FLATHEAD COUNTY

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023

Acknowledgements

1

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

A. What is a CEDS?

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a local economic development plan. The United State Economic Development Administration, (EDA) requires a CEDS to qualify for planning programs and assistance related to public works and other economic development initiatives. The EDA states, "A CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. A CEDS is the result of a regionally-owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region. It is a key component in establishing and maintaining a robust economic ecosystem by helping to build regional capacity (through hard and soft infrastructure) that contributes to individual, firm and community success."

A CEDS is the result of a planning process with broad community participation to identify strengths, threats and opportunities in the region. Through this process, the CEDS establishes a vision for the community and includes goals and strategies that help the community achieve this vision over the next five years. Additionally, the CEDS addresses economic resilience to help the region withstand any type of disruption or stress it may experience.

B. Organizational Information

1. Montana West Economic Development (MWED)

MWED is a non-profit organization that serves all of Flathead County and oversees a variety of economic development projects throughout the county.   MWED services include business loans, grant writing, member development, and project management.   It provides staffing for the Procurement Technical Assistance Center and the Flathead County Economic Development Authority.

> **MISSION:** "Montana West Economic Development (MWED) is a private, non-profit organization working throughout Northwest Montana and its communities to promote economic diversity, job growth, and healthy businesses."

2. Flathead County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA)

In 1999, the Flathead County Commission voted to create the Flathead County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) under the requirements of the Montana Code Annotated (MCA), Title 7: Local Governments, Chapter 14, Part 11 – Port Authorities.   The purpose of a port authority is as follows:

> **7-14-1104**. Purpose -- public and governmental functions.
> (1) The purposes of a port authority are to:
>   (a) promote, stimulate, develop, and advance the general welfare, commerce, economic development, and prosperity of its jurisdiction and of the state and its citizens;
>
>   (b) endeavor to increase the volume of commerce within the jurisdiction of the port authority and the state through planning, advertising, acquisition, establishment, development, construction, improvement, maintenance, equipment, operation, regulation, and protection

of transportation, storage, or other facilities that promote the safe, efficient, and economical handling of commerce;

(c)   cooperate and act in conjunction with other organizations, public or private, in the development of commerce, industry, manufacturing, services, natural resources, agriculture, livestock, recreation, tourism, health care, and other economic activity in the state;

(d)   support the creation, expansion, modernization, retention, and relocation of new and existing businesses and industry in the state and otherwise stimulate, assist in, and support the growth of all kinds of economic activity that will tend to promote commerce and business development, maintain the economic stability and prosperity of its jurisdiction and of the state, and thus provide maximum opportunities for employment and improvement in the standard of living of citizens of the state.

Per the MCA, the Flathead County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) is supported by a mill levy, set in place by the Flathead County Commissioners. Additionally, FCEDA works with outside funding sources to procure dollars for economic development projects, including state resources such as the Montana Board of Investments and the Montana Department of Commerce's Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund Program.

C. Partners

The vision established in the CEDS can only be accomplished through partnerships with multiple organizations. Local governments and non-profits utilize the information in the CEDS to apply for grants and establish priorities. State and federal agencies provide funding and assistance for economic development projects**.** Flathead Valley Community College and local school districts are key partners for workforce training.   Chambers of Commerce help with outreach and undertake related economic development initiatives. Local businesses and major employers provide valuable input for the CEDS, mentor new businesses and represent the economic engine for the county. Partnerships include:

- Local governments – Flathead County, City of Kalispell, City of Whitefish, City of Columbia Falls

- State Agencies – Office of the Governor, Montana Department of Commerce, Montana Department of Labor & Industry, Job Service-Kalispell, Montana Manufacturing Extension Center, Montana Department of Transportation, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Broadband Office

- Federal Agencies – Economic Development Administration, United States Department of Agricultural – Rural Development, United States Environmental Protection Agency – Brownfields Program, Small Business Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, National Telecommunications and Information Administration – BroadbandUSA, Glacier National Park

- Local Chambers of Commerce – Kalispell Chamber of Commerce, Whitefish Chamber of Commerce, Columbia Falls Chamber of Commerce, Evergreen Chamber of Commerce, Bigfork Chamber of Commerce, Lakeside/Somers Chamber of Commerce, Kalispell Business Improvement District, Kalispell Tourism Business Improvement District

- Education - Flathead Valley Community College, Flathead County Superintendent of Schools, Local school districts, ImagineIF Libraries

- Transportation – Glacier Park International Airport, BNSF Railway, Amtrak, Montana Department of Transportation, Flathead County Mountain Climber (transit), Flathead Trails Association

- Non-profits - Kalispell Downtown Association, Convention and Visitor Bureaus, local community foundations, housing agencies and other local non-profits

- Businesses & Major employers – Logan Health, Flathead Electric Cooperative, Applied Materials, Nomad GCS

- Whitefish Mountain Resort, Internet service providers, financial institutions

Multiple partnerships were behind the development of the Glacier Rail Park in Kalispell

D. Relevant Planning Documents

Local governments have adopted planning documents with strategies related to economic development and related strategies. It is important to coordinate on economic development goals.
- Flathead County Growth Policy & Neighborhood Plans
- Kalispell Growth Policy
- Whitefish Growth Policy
- Columbia Falls Growth Policy
- Kalispell Downtown Plan & Core Area Plan
- Whitefish Housing Needs Assessments
- Kalispell Area Transportation Plan: Move 2040 and other MDT plans

E. MWED Accomplishments

This document builds on the following accomplishments and programs:

- **Glacier Rail Park –** This collaboration between MWED, FCEDA, and the City of Kalispell included multiple grants for environmental remediation of the former gravel pit and installation of infrastructure for a new industrial, railroad served business park. Upon completion, two former downtown businesses relocated to the park freeing up multiple industrial properties for redevelopment and allowing the rail tracks to be removed and replaced with the "Kalispell Parkline Trail".

- **Former CHS Site Redevelopment -** When CHS relocated out of downtown to the Glacier Rail Park, FCEDA purchased two of their three properties and began environmental clean-up of the sites. After cleaning up the sites both properties were sold to private developers in 2021. The new developments are under construction and include mixed-use construction that includes retail, office, and 200-300 residential units.

- **Glacier Airline Enhancement and Retention Outreach (Glacier AERO) –**MWED is a member of Glacier AERO, a 501-c-6 organized to promote business and community growth and development by investing in strategies designed to expand commercial air service in the Flathead Valley.

- **W.E.L.L. Women's Business Center** – MWED is a partner with the W.E.L.L. Women's Business Center. MWED works alongside the W.E.L.L. WBC to serve current and aspiring women business owners in Western Montana to provide businesses and entrepreneurs with business services and opportunities to start and grow their businesses.

- **Brownfield Assessment -** MWED is the recipient of a $500,000 EPA brownfield assessment grant to identify contaminated industrial and commercial properties in Flathead County.

- **Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program –** MWED has received a $15 million grant from U.S.D.A for a revolving loan program for local meat and poultry processors.

- **PeerSpectives®** is a roundtable system for CEOs and leaders of second-stage companies where participants can improve decision-making, enhance leadership abilities, confidentially share challenges and experiences with their peers, and advance their network and capabilities as organizational leaders in the Flathead Valley.

- **Financing -** Montana West Economic Development offers loan funds for businesses and entrepreneurs to help with startups, expansions, working capital, or equipment purchases. The goal is to support healthy and successful local businesses that create and retain jobs in Northwest Montana. MWED works closely with local lending partners and offers gap financing when bank lending or owner equity is not sufficient to meet a business's full financial needs.

- **Success Stories –** Additionally, FCEDA and MWED have successfully received funds from the Big Sky Trust Funds, Otto Bremer Trust Grant and other funders. Their efforts have helped create thousands of jobs and stimulate numerous sectors of the economy including major achievements and key companies such as GL Solutions, Nomad Global Communication Solutions, Endpoint Utility Corporation, The ZaneRay Group, and more. MWED was recently awarded a Food and AG Development Center (FADC) grant from the Montana Department of Agriculture.

II. Flathead County Profile

A. Geography

Flathead County is in northwest Montana and is 5,087 acres in size with a population density in 2020 of 20.5 people per square mile. Approximately 76% of land in the county is under public land ownership. The US Forest Service owns 52% of all land in the county while Glacier National Park comprises 19% of land in the county. Flathead Lake is located about seven miles south of Kalispell and is approximately 30 miles long and 16 miles wide. Whitefish Lake, Flathead River, Stillwater River and many other lakes and streams contribute to the mountain scenery with abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation and water sports.

Figure 1: Flathead County

Kalispell is the county seat and largest city in the county.   Other incorporated municipalities include Whitefish, located 11 miles north of Kalispell, and Columbia Falls, located seven miles east of Whitefish. Unincorporated towns include Evergreen, Bigfork, Lakeside, Somers, Marion, Kila, Hungry Horse, Coram, and Olney. Spokane, Missoula, and Calgary are the nearest metropolitan areas.

Table 1: Distance from Major Cities

Attraction	Mileage (from Kalispell)
Missoula	121 miles
Helena	194 miles
Spokane	237 miles
Seattle	515 miles
Calgary	262 miles

B. History & Culture

1. Tribal History & Early Settlement

The Flathead Indian Reservation is home to the Bitterroot Salish, Upper Pend d'Oreille, and the Kootenai Tribes. The territories of these three tribes covered all of western Montana and extended into parts of Idaho, British Columbia, and Wyoming. The Hellgate Treaty of 1855 established the Flathead Reservation, but over half a million acres passed out of Tribal ownership during land allotment that began in 1904. The majority of Flathead Indian Reservation is located within Lake County and with approximately 28,296 acres extending into Flathead County.   The Timber and Stone Act of 1878 allowed the purchase of large amounts of non-reservation federal land in Montana and, along with homesteading, this resulted in the early settlement of the county, including the former town of Demersville located southeast of present-day Kalispell along the Flathead River. *(Source:* https://csktribes.org/index.php/history-culture & *Flathead County Growth Policy)*

2. Kalispell

Kalispell, Montana, is the county seat and was founded in 1887. Surveyors from the Great Northern Railroad located the town site with the first train arriving in in 1892. The railroad established Kalispell as an industrial and trade center. Three museums in town include the Hockaday Museum of Art in the town's original Carnegie library, the Conrad Mansion Museum, and the Northwest Montana History Museum located in the Central School built in 1894. Kalispell's three nationally listed historic districts cover   more   than   80   blocks.   (*Source: Advisory   Council   on   Historic   Preservation,* *https://www.achp.gov/preserve-america/community/kalispell-montana*)

3. Whitefish

The Great Northern Railway initially followed a route through Columbia Falls and Kalispell. The route west of Kalispell, however, included a difficult climb over the Salish Mountains so the railroad was re-routed to the north with regional headquarters at the south end of Whitefish Lake. The new Whitefish Townsite was surveyed in 1903. Timber, farming, ranching and the railroad were the backbone of the town's economy—and culture—for the next 50 years. In 1947, the first ski lift was built at what became Big Mountain Ski Area, these days known as Whitefish Mountain Resort. While Whitefish is still a working railroad town, tourism is now the major economic driver. The Stumptown Historical Society is located in the historic train depot. *(Source: Whitefish Chamber of Commerce,* *https://www.whitefishchamber.org/history*)

4. Columbia Falls

Columbia Falls was established in 1891 in anticipation of the Great Northern Railroad. It was officially incorporated in 1908 and became a center of several timber mills and agricultural activities.   Two lumber mills still remain.   The former Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC) was established in 1955 and became a major employer.   The plant closed in 2009. With the town's proximity to Glacier National Park, tourism is becoming a major economic driver.   *(Source:* *https://columbiafallshistoricalsociety.org/)*

5. Glacier National Park

Evidence of human use in this area dates back over 10,000 years. The Blackfeet Indians controlled the vast prairies east of the mountains, while the Salish and Kootenai Indians lived in the western valleys. By 1891, the completion of the Great Northern Railway allowed a greater number of people to visit and Glacier National Park was established in 1920 as the country's 10th national park. In 1933, the completion of Going to the Sun Road opened up the park to automobile traffic.
*(Source: https://www.nps.gov/glac/learn/historyculture/index.htm)*

C. Population Trends

1. Population Growth

Flathead County has experienced steady population growth over the last 50 years. Since the 2010 Census, it is estimated that Flathead County has one of the highest growth rates in the state and is now one of four counties in Montana with a population exceeding 100,000.

Figure 2: Population Trends Flathead County
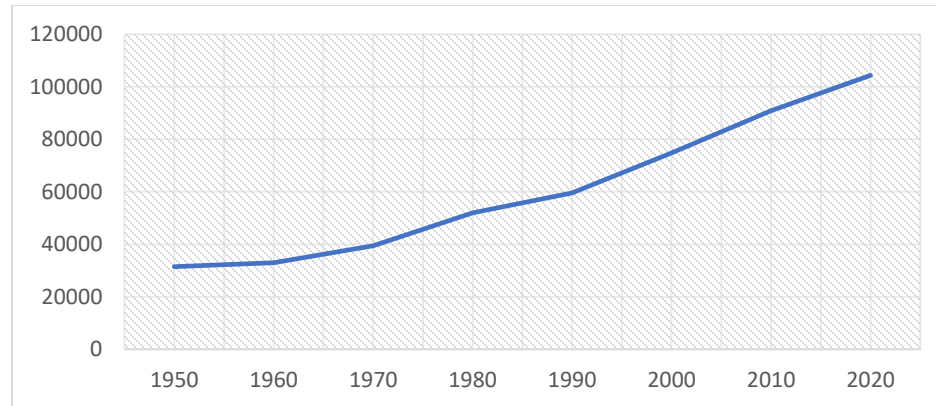
1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
31,495	32,965	39,460	51,966	59,545	74,774	90,928	104,349

Source: U.S. Census of the Population

While the majority (62%) of the population resides in the unincorporated areas, the three incorporated municipalities are growing at a higher rate than the rest of the county. From 2020 to 2022, it is estimated that population growth in Kalispell and Whitefish exceeded 15% compared to 3.1% for the rest of the county.

Table 2: Population Trends & Projections by Locality

	2010 Census	2020	% Change 2010-2020	2022 Estimate	% Change 2020-2022
Flathead County	90,928	104,349	14.8%	111,814	7.2%
Kalispell	19,927	24,558	23.2%	28,450	15.7%
Whitefish	6,357	7,751	21.9%	8,915	15.1%
Columbia Falls	4,688	5,308	13.2%	5,656	6.4%
Rest of County	59,956	66,732	11.3%	68,793	3.1%
Montana	989,415	1,084,225	9.6%	1,122,867	3.6%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census,

The Montana Department of Commerce last published projections for 2020 based on data from the Regional Economic Model Incorporated (REMI). This model projected an annual growth rate of 1.16% for Flathead County. These projections, however, were released pre-pandemic. The Montana Site Selector web site publishes ESRI population projections that are more current and reflect more rapid growth with an annual growth rate of 1.27%. The projections for 2028 are based on this higher growth rate. Whitefish is expected

to have the highest rate of growth in the county.   With the recent slow-down of building activity, however, this may indicate that growth will return to pre-pandemic levels.

Table 3: Population Projections - 2028

	Annual Growth Rate	2028 Projections
Flathead County	1.27%	122,250
Kalispell	1.69%	28,700
Whitefish	1.92%	9,961

Source: Montana Department of Commerce – Montana Site Selector (ESRI)

2.   Aging Trends

One of the major trends is the aging of the population. Currently, the median age in Flathead County is 42.2 compared to 38.8 nationally. According to projections from the Montana Department of Commerce (REMI model), the population over age 65 will increase by 6,802 (31%) by 2030.   The growth in this age group far outpaces the anticipated 11.5% population growth in the county during this same period.

Table 4: Age Distribution – Flathead County

	2020	2030	# Increase	% increase
Under 5	7,076	7,541	465	6%
Under 18	22,801	23,431	624	3%
65 and over	21,963	28,765	6,802	31%

Source: Montana Department of Commerce – Regional Economic Model Incorporated (REMI)

As illustrated below, seniors will comprise a larger portion of the future population, especially compared to the school age demographic.   This has workforce implications as well as impacts on providing senior services in the county. Mobility issues associated with aging also need to be addressed.

Figure 3: Projected Age Distribution for Flathead County
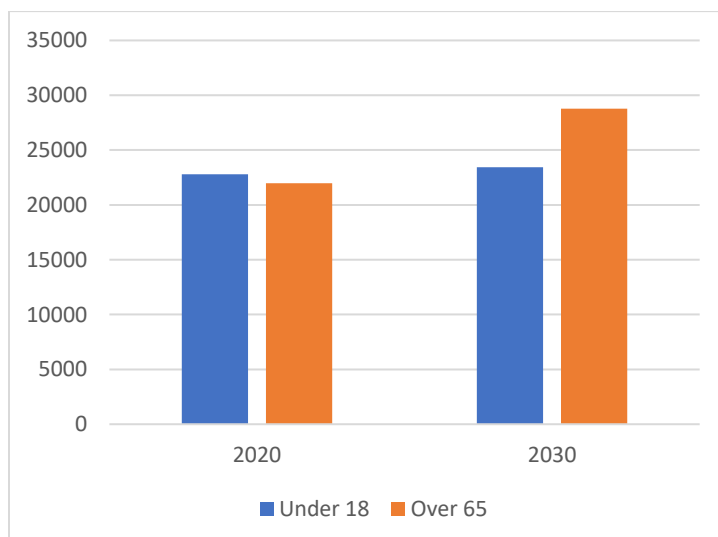
Source: Montana Department of Commerce – Regional Economic Models Incorporated (REMI)

3. Race

According to the 2020 Census of the population, the county has become more diverse. This has followed national trends.   The largest racial group in the county remains "White" (88.7%) followed by "American Indian and Alaska Native" (6.6%).   Other minority groups with significant representation include "Hispanic or Latino" (4.3%) and "Two or more races" (3.0%)

Table 5: Percentage of Population by Race 2010 & 2020

	White	**Black**	**Amer. Indian**	**Asian**	**Hawaiian Pacific Isl.**	**Two or More**	**Hispanic**
2010	95.5%	<1.0%	1.1%	<1.0%	<1.0%	2.1%	2.2%
2020	88.7%	<1.0%	6.6%	< 1.0%	<1.0%	3.0%	4.3%

Source: U.S. Census of the Population

4. Educational Attainment

Compared to national trends, Flathead County has a slightly higher percentage of high school graduates as well as people with some college, associate degree, and bachelor's degree.   The county lags the national average for persons with a graduate, professional or doctorate degree

Table 6:   Educational Attainment in Flathead County vs. U.S. Population

| **Educational Attainment in 2021**	**Number**	**% of Flathead Population 25+**	**U.S. % of Population 25+**
Total Population 25 and Older	73,763	100%	100%
Less than 9th Grade	780	1.1%	4.8%
9th to 12th, No Diploma	2,949	4.0%	6.3%
High School Graduate (includes equiv.)	20,566	27.9%	26.5%
Some College, No Degree	17,324	23.5%	20.0%
Associate Degree	7,323	9.9%	8.7%
Bachelor's Degree	16,527	22.4%	20.6%
Graduate, Professional or Doctorate Degree	8,294	11.2%	13.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

D. Income & Poverty

1. Income Trends

In 2021, Flathead had a per capita personal income (PCPI) of $58,964. This PCPI ranked 9th in the state and was 103.5 percent of the state average ($56,949) and 91.9 percent of the national average ($64,143). The 2021 PCPI reflected an increase of 5.7 percent from 2020.

Figure 4: Per Capita Income as a Percent of the United States
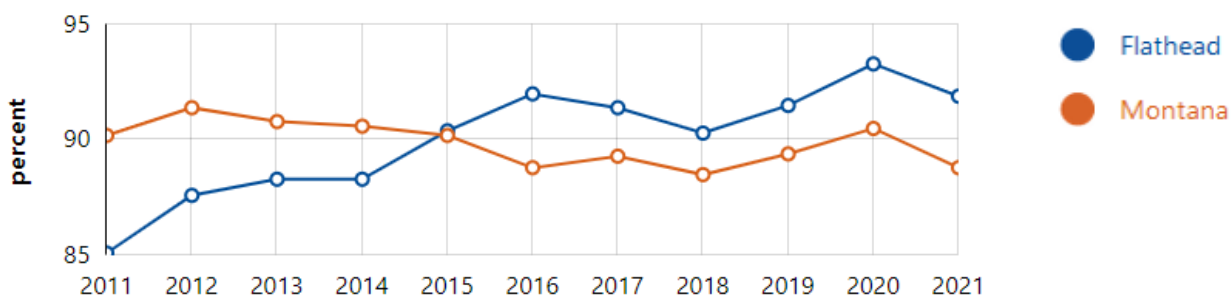
Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, www.bea.gov/regional/bearfacts

Total personal income includes net earnings by place of residence; dividends, interest, rent collections; and personal current transfer receipts. In 2021, Flathead County had a personal income of $6,394,934. This personal income ranked 4th in the state and accounted for 10.2 percent of the state total.   Compared to the rest of the nation, income from dividends and transfer payments (i.e., social security …) comprise a larger share of personal income for the Flathead County and Montana. This is due in part to the larger number of retirees in the region.

Figure 5: Personal Income by Type - 2021
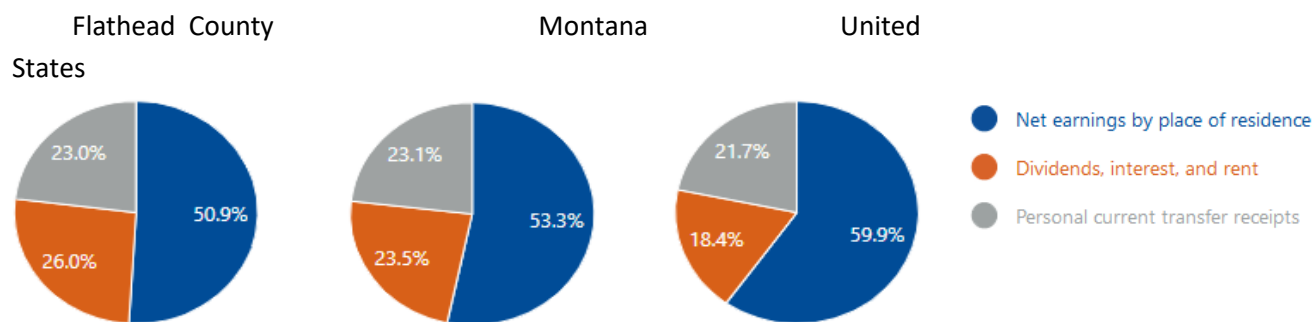
Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, www.bea.gov/regional/bearfacts

2. **Poverty Trends**

The poverty threshold is based on the number of people, number of related children under 18, and whether the primary householder is over age 65. Family income is then compared to the poverty threshold; if that family's income is below the threshold, the family is classified as being in poverty.

Each year the U.S. Census Bureau establishes thresholds to measure the number of people living below a certain income level. The numbers are used to formulate economic policy and distribute social service aid. The poverty threshold in 2021 for a single individual was $13,788 and for a family with 2 adults and 2 children it was $27,499.

According to 2021 data from the U.S. Census, 8.2% of the Flathead County population have incomes below poverty levels and 9.3% of children below the age of 18 live in poverty. Children under age 5 are more likely to be living in poverty than any other group.   Compared to the state, poverty levels are lower in Flathead County while median household income in the county is slightly higher than the State average.   Overall poverty level decreased from the 2017 level of 10.2%. This is consistent with national trends of a reduction in poverty due primarily to pandemic relief programs.

Table 7: Poverty Levels in Flathead County - 2021

% in Poverty	Flathead County	Montana
All ages in Poverty	8.2%	11.9%
Under age 18 in Poverty	9.3%	14.1%
Under age 5 in Poverty	15.7%	17.9%
Ages 65 years and over	7.4%	8.8%
Median Household Income	$66,126	$63,249

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, https://data.census.gov/table

E. Labor Force & Employment

1. Labor Force

Although the unemployment rate in Flathead County is slightly higher than the statewide average, it has steadily declined from a peak of 9.0% in 2012.   Both the county and state unemployment rates are lower than the national average of 3.7%.   A rate under 5% is an indication of a workforce shortage.

Table 8: Selected Labor Statistics – Flathead County & Montana

	Flathead County	Montana
Total Labor Force (May 2023)	54,078	575,362
Total Unemployed (May 2023)	1,551	13,439
Unemployment Rate (May 2023)	2.9%	2.3%

Source: Unemployment Rages = Montana Dept. of Labor & Industry; Education Data = U.S. Census, ACS Data

2. Employment by Industry

The Census Bureau collects annual data on business establishments, employment, and payroll. The following table indicates changes in employment since the last CEDS. Some trends to note include:

- In Flathead County, the "Health," "Retail," "Accommodation/Food Services" and "Administrative Support" sectors account for the largest share of private sector employment. The "Government" sector also has a large employment base.
- The "Construction," "Health," "Administration" and "Accommodations/Food Services" sectors showed the strongest employment growth from 2015 to 2021.
- Business sectors with a decline in jobs include "Management" (Corporate offices/bank holding companies), and "Information."
- Employment growth in the "Retail" sector slowed from 12.5% during the last CEDS to 7.5%. This may be representative of more on-line competition and more automation in the industry.

Table 9: Change in Employment Growth by Industry Sector 2015 & 2021

	2021 Establishments	2015 Employment	2021 Employment	# change	% change
Total All Sectors	**4,737**	**36,507**	**41,781**	**5,274**	**14.4%**
GROWTH SECTORS					
Construction	950	3,039	4,312	1,273	41.9%
Administration/Support**	282	2,692	3,578	886	32.9%
Professional/Scientific/Technical	505	1,547	1,879	332	21.5%
Accommodation & Food Services	420	4,910	5,801	891	18.1%
Health	420	6,200	7,268	1,068	17.2%
Real Estate	250	786	907	121	15.4%
Manufacturing	186	2,620	2,952	332	12.7%
Transportation	138	801	872	71	8.9%
Retail	459	6,071	6,514	443	7.3%
Wholesale	129	1,056	1,113	57	5.4%
Finance/Insurance	181	1865	1,964	100	5.4%
Arts/Entertainment/Recreation	128	1,172	1,209	37	3.2%
Government**	4976	4,897	4,976	79	1.6%
DECLINING SECTORS					
Education	40	571	523	-48	-8.4%
Agriculture/Forestry	50	169	153	-16	-9.5%
Information*	63	560	381	-179	-32.0%
Management	12	812	473	-339	-41.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau – County Business Patterns

* Newspapers, social media, software, publishing, telecommunications, motion picture & video distribution

** Employment services, property mgt, janitorial, packaging/labeling, and waste management

***Government data is from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics from years 2021 & 2018

3. Location Quotients & Wages

Location quotients (LQ) compare the concentration of an industry in an area compared to national averages. An LQ greater than 1.0 indicates an industry has a greater share of the local area employment than is the case nationwide. Data is collected for business sectors that typically comprise the local economic base. Base industries refer to sectors that contribute a significant percentage of jobs and earnings to a local area as well as bring in outside revenue which helps to grow the regional economy.

According to this measure there is a high concentration of jobs in the construction, leisure, and hospitality sectors while there is lower than national average in the information and professional/business sector. The concentration of government jobs is lower than the national average and statewide average.

There is a high concentration of leisure/hospitality jobs. This sector has among the lowest paying jobs of the basic industries. Except for the health care sector, average wages in Flathead County are lower than national averages.

Table 10: Private Sector Employment– Flathead County – 2022 Annual Average

Industry	Location Quotient	Avg. Weekly Wage - Flathead	Avg. Weekly Wage - U.S.
Construction	1.75	$1,089	$1,306
Leisure and Hospitality	1.71	$492	$539
Other Services	1.20	$673	n/a
Natural Resources/Mining	1.15	$1,078	$1,359
Education/Health Services	1.03	$1,245	$1,096
Financial Activities	1.02	$1,468	$2,961
Wholesale Trade, Transportation, Utilities	1.02	$916	$1,114
Manufacturing	0.81	$1,248	$1,560
Professional/Businesses Services	0.60	$1,221	$1,866
Information	0.36	$1,336	$3,069
Federal Government (Flathead County)	0.80	n/a	n/a
Local Government (Flathead County)	0.80	n/a	n/a
State Government (Flathead County)	0.45	n/a	n/a

Source: United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, https://www.bls.gov/cew/

Note: 1. Health/Education sector represents non-government jobs. School district jobs are included under "Local Government"

2. Retail Trade, Insurance and Real Estate sectors are not included as basic industries

3. Statewide Montana LQ for Government Jobs (Federal = 1.40   State = 1.49   Local = 1.06)

4. Cost of Living

The Council for Community and Economic Research collects data from cities nationwide to calculate a "cost of living index" (COLI) that allows for comparison of the overall price of goods and services between different areas of the United States. The national average is 100. In the first quarter of 2023, the COLI for Flathead County was 108.6 meaning it had an 8.6% higher cost of living than the national average. This compared to a COLI of 103.7 for the State of Montana.

5. Work Trends

The Covid pandemic resulted in marked changes to the composition of the workforce. According to the U.S. Census, the percentage of people working from home in Flathead County doubled from 2019 to 2021. This mirrored national trends. After the pandemic, there was also significant growth in the percent of self-employed workers in Flathead County. In 2021, the share of the workforce that was self-employed in Flathead County was 12.4% compared to just 5.9% nationwide. Although this remote workforce is typically not included as part of the employment totals for incorporated business establishments located in the county, the impact these workers have on population growth and earnings should not be overlooked.

Table 11:   Workplace Trends in Flathead County

	2019	**2021**
Self-Employed	7.5%	12.4%
Work from Home	8.1%	17.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

F. Retail Sales Trends

The Spending Potential Index (SPI) is household-based, and represents the amount spent for a product or service relative to a national average of 100.   Household spending, along with population growth, are factors in projecting retail demand. High population growth, combined with higher-than-average household spending for RVs, boats, home maintenance, remodeling, and lawn/garden indicates a strong retail demand in this sector.   Although Flathead County households spend below the national average for alcohol and dining out, this sector is also reliant on a visitation economy and growth in tourism should be considered as an indicator of future growth in those sectors.

Figure 6: Household Spending Index Potential Per Retail Group

Below Average	Average	Above Average
•Apparel •Computer •Alcoholic beverages •Food away from home •Home Exercise Equipment •Furniture	•Entertainment •Major appliances •Fishing/Hunting Equip •Food at home •Vehicle repair & maintenance •Bicycles	•Playground equipment •Water Sports •Video games/Arcade •Pets •Boats & RVs •Home remodel & maintenance •Lawn & garden

Source: ESRI Business Analysist, Montana Site Selector, https://svc.mt.gov/doc/siteselector/
*Note: SPI Range Average= 95 to 105, Below Average = 85 to 94, Above Average = 106+*

G. Tourism

1. Visitation Trends

With public lands, including Glacier National Park, comprising the majority of land area, the county attracts outdoor enthusiasts and eco-tourism. Visitation in the county peaked during the pandemic years due to a preference for outdoor vacations. Since international travel limitations have been tourists are choosing other destinations and local visitation has returned to previous levels in 2022. ITRR notes that until travel delays in the airline industry are resolved, tourism will likely remain at 2022 levels for the near term.

Figure 7: Visitation Flathead County
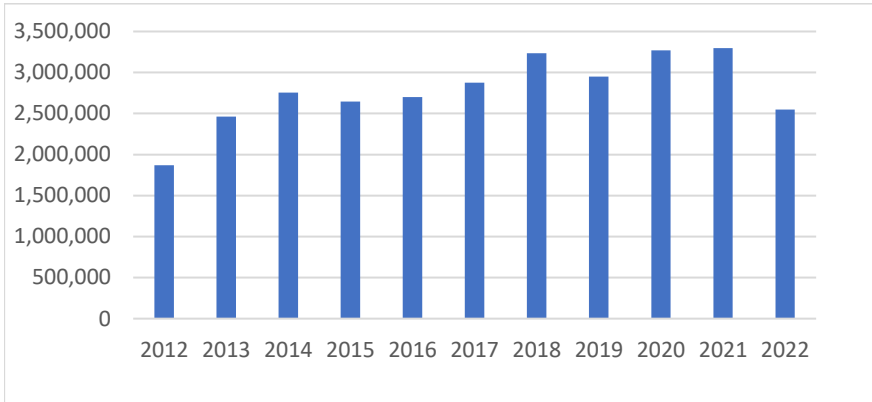
Source: University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITTR)

2. Visitation Expenditures & Economic Impact

According to ITRR surveys, the total amount of direct expenditures from visitation in Flathead County was $818,639,000. Including non-direct spending from employment in the travel industry, the combined economic impact was $1.3 billion. Statewide, only Gallatin County had a higher level of economic impact.

*Table 12: Total Nonresident Spending in Flathead County - 2022*

Restaurant, Bar	$174,309,000	21%
Outfitter Guide	$137,581,000	17%
Hotel/Motel	$104,375,000	13%
Gasoline, Diesel	$91,894,000	11%
Groceries, Snacks	$73,401,000	9%
Rental Cabin Condo	$72,453,000	9%
Auto Rental	$52,762,000	6%
Retail Sales	$48,036,000	6%
Made in MT	$28,347,000	3%
Campground, RV Park	$14,383,000	2%
Licenses, Entrance Fees	$13,487,000	2%
Vehicle Repairs	$2,524,000	<1%
Gambling	$1,917,000	<1%
Farmers Mkt.	$1,180,000	<1%
Total	**$818,639,000**	

Source: University of Montana Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research

3. Lodging Tax Revenue

The increase in lodging revenues may be influenced by higher occupancy rates, an increase in lodging rates, or an increase in the inventory of lodging rooms. Inventory may include short-term rentals through companies such as Airbnb and VRBO. Revenues collected from the 4% lodging facility use tax are deposited to a state special revenue fund and is used by the Department of Commerce to promote tourism and to promote the state as a location for the production of motion pictures and television commercials. Revenues collected from an additional 3% lodging facility sales tax are deposited to the General Fund. As indicated in the chart below, lodging revenue in Flathead County experienced a steady increase from 1996 to 2020. Coinciding with the pandemic years when visitors preferred outdoor destinations, visitation peaked, and the increased demand resulted in premium pricing. The combination of these factors resulted in a lodging tax revenue collection almost doubling from previous levels.

Figure 8: Lodging Tax Revenue Collections – Flathead County
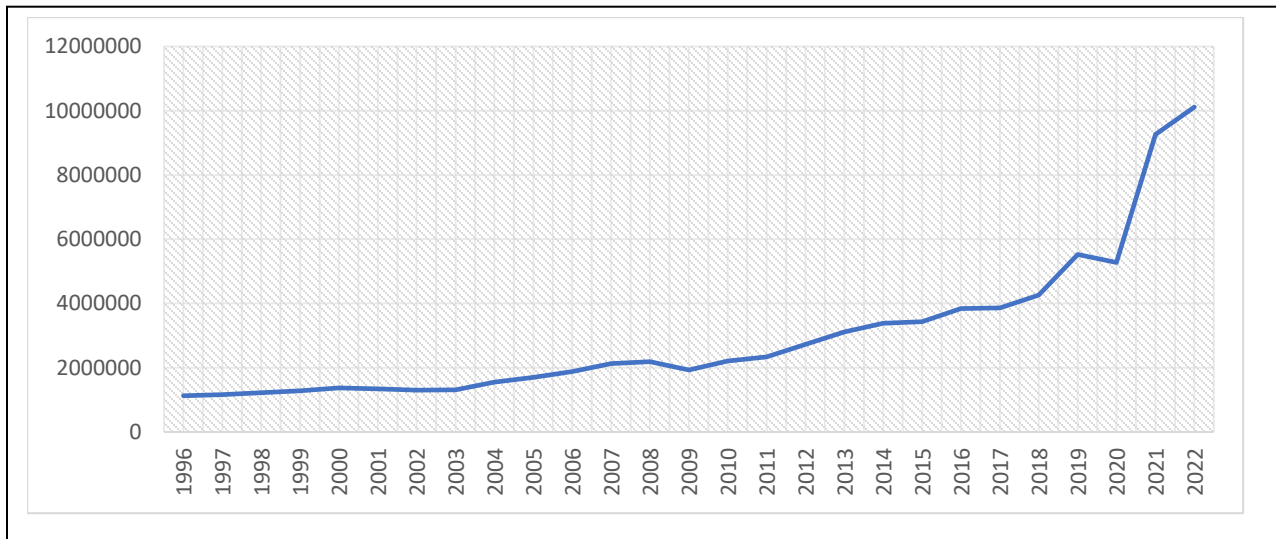
Source: MT Dept. of Commerce Montana Promotion Division,
http://marketmt.com/Resources/LodgingFacilityUseTax

4. Tourism Organizations

State, regional, and local organizations provide tourism planning, marketing and support services for the visitation industry. Whitefish and Glacier Country have created sustainability plans addressing resilience issues related to tourism.

- Montana Department of Commerce - Tourism Office - https://www.visitmt.com/
- Glacier Country - https://glaciermt.com/ (See Destination Stewardship Plan https://issuu.com/windfall/docs/glacier_country_destination_stewardship_plan)
- Kalispell Convention and Visitor Bureau https://kalispellchamber.com/kalispell-convention-visitor-bureau/
- Explore Whitefish/Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau - https://explorewhitefish.com/
- City of Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan https://www.cityofwhitefish.org/642/Sustainable-Tourism-Management-Plan-Stan

H. Housing

1. Housing Inventory

As indicated below, 71% of the housing inventory in the county is comprised of single-family homes. This is comparable to the statewide average but higher than the 60% rate Missoula and Gallatin counties. Both of those counties have large college student populations which are more likely to rent apartment units. In Flathead County, the majority of multi-family units are located within the three incorporated municipalities. Compared to the Missoula and Gallatin counties, Flathead has a higher percentage of single-family homes

Figure 9: Flathead County Housing by Type
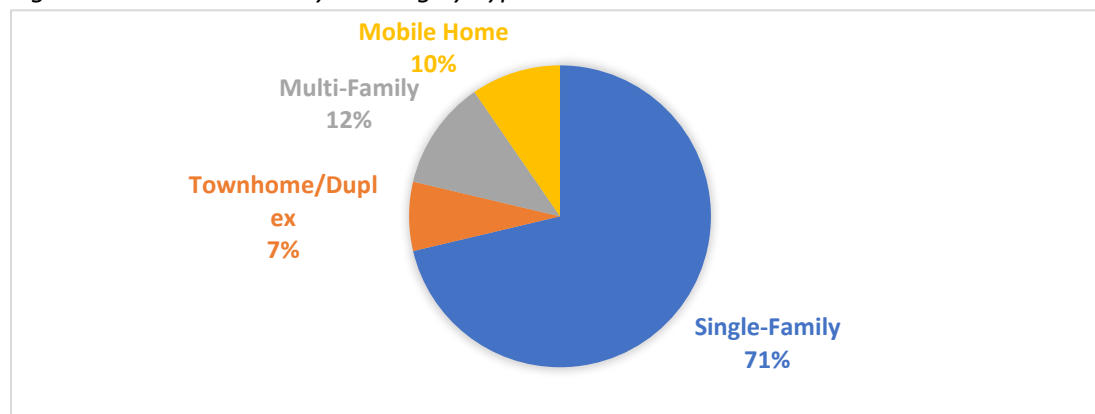
Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2017-2022

A housing unit is vacant if no one is living in it at the time of enumeration. According to U.S. Census Data, Flathead County typically has a high vacancy rate. Many of these vacancies, however, are due to the considerable number of seasonal homes and short-term rentals located in Whitefish and in the unincorporated areas. In the cities of Kalispell and Columbia Falls, the vacancy rate is around 7%.

Table 13: Flathead County – Housing County and Occupancy Statistics

	Flathead County	Kalispell	Whitefish	Columbia Falls
Total # Housing Units	49,595	10,399	4,660	2,281
Occupied	40,780	9,714	3,475	2,107
Vacant Units	8,815	685	1,185	174
Vacancy Rate	17.8%	6.6%	25.4%	7.6%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2017 - 2021

Vacancy rental data for Flathead County is influenced by the large amount of vacation rentals which are counted as vacant units. Montana statewide data, however, is more indicative of the general rental vacancy trends in the county. In 2019, the year prior to the pandemic, statewide rental vacancy rate was 5.0% compared to a 3.2% vacancy rate in 2022. A rental vacancy rate of less than 5.0% typically represents a tight market for rental properties. The current statewide vacancy rate of 3.2% is at the lowest level in over 30 years.

2. Supply Gap

Northwest Montana Association of Realtors maintains data on the supply of available for sale units. The absorption rate measures the pace of home sales. A rate with fewer than three months' supply is an indicator of a market with an "under supply." A supply rate of three to nine months is considered a normal market. According to data from 2022, there is an undersupply of houses in the affordable range of under $450,000 while there is an over-supply of houses in the higher range of $750,000.

Table 14: Supply Gap & Absorption Rate by Price Range thru October 2022 -Flathead County

Price Range	Sold Last 30-days	Active Listings	Normal Market Listings	Supply Gap	Absorption Rate (Months)
$0 - $150,000	1	3	6	-3	3.00
$150,001-$300,000	2	11	24	-13	2.75
$300,001-$450,000	24	34	144	-110	1.42
$450,001-$600,000	19	88	114	-26	4.63
$600,001-$750,000	10	63	60	3	6.30
$750,001+	26	309	156	153	11.88
Total	84	508	504	4	--

Note: Normal market listings are the estimated listings needed to meet demand for a 6-month period.
Source: Northwest Montana Association of Realtors, www.nmar.com/market-data-home/supply-data

3. Housing Affordability

Per Census data from 2021, median home values in Flathead County were higher than the state average. Average rental costs in the County were slightly higher than the state average.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a cost burden as housing costs that consume more than 30% of household income. Housing costs include monthly payments for rent or mortgage and utilities. According to this definition, four out of ten renters throughout the county are experiencing a cost burden.
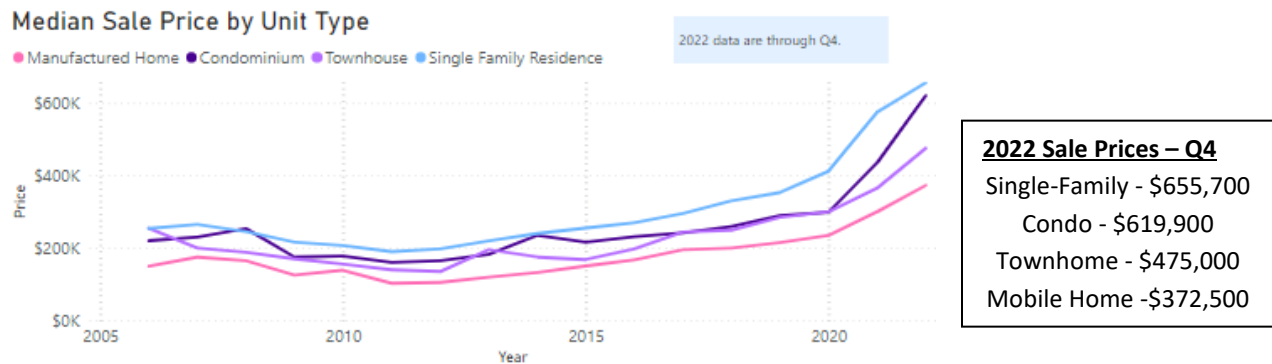
Table 15: Flathead County Housing Costs

	Flathead County	Montana
Median Home Value	$493,674	$322,900
Median Rental Cost	$883	$877
% Homeowners with Housing Cost > 30%	32.6%	27.7%
% Renters with Housing Cost > 30%	43.2%	42.2%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2021

More recent data compiled from the Multiple Listing Services (MLS), indicates the dramatic increase in average sale prices over the last few years. As of 2022, Whitefish had the highest median sales price in the county ($835,000) followed by Bigfork ($751,750), Columbia Falls ($562,000) and Kalispell ($438,500). (https://www.nmar.com/market-data-home/market-data) More recent data for "Fair Market Rent" is available from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development also indicates a rise in rents. In 2023, the average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in Flathead County was $1,010.

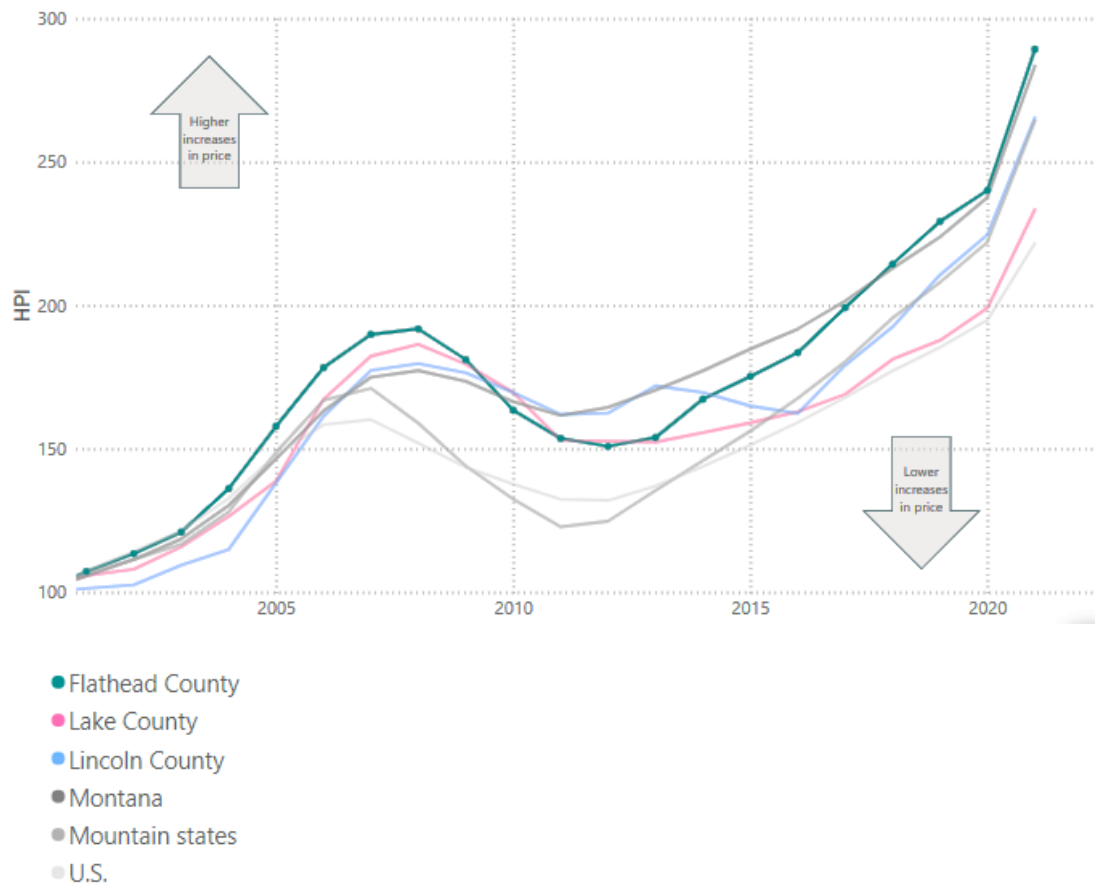*Figure 10: Flathead County Median Sales Price of Single-Family Homes*

Median Sale Price by Unit Type

● Manufactured Home ● Condominium ● Townhouse ● Single Family Residence

2022 data are through Q4.

2022 Sale Prices – Q4
Single-Family - $655,700
Condo - $619,900
Townhome - $475,000
Mobile Home -$372,500

Combined # Sold and Median Price for Selected Unit Types

Source: https://www.nmar.com/market-data-home/market-data

The Housing Price Index calculated by the Federal Housing Finance Agency is another indicator of the rising cost of housing. The index compares housing costs to the base year of 2000. As indicated in the chart below, there has been a dramatic increase in housing prices since 2015.

Figure 11: Housing Price Index (HPI) – Base Year 2000

● Flathead County
● Lake County
● Lincoln County
● Montana
● Mountain states
● U.S.

Source: Source: https://www.nmar.com/market-data-home/market-data

4. Projected Housing Demand

Per the "Flathead Valley Housing Market Analysis," Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) - University of Montana, the supply of new housing units lagged behind demand over the last 10-years creating a housing shortage. To meet pent-up demand and provide an adequate supply to meet anticipated population growth, 14,803 new housing units should be added to the housing stock over the next 10 years.

Figure 12: Shortage of Units, New Unit Demand and Total Unit Demand 2012-2032
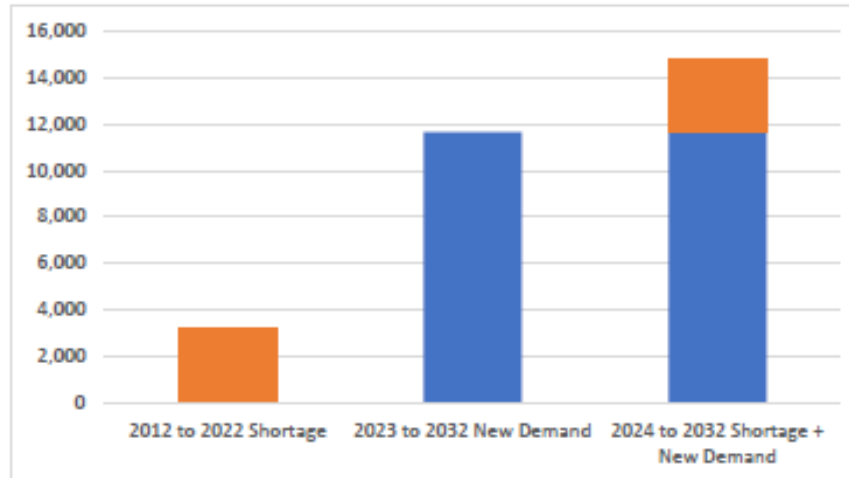
2012 to 2022 Shortage	3,161
2023 to 2031 New Demand	11,642
2023 to 2032 Shortage + New Demand	14,903

Source: University of Montana, Bureau of Business and Economic Research, 2023

5. Housing Service Providers and Initiatives

The following organizations provide housing services as well as conducting planning to meet housing needs in the county.

- Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana - https://www.capnm.net/
- Northwest Montana Community Land Trust - https://www.nwmtclt.org/
- Whitefish Housing Authority - https://whitefishhousing.org/
- Montana Department of Commerce Housing Division - https://housing.mt.gov/
- City of Whitefish Housing Committee - https://www.cityofwhitefish.org/594/Whitefish-Community-Housing-Committee
- Housing Whitefish - https://www.housingwhitefish.org/
- U.S. Department of Agriculture - Rural Development, Montana - https://www.rd.usda.gov/mt
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development – Montana Office - https://www.hud.gov/montana

I. Transportation

1. Road Network

The road network includes two major U.S. Highways. U.S. Highway 93 is a north-south highway that extends from the Canadian border and is the main route to Missoula. U.S. Highway 2 crosses the county from east-to-west and is the southern border of Glacier National Park. The county road system includes 430 miles of paved roads and nearly 700 miles of graveled roads. The 2020-2021 US Census named Kalispell the fastest growing micropolitan area in the country. Consequently, traffic volumes have increased dramatically. The table below indicates major active transportation projects from the Montana Department of Transportation to address traffic needs. In addition to these major construction projects, MDT will also be upgrading intersections, repaving roadway segments, and making safety improvements.

Table 16: Major Road Improvements Projects in Flathead County

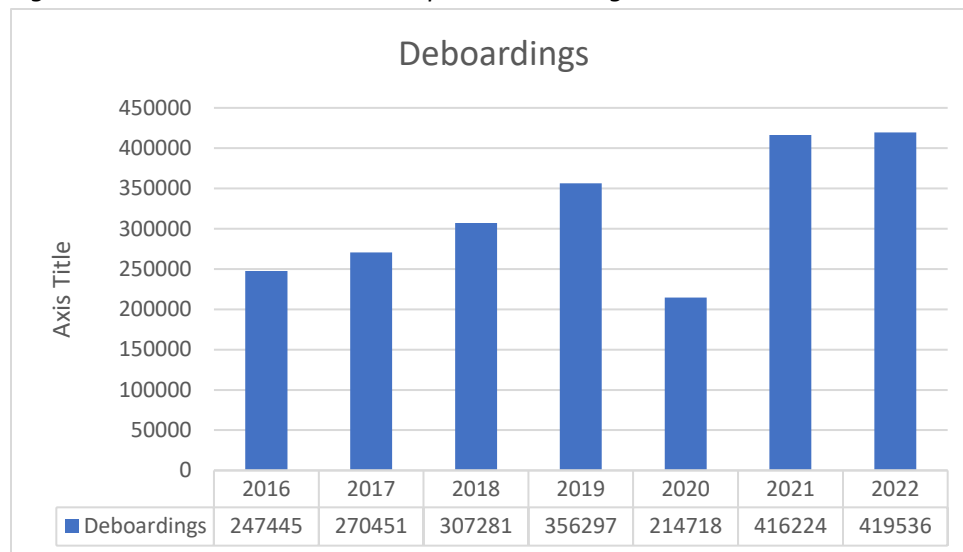| Road Segment	Status
Batavia Intersection Improvements	Improve traffic flow, vehicle safety, and safety for school children crossing US 2. Roundabout configuration and the engineering design is underway. Project funding has not yet been identified and no timeline for construction is available at this time.
Kalispell Bypass	Siderius Road/Basecamp Road Intersection (Engineering phase)
Old Reserve Drive Rural Reconstruction	Designing plans to reconstruct approximately 3 miles of Old Reserve Drive located northwest of Kalispell. This project begins at the intersection of Old Reserve Drive and Farm to Market Road and ends approximately 650 feet west of the Stillwater Road intersection
Reserve Drive: Hutton Ranch Road to Whitefish Stage Road	Design for improvements to include Project improvements will include widening Reserve Drive from Hutton Ranch Road to Whitefish Stage Road from three to five lanes, including a center turn lane, replacing the Stillwater River bridge deck to include sidewalks, and adding a shared-use path and a pedestrian sidewalk. In addition, intersection improvements to Hutton Ranch Road and Whitefish Stage Road will include dedicated turn lanes, signals, and concrete surfacing. Construction will occur in 2024 and 2025.
Other MDT roadway projects:	Kalispell ADA improvements near courthouse, US. Hwy 2 Slope improvements, Hwy 206 Safety Improvements, Sportsman Bridge, Woodland/2nd Street/Conrad Round-about, Hwy 35 Environmental Assessment
Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act "Safe Streets for All" grant	Kalispell and Whitefish have received funding from the IIJA to identify roadway and pedestrian safety improvements.

Source: Montana Department of Transportation, https://mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/active-projects.aspx

2. Airports

Glacier Park International Airport provides commercial passenger service and direct flights to multiple locations.   Six major airlines —Alaska, Allegiant, American, Delta, Sun Country, United and Avelo — serve the Flathead Valley with service to hubs in Seattle, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, Denver, and Las Vegas. In addition to daily and weekly service through these main hubs, direct seasonal flights with the various carriers are also available to New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago, Houston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Phoenix, Portland, San Francisco/Oakland, and San Diego. Glacier Airline Enhancement and Retention Outreach (AERO) works with Glacier Park International Airport to increase airline travel opportunities at GPI. As noted in the chart below, except for the pandemic year of 2020, there has been a steady increase in deboardings. The construction and equipping of an approximately 120,000 square foot terminal expansion to the Glacier Park International Airport is underway and is expected to be a 5-year project. (https://www.gpiexpansion.com/)

Figure 13: Glacier International Airport Deboardings

Deboardings	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Deboardings	247445	270451	307281	356297	214718	416224	419536

Source: Montana Department of Transportation, https://mdt.mt.gov/aviation/studies-research.aspx

Other general aviation airports in Flathead County are intended primarily for general and recreational use and have no scheduled carriers. General aviation airports are located in Kalispell, Whitefish, and Ferndale. The Kalispell City Airport provides charter services and is managed by the city. Whitefish Airport is owned and operated by the Montana Aeronautics Division of the Montana Department of Transportation. The Ferndale Airport is owned and operated by Flathead Municipal Airport Authority.

3. Rail

The main northern route of the BNSF Railway Company crosses Flathead County with a major facility located in Whitefish.   Freight service is also available to Glacier Rail Park in Kalispell.   The Amtrak "Empire Builder" provides daily passenger service with stops in Whitefish and West Glacier.

4. **Transit - Mobility**
   a) Flathead Mountain Climber (https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/mountain-climber)
Flathead County operates on-demand transit and para-transit service.
   - Services in Kalispell, Columbia Falls and Whitefish
   - Elementary school pick-ups during school year
   - Paratransit Dial-A-Ride - Door-to-door, appointment based, shared ride service for people with disabilities or other conditions that make it difficult to use fixed route city bus service
   - Currently no charge but will be implementing $1 fare in the future.

   b) Big Mountain Commercial Association (http://bigmtncommercial.org/)
The Big Mountain Commercial Association is a non-profit association that raises funds to pay for bus service to Whitefish Mountain Resort. The S.N.O.W Bus operates from December to April and provides free transit service from locations in Whitefish to Whitefish Mountain Resort.

5. **Walkability – Connectivity – Trails**
Flathead County has a partial network of multi-use trails that are maintained by multiple jurisdictions and non-profit groups. Various planning documents express a goal of expanding and connecting the trail networks between cities. State and federal agencies also maintain trails for hiking, mountain biking and other recreation activities on public land. Information on trails and trail plans in the county can be found at the various web sites.

   - Montana Department of Transportation - https://www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/
   - Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks - https://fwp.mt.gov/stateparks
   - Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation - https://dnrc.mt.gov/TrustLand/about/field-offices
   - Flathead County Parks & Recreation Department - https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/parks-and-recreation
   - City of Whitefish, "Connect Whitefish: Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan" http://www.cityofwhitefish.org/planning-and-building/long-range-plans.php
   - Foys to Blacktail Trail – http://www.foystoblacktailtrails.org/
   - Whitefish Legacy Partners/Whitefish Trails - https://www.whitefishlegacy.org/
   - Flathead Trails Association - https://www.flatheadtrails.org/partners
   - Gateway to Glacier - https://www.gatewaytoglaciertrail.com/
   - Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Plan - https://mtaccessproject.com/bigfork-area-outdoor-recreation-plan/
   - Glacier Nordic Club - https://www.glaciernordicclub.org/
   - Montana Conservation Corp - https://www.mtcorps.org/
   - Flathead Land Trust - https://www.flatheadlandtrust.org/
   - Rails-to-Trails of Northwest Montana - https://railstotrailsofnwmt.com/
   - USFS Flathead National Forest - https://www.fs.usda.gov/flathead
   - City of Kalispell Move Transportation Plan 2040 - https://mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/brochures/kalispell-tranplan-21.pdf

J. Infrastructure & Utilities

1. **Water & Sewer**

- **Municipal Water & Wastewater Systems**
  The incorporated cities of Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls all operate their own water and wastewater systems. New developments must annex into the municipality to connect to these systems. City websites have more information on these facilities.

- **Water and Sewer Districts**
  The largest water and sewer districts serve the communities of Bigfork, Coram, Evergreen, Hungry Horse, Lakeside, Martin City and Somers. Each serves between 500 and 8,000 residents and businesses. The Coram, Hungry Horse and Martin City Districts offer public water services only. No public sewer treatment is available. The Bigfork and Lakeside Districts operate their own sewer treatment facilities, while Somers contracts with Lakeside for sewer treatment. Evergreen contracts with the City of Kalispell for sewer treatment services.   In addition to the major districts described above, there are other small water and/or sewer districts that have been established to serve larger scale development and subdivisions.   A list of districts and their boards can be found on the following web site. https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/commissioners-office/our_boards

- **Septic Systems**
  Areas that are not served by a water or sewer district rely on individual wells and septic systems. Flathead County has an estimated 30,000 wastewater treatment systems already in-place, with continued growth to occur in the upcoming years. The increasing number of septic systems, in addition to the dwindling amount of available land for current septage disposal methods, has created a potential problem that could negatively impact the environment and groundwater resource in the valley. The County is exploring the creation of a regional solution to mitigate issues related to septage and biosolids for the community. The county recently purchased a possible site in the lower valley. https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/health/environmental-health/septage-treatment

2. **Electric & Gas**
   - **NorthWestern Energy**: Provides natural gas to the incorporated cities.
     http://www.northwesternenergy.com/

   - **Flathead Electric Cooperative (**https://www.flatheadelectric.com/ **)** provides the electric power to the core of Flathead County. The primary power source is hydro-electric power generated by the Federal Columbia River Power System through the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). As a result of being served primarily by hydropower, Flathead County has one of the least carbon-intensive electric grids, and members enjoy some of the most affordable electric rates in the country. Innovative projects to invest in renewable energy include community solar, biomass project, Whitefish hydro project, landfill gas-to-energy project and energy storage study. https://www.flatheadelectric.com/about-my-co-op/how-we-provide-power/landfill-gas-to-energy-plant/

K. Broadband

1. FCC Broadband Speeds

According to data collected by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Montana lags the nation in providing fixed high-speed broadband and Flathead County lags the rest of the State in access to broadband services. Fixed broadband technologies include cable, DSL, or fiber.   The FCC defines minimum broadband speeds as 25 mbps download/3mbps upload. To fully access video and other applications related to telework or telehealth, however, speeds of 100/20 mbps are recommended.   Nationwide, 33.5% of households have access to Gigabit (1,000 mbps) speeds. Statewide, 16.4% of households have access to gigabit services while in Flathead County, only 2.4% of households have comparable access.

Figure 14 : Comparisons of Fixed Broadband Speeds

https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/home
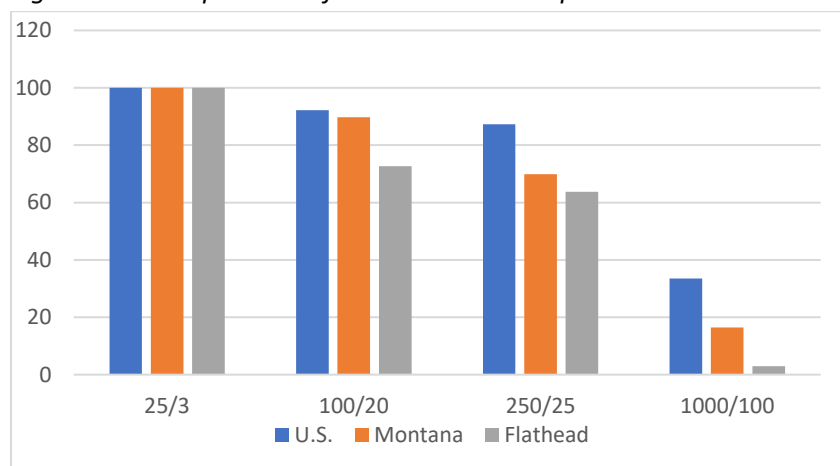
2. Broadband Adoption – Digital Equity

Broadband adoption is necessary for education, employment, civic participation, health care and other essential services. Even when broadband services are available, adoption of broadband services varies due to factors such as affordability, lack of computers or other devices to access the Internet and lack the technology skills to use Internet applications. Reliability of Internet services is another barrier to adoption.

According to the U.S. Census 13% of households in Flathead County lack an Internet connection at home while 10% of households lack a computer, tablet, or smartphone. This is comparable to statewide averages. Populations more likely to lack services include seniors, veterans, individuals with disabilities, racial minorities and rural residents. Programs to address broadband adoption include the FCC Affordability Connect Program and Lifeline program as well as local libraries programs.

3. ConnectMT *(https://connectmt.mt.gov/IIJA/Funding)*

In 2021 legislation established ConnectMT to administer American Rescue Act funds. The Department of Administration (DOA) for administering the broadband infrastructure deployment program.   The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides additional funding for broadband. As part of the program, the state has prepared broadband deployment and digital equity Plans.

L. Local Services

1. Education & Libraries

- **Flathead Schools** - Flathead County communities support twenty-three independent school districts. The four high school districts include Bigfork, Columbia Falls, Kalispell, and Whitefish. The high schools work in conjunction with Flathead Valley Community College to provide increased local opportunities to students. The nineteen elementary districts partner with their respective high school districts to assure "readiness" in transitions.   The Flathead County Superintendent of Schools maintains a list of districts. https://flathead.mt.gov/schools/districts.php   Montana Office of Public Instruction has data on private schools in the County.

- **Flathead Valley Community College -** Flathead Valley Community College has two campuses located in Kalispell and Libby.   It provides the following services (www.fvcc.edu)
  - Associate degrees, technical programs, select undergraduate and graduate degrees through partnerships with various Montana colleges and universities
  - Running Start program for eligible area high school students
  - Customized workforce training for area businesses
  - Online Classes, Non-Credit Continuing Education & Enrichment classes
  - Wachholz College Center (Performing Arts Center, gymnasium)

- **ImagineIf Library -** The library is funded through the County with the main branch being in Kalispell. Branches are also located in Columbia Falls and Bigfork. The Library Foundation is conducting fundraising and working with the County on a new library facility in Bigfork.   The library board is exploring options for a new main library facility in Kalispell.   https://imagineiflibraries.org/

- **Whitefish Library** – The Whitefish Community Library is a non-profit library that serves the community of Whitefish.   https://whitefishlibrary.org/

- **West Shore Community Library –** West Shore Community Library is an all-volunteer non-profit located in Volunteer Park in the community of Lakeside.   http://www.wsclibrary.org/

2. Health Care

- **Greater Valley Health** - Greater Valley Health provides medical and dental services through the Flathead Community Health Center. Greater Health led the collaborative initiative to conduct a "Community Health Needs Assessment" to identify community health needs and define priorities for addressing the needs. https://greatervalleyhealth.org/

- **Flathead City - County Health Department** - Provides environmental health services as well as some community health services.   http://flatheadhealth.org/

- **Logan Health** - Logan Health is a nonprofit, 622-bed health system based in Flathead County. The main medical campus is in Kalispell with a smaller 25-bed facility in Whitefish. Core services include: Behavioral Health, Cancer Care, Heart/Lung/Vascular, Neuroscience, Orthopedics, Pediatrics, Primary Care, Surgical Services and Women's Health. On Sept. 1, 2023, Billings Clinic and Logan Health united to create one health care system, serving patients across Montana and Wyoming. https://www.logan.org/

M. Environment – Climate Resiliency

1. Environmental Remediation

    a. Superfund

EPA's Superfund program is responsible for cleaning up some of the nation's most contaminated land and responding to environmental emergencies, oil spills and natural disasters. To protect public health and the environment, the Superfund program focuses on making a visible and lasting difference in communities, ensuring that people can live and work in healthy, vibrant places. Sites on the National Priorities List (NPL) are often referred to as Superfund sites. Superfund is the federal program that investigates and cleans up contamination at sites that pose a risk to human health and the environment. http://deq.mt.gov/DEQAdmin/cfac

On September 7, 2016, the EPA added the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC) site to the National Priority Listing, effective September 9, 2016. CFAC permanently closed in March 2015. In 2023, the proposed clean-up plan was available for public comment. https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/csitinfo.cfm?id=0800392

    b. Montana Department of Environmental Quality

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality defines brownfields as real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. DEQ addresses blighted or underutilized brownfields properties by:
- Promoting the redevelopment of Brownfields sites throughout Montana
- Serving as a resource for local communities, non-profits, and economic development authorities
- Making petroleum Brownfields eligibility determinations, as delegated by the EPA. DEQ has developed their guidance document and eligibility form to maximize the number of Brownfields eligible sites in Montana, while ensuring that the federal Brownfields requirements are met.
- Ensuring that state cleanup standards are achieved to protect human health and the environment when federal Brownfields funds are spent on cleanup.

https://deq.mt.gov/cleanupandrec/Programs/brownfields

    c. Kalispell Brownfields

The Kalispell Brownfield Program is voluntary and available within the City limits. Public or private property owners may access environmental site assessments including phase I, phase II and site clean-up planning if needed to address regulatory agency requirements, complete due diligence in a property transfer/sale, or to learn more about their property in advance of selling it. Assessments are completed at no cost to the property owner and information on the presence/absence of contamination is provided to the owner upon completion of the work. In addition, any site assessed through this program is potentially eligible for Brownfields cleanup funds. https://www.kalispell.com/633/Brownfields-Program

    d. Montana West Economic Development

In 2023, the United States Environmental Protection Agency announced that Montana West Economic Development has been selected to receive a $500,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant. These funds can be used to fund assessment of Brownfields sites throughout Flathead County, identifying contaminated industrial and commercial properties that may be cleaned up and returned to productive reuse and redevelopment. https://dobusinessinmontana.com/brownfields/

2. Climate Resiliency

    a. <u>Climate Indicators</u>

Climate Conditions are projected to change over the next 50 years. The "Climate Mapping for Resilience and Adaptation" tool provides indicators on how such change may impact individual counties. Projections for Flathead County include:

- Extreme Heat – Annual days with a maximum temperature over 90 degrees is expected to increase but will not be as severe as eastern Montana or other regions in the U.S.
- Drought/Wildfire – The number of dry days per year with no precipitation and the consecutive number of dry days is projected to increase leading to higher wildfire risk and agricultural impacts.
- Floods – While the number of wet days is projected to decrease, annual precipitation is projected to slightly increase. This translates into intense rain events with precipitation over one inch.
- Snowpack - Days with a maximum daily temperature below 32 degrees is projected to decrease - contributing to early snow melt, increased flooding and drought risks.

Source: https://resilience.climate.gov/

    b. <u>Climate Resiliency Initiatives</u>

Planning initiatives and programs in Flathead County addressing climate resiliency include:

- Countywide Hazard Mitigation Plan - Flathead County and the cities of Columbia Falls, Kalispell, and Whitefish are currently participating in the Western Montana Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan sponsored by Montana Disaster Emergency Services. https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/oes/emergency-management

- Community Wildfire Protection Plans (Flathead County, Whitefish, Elkhorn) https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/oes/fireservice

- Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes Climate Plan - http://csktclimate.org/index.php

- Glacier National Park Climate Information - https://www.nps.gov/glac/learn/nature/climate-change.htm

- City of Whitefish Climate Action Plan https://www.cityofwhitefish.org/DocumentCenter/View/339/2018-Climate-Action-Plan-PDF

- Montana West Economic Development and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation "Fuels Reduction Program", https://dobusinessinmontana.com/fuels-reduction/

- Flathead County Environmental Health –Outdoor air quality program including air quality monitoring sites, real time air quality information, burn permits and fire restrictions. https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/health/environmental-health

- Kalispell & Whitefish – Participating in Montana C-PACE program offering financing for energy efficiency upgrades. https://lastbestpace.com/

- Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) – Recipient of a Climate Pollution Reduction Grant from EPA to create a Montana Climate Action Plan. https://deq.mt.gov/

III. Community Engagement

A. Overview of Process

MWED is committed to an equitable planning process and implementation activities.   This includes transparent procedures, broad representation from the community, and accessible engagement opportunities such as meetings, surveys and on-line public comment. The CEDS is intended to be a dynamic document that will allow for a range of perspectives and viewpoints through continual public engagement.

B. Focus Groups

In April and May of 2023, Montana West conducted six community focus group discussions throughout the County. Meetings were open to the public and were promoted through the local media, MWED website and various listserves. Over 100 people representing citizens, businesses, and a broad range of stakeholders participated in the meetings.   The table summarizes comments on county-wide issues and national/state.

Topic	Comments
Countywide Assets	• Outdoor Recreation – Scenic beauty • Abundant water resources to support growth • Affordable electricity • Engaged community – partnerships • Assets - Airport, health care, community college, Kids Sports, Local foods
Countywide Challenges	• Housing affordability and low inventory to meet needs • Short-term rentals & remote works impact housing affordability • Condition of road network & poor walkability/connectivity • Limited options for public transit • Infrastructure and local services not keeping up with rapid growth (water, sewer, roads, emergency services …) • Childcare costs & supply • Labor shortages – Skilled labor, retirements, turnover, … • Need better long-range planning for growth • Mental health services not meeting demand • Over tourism – Glacier National Park reservation system • C-PACE program should be countywide
National/State Trends	• Inflation • Higher interest rates • Aging population – More demand for aging services • Supply chain issues cause delay and higher costs • Increase cost for construction (materials & labor) • Divisive political climate
Top Priorities for CEDS	• Housing affordability and diversification of the housing stock • Funding to meet infrastructure needs • Childcare – Affordability & new facilities • Workforce development – address labor shortages • Sustainable growth – collaborative land use planning

While the section above identifies trends that apply countywide, there were some issues that were specific to each of the communities that hosted focus groups. These issues and opportunities suggest that each community may want to adopt specific strategies to address these topics.

Table 10:   Community Specific Feedback

Community	Opportunities/Assets	Issues
Kalispell	• Available land for development (Zoned with infrastructure) • Rail line – rail park • County seat, trade/service center • Opportunity Zone (expires in 2026) • FVCC career center, entrepreneur launch pad	• Pockets of blight • Crime – homelessness (related to mental health issues) • Lack of community support for school/library bond referendums • Downtown tax base • New site for library
Whitefish	• Whitefish Philanthropy • Whitefish Trail • Whitefish Mountain Resort • Rail hub/Amtrak • Entrepreneurs/Downtown business	• Housing shortage/costs • Broadband issues outside city limits • Many employees must commute to Whitefish, need better transit • Sustainable tourism
Columbia Falls	• Proximity to Glacier National Park • Gateway-to-Glacier Trails • Rail service & Hwy 2 • Columbia Falls Chamber designated "Destination Market Organization" • Downtown development	• Public transit is limited • Land not available/ready for development • Recent childcare center closure
Bigfork	• Theater – Cultural opportunities • Flathead Lake • Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Plan • Update of Bigfork Neighborhood Plan	• Broadband issues in areas around town • Not bikeable – walkability issues • Lack of activities for young families • Tourism overcrowding • No public transit • Highway 83 safety issues
Evergreen	• Centrally located • Room to grow but lacks infrastructure • Proximity to airport • Affordable housing – lower taxes • Flathead Electric • Boys & Girls Club • Evergreen sidewalk project • Technology upgrade by Spectrum • School/Greater Valley Health partnership	• Infrastructure at capacity • Traffic flow • Unincorporated – wants more of a voice in local planning • Stigma about Evergreen (Lower socioeconomic status, crime) • Floodplain • Loss of major retailers • Concentration of marijuana dispensaries
Lakeside/Somers	• Flathead Lake access -Volunteer Park • Lakeside Community Council is reactivating – may update Neighborhood Plan	• Highway 93 safety issues • Need more meeting spaces • More local control in planning decisions

C. Survey Results

In addition to the focus group, MWED conducted an on-line survey to obtain more widespread input from the community. The survey link was sent to e-mail lists by MWED, local cities and Chambers of Commerce in the county. The link to the on-line survey was on the MWED and FCEDA web sites and a press release and media coverage directed community members to these web sites to take the survey. A total of 79 people responded to the survey. Below indicate the characteristics of the respondents.

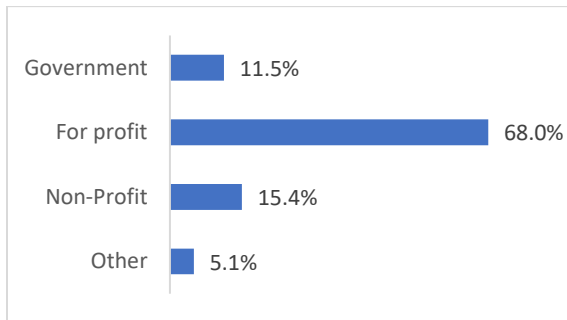*Figure 15: Respondent Characteristics by Type of Business*

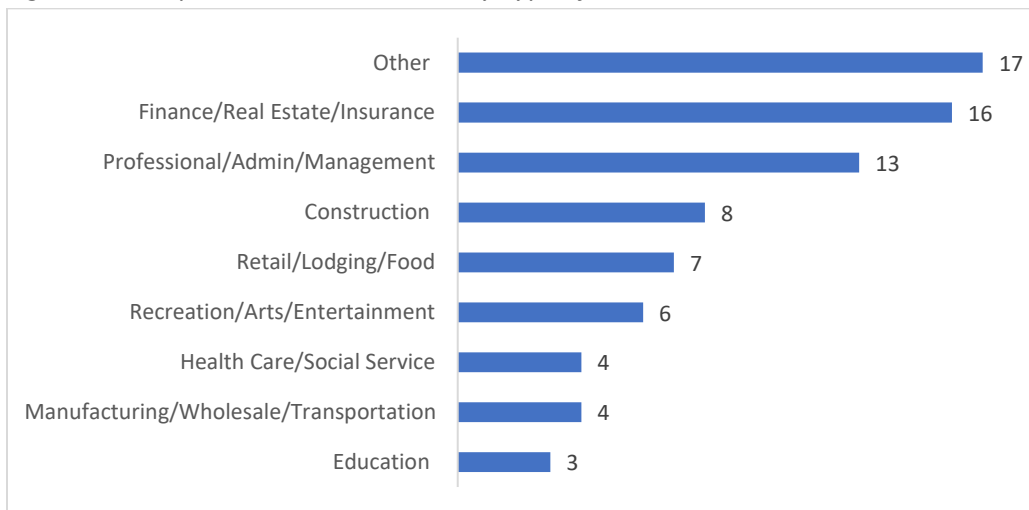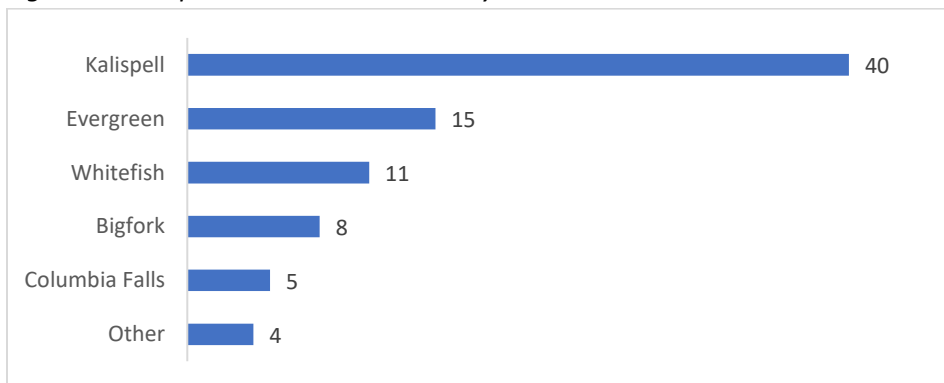*Figure 16: Respondent Characteristics by Type of Business*

Figure 17: Respondent Characteristics by Location

On a scale of one to four with "Excellent" equal to four and "Poor" equal to one, the survey asked respondents to rank the ability of infrastructure to meet existing needs in the county.   A higher score represents more satisfaction with the infrastructure.   Electric power and water supply ranked the highest while public transit and trail system/sidewalks ranked the lowest.

Table 17: Satisfaction with Infrastructure

| Infrastructure/Facility	Rank
Good/Excellent	
Electric Power	3.07
Water Supply	3.06
Airport Service	2.96
Sewer Infrastructure	2.61
Fair/Poor	
Rail Service	2.58
Broadband	2.37
Road network	2.37
Trail system/Sidewalks	2.01
Public Transit	1.39

On a scale where "Very Positive" is equal to one and "Very Negative" is equal to five, the survey asked respondents to rank how various factors affect economic vitality. A lower score indicated the factor to have a more positive impact.   Access to outdoor recreation ranked the most positive while housing availability ranked the most negative.

Table 18: Satisfaction with Services and Community Amenities

Services	Rank
Positive/Very Positive	
Access to outdoor recreation	1.59
Access to quality education	2.35
Access to arts and entertainment	2.52
Availability of capital and financing	2.93
Somewhat Negative/Very Negative	
Technology infrastructure – broadband	3.35
Community walkability	3.36
Public safety	3.41
Transportation infrastructure	3.53
Public transit	3.68
Commercial/industrial real estate availability	3.71
Mental health services	3.86
Housing availability	4.57

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of services or programs that would help their organization thrive.   Workforce housing ranked the highest followed by expanded childcare options and technology infrastructure.   Of significance is that public transit and trails/sidewalks ranked higher than other traditional economic development programs such as financing, business planning or marketing assistance.

*Figure 18: Ranking of services that May Help Respondent's Organization to Thrive*
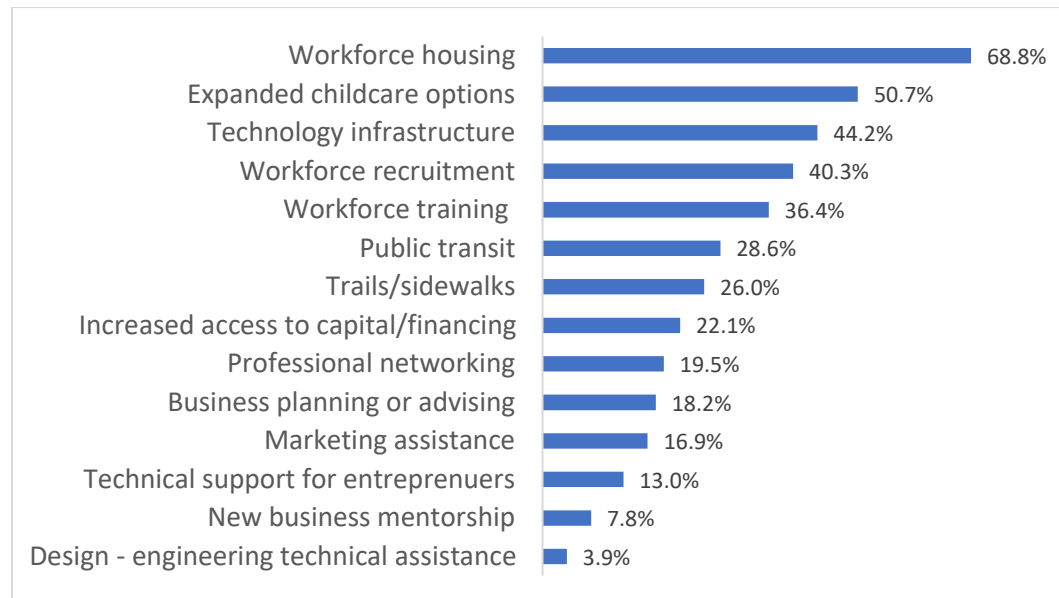
On a scale with one equal to "Not a Concern" and four equal to "Major Constraint", the survey asked respondents to rank how various factors may be a barrier to their organization.   A higher score indicates the factor is more problematic.   Inflation and professional workforce availability had the highest scores while availability of capital/finance were the lowest.

Table 19: Ranking of Potential Barriers or Constraints

Potential Barrier	Rank
Not A Concern/Mildly problematic	
Availability of capital/finance	1.90
Organizational capacity	2.11
Public transit	2.14
Community walkability	2.17
Demand for services/products	2.46
Somewhat problematic/Major constraint	
Federal regulations	2.56
Local regulations	2.61
Entry-level workforce availability	3.11
Professional workforce availability	3.32
Inflation	3.32

Respondents were asked to select the three most important types of infrastructure to meet the future needs of their business in Flathead County.   Road network and broadband were selected as the most important while rail service and water supply were selected least often.

Figure 19:   Ranking on Importance of Types of Infrastructure
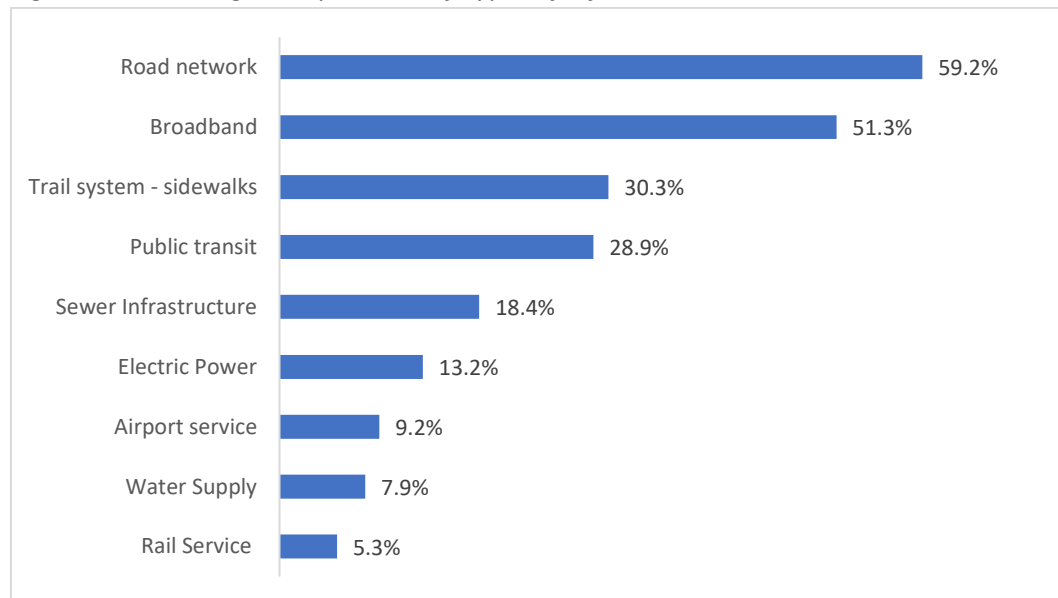
On a scale of with "Not a Concern" equal to one and "Major Constraint" equal to four, the survey asked respondents to rank the impact of various factors on the cost of doing business for the organization.   A higher score indicates that the factor is more likely to be a major constraint.   The cost of labor was ranked the highest as being a constraint among the various cost factors.

Table 20: Ranking of Impact of Cost Factors on Business

Cost Factor	Rank
Cost of labor	3.39
Cost of health care	2.99
Cost of materials/supplies	2.93
Cost of transportation/freight	2.32
Cost of energy	2.18

IV. SWOT Analysis & Indicators

The SWOT is a strategic planning tool to develop clear objectives based on regional capacity. A SWOT analysis identifies the region's competitive advantages as well as factors that can hinder a region from realizing its goals. Per the EDA CEDS guidelines, a SWOT analysis elements include:

- **Strengths** are a region's relative competitive advantages (e.g., industry supply chains and clusters, extensive port, rail, and broadband assets, specialized workforce skills, higher education levels, collaboration among stakeholders) and often are internal in nature;
- **Weaknesses** are a region's relative competitive disadvantages (e.g., a risk-averse or change-resistant regional culture), also often internal in nature;
- **Opportunities** are occasions for regional improvement or progress, often external in nature;
- **Threats** are chances or occasions for negative impacts on the region or regional decline, also often are external in nature.

Data from the community profile and public input are the basis for the SWOT analysis.   Additionally, the appendix includes the results from several analytical tools that measure the regions "Innovation Capacity" and "Economic Development Capacity".   The following SWOT analysis also includes the indicators that were used to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.   The data for these indicators are described throughout the CEDS document.   They provide a reference point to evaluate and track outcomes from the goals and objectives in this plan.

STRENGTHS	INDICATORS
Outdoor Recreation	Focus groups, Community survey Trail organizations Growth policies
Historically Abundant water resources	Growth Policies Community Survey
Affordable electricity	Flathead Electric Cooperative – Rate info Community Survey
Human Capital – Quality of Life - Education	Economic Development Capacity Index Educational attainment (U.S. Census) Community Survey
Industry Capacity - Business environment – Small business	Economic Development Capacity Index Innovation Capacity Profile Focus groups
Employment and productivity	Innovation Capacity Profile Employment Growth (County Business Patterns)
Rail Service – Rail Park	BNSF Rail Stats, Amtrak passenger data Rail park occupancy
Regional Center (Retail, health care, …)	Economic – retail trade data Logan Health
Tourism Economy	Whitefish Mountain Resort visitation data Glacier National Park visitation data ITRR Data, Lodging tax, Location Quotients

WEAKNESSES	INDICATORS
Work force – Labor Shortage	Focus groups, community survey Census, employment & economic data
Housing affordability - availability of units - impact of short-term rentals	Census ACS & HUD Housing Data Northwest Montana Assoc. of Realtor Data Growth Policies University of Montana, BBER projections Focus groups - Community survey
Road conditions - Poor walkability – connectivity of trails – Public transit/mobility	Focus groups - Community survey Growth policies – Trail Plans MDT Transportation plans & projects Flathead County Mountain Climber Transit
Population Growth & increase in tourism outpacing capacity of infrastructure & local services. Need for collaborative planning process to address.	Growth policies – municipal facility plans Focus groups – Community survey Census population data, tourism data
Broadband – Digital Equity	Focus groups - community survey BroadbandUSA and FCC Data Census ACS Data
Child care capacity & costs	Focus groups - community survey Kalispell Chamber Child Care Study Montana DPHHS data & programs
Institution and Partnership Capacity	Economic Development Capacity Index Focus groups
Mental Health Services	Community Health Needs Assessment Focus groups – survey

OPPORTUNITIES	INDICATORS
Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) career center & entrepreneur launch pad	FVCC program statistics
Update of growth policies & land use plans	Bigfork & Lakeside Neighborhood Plan updates Whitefish Growth Policy Land zoned and available for development Downtown plans (Kalispell, Whitefish)
Airport Expansion	Glacier Park International Airport Expansion Plans
Trails & Sidewalk projects/plans	Evergreen Sidewalk project Glacier to Gateway Trails (Columbia Falls) Whitefish Trails Parkline Trail/Rails-to-Trails (Kalispell) Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Plan
Philanthropy	Whitefish Community Foundation, Library Fdn. Non-profits
Broadband programs	ARPA & IIJA grants for broadband
Agriculture	Census of Agriculture FVCC & MWED Agriculture programs

THREATS	INDICATORS
Inflation – Cost of Living	Focus groups – Community survey Cost of Living Index U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics – Wage US Census Poverty Data
Higher Interest Rates	Financial institution data Federal Reserve Data
Aging population	Census data Social service providers
Supply Chain issues & construction costs	Focus groups Building industry
Divisive political climate	Focus groups, survey
Regulatory barriers Glacier National Park ticketed entry	Focus groups, survey Growth policies National Park visitation data
Cost of labor & health care	Bureau of Labor Statistics MT Dept. of Public Health & Human Services Focus groups, survey
Climate – Wildfire, drought, flooding, …	County Hazard Mitigation Plan Climate mapping tool
Electric power generation & grid capacity	DEQ "Understanding Energy in Montana" 2023

Representative Survey Comments

"Flathead County is long overdue for taking action in support of the many social and infrastructure needs throughout the area".

"Comprehensive growth policy plans at the county level would be huge. Better collaboration or communication between cities would be great".

"Labor, roads, product transportation (not air) and current interest rates and inflation have an impact on growth potential.   The demand is there but is too great to keep up with without resources"

"Workforce housing is needed. Commuter transit is needed."

"Housing and childcare along with mental health and substance abuse support resources are the major issues we see in this area."

"Cost of living is becoming a major constraint to most all business from service to manufacturing."

"The growth we have experienced in the last years would usually happen over 15-20 years and it happened in 3 years."

V. Goals & Objectives

As stated in the EDA guidelines for CEDS, "Goals and objectives provide the basis for formulating the action plan and serve as milestones to evaluate regional progress. Goals are broad outcomes or general intentions that build upon the vision and are often intangible. Each goal should have a rationale that is clearly understood and publicly supported. Objectives are more specific, measurable, concrete and support the attainment of the goals. Goals and objectives provide benchmarks by which area officials, economic development stakeholders, and the community can measure performance. The goals and objectives should be consistent with the community aspirations for economic prosperity."

GOAL 1: Enhance and expand workforce development and educational opportunities in the county to provide a skilled workforce for businesses and increase regional competitiveness.

Objectives:

    1.1 Work with employers, Flathead Valley Community College, libraries, school districts, state agencies and vocational programs to identify workforce training and degree programs to match the needs of local industries.

    1.2 Promote higher paying jobs and competitive wages by targeting programs for specific skilled trades and the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields.

    1.3 Expand opportunities for students and workers to engage in hands-on learning through internships, mentoring, apprenticeships and other programs.

    1.4 Provide necessary resources and scholarships for targeted post-secondary education to meet workforce needs.

    1.5 Work with Department of Labor and Industry, employment agencies and chambers to assist in recruitment and employee retention initiatives and encourage people to enter the workforce.

    1.6 Build a resilient workforce that can shift between jobs or industries through job-driven skills strategies and access to support organizations.

Goal 2: Assess economic vulnerabilities and climate risks in order to anticipate, prepare and respond to events, trends and disturbances that may impact regional economic prosperity.

Objectives:

    2.1 Engage in community and hazard mitigation planning to define and implement a vision for resilience that includes the alignment of related planning efforts.

    2.2 Identify and promote best practices, information sharing, education, communication, and coordination among stakeholders for disaster and emergency planning, crisis management and post-disaster response.

2.3 Promote sustainable tourism practices to support businesses year-round and to mitigate the impacts of visitors on local communities and surrounding public lands that are the basis of the outdoor recreation economy.

2.4 Design resilient infrastructure and integrate resiliency into land management and development to withstand the impacts of severe weather events and respond to climate trends related to drought, wildfire, flooding and reduced snow pack.

2.5 Remediate brownfield and superfund sites to allow redevelopment that supports economic diversity, creates community amenities, and mitigates impacts on nearby communities.

2.6 Support redundant communication networks and regional efforts to create a resilient electric grid and power generation capacity adequate to meet growth and electrification demands.

Goal 3.0: Build on the region's strengths and assets to support, retain and grow existing businesses.

Objectives:

3.1 Diversify the economic base by targeting industry clusters to meet market niches and thrive by building on relationships with other similar businesses.

3.2 Identify and provide services for local entrepreneurs and business owners such as mentoring, business counseling, networking, technical assistance, and financing options.

3.3 Encourage active and regular communications between the public, private, education, and non-profit sectors to collaborate on existing and potential challenges and opportunities.

3.4 Provide resources and help businesses plan for potential disruptions such as economic downturns, supply chain issues, inflation, and other external factors.

3.5 Promote the area as a year-round destination and explore opportunities to attract conferences through development of a convention center.

3.6 Identify existing and potential industrial/commercial sites and attract investment to prepare shovel-ready locations.

Goal 4.0: Support the maintenance and upgrades to the physical infrastructure that is needed for sustainable growth in Flathead County.

4.1 Support improvements in the road network to promote smart growth, reduce congestion, advance safety, and improve mobility for people of all ages and abilities.

4.2 Support improvements for a resilient water and sewer infrastructure to provide adequate capacity to meet growing demand.

4.3 Promote improvements and access to affordable and reliable high-speed broadband to enhance education, public safety, health care, business, government services and digital equity.

4.4 Continue the efforts of Glacier Airline Enhancement and Retition Outreach in working with Glacier International Airport to expand commercial air service and complete airport upgrades.

4.5 Explore opportunities and partnerships to expand transit and para-transit services in the county.

4.6 Promote partnerships and leverage local dollars, grants, and new funding opportunities for completion of critical infrastructure projects.

Goal 5.0: Develop and maintain a positive quality of life for all citizens and visitors to promote resilient communities and provide affordable and healthy places to live, work, recreate and conduct business.

5.1 Partner with community and business leaders to promote affordable and safe workforce housing through programs such as alternative affordable housing types, deed restrictions, rezoning, subsidies, and other innovative tools.

5.2 Work with MDT, local jurisdictions, and stakeholders to develop a walkable and safe connected network of trails, sidewalks, and shared-use paths for citizens of all ages and abilities.

5.3 Support efforts to expand access to affordable and quality child care in the county.

5.4 Foster health and wellness for all by engaging local jurisdictions and stakeholders to incorporate wellness principles into planning, site design and programs.

5.5 Support educational institutions and libraries in providing quality education and services throughout the county.

5.6 Encourage and plan for outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities that promote health, adopt best practices for conservation of resources and offer economic benefits for all.

5.7 Encourage civic participation, engage youth, and reach out to community groups to promote leadership skills for future decision makers and public officials.

VI. Action Plan

The action plan includes strategic projects, program, and activities to support the achievement of the goals and objectives that are part of this economic development strategy. For each task in the action plan, the table identifies the projected Timeframe, Lead Agency, Partners, and Resources necessary to accomplish the task.

The **Timeframe** indicates the expected life of the project. **Lead Agency** indicates the organization that has agreed to take on responsibility for overseeing and guiding the project from start to finish while providing some or all the required **Funding and Resources**. **Partners** are additional organizations that may contribute **Funding and Resources** at some point during the life of the project.

This table will provide the basis for MWED and FCEDA Boards as well as other economic development, education and government partners to evaluate progress and assess any change in priorities that may occur over the next five years.

Action Area 1:   Workforce

Task	Timeframe	Lead Agency	Partners	Funding & Other Resources
Identify training & degree programs for skilled trades and STEM careers	Near term	School Districts FVCC	MWED Job Service Workforce Flathead	FVCC career center
Assist businesses in setting up apprenticeships, internships & mentoring programs	To be determined	MWED, FVCC	School Districts, Business leaders, MT Dept. of Labor & Industry	FVCC Entrepreneur Launch Pad
Conduct employee recruitment & retention workshops	Near term	Job Service Kalispell	Employment Agencies MWED	Partnerships
Support schools and libraries efforts to upgrade facilities to provide learning skills needed for 21st Century jobs	To be Determined	School Districts, Libraries	MWED, City of Kalispell, Bigfork,	Grants Bonds, Fundraising

Action Area 2: Resiliency

Task	Timeframe	Lead Agency	Partners	Funding & Other Resources
Participate in local govt planning efforts & hazard mitigation planning to promote CEDS goals	As needed	Flathead County City of Kalispell City of Whitefish City of C. Falls	MWED FCEDA	Local funds & grants for planning efforts
Brownfield assessment programs to assist with redevelopment and planning of brownfield sites	Near Term	MWED Kalispell	EPA, DEQ, EDA Flathead County Columbia Falls, Whitefish FCEDA	EPA Brownfield Assessment Grants DEQ
Conduct events for public officials and businesses on crisis management & disaster response	Periodically	Dept. of Emergency Services	MWED Chambers Kalispell, Whitefish, C. Falls Fire Districts	Recruit organizations to host
Education and outreach for sustainable tourism efforts	On-going	Convention & Visitor Bureaus	Chambers Local Govt. Hospitality Industry	Montana Tourism Office resources & grants, Lodging Tax
Support investment to support electrification and improvements towards a resilient electric grid and generation capacity.	As needed	Flathead Electric Northwestern Energy	BPA, U.S. DOE, alternative energy producers	C-PACE MT DEQ – Energy Bureau
Develop coordinated communication between agencies for information sharing and to identify ongoing challenges & opportunities	Near-term	Flathead County (GIS, Emergency Services, FCEDA, other county services)	Chambers of Commerce, GOED, Private Business Kalispell Business Improvement district	Grants Partnerships

Action Area 3: Business Support, Retention & Attraction to Diversify Economic Base

Task	Timeframe	Lead Agency	Partners	Funding & Other Resources
Continue to provide business assistance through grants & business development	On-going	MWED FCEDA	MT Dept. of Commerce, USDA Rural Dev., EDA, MT Dept. of Labor & Industry	Big Sky Trust Fund, Rural Business Development Grants, Business, Workforce training funds
Continue and expand business lending programs	On-going	MWED	Banks FCEDA	Revolving loans, Montana Board of Investments, CDBG
Apex Accelerator Procurement Technical Assistant Center	On-Going	MWED FCEDA	Federal and State Agencies	U.S. Dept. of Defense MT Dept. of Transportation
Support efforts to market area for meetings and tradeshows & identify opportunities to expand or improve convention facilities/services.	On-going	Local Chambers of Commerce & Convention and Visitor Bureaus	Hospitality industry	MT Dept. of Commerce Tourism grants
Promote agriculture and value-added ag industries	Near Term	MWED MT Dept. of Agriculture,	USDA, MSU-Cooperative Extension, Ag Growers, FVCC	FADC, Grants Meat and Poultry lending program
Identify shovel-ready sites to attract businesses such as the Glacier Rail Park and redevelopment of the CHS site	Near term	FCEDA MWED	Cities, commercial realtors	Financing tools, EDA & other grants, Growth Policies,

Action Area 4: Infrastructure & Local Services

Task	Timeframe	Lead Agency	Partners	Funding & Other Resources
Improve access by air travel to Flathead County	On-going	Glacier Park International Airport Glacier AERO	FCEDA MWED Chambers Local Businesses	Private Business Contributions, Federal Grants, FCEDA Guarantees
Coordinate with state plans expand access to affordable broadband	Mid-Term	MT Broadband Office Internet Service Providers	MWED, FCEDA Chambers Libraries Local Govts.	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

Task	Timeframe	Lead Agency	Partners	Funding & Other Resources
Advocate for adequate & resilient water & sewer infrastructure	On-going	Cities, County, Water & Sewer Districts	MWED FCEDA	Growth Policies & Facility Plans, User fees, grants, SIDS,
Adequate safe transit and transportation network	On-going	MDT, Cities & County Govts.	MWED, FCEDA Mountain Climber	Growth Policies Plans, User fees, grants, SIDS

Action Area 5: Quality of Life

Task	Timeframe	Lead Agency	Partners	Funding & Other Resources
Support efforts to develop outdoor recreation and sports facilities to benefit community	To be Determined	Kalispell Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Alliance	MWED Kalispell Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID)	Community fundraising, grants, tax revenues
Assist efforts to expand and connect trails systems throughout the county	As needed	Collaboration between Stakeholders	Flathead County, MDT Cities Flathead Trail Assoc	Local funds, grants, FHA funds, SIDs, fundraising , trail plans
Support efforts to address affordable – workforce housing issues	As needed	Housing agencies, CAP, cities, county, land trusts	MWED, Developers, MT Dept. of Commerce	Whitefish Housing Assessment, grants, fundraising, developer deed restrictions
Promote regional health care services, mental health services and community wellness	On-going	Logan Health, County & health, care providers	Kalispell Chamber Schools, cities	Community Health Needs Assessment, Partnerships
Support initiatives to address child care needs	Near Term	Kalispell Chamber, Nurturing Center Early Childhood Coalition	Employers, FVCC, Schools, DPHHS, Nurturing Center	Grants Kalispell Chamber Child Care Study,

Appendix

Attachment A; Innovation Capacity Profile
https://www.statsamerica.org/innovation/ii3.aspx

FLATHEAD COUNTY, MT

Crafting data-driven regional development strategies requires data to determine capacity for innovation and regional competitiveness. The headline or summary index is calculated from multiple index categories based on inputs and outputs. The index is a hierarchy, built up pyramid-like from a large foundation of data that is transformed into metrics that are key to each category. In this way, you can see your summary index and rank, as well as dive into the categories to understand which areas of innovation reveal your region's strengths and weaknesses.

Innovation Intelligence Index

130.9

Rank: **329**
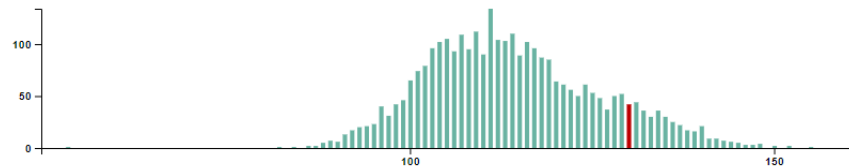
The graph above, and the similar graphs below, show the distribution of index values for all counties. The value for Flathead County, MT is highlighted in red.

This area has high relative Innovation Capacity. The innovation index incorporates statistical data from a wide variety of sources. Review the indexes below to learn more about how this number was determined.

## Human Capital and Knowledge Creation Index 140.4 (rank: 429)

Key Takeaways
- Patterns of establishment formation and composition indicate a high level of business competitiveness.
- The top measures for this index are:
    1. Average Prime Working-Age Population Growth (rank 92)
    2. Bachelor's Degree Attainment (rank 374)
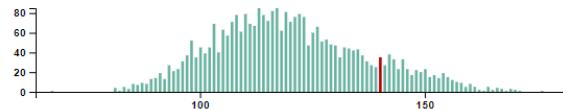
Business Dynamics Index 152.0 (rank: 162)

Key Takeaways
- Patterns of establishment formation and composition indicate a high level of business competitiveness.
- The top measures for this index are:
    1. Average Small Establishments (per 10,000 Workers) (rank 303)
    2. Establishment Births to All Establishments Ratio (rank 301)
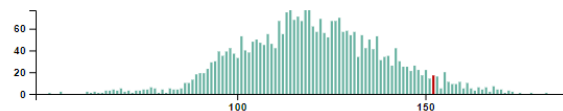
## Business Profile Index 85.4 (rank: 749)

Key Takeaways
- The relative availability of resouces for entrepreneurs and businesses is moderate in this area.
- The top measures for this index are:
    1. Farm Operators with Internet Access (rank 51)
    2. Industry Cluster Growth Factor (rank 86)
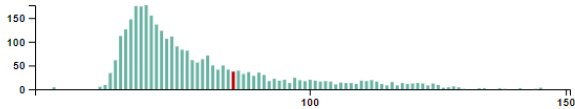
Employment and Productivity Index 139.4 (rank: 132)

Key Takeaways
- Industry performance in Flathead County, MT indicate a high level of positive outcomes from existing economic activity.
- The top measures for this index are:
    1. Patent Diversity (rank 396)
    2. Job Growth to Population Growth Ratio (rank 438)
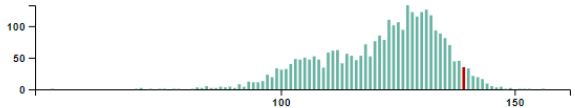
Economic Well-Being Index 137.0 (rank: 1,197)

Key Takeaways
- As measured by residential internet connectivity and income, this area has a moderate standard of living.
- The top measures for this index are:
    1. Broadband Adoption Barriers (rank 322)
    2. Average Poverty Rate (rank 1038)
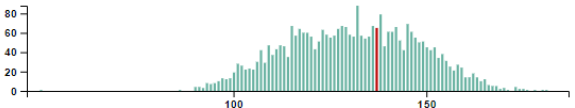
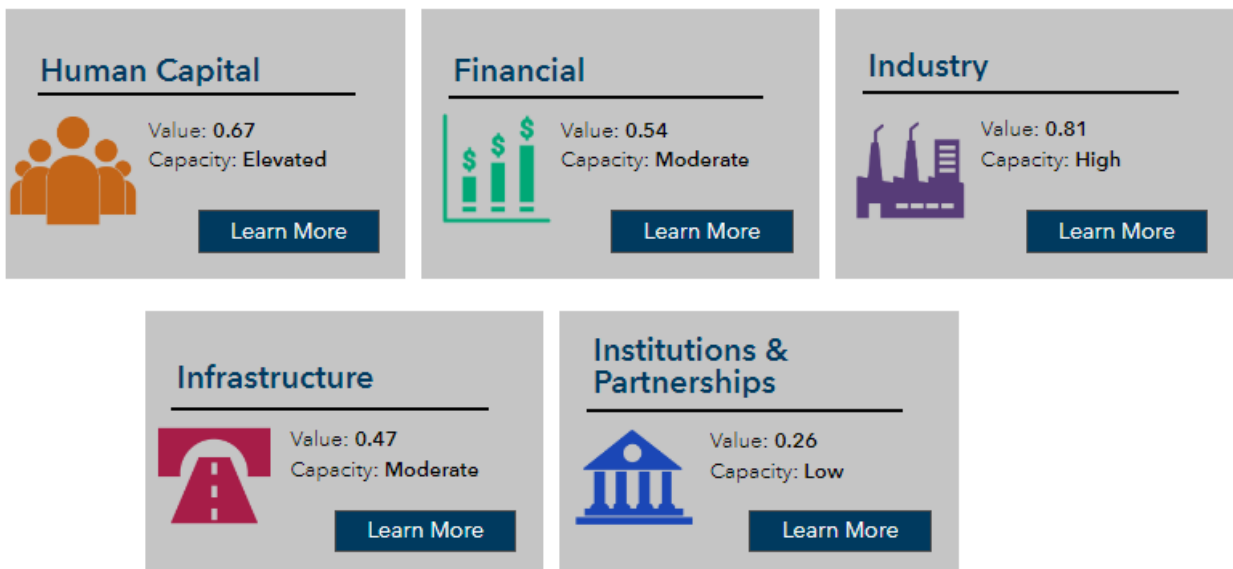# Attachment B: Economic Development Capacity Index (EDCI)

https://www.anl.gov/dis/economic-development-capacity-index

What is the Economic Development Capacity Index?

The Economic Development Capacity Index (EDCI), developed through a partnership between the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and Argonne National Laboratory (Argonne), uses publicly available data to assess critical elements that contribute to a county's overall economic development capacity. Economic development capacity is comprised of the knowledge, skills, assets, and resources that foster prosperity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and high quality of life in a community. The EDCI brings together 53 indicators across five major capacity areas:

- Financial
- Human Capital
- Industry Composition
- Infrastructure
- Institutions and Partnerships

To aid comparisons among counties, indicator quantitative scores have been transformed into percentiles for the Economic Development Capacity Index web mapping application. To calculate indicator quantitative scores, raw indicator data have been standardized into z-scores. These quantitative z-scores are calculated separately for each indicator, where a zero score corresponds to the national average. Positive scores correspond to counties with indicator values above the national average, and negative scores correspond to counties with indicator values below the national average.

EDCI Report for: Flathead, Montana

Human Capital
Value: 0.67
Capacity: Elevated
Learn More

Financial
Value: 0.54
Capacity: Moderate
Learn More

Industry
Value: 0.81
Capacity: High
Learn More

Infrastructure
Value: 0.47
Capacity: Moderate
Learn More

Institutions & Partnerships
Value: 0.26
Capacity: Low
Learn More

Human Capital: This capacity area focuses on the overall composition of the workforce and the quality of life for all residents in a county. Economic development differentiates itself from economic growth by incorporating the goal of improving the quality of life of individuals. This capacity area includes indicators related to education attainment, creative or inventive.
Flathead, Montana Human Capital Level: **Elevated** Percentile: **0.67**

Financial This capacity area considers the financial environment within a county. Ready access to capital can spur economic growth and entrepreneurship. Conversely, capital constraints are a significant limiter of economic growth and can inhibit innovation. This capacity area includes indicators related to local government financial health, private sector access to small business loans, small business access to federal seed funding for technology and research development activities, and access to local banks.
Flathead, Montana Financial Capacity Level: **Moderate** Percentile: **0.54**

Industry: This capacity area considers the overall business environment within a county. Diverse economies, with robust local clusters, do not rely on a single source for their economic stability, whether that is a single business or a single industry. Increases in industry diversity and the presence of clusters contribute to economic growth and can increase resilience to economic shocks. This capacity area specifically includes measures related to local clusters for establishments and employment, industry diversity, business entries and exits, and the presence of advanced industries.
Flathead, Montana Industry Capacity Level: **High** Percentile: **0.81**

Infrastructure: This capacity area considers the physical and environmental resources that make business and economic development activities possible. Infrastructure facilitates the movement of goods, services, and people and enables the operations of businesses. It also contributes to quality of life, making a community or region more attractive to individuals, families, and businesses. Indicators relate to the status, quality, or accessibility of infrastructure and natural systems, including transportation, ports, transit, broadband, energy reliability, air and water quality, and green space.
Flathead, Montana Infrastructure Capacity Level: **Moderate** Percentile: **0.47**

Institutions and Partnerships: This capacity area focuses on the public and private entities that support and facilitate economic development through collaborative networks. The support network created by these institutions and partnerships acts as a force multiplier for economic development planning and investments. This capacity area includes indicators related to local government capacity, experience with grants, participation in Economic Development Districts (EDDs), institutions of higher education, non-profits, and cultural organizations.
Flathead, Montana Institutions & Partnerships Capacity Level: **Low** Percentile: **0.26**

Low: Capacity is well below national average
Limited: Capacity is slightly below or approaching the national average
Moderated: Capacity close to the national average
Elevated: Capacity is above the national average
High: Capacity is well above the national average