



GUEST COLUMN

# The Importance of Investing in Kalispell

The state needs to understand the importance of investing in Kalispell and the Flathead

BY KYLE WATERMAN

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**A**s Kalispell grows, it is important that the government be nimble, keep up, and make strategic investments. Recently the City Council supported full investment into the Parkline Trail. This didn't require us to raise taxes or cut corners. Because of sound fiscal practices, we had the reserve to make the investment. As our growth accelerates, it is important for us to continue to make strategic investments like this, so our future is paved for us.

Kalispell is growing fast, but mismanaged growth can lead to a future of wasting money and resources on fixing past mistakes. To keep the business community and our neighborhoods connected and thriving, we need smart growth. Smart growth means finding ways to encourage growth in Kalispell — such as providing housing that working families can afford and incentivizing businesses to stay.

I believe this will require us to invest wisely into things that foster community and the economy, such as the downtown, public transportation, and neighborhoods that lack pedestrian access with sidewalks. I believe that strategic investment in items like these will incentivize developers and businesses to invest in Kalispell.

This also means that we need to invest in local solutions to address our continued mental health crisis in partnership with non-government agencies. The mental health crisis is growing, and we need collaborative efforts, with local boots on the ground to address it. Historically being the smallest large town in Montana, we have for too long relied on state services to be based out of Helena, Missoula, or Deer Lodge. It is time for the state to make Flathead County, the third fastest growing rural county in America, a priority and base resources here.

This does not and should not require more government. Instead, it requires an effective government that leads with strategic investment into Kalispell and coordination with local partners. Local government should be a lean and nimble boxer with the ability to punch above its weight when the fight is critical.

The state needs to understand the importance of investing in Kalispell and the Flathead so that we are not overwhelmed by our growth or the number of visitors we host on behalf of Montana every year. If we don't receive prioritization by the state in how grants and funding is distributed, then local entities are forced to pull the property tax lever to address growth. That's mismanaged growth, and it will force Montanans and their families to leave the Flathead.

*Kyle Waterman is a Kalispell city councilor.*

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