

# KALISPELL MOVES FORWARD ON CORE AREA PLAN

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The Kalispell City Council voted Tuesday night to push plans forward to shift rail use out of the city's core area and transform the heart of Kalispell into a city center.

The industrial rail park and the Kalispell Core Area Revitalization Plan seek to relocate the railroad tracks currently downtown and use the space to develop a nearly two-mile pathway system connecting people to the city's shops. It also connects four disjointed streets that were previously choked off from the city's center.

The council approved a deal with Northwest Drywall and Flathead County Economic Development Authority on Tuesday that allows the company to move to the planned Glacier Rail Park.

Tom Esch, an attorney working with Northwest Drywall, spoke in favor of the agreement.

"This relocation for them, gives them the certainty in knowing that their place in Kalispell is secure," he said. "From my perspective, this is as significant of any deal I've seen in Kalispell, maybe as significant as when the rail came to Kalispell in 1890."

Esch said he has been working with the company on the agreement since 2012. He said the business has operated out of its current location since 1988. Without the deal, Northwest Drywall would have been cut off from the rail or suffered too high a cost in relocating to the park to survive as a business.

The agreement says that the city and the economic development group will provide \$1.6 million toward the land, new facility and site improvements in the relocation.

Northwest Drywall will contribute \$750,000 to the project, which covers most of the remaining construction costs. The city will use Northwest Drywall's existing building, appraised at \$750,000, for collateral to provide the business with a 3 percent loan for the relocation costs.

City Manager Doug Russell said moving the rails from the downtown area has been talked about for more than 20 years. Russell said Tuesday's deal paved the way for more development in the Glacier Rail Park.

"The deal really started shaping itself into really, what is a fair and appropriate relocation program," he said.

The council also voted to request that BNSF Railway Co. abandon the existing rail line in town. That process is expected to take between seven and eight months. The move matches the city's rail use with highway access in an area zoned for growth.

The Glacier Rail Park, set to be constructed in a reclaimed gravel pit, is expected to create 200 jobs and increase freight traffic along the Great Northern Corridor.

The rail park and Kalispell Core Area Revitalization Plan was set in motion in 2010. The city received the funding to complete the project by the U.S. Department of Transportation through a \$10 million TIGER grant.

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