W&S District but noted the potential limitations of availability of water rights to create centralized water service. “Gateway Water and Sewer [District] doesn’t have any water rights. They’ll need those to do central water. Of course, it’s [Lower Gallatin Watershed] a closed basin, so that will be difficult.” Several interviewees observed that growth in downtown Gallatin Gateway “would rely on a central water system” and would be necessary in order to “grow commercially and residentially.”

A couple interviewees commented on other types of infrastructure. One noted that high-speed internet was critical to their ability to work. Another expressed appreciation for downtown’s “minimal” infrastructure, which lacks streetlights and has minimal pavement. A couple interviewees did not think sufficient infrastructure was an important principle.

Only one interviewee made remarks related to schools and fire protection, and it was in the context of taxation: “A bigger fire department, a bigger school, all of that costs money. I’ve watched our property

taxes triple since 2002.” The lack of commentary on the schools and fire protection could suggest that interviewees do not think of them as key components of sufficient community infrastructure. However, it is important to note that interviewees were presented with the title of this principle, which only highlights central water and sewer infrastructure. This could explain why schools and fire protection were absent from interviewee responses. Furthermore, the school has its own dedicated principle, described in the following section.

Pride in the Gallatin Gateway School

The Plan states that “there is strong community support for the school [and that] the school helps provide an identity for the community.” All but one interviewee affirmed this principle. Interviewees voiced “[p]ride” and broad appreciation for both the school’s educational role—this was valued even by interviewees without children currently enrolled in the school—and its role as a social “hub” that is the “heart of the community.” Many interviewees also reported having pride in the 1916 building, which they see as a “focal point” of downtown that connects the community to its history and identity. As one interviewee stated: “For people who’ve been in the community for generations, the school is a touchstone.” Interviewees generally saw both the school and its historic building as a link to the community’s past and part of a solid foundation for the future. “A strong school system is a sign of a healthy community...Having a great place for [students] to gain education and social experience, is just as important as having a bar for the adults.”

Generally, conversations with interviewees about the school were punctuated by the same questions and concerns about costs and infrastructure that arise in broader conversations about Gallatin Gateway’s growth. For example, a handful of interviewees expressed concerns about the limitations of the historic school building and the costs associated with increased enrollment. One interviewee summarized by saying: “I’m concerned how the school will handle future growth, 1) because of how much physical space they have and 2) because of how schools are financed. I like the school, I love the school, and I’ll always support it. I’m concerned, however, how much I’ll have to foot the bill for somebody else’s growth.” Several interviewees also identified safety and traffic concerns associated with the school’s current location: “The traffic is horrendous, particularly when school lets out, and in the mornings, too.”

Better Transportation

The Plan identifies “better transportation” as “good, safe, and efficient traffic safety on Highway 191...and traffic and pedestrian safety on Mill Street in Downtown Gateway.” This vision includes “paths and trails incorporated into the area.” With one exception, interviewees affirmed the primacy of this principle and generally agreed that increasing traffic safety and improving mobility remain high priorities. Interviewees also confirmed that safety remains the most pressing concern.

Many described increasing highway traffic over the past decade, often connecting it to booming activity in Big Sky: “It’s nearly impossible to get on the highway when everyone’s trying to go to and from Big Sky, which is when you’re trying to pick up your kid from school.” Many interviewees also reported frustrated and fearful attempts to turn in and out of Gateway during peak travel times, as “every intersection at US-191 is extremely dangerous from 5:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and from 3:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. every day.”

It was clear that interviewees had given this principle significant thought, as they generated a wealth of potential solutions. Suggestions to increase traffic safety included installing a stoplight or another form of traffic control at the intersection of Mill Street and U.S. Highway 191, reducing speed limits on U.S. Highway 191 near Gallatin Gateway, installing sidewalks in downtown Gallatin Gateway, widening

shoulders along U.S. Highway 191, and improving infrastructure for cyclists, walkers, and equestrians (active transportation infrastructure) throughout the area. Suggestions to enhance mobility included adding travel and/or turn lanes to U.S. Highway 191; adding parking in Gallatin Gateway's downtown; improving bus service, particularly to Big Sky; installing active transportation infrastructure; and reestablishing the historical rail line between Gallatin Gateway and Bozeman.

Protected Natural Resources

The Plan states that "clean water, clean air, wildlife, and the surrounding open space and agricultural lands are crucial to maintaining the quality of life of the community." Interviewees affirmed that clean water and wildlife are important natural resources to protect. A handful of interviewees mentioned open space, while no one mentioned agricultural lands as part of the discussion of this principle. This is likely because "Protected Open Spaces and Agricultural Landscapes" is its own principle. No interviewees brought up air quality in relation to this principle. In general, interviewees linked Gallatin Gateway's identity to its natural resources: "[I]t's our rivers, it's our open space, it's the viewsheds that really draw people to Gallatin Gateway in the first place. This doesn't necessarily mean: Protect it, never touch it. It means: Protect it, embrace it, and utilize it."

The Gallatin River clearly stood out as a priority for interviewees. Many interviewees recognized the river's role in providing wildlife habitat and expressed interest in maintaining a healthy river system. Many characterized the river's health in terms of surface and groundwater quality. Some saw it in terms of the amount of development in its riparian, channel migration, and flood zones. For several interviewees, the valuation of the river translated to the need for protections: "We really need meaningful protections for the Gallatin River system. Not being able to have developments that are so impactful to groundwater and surface water." Nearly all interviewees who brought up the river expressed concerns about the impacts that growth would have on it, both locally and upstream, with one interviewee wondering "I don't know how well septic is being controlled up at Big Sky."

A few interviewees also expressed appreciation for the recreation opportunities the river affords, such as fishing and kayaking, and would like to see enhanced opportunities for "people in our community to access the river for recreation." Along with increased access came some concerns about the potential for increased trespass: "The more people who move here, the more people want to trespass. This violation happens frequently, and that's only what we see."

Outside of the river, numerous interviewees expressed concerns about wildlife migration and habitat throughout the Gallatin Gateway area. "The more we cut up those open spaces, the less there will be routes and safe spaces for wildlife to cohabitate. It's already been dramatically changed from the time I was a kid." Several interviewees were concerned specifically with wildlife-vehicle collisions on U.S. Highway 191. A couple interviewees expressed concerns about development interfering with wildlife movement, particularly development at the mouth of Gallatin Canyon.

As with many of the Plan's principles, there is no clear guidance on how this principle should be implemented. While most supported the principle, there was skepticism on how effective local planning and regulations could be in support of this goal. One interviewee expressed concern that zoning is a limited tool for achieving this principle and others pointed out that "existing federal, state, and local environmental regulations are [already] in place to protect our local natural resources." One interviewee even questioned this principle's value based on their expectations about who would be "protecting" natural resources and how it would be done, asserting that governments "never do this well and usually make a mess [when attempting to protect natural resources]." Regardless of how this principle is

implemented, one interviewee saw natural resource protection as "a guiding principle across the board for Montana."

Rural Lifestyle

The 2009 Plan identifies quality of life, the night sky, access to recreational areas, the sense of community, and the neighborliness of Gallatin Gateway residents as principal values of a rural lifestyle. With a handful of exceptions, interviewees affirmed that these aspects of a rural lifestyle remain important. One interviewee noted that support for this principle without a clear understanding of what it is can cause problems: "I think that we need a better description of these things to reduce as much as possible future conflict, simply because we thought we were talking about the same thing, and it turns out we're not." The range of perspectives about what constitutes a "rural lifestyle" adds complexity to the conversation.

Despite the nebulosity of this principle, interviewees were able to articulate some key components of what a rural lifestyle looks like in Gallatin Gateway. Interviewees described an environment with low levels of activity, where "people slow down" and "if you see someone on the roads, they actually wave," where "you can still ride your utility vehicle down to the river [and] ride your bike without dodging trucks," where there is "opportunity to have horses and chickens," and where people have "elbow room" that affords them privacy. Some associated a rural lifestyle with large lots sizes, low density, fewer services and/or less infrastructure, such as dirt instead of paved roads. Several interviewees also identified rural communities as having fewer rules and regulations and frequently connected this to the ability of individuals to address issues informally, in a "neighborly" way. As one interviewee put it: "Less services, less government, people who mind their own business, people who understand property rights, few rules and regulations, take care of yourself and your neighbors, people who generally leave each other alone and respect one another." Finally, several interviewees identified working landscapes as a key characteristic of a rural lifestyle: "When I think of rural lifestyle, I think of the larger ranches that are productive and—I assume—financially viable operations. It would be a shame to see them divided into five-acre tracts with knapweed and two horses thrown on it. I really think that working agricultural lands are part of Gateway's identity."

Although there was general agreement that farms and ranches are an integral part of the identity of Gallatin Gateway, many interviewees acknowledged that a significant shift is occurring from large agricultural lots to smaller, more dense residential parcels. Many interviewees recognized this process is unpredictable: "Obviously, it's going to change, but how it changes and how it affects the historical character of the area is important." One interviewee thought that "an adapted idea of rural is more realistic," given Gallatin Gateway's growth.

The handful of interviewees that questioned the value of this principle struggled to reconcile the different, changing conceptions of a rural lifestyle. One interviewee emphasized that an economic connection with the land is the defining characteristic of a rural lifestyle, saying that: "[m]ost who relocate into the Gallatin Gateway area are moving into subdivisions...[and] are employed in town, which also gives them a disconnect from a 'rural lifestyle'." Another interviewee echoed this sentiment, highlighting the loss of a rural lifestyle as the area moves away from an agrarian economy: "Rural lifestyle...isn't going to be cow-calf, grains-farming lifestyle. Those people are being pushed out."

Others highlighted different, and sometimes competing, ideas about what kinds of conditions lead to and support a rural lifestyle. One interviewee focused on uses: "In my mind, rural lifestyle means the combines are free to do the work they need to do. For other people, it's a gated community." Another focused on density: "All the lots in my subdivision are five to 20 acres. I think people consider that rural. But this needs to be defined. Does [rural] mean my neighborhood, or does it mean 180-acre tracts?" A third interviewee

shared a different concern: A rural lifestyle characterized by a low population might not provide the tax base necessary to support essential services, such as fire protection.

Not only did interviewees bring up questions about *what* a rural lifestyle means for Gallatin Gateway, but *where* a rural lifestyle is appropriate and possible. This is not a new issue. The 2009 Plan stresses that new development, whether residential, commercial, or industrial, should be appropriate to the area and its neighbors. One interviewee captured the complexity of this question in the context of Gallatin Gateway's growth: "I do think that maintaining a rural lifestyle is important, but it needs to be done in the right areas. There's no sense in maintaining 60 acres of cattle land in the heart of downtown Gallatin Gateway."

Protected Open Spaces and Agricultural Landscapes

The 2009 Plan describes this principle as "critical to maintaining the rural nature of the area." Aside from one interviewee who saw the Gallatin Gateway area as having "plenty of open space," the majority of interviewees voiced support for protecting open spaces and agricultural landscapes. Most interviewees also confirmed that both open space and agricultural lands remain an important aspect of the rural lifestyle of Gallatin Gateway and recognized that large landowners play a critical role in implementing this principle. One interviewee highlighted the role that open space plays in connecting community members of all ages to the land, through experiences of the Gallatin River and by preserving "amazing view[s] of the mountains."

A key question shared by most interviewees was about mechanisms for protecting open spaces and agricultural landscapes. They wondered about what mechanisms exist and how they work. A few interviewees supported certain incentives and programs, such as conservation easements, the Gallatin County Open Lands Program. Another interviewee suggested that the community strategically direct development to downtown Gallatin Gateway as a means of achieving the same goal: "Just keep growth closer to Gateway proper, rather than putting a lot of restrictions and designations outside of the Gateway area."

A handful of interviewees acknowledge that economic realities compete with protection efforts. "At a certain point, if someone's going to get \$30 million for a piece of property, they're probably going to decide to sell it." A couple interviewees emphasized their concerns about the potential opportunity costs associated with land protection. One saw "no money in open space for landowners," describing it as "a slit-your-own-throat situation." Another elaborated: "Since ranches are generally only marginally profitable at best, the only viable solution...will be to subdivide and sell off a minor portion of the ranch to generate cash...without being forced to sell off the entire ranch, i.e., have the contingency ability to cut off the arm to save the body."

Protected Viewsheds Through Control of Signage and Billboards

The 2009 Plan states that "[a]ll participation efforts [leading to the Plan's creation] showed that control of new signs and billboards, primarily along U.S. Highway 191, was a priority." The majority of interviewees affirmed the continued importance of this principle, while expressing a common distaste for billboards. One interviewee shared the opinion that billboards must be addressed before the community can focus on other aesthetic issues: "You gotta get rid of billboards first. You can't tell someone they can't have bright lights on their building or can't have junk cars in their yard when billboards are still allowed." Many interviewees acknowledged that billboards already exist in the Gallatin Gateway area. One interviewee named the U.S. Highway 191 between Blackwood Road and Four Corners as "billboard alley." The

presence of billboards made another interviewee question the value of this principle, given their view that “[b]illboards and signage already dominate the view on 191 both north and south of Gallatin Gateway.” No interviewees expressed concerns about signs that were not billboards.

Interviewees identified several important aspects of viewshed protection beyond just controlling signage and billboards. Chief among these was light pollution (both from billboards and other sources), which inhibit views of the dark night sky that many interviewees value. “You can see the lights on those billboards at night for miles. I can see them across the river, through the trees, on our place.” Night lighting could be one avenue to mitigate the impacts, as one interviewee noted: “Bozeman has regulations that require lights to be pointed downward and the number of lights you can have.” Interviewees also identified building height and placement as considerations related to viewshed protection. One interviewee suggested that “[h]eight restrictions on buildings could protect viewsheds,” while another expressed concern about “hilltopping,” the practice of siting buildings on prominent ridgelines.

Interviewees emphasized that views of Gallatin Gateway’s beautiful natural setting—including agricultural lands and open space—are worth protecting and relatively unique. As one interviewee put it: “I love the fact that I can walk around my community and have great views from all parts of Gallatin Gateway.” Another interviewee saw each component of the landscape as part of a whole: “The pristine Gallatin River, the pastures, foothills, and mountains form a view corridor and environmental asset of priceless value.” A third noted that a more holistic approach to viewshed protection was imagined during the creation of the 2009 Plan: “During the planning process, a lot of people said they wanted to make Four Corners to Gallatin Gateway a scenic byway.”

Two interviewees expressed concern about how the protection of viewsheds might impact property rights. One rejected the principle outright because “if others want to protect viewsheds, then it shouldn’t be done at the expense of the property owners who provide it to them at no charge.” The other captured the tensions between the rights and responsibilities held by an individual versus those held by a group: “This is a strange dichotomy for me, personally, in that I believe in personal property rights. Do I think the corridor between Gateway and Four Corners is abhorrent? Yes. Do I have a billboard...and think it’s a good marketing tool? Yes.”

Property Rights Protection

The 2009 Plan states that “[b]asic property rights protection is always in the background (if not the forefront) of every discussion regarding planning. Discussion showed that property rights is a two-sided coin: the right to use property goes hand in hand with responsibility to your neighbors and your community.”

Most interviewees agreed that private property rights are important to residents of Gallatin Gateway. While commonly viewed as important, one interviewee acknowledged that the concept might not be commonly understood: “[p]roperty rights means something different for everyone.” For example, one interviewee gave a straightforward description of property rights: “If you own the property, you should be able to use it.” The Bible served as another interviewee’s foundation for “well-defined property rights,” which includes “treat[ing] each other with real fairness,” refraining from exercising “excessive control,” and recognizing that property owners “are only stewards, managing that which belongs to God.”

Several interviewees brought up the idea of neighborliness as part of their fundamental understanding of property rights. “You’ve got rights, but you’ve also got an ethical responsibility,” said one interviewee. They continued, stating that this principle depends on the good will of others: “We’ve been spoiled. We’ve

always had good neighbors." Another interviewee echoed this sentiment, saying "I agree with property rights, but they go across survey lines. What my neighbor does affects me and vice versa. We have to look out for each other."

This focus on "neighborliness" and "fairness" highlights a question that most interviewees had, which one interviewee summarized as: "How much of a right do you have to intrude upon someone else's property, who also has a property right?" Many people believed there was "room for discussion" and that thoughtful community conversations could help answer that question. A handful of interviewees shared their perspectives on how property rights protection can be achieved, even if "getting everyone to that yes table is a challenge." One interviewee felt that this could be done through informal conversations: "As far as me imposing my views through the government, that's wrong. It's between me and my neighbor. If we have problems, we'll get them solved."

Several other interviewees identified the role that government can play in establishing and maintaining a balance between individual and community rights. One interviewee recognized the importance of both, saying that "[p]roperty rights are important to me and sometimes it's important to have rules and regulations for everyone's better interest." A second thought that "what's good about the balance of governance and pure anarchy" is that "collective hopes and dreams of people...go into government" and that "some sort of governance" can help mitigate uses of private property that are "injurious in a real way to other people." This individual echoed the sentiment of other interviewees, who thought that conversations about property rights will be important and emphasized the responsibly community members have to participate: "If you aren't part of that conversation, then you're required to adhere to what came out of the conversation." A third thought about this topic explicitly in the context of zoning conversations, underscoring the need for property owners to be heard: "Property rights are such a part of Montana. How do you maintain property rights while you're doing zoning? You listen to the property owners." This is particularly important given one interviewee's perspective that "large landowner property rights were ignored when the last Gallatin Gateway Neighborhood Plan was developed."

A couple interviewees struggled to grasp what property rights protection meant and how it could be achieved. As one interviewee put it: "I don't even know what 'property rights protection' means, and I'm a big private property rights guy." A few others questioned the value of a principle focused on property rights. Instead, one thought there should be greater emphasis on building the community that was laid by the founders of Salesville, who would "be thinking about what we can do collectively to realize these guiding principles." (*Note: Salesville is the name of the original settlement in Gallatin Gateway*)

Implementation and Results

In the 2009 Plan, many residents expressed "a desire to have a successful and meaningful planning process, resulting in a thoughtful community plan ensuring the appropriateness of new development in the area. In addition, residents have expressed a willingness to explore zoning, central water and sewer, and other tools to implement the plan."

It is important to note that interviewees were only presented with the title of this principle, which does not include examples of tools for implementation identified in the Plan. This could explain why this principle was generally met with confusion, and why those who chose to respond focused on how to clarify and improve this principle. Except for a couple of interviewees, most had no clear idea of what was meant by "implementation and results."

Of the few who did offer comments, one thought implementation would involve “a review board with local residents to have a conversation” about planning-related topics. Another wondered what would be implemented: “Implementation of programs? Zoning? What? If there is a zoning update, having a really specific plan and providing data on the results would be important.”

Increased taxation or other infrastructure costs

A key concern that interviewees commonly expressed, but that is absent from the 2009 Plan, relates to taxes as Gallatin Gateway grows. While no one explicitly connected these concerns to the 2009 Plan, one interviewee suggested that all these conversations about growth and development “[c]ome back to our taxes: When do they stop going up? That’s what’s making it unaffordable to be here.” Many interviewees expressed some level of tax fatigue, saying: “We’re not afraid of paying our fair share, but we’ve seen communities around here where guys have to sell their properties because they can’t pay their taxes.” There were a variety of concerns expressed about how increased taxation is impacting residents, and one interviewee noted the difficulty property owners face when making improvements: “If you improve a property and make it look nice, you’re taxed more.”

Several lamented that increased taxation is jeopardizing the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers. “The single greatest threat for the ranches and farms in the Gateway rural areas is the prospective impacts of the proposed tax law changes—state taxes, remove step-up basis, reduce gifting exemptions, etc. The substantial escalation of ranch prices will further increase these tax and other liabilities. These pending changes will make it virtually impossible for families to pass their properties down to the next generation.”

As mentioned briefly in the Sufficient Infrastructure and Gateway School sections, most of the interviewees also expressed concerns about increased taxes or other costs related to the expansion of public services and infrastructure to serve the increasing growth and development. “I don’t like seeing my taxes go up and go up. It’s because of growth going on around. I’m concerned how much I’ll have to foot the bill for somebody else’s growth.”

Tools for Guiding Growth

While most interviewees recognized Gallatin Gateway’s growth and shared similar concerns about its impacts, the ideas and approaches for *how* to address these impacts varied considerably and could be considered a source of disagreement. Not only did interviewees report a range of ideas on what the most effective and appropriate tools are for managing growth, there was also a significant amount of confusion, misinformation, and misunderstanding on what kinds of tools were available, how those tools are implemented, and what the potential benefits and drawbacks are, particularly when it came to zoning.

Non-Zoning Tools

Interviewees discussed a handful of potential land use and development tools other than zoning. Some recognized that regulations currently apply throughout Gallatin Gateway, including federal and state environmental laws and Gallatin County’s subdivision and floodplain regulations. A handful expressed curiosity about voluntary mechanisms that apply only to an individual’s property, such as conservation easements for protecting large agricultural properties. Others explored the possibility of municipal incorporation as a way to exercise greater local control over land use, infrastructure improvements, and revenue generation/management. Others suggested expanding the boundaries of the neighborhood plan to include more of the Gallatin Gateway community, but recognized limitations given the plan’s non-regulatory status.

Zoning

As directed by the County Commission, the interview protocol contained questions investigating interviewees' perspectives on zoning, including:

- "How might the creation of a Gallatin Gateway zoning district preserve character and/or fulfill your vision?"
- "If you felt like another, nearby district already had most of what you'd want (regulations and zoning types), do you see any benefits of consolidation with that district, as opposed to the creation of a new, unique district for this area?"

A handful of interviewees were outright opposed to zoning. One interviewee stated that zoning would further accelerate the growth and development the Gallatin Gateway area is currently seeing, saying "[t]he faster it is zoned, the more likely people will sell it off and development will occur." Those opposed to zoning mostly focused on property rights, with one interviewee saying that the "property owner takes their rights and hands it over to the governing body." Another lamented that this loss of control would eliminate the ability "to pass unencumbered land to my children." Other interviewees opposed zoning simply because of a more pessimistic viewpoint on its ability to manage growth and development: "There's no reason to zone. It would be nice to control things a little bit, but we can't." Another echoed that sentiment, saying, "Zoning's not going to do any good." Lastly, one interviewee was concerned about the added costs to development with potential zoning and permitting fees.

On the flip side, there were a handful of interviewees who were strongly supportive of zoning. One interviewee cited the history of zoning as a case for it being an effective land use tool, saying that "Zoning is established because of known outcomes and the confidence in the future that comes from that." Another cited the stability that they believed zoning could provide, saying it "can ensure compatible land use, protect unique views and landscapes, and ensure future generations can enjoy wildlife. Zoning can ensure our dark skies are protected. Zoning can protect our property values." Another interviewee believed that the time for zoning was ripe, saying that "with all the things happening right now, there's a groundswell of people wanting to mitigate the impacts of growth. There's a renewed cry for some sort of zoning."

As with many of the topics discussed in the interviews, most interviewees fell somewhere in the middle, believing that some form of zoning could be a potential tool for guiding growth, saying things like: "I think zoning probably provides value" and it "[c]an increase your property value if it's done correctly" and it "[c]ould allow us to really target development and preserve important aspects of our community that we don't want to change." Despite this cautious optimism, many interviewees wondered about the whether it would be the *right* tool for the Gallatin Gateway community, expressing hesitation about creating a regulatory environment that does not currently exist in the community:

- "I think concerns about property rights protection and government still exist."
- "I think governance overstep would be something I'm concerned about."
- "I don't want to create a large bureaucracy down here. I don't want a bunch of rules and regulations to follow and driving up the cost of things."
- "I'm not a strong government intervention person, but what I can say is that you gotta start somewhere."

- “It’s nice to not worry about extreme oversight. That was a selling point. Having that wiggle room and not being strictly regimented. It’s different, however, when a developer wants to fill up an empty field.”
- “I understand there are reasons for rules and that people disagree with the extent of some rules. Honestly, I feel sometimes the rules are over-implemented, but it’s usually understandable where the rules come from.”

When asked about zoning consolidation, there were a few interviewees who were interested, saying that “[c]ombining with another zone sounds like the fastest way to implement zoning.” Another interviewee supported this approach, recognizing that creating a new zoning regulation is “[a] heck of a lot of work if you’re doing it from scratch.” Four Corners was logically the most obvious choice, given its geographic proximity to the Gallatin Gateway area. However, a few interviewees noted that Four Corners would need to be updated in order to feel more comfortable with integrating into that zoning regulation.

Despite some tentative interest in zoning consolidation, most interviewees who were curious about zoning or thought it could be a useful planning tool held a desire to have a specific zoning regulation for the Gallatin Gateway area. One interviewee said that consolidation “[m]ight be more expeditious or efficient, but that’s not the way I’d prefer to move forward.” Another echoed this hesitance, saying, “I don’t think that residents of Gateway would agree to be annexed by another zone.”

In terms of model regulations that Gallatin Gateway could look to, the Bridger Canyon Zoning Regulation came up several times. One interviewee stated that “[t]he only zoning I’ve ever seen that worked is Bridger Canyon. They did it years and years ago, but they stuck to their guns.” Other interviewees pointed to the Bridger Canyon as a potential starting point: “I am not advocating for copying Bridger Canyon Zoning, but their approach works very well.” Another interviewee had similar thoughts: “I don’t know that the Bridger Canyon rules or regs would transfer out to us, but they were smart enough to do it back in the early 1970s, so they’ve got a pretty nice place still.”

Overall, there were many different opinions on what existing zoning regulation made the most sense for Gallatin Gateway. In addition to mentioning Bridger Canyon, interviewees talked about Four Corners, South Cottonwood Canyon, North Gallatin Canyon, and the City of Manhattan as possible zoning models.

For those interested in zoning, there was a range of geographic scales that interviewees thought might be appropriate for a zoning regulation. Some focused strictly on the river corridor as being the most important area to protect with zoning. One interviewee suggested that “[m]aybe there should be a clear river corridor with hard and fast rules about what you can and can’t do.” Another echoed a similar sentiment. “The main zoning issue we advocate is setbacks. We want to give the river as much room as possible.” Others focused on the downtown area as being the most appropriate place for zoning, particularly regarding commercial development, advocating for “setting up Mill Street as a commercial zone.” Another suggested a similar approach: “Keep downtown as a focus for commercial and high density.” One interviewee expressed optimism for zoning in the town core as a starting point: “I think we could certainly get an effective document for what we used to call the downtown core. That’s probably attainable.” Finally, one interviewee looked at zoning from a more zoomed out lens, saying that if community members do not want to opt into the Gallatin Gateway zoning regulation, there should still be an underlying county-wide zoning regulation: “It shouldn’t be an opt out, it should be a choice: You can opt-in to Gallatin Gateway, but if you don’t, you’re covered under an umbrella, County-wide zoning regulation.”

Again, while most interviewees showed general open-mindedness and interest in zoning, there are many unanswered questions in the community about how it functions as a growth management tool. Interviewees' questions about zoning (and other topics) listed in the subsequent "Key Questions" section reveals a relative lack of understanding on the topic. Questions generally centered around how zoning works, including the process of establishing zoning, and zoning's potential impacts on agriculture, growth, and taxes. This confusion and nescience on zoning seems to be driving the skepticism and mixed feelings about whether zoning is an appropriate tool for the community. Many interviewees recognized that it would be important to gain a better understanding of zoning before proceeding.

Key Questions

In addition to zoning, interviewees brought up many questions about various planning related topics. The following section is a collection of the questions asked by the interviewees back to Planning Staff during the interview process, categorized into major themes and related sub-themes. The questions themselves provide important clues and context that help create a clearer picture of the community's collective baseline understanding of these topics, which is an important starting point for future consensus-building.

• Planning and Zoning

○ Zoning

- Does zoning induce growth?
- How can zoning guide commercial growth and where?
- How can property rights be maintained with zoning?
- Can zoning protect agricultural producers and working agricultural land?
- Can zoning support the continuation of agricultural activities?
- Can properties be zoned as agriculture?
- Do more than 50% of agricultural landowners have to support a zoning effort for zoning regulations to be adopted?
- What are the rules for protesting an adopted zoning regulation?
- Can you create a zoning district in which unzoned property is surrounded by zoned property?
- How does zoning interact with other regulations, plans, and policies (e.g., neighborhood plans and subdivision regulations)?

○ Conservation Easements

- How do conservation easements work?
- How does the Open Lands Board process work?
- What is the relationship between conservation easements and zoning? Which controls?

• Local governance and community agency

- Would it be beneficial for Gallatin Gateway to incorporate?
- Would it be beneficial for Gallatin Gateway to form a Community Council?
- Would it be beneficial for Gallatin Gateway to form a Zoning Advisory Committee (e.g., Big Sky, Hebgen)?
 - How does an advisory board get created/operate?

• Taxation

- Will taxes go up with zoning?
- How do we improve services without increasing the tax burden?
- When will taxes stop going up?
- Can new development ease the tax burden?

- **Community infrastructure and service capacity**

- Water & Sewer

- What is the capacity of the water and sewer district?
 - Is Gallatin Gateway currently close to meeting that capacity?
 - Why are prices so high? What would decrease them?
 - Can and should the community get central water, along with central sewer?
 - How does the community get central water?
 - Will there be any cooperation with Four Corners Water and Sewer District?

- Gallatin Gateway School

- Will the school be able to meet its bond?
 - Will the school have capacity for new residents brought by the Gateway Village and the proposed Gateway Inn projects?

- **Transportation**

- U.S. Highway 191

- What is Montana Department of Transportation's plan for the corridor, now that the 191 Corridor Study is complete?
 - Would it be possible to get a stoplight at U.S. Highway 191 and Mill Street?
 - Could speed limits be reduced on U.S. Highway 191 leading into the mouth of Gallatin Canyon?
 - How might noise from U.S. Highway 191 be reduced?
 - Would it be possible to build a cellphone lot near the mouth of Gallatin Canyon, where drivers on U.S. Highway 191 could pull over and finish calls rather than park in neighborhoods?

- **Wildlife**

- What are the migratory patterns of large ungulate herds (e.g., elk, deer, etc.) in the area?
 - What solutions exist for facilitating their movement across U.S. Highway 191?

Recommendations

Interviewee Recommendations

In order for participants to make community planning decisions based on the same understandings and information, these key questions listed above will need to be addressed as part of any conversation about Gallatin Gateway's future. Interviewees almost unanimously saw significant value in education and engagement around growth, development, zoning, and other planning related topics. They recommended the following strategies for enhancing education and engagement opportunities:

What to discuss:

- Educational session answering questions
- Options and approaches for how to guide growth
- Education about what zoning can and cannot do and how it can be modeled to best fit the needs of the community
- Property rights
- Infrastructure
- Conservation easements
- Marijuana growing, processing, retail
- Taxation

Who to involve:

- If the plan is to move forward with creating a zoning regulation, form an advisory group featuring representatives of key stakeholder groups, making sure to include individuals who are “skeptical”
- Business owners
- Large landowners and ranches
- HOAs

How to meet:

- Have in-person meetings at the Community Center
- Pair in-person meetings with food
- Coordinate outreach and/or activities so it coincides with annual community events
- Post notices at the Post Office, the Community Center, and the Gallatin Gateway School
- Advertise in the Willing Workers Ladies Aid Society newsletter and on their Facebook page
- When scheduling events, be mindful of when certain groups are likely to be out of town or unavailable (e.g., agricultural producers who are very busy during the summer, people who spend certain seasons elsewhere, etc.)
- Roundtable discussions with business owners
- Mixed approaches: surveys, zoom meetings, emails, website, local radio, mailers

Planning Department Recommendations

Present findings of this report to community.

There are several approaches that could be utilized to present this report. However, given the feedback that was received from interviewees on how best to engage the community, Planning Staff recommends presenting the findings of this report during a meeting at the community center, ideally with a County Commissioner present.

Address questions brought up by interviewees.

The Planning Department is the subject matter expert on these topics and likely has the answers to a lot of these questions on hand. Further, these questions are likely shared by people all over the county, so this could be a beneficial resource beyond Gallatin Gateway. Staff recommends delivering this information to the Gallatin Gateway community in a format that works best for the community, which is discussed in the previous section. Additionally, it could be helpful for the broader public to post answers to some of the more general questions on the County website.

Adopt this Situation Assessment as part of existing Community Plan.

This report provides an important status update on the effectiveness of the Plan, 13 years after the Plan’s original adoption. It also provides both community and planning staff recommendations on moving forward with how to update the Plan to make it a clearer and more effective document, which could be useful if that is the community’s desire.

Revisit and refine the Principles of the Community Plan.

As discussed previously, it is important to attempt to resolve competing and conflicting understandings of some of the Community Plan’s guiding principles. Implementation of the 2009 Plan will require

continued community conversation to clarify and better define the Plan's principles and, eventually, to identify which tools are best suited to achieving the Plan's vision and why.

Update Plan map.

Implementing any growth and development tools that will be meaningful for the community will require amending the boundaries of the Community Plan. As is, the Plan map is not logical or cohesive, and any attempt to implement growth and development tools will result in inconsistent application across the community, due to large portions of the area opting out of the plan and therefore not subject to any community-wide solutions.

Careful consideration of externalities.

Lastly, Planning Staff urges readers to keep in mind that when implementing any land use planning tools, particularly zoning, the geographic scale of the new rules can have significant implications both within and beyond the regulatory area.

As previously mentioned, it will be important to update the Community Plan Map. Aligning a future zoning effort with the current Community Plan map will create zoning pockets within the Gallatin Gateway area and will exacerbate existing issues of land use inequity, ultimately having a limited impact on the issues that inspired this Situation Assessment in the first place. Therefore, it is critical to consider the Gallatin Gateway area holistically, update the Plan map accordingly, and align the proposed zoning regulations with the new Plan map.

However, even if zoning were implemented at the broadest geographic scale considered in this report (see Figure 1.1), it will likely create externalities on adjacent areas outside of those boundaries. Creating another pocket of zoning in the County, on top of the 22 discrete zoning districts that already exist, will likely push development outwards to other unzoned areas of the County, both generating new and exacerbating old growth and development issues similar to those the Gallatin Gateway community is currently experiencing.

Because of the issues associated with the incomplete Community Plan map and the concerns of unintended externalities that zoning could cause beyond the Gallatin Gateway area, a zoning effort would be most effectively employed if it were enacted as part of a broader geographical effort. The geographic boundaries of such an effort remains unknown and is up for careful consideration, but it would, at minimum, go well beyond the borders discussed in this Situation Assessment. A zoning effort at a larger geographic scale is more challenging, but ultimately more cohesive and inclusive for both the Gallatin Gateway community and the broader community of Gallatin County.

Appendix A: Stakeholder Groups Represented

During the winter of 2021, Gallatin County Planning Department staff conducted in-depth confidential interviews with more than 30 individuals. Interviewees were intentionally selected to ensure representation from multi-generational, medium-term, and new residents, and those who had and had not participated in the 2008 zoning effort. The interviews included representation from the following stakeholder groups and organizations:

Local business owners and/or Gallatin Gateway residents who work in the following sectors:

- Farming, ranching, and leasing land for agricultural activities
- Hospitality and tourism (resorts, restaurants, bars, etc.)
- Construction trades (e.g., contracting, carpentry, plumbing, etc.)
- Light industrial
- Architecture, landscape architecture, and engineering
- Real estate and development
- Finance
- Outdoor recreation
- Education and research

Those involved in community organizations or community service providers, including:

- Gallatin Gateway Community Center
- Willing Workers Ladies Aid Society
- Gallatin Gateway School Board
- Gallatin Gateway Fire Department
- The Gallatin Gateway Water & Sewer District

Representatives of agencies with expertise in issues identified as important by Gallatin Gateway stakeholders:

- Montana Department of Transportation
- Montana Land Reliance
- Trout Unlimited

Groups the Planning Department reached out to, but were unable to speak with:

- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- West Gallatin Canal Company
- Association of Gallatin Agricultural Irrigators

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Re: Interview to Discuss Zoning for Gallatin Gateway

Greetings,

Gallatin County requests your participation in an interview about planning and zoning in Gallatin Gateway.

This fall, a number of community members contacted the Planning Department to share their concerns about the growth and development taking place in Gallatin Gateway. Some of the comments we received identified zoning as a potential remedy to these concerns; many requested that the Department intervene to prevent undesirable outcomes. In response, we are initiating a process to update Gallatin Gateway's [existing neighborhood plan](#) and to explore the creation of complementary zoning regulations.

A necessary first step is to learn from community members who wish to help stake out common ground on which to build a shared vision, including those who participated in the creation of the 2009 neighborhood plan. We believe you can provide informed, thoughtful feedback on how to set this new effort up for success. We hope you will help us identify potential pitfalls while bringing to light the interests and concerns you share with your fellow community members.

The interview questions are attached in case you would like to look them over before agreeing to speak with us. We anticipate interviews will take 60 to 90 minutes. We can conduct them either by Zoom or by phone.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful input and time.

Best wishes,

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Gallatin Gateway Interview Protocol

- 1) Tell us a bit about who you are – name, organization/group, title
- 2) What has been your involvement with planning, zoning, and land use decision-making related efforts or concerns in the Gallatin Gateway area?
- 3) What geographic area comes to mind when we say “Gallatin Gateway”? Currently the Gallatin Gateway Community plan area goes from Johnson Road on the north to Wilson Creek on the south.
 - a) How would you describe development in the area?
- 4) Based on the guiding principles of the existing neighborhood plan:
 - Rural lifestyle
 - Compatibility between existing residential and new commercial
 - Property rights protection
 - Pride in the Gallatin Gateway school
 - A healthy, vibrant downtown
 - Protected natural resources
 - Sufficient infrastructure, including central sewer and water for downtown GG
 - Protected viewsheds through control of signage and billboards
 - Better transportation
 - Protected open spaces and agricultural landscapes
 - Implementation and results

What is your vision for the community and the Gateway area, particularly regarding growth, development, community feel, land use, and other planning-related concerns?

- 5) In terms of planning, zoning, and land use, what specific risks or impacts are you most concerned about (at the neighborhood and Gateway-area level)? Why?
- 6) How might the creation of a Gallatin Gateway zoning district preserve character and/or fulfill your vision?
- 7) Do you feel people agree about the vision for the Gallatin Gateway area? a) What do you feel are key sources of disagreement?
- 8) How important do you feel it is that you, other affected community members, and members of the public are involved when changes are being made to regulations, policies, and codes that affect land use and development (at the local and county level)?
 - a) Based on your prior experience with zoning efforts in Gallatin Gateway, how do you think people should be involved in this upcoming zoning effort?
 - b) Who would be important to include in this effort?
 - c) One way that people can be involved is by serving on a Zoning Advisory Committee. Typically, the County Commission puts out a call for Advisory Committee members and then appoints some of those who apply. This has had mixed results in the past and we are considering other methods of assembling the Advisory Committee. Do you have any thoughts on this?

9) If you felt like another, nearby district already had most of what you'd want (regulations and zoning types), do you see any benefits of consolidation with that district, as opposed to the creation of a new, unique district for this area?

10) Do you have anything else you think we should know or that you'd like to tell us about planning and land use in Gallatin Gateway or Gallatin County?