

# COUNCIL OKS \$4.5 MILLION FOR RAIL PARK

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Kalispell City Council members had no reservations about passing a \$4.5 million infrastructure measure on Monday. Most of them had been through the process before.

"We're all just kind of sitting here waiting to explode," council member Jim Atkinson said prior to the unanimous approval. "This is the neatest thing since sliced bread."

The funding resolution would serve as a local match toward construction of the Glacier Rail Park, a \$21 million centralized industrial area planned for east Kalispell. The city would release the \$4.5 million only upon receiving a federal grant that currently is in the application stage.

The city's portion would come out of the West Side Tax Increment Financing District, which is meant to serve the core area of central Kalispell.

Katharine Thompson, city community development director, said that development as a result of the rail park is where much of the incentive lies.

"The vast majority of the benefits come not just from the rail park development, but subsequently from the trail development," she said.

Part of the rail park plan includes removing the rails that run north of Center Street and relocating the businesses that use them. From there, the city plans to develop that space for pedestrian access. More than \$1.3 million of the city's commitment would be directed at that core area.

Other financial contributors to the project include the Flathead County Economic Development Authority, which is working to secure public and private funding. BNSF Railway Co. recently pledged \$500,000 for the rail park.

It's all contingent on the federal infrastructure grant of \$10 million.

Prior to voting on Monday, council members voiced support for the project that has been years in the making.

Council member Phil Guiffrida called the rail park an investment with a high return.

"It's really taking a one-time grant and making a lifetime change out of it," he said. "And that's why it's so important."

The Flathead Authority will submit the grant application to the U.S. Department of Transportation today. Mayor Mark Johnson and other representatives are expected to travel to Washington, D.C., this summer to garner support. Grant winners are expected to be announced this fall.

The funding measure passed unanimously, with council member Tim Kluesner absent from Monday's meeting. Two previous bids to achieve the federal grant were unsuccessful.

"We're sure hoping that this time it's going to happen," Atkinson said. "You will see maybe a parade down Main Street if it does happen this time, because this is going to change Kalispell in so many very, very positive ways."

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