



Building Buzz: Glacier Rail Park, Other Large Developments Poised to Break Ground

Construction begins on elementary school; brewery, apartment complexes in the works

BY [DILLON TABISH](#) // JUN 13, 2017 // [NEWS & FEATURES](#)



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Being a city planner in Kalispell these days is a constant juggling act as staff members keep up with a frenetic pace of building activity.

In just the last week, Kalispell annexed 56 acres into the city, opening the door to a [large mixed-use commercial and residential development](#) along

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U.S. Highway 93 North; approved a six-building, 108-unit apartment complex off Meridian Road that is part of a pending flood of multi-family rental developments; and [broke ground on a new \\$15 million elementary school](#) on Airport Road.

Even more expansion is on the horizon. The architectural review committee this week evaluated plans for a new brewery next to the Kalispell Center Mall; an estimated 600-700 potential multi-family units are emerging or in the early planning stages; and the 485-acre [Kalispell North Town Center continues to move dirt](#) in preparation for the first of many build-out phases.

In the city's latest fiscal year budget, dating back to July 1, 2016 with one more month remaining, the building department's revenue is already 237 percent of its annual budget, according to City Manager Doug Russell. Building permits in the last year have more than doubled the budgeted amount of \$350,000, and plan review fees are over 3.5 times the budgeted amount of \$100,000.

That doesn't even include one of the largest — and potentially most transformational — projects in the history of Kalispell, [the forthcoming Glacier Rail Park](#), which is surfacing off Whitefish Stage Road and will spur widespread changes throughout Kalispell's core area over the next two years.

The city is poised to award a bid on June 19 to construct the 43-acre industrial rail yard. The winning contractor is expected to move forward with development this summer, and the tentative completion date is mid to late 2018, according to project leaders.

The development of the rail park will usher in the relocation of two downtown businesses — CHS and Northwest Drywall — and prompt the removal of the railroad tracks that slice through the heart of the city. The tracks will be replaced by a pedestrian trail system in 2019. The city will also reconnect disjointed streets in the

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area. City and business leaders hope these changes and others will spur private redevelopment in Kalispell's core area.

City planners are also recharging the so-called Downtown Plan, [a steering document established](#) a few years ago with community input that targets goals in the historic heart of Kalispell. The city's planning board reviewed the draft document at its June 13th meeting, and the city is collecting new public input to ensure the plan meets all the goals for downtown.

"As the rail park and core area projects unfold, we can't forget about the rest of our downtown," Kalispell Planning Director Tom Jentz said. "We're trying to get the spotlight back on downtown as we move forward."

The Downtown Plan already features a lineup of tentative goals, including wider sidewalks, improved parking opportunities and stimulating an entertainment district with more restaurants and public venues.

Mostly, the document centers on a fundamental yet contentious issue: street layouts. According to the city's plan, the primary concerns in downtown center on high traffic volumes, speed, and the associated noise and dust from the persistent stream of vehicles on Main Street.

Currently, the city, county and state are debating the [alignment of U.S. 93 around the courthouse](#), known as the couplet. Kalispell has expressed interest in shrinking Main Street from four to three lanes — one lane going south, one going north and a center turn lane.

As the Downtown Plan states, "The current design of Main Street's right-of-way is not conducive to fostering or enhancing a true main street community."

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