

# **OPINION: Core Area Redevelopment will enrich Kalispell**

**By Erica Wirtala | Posted: Sunday, July 10, 2016 8:00 am**

Like the reality TV shows that stream into our homes daily, the city of Kalispell is hard at work on their own “makeover” project for Kalispell’s Core Area. As Realtors in the Flathead Valley, we could not be more excited to welcome this fresh look and the positive economic impact it will bring to our community.

As with any large project, the Core and Rail Redevelopment plan has many moving parts and stakeholders. There are numerous timelines, deadlines and milestones to be completed before the grand unveiling. We are patiently watching as the pieces fall into place.

There are several important things to know about the Core and Rail Redevelopment:

- The city of Kalispell is not purchasing properties adjoining the trail. Instead, the city’s role is to encourage landowners to develop and to assist those landowners with the regulatory processes. There are several vacant parcels within the Core Area; many simply need a facelift.
- Landowners may buy and sell properties within the Core Area, utilizing their own Realtors.
- To attract additional development to the area, the city of Kalispell recently incorporated a zoning district specific to the boundaries of the Core Area. With this new “B-3 Core Area” zoning, the city has relaxed some of height limits, minimum lot sizes, setbacks and parking requirements. Kalispell’s former zoning model was loosely based on separating commercial development from the residential areas. Prior building height limitations, parking requirements and setbacks all posed challenges to creating an urban center.
- By adopting the B-3 Core Zone, the city has empowered landowners and developers to be more creative with the spaces that they own, giving them more “permitted use” options as opposed to “conditional uses.” This new zone encourages a “mixed-use” approach to the Core Area, combining denser, multi-family housing, retail, office and light industrial uses while prohibiting heavy industrial use. For the urban core of Kalispell, it is an innovative approach to development.

The Core Area Plan is a newer “mixed-use” concept similar to those used in vibrant urban centers. A mixed-use zone incorporates a residential component to an area previously devoted only to commercial enterprise. Why does this matter? Whether it’s lofts, duplexes, multi-family townhouses, accessory apartments or traditional apartments, people are increasingly looking to live right where they work, shop and socialize. Many prefer to walk, bike or take public transportation to their favorite coffee stations, brew pubs, restaurants and boutiques. The Core Area project will provide this lifestyle in Flathead Valley’s commercial center, Kalispell.

Developer-friendly zoning is already in place and the new Core Area plan is moving forward rapidly. Within the TIGER grant, there is money to remove the railroad track and replace it with a bike and pedestrian trail. Together, the effect of these changes on neighboring properties will be tremendous. Realtors anticipate that property values will increase exponentially as business and residential buyers seek out the highly desirable

## Core Area.

The Core Area plan restores the heart and soul of Kalispell back to its downtown. The Northwest Montana Association of Realtors believes this is the start of a wonderful resurgence and stands wholeheartedly behind the Core Area Plan.

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