

Opinion | *Like I Was Saying*

KB's 2021 Predictions

This is also the time of year where I make my own best guesses on what lies ahead

BY KELLYN BROWN // JAN 7, 2021

Each year we publish the Outlook Edition. It's our attempt to predict what the year may look like based on interviews with industry insiders and public officials. This is also the time of year where I make my own best guesses on what lies ahead.

To be sure, I'm often way off. Like that time at the beginning of 2019 when I predicted that someone would lease the vacant Herberger's retail space in downtown Kalispell. Well, it's two years later and, drumroll please ...

Someone will lease the former Herberger's space, please.

Look, there is perhaps no better example of a pristine piece of real estate in the Flathead Valley going to waste than this

one. The 80,000-square-foot building was renovated just a year before its tenant's parent company's bankruptcy.

 KALISPELL 29°F -1°C
BROKEN CLOUDS

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Someone, anyone, please make use of this space. I previously recommended a family fun center akin to Chuck E. Cheese, but I'm now open to other ideas.

The long-talked-about trail will start looking like a trail.

Remember the Kalispell Trail, or what is now known as the Kalispell Parkline? It's easy to forget during a pandemic, but the largest city in the county received a \$10 million U.S. Department of Transportation grant to help spur development in the city's core area. That was more than five years ago. While the new rail park is completed and rail-served businesses relocated, the tracks, which local officials at one point estimated would be replaced by a linear park in 2018, are still there. This year, finally, the Parkline begins taking shape downtown.

The Legislature is going get weird.

Republicans hold the governorship and a super majority in the state Legislature. That doesn't mean they plan on getting along. Last week U.S. Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., hailed the passage of his bipartisan bill, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act, which permanently settles the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes water dispute. In response, conservative state lawmakers, many from this area, said Daines including the water compact in the omnibus bill was a "clear betrayal of our state and of President Trump." The Montana GOP's vice chair, who was included in the critical letter, said she never consented to having her name attached. The state party added that the letter was "written and driven by a disgruntled staffer who continues to choose dysfunction and dishonesty everywhere he lands." The session hadn't even started yet.

It will also be less dramatic than some predict.

There will be a ton of new reporters covering the Legislature this year. Lee Newspapers expanded its capitol bureau and three nonprofits are also on the beat. This is, in fact, an historic session with the first Republican governor in 16 years. But while Gov. Greg

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SCOREBOARD



Football

10/28

FRIDAY, OCT. 23

Hellgate	16
Butte	35
Glacier	0
Sentinel	44
Capital	6
Helena	12

FRIDAY, OCT. 16

Butte	35
Big Sky	16
Glacier	35
Flathead	14

Gianforte will have far different priorities and philosophies than his predecessor, I predict his governorship will be more nuanced than scorched Earth.

Sentinel
Helena

48
0

Fewer people moved to the Flathead Valley than you think.

We've all heard the rumors that the pandemic caused Flathead County's population to grow by up to 20,000 people. That rumor is wrong. It's closer to 5,000.

But more are on the way.

With COVID-19 lockdowns continuing into the New Year, another 5,000 new residents may arrive this year.

2021 will be better than 2020.

The bar is low.

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