



GREAT FALLS AREA



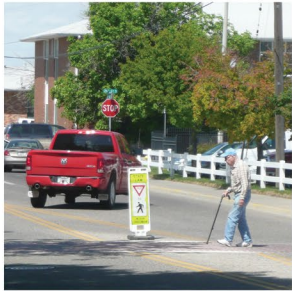
LONG RANGE 2024 TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Prepared for:

Great Falls **MPO**

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Public Involvement Plan



Prepared by:



CIVIL ENGINEERING / PLANNING / SURVEYING

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Public Involvement Plan

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Great Falls Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has engaged Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA) to update its Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The *Great Falls Area LRTP* will address existing and future land use needs, regional transportation issues, overall travel convenience, connectivity, safe and accessible accommodations for all users, consideration of new transportation technologies, sustainability, transportation demand management, and environmental and fiscal constraints.

Recent passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) resulted in new federal requirements for MPOs, updated planning emphasis areas, new eligibilities for apportioned highway funding programs, and more than a dozen new discretionary highway funding programs. Accordingly, the LRTP will be fully compatible with BIL and other state and federal requirements while also responding to the changing nature and interests of the community. Ultimately, the plan will serve as a guide for responsible investment in the community’s multimodal transportation systems over a 20-year planning horizon. The LRTP will incorporate a comprehensive review of relevant background information, detailed analysis of existing and future conditions, and meaningful input from citizens and local officials to provide a framework for future efforts within the context of funding rules, regulations, and budget allocations.

Early and sustained public and stakeholder communication will be important to involve Great Falls citizens in the planning process, understand the community’s concerns and desires, identify potential constraints, and develop a suite of transportation improvements that will support the long-term needs of the Great Falls area. For this planning effort, we propose multiple engagement strategies designed to reach a broad audience and elicit meaningful participation from the public.

1.1. PURPOSE OF THE PIP

Updating the LRTP will provide public and stakeholder outreach opportunities to help ensure the plan responds to the public’s needs and help increase the public’s investment in decisions about the transportation system. The purpose of this Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is to outline those involvement opportunities and provide a streamlined strategy for engaging the public and stakeholders throughout development of the *Great Falls Area LRTP*. Providing accurate information, timely notices, and convenient opportunities to provide input will help achieve these goals. The planning team is committed to providing information to the public and interested parties and seeking their input throughout the process.

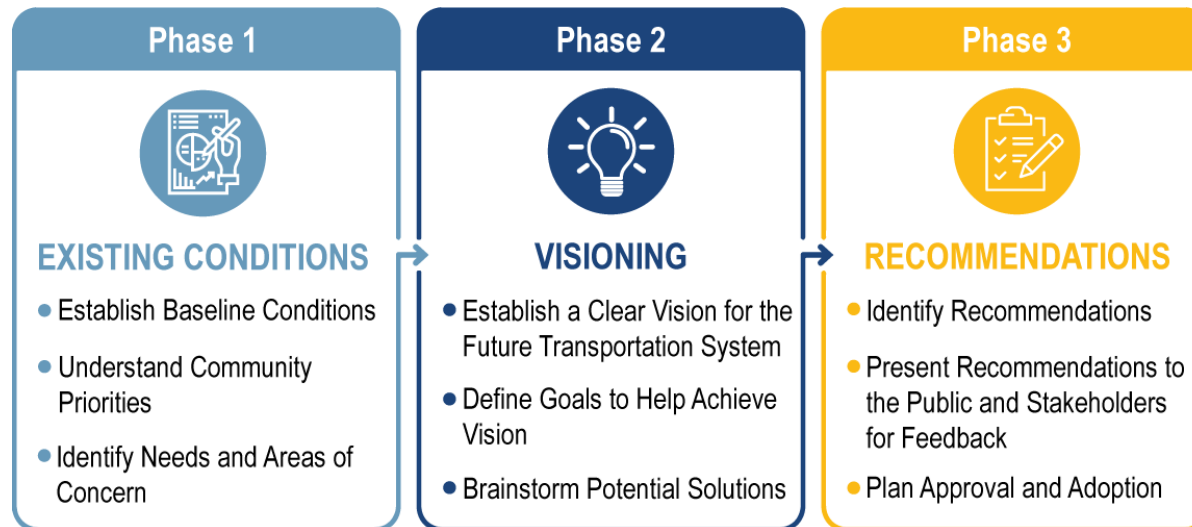


The last LRTP for the Great Falls Area was completed in 2018 and amended in 2019. Now, five years later, it is time to update the plan again to respond to changed community conditions and satisfy federal requirements.

1.2. APPROACH TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The *Great Falls Area LRTP* will be completed utilizing a three-phased approach. Public and stakeholder engagement will be conducted throughout all phases of the planning process. The phased approach helps to ensure that the planning team provides meaningful outreach opportunities, receives feedback on critical needs, properly identifies barriers and constraints early in the planning process, and develops improvements that are feasible to implement in the community. The three phases are outlined below:

- **PHASE 1: EXISTING CONDITIONS** – The initial public involvement phase will be coordinated with the analysis of existing conditions and identification of community needs and areas of concern. This phase will focus on understanding what is important to the community and key stakeholders.
- **PHASE 2: VISIONING** – The second phase will take place after there is a clear understanding of existing conditions and key areas of transportation concern. This phase will focus on establishing a clear vision for the community’s future transportation system, developing goals to help achieve the vision, and brainstorming potential solutions. This effort will help inform the identification of recommendations in the next phase.
- **PHASE 3: RECOMMENDATIONS** – The final phase of public involvement will focus on presenting and soliciting feedback on the draft recommendations in the LRTP. During this phase, the planning team will encourage public comments, engage with stakeholders and committees, and work toward plan approval and adoption.



1.3. STUDY AREA

The boundary for the 2023 LRTP is coincident with the boundary used in the past plan. The boundary includes the entire city limits of Great Falls, as well as a substantial amount of unincorporated county lands surrounding the city. The study area is shown in **Figure 1** and will be used for all aspects of the LRTP planning process. This study area includes all the major employers and developed residential land uses in the area as well as those areas likely to be developed over the planning horizon.

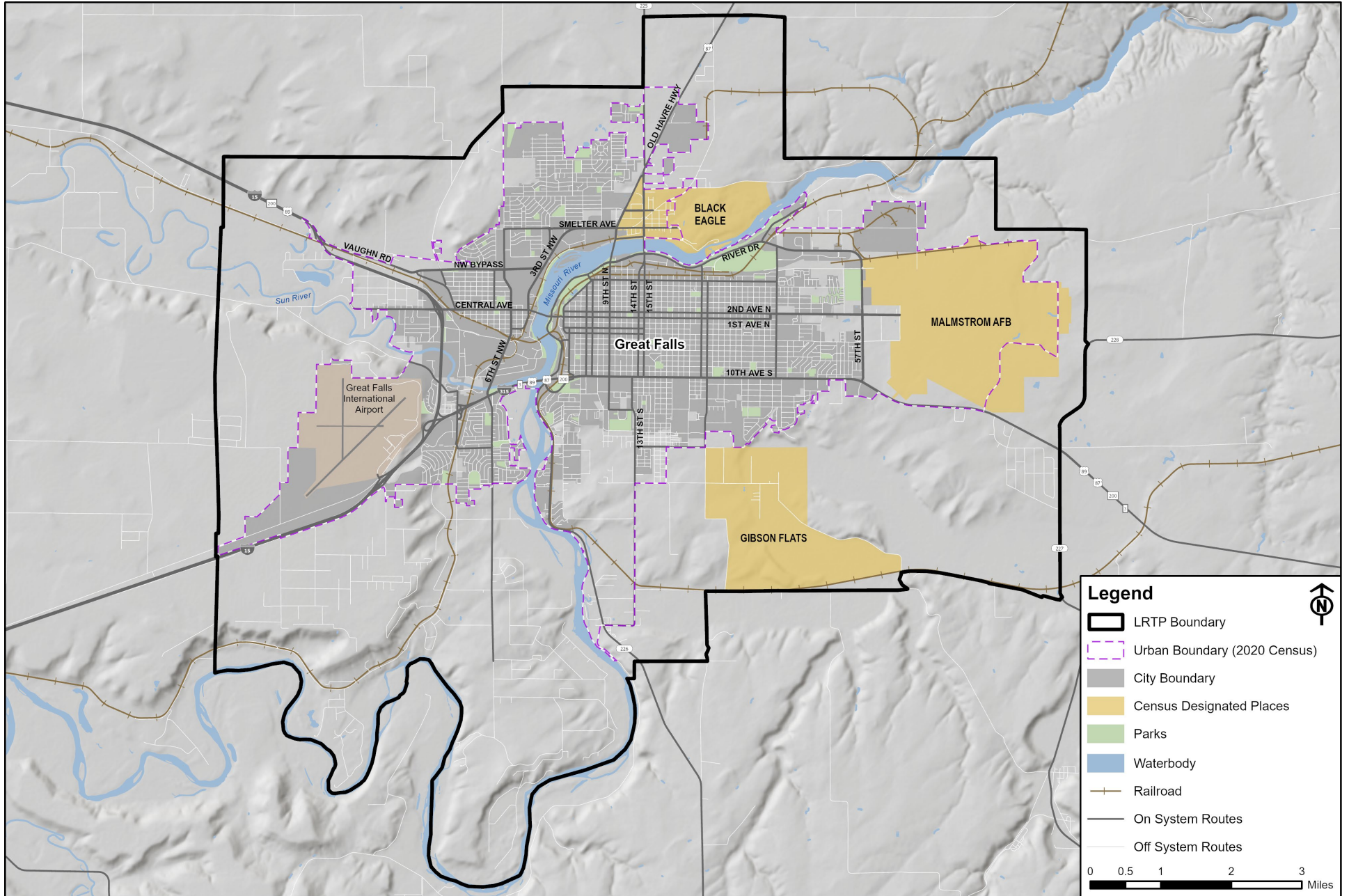


Figure 1: Study Area

2.0 KEY AUDIENCES

Active public participation and input will be encouraged during every phase of the planning process. Identifying those with a vested interest in the planning effort and those with expertise related to the LRTP is necessary to guide development of the LRTP, identify areas of concern and opportunities for improvement, and help reach a larger audience. The following sections discuss the primary contacts and oversight for the plan, anticipated key stakeholders, and other interested parties to be included in the planning process.

2.1. PLAN CONTACTS

Contact information for the Great Falls and the consultant project managers will be provided in all published information. These individuals will serve as primary points of contact for the plan.

Andrew Finch

City of Great Falls
Planning and Community Development Department
Senior Transportation Planner
#2 Park Drive South, Room 112
Great Falls, Montana 59401
406.455.8430
afinch@greatfallsmt.net

Scott Randall

Robert Peccia and Associates
Consultant Project Manager
3147 Saddle Drive
Helena, MT 59604
406.447.5000
srandall@rpa-hln.com

2.2. PLANNING TEAM

The planning team is tasked with guiding the planning process, providing local input, and reviewing deliverables produced by the consultant. The planning team will include representatives from the Great Falls MPO, City of Great Falls, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), and the consultant team (RPA). Other participants may also be invited to participate on an as-needed basis. Planning team meetings will be held on a regular basis to track progress and address any issues or questions that may arise. The meetings are important for the exchange of technical information and ideas during the development of the plan.

2.3. TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Development of the LRTP will be overseen by the Great Falls Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC is made up of representatives from the Great Falls MPO, City of Great Falls, Cascade County, MDT, and other regional transportation providers. The TAC will act in an advisory and oversight role for the transportation planning effort and submit formal recommendations to the Great Falls Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) for adoption of the LRTP. TAC meetings will be held bi-monthly to provide updates and review deliverables.

2.4. STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders include everyone with interest or expertise related to the planning effort. Outreach to stakeholders early in the planning process will be important to open dialogue, build trust, and understand needs. We will develop a list of key stakeholders and interested parties including neighborhood councils, government agencies, business owners, special interest groups, and local officials. Under the BIL, MPOs are now required to include local affordable housing organizations as key stakeholders.

An initial list of stakeholder groups has been identified. Specific representatives for each stakeholder group will be identified in coordination with the planning team.

INITIAL STAKEHOLDER LIST

- City of Great Falls – Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Conservation District, Emergency Management, Police, and Fire Departments
- Cascade County – Planning, Emergency Management, Public Works, Sheriff's Office, Rural Fire District, and Zoning Board
- Cascade County Senior Advisory Council and Aging Services
- Cascade County DUI Task Force
- Great Falls Housing Authority
- Great Falls Development Authority
- Great Falls Parking Commission
- Great Falls Transit District
- Great Falls Chamber of Commerce
- Great Falls Business Improvement District
- Great Falls Tourism Business Improvement District
- Downtown Great Falls
- Neighborhood Councils #1 – 9
- Benefis Health
- Get Fit Great Falls
- Building Active Communities Initiative
- River's Edge Trail Foundation
- Montana Independent Living Project
- North Central Independent Living Services
- Bike Walk Montana
- Regional Airport Authority
- Malmstrom Air Force Base
- Great Falls International Airport
- Montana Air National Guard

2.5. GENERAL PUBLIC

Comments and input from the general public will be welcomed throughout the planning process. All comments and concerns received at meetings and through individual discussions will be considered by the planning team throughout the planning process. Comments will be compiled and sorted to identify common themes which will help establish areas of concern and opportunities for improvement. Additionally, an official comment period will be provided after the release of the draft *Great Falls Area LRTP*. All comments received during the official comment period will be included as an appendix to the final LRTP.

3.0 OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the development of the LRTP, several public involvement methods will be deployed to share information about the planning process, offer opportunities for dialogue, obtain meaningful input, identify areas of concern and opportunities for improvement, and identify potential barriers or constraints that may influence the feasibility of potential improvements. The outreach strategies discussed in the following sections are designed to work together to reach the most people possible, engage a diverse cross section of interests and perspectives, and elicit meaningful participation from the beginning of the planning process. These strategies are intended to align with the national focus on integration of in-person and virtual public involvement techniques as well as the use of social media and web-based tools to foster public participation and solicit feedback.

3.1. ON-DEMAND ENGAGEMENT

The planning team recognizes that people lead increasingly busy lives. Allowing the public to access information and provide input on their own schedules has proven to increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of input. Electronic engagement allows expansive, on-demand outreach allowing the public to participate at their convenience, which encourages meaningful feedback. Multiple on-demand public engagement strategies will be used to educate the public about the planning process and collect input throughout the plan duration.

PLAN WEBSITE

A plan-specific website (www.greatfallstransplan.com) will be used to encourage on-going public interaction and to provide information throughout the planning process. The website will serve as the primary platform to provide information and solicit feedback during the planning process. The website will be hosted by RPA but may be linked to the City's existing website to help reach an expanded audience. As deliverables are developed and milestones are met, the website will be populated with updates and informational content. Informational material to be posted to the website will include contact information, meeting announcements, frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the planning process, a description of the LRTP, finalized documents, and interim memoranda. The website will also be used to host virtual public meeting opportunities and other interactive engagement activities as described below.

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Our team will develop interactive content for the plan website to allow the public and stakeholders to engage with the planning process when it is convenient for them. The tools discussed in the following sections are intended to reach the broader community.

Commenting Map

An interactive commenting map will be developed using Wikimap to engage the community throughout the planning process. The commenting map will be available through the plan website and will serve as a platform for users to provide feedback on issues, areas of concern, and other needs. Participants will be able to leave notes, draw routes, and identify problem areas just as if they were at an in-person event.

Electronic Survey

An online survey will be developed to supplement the Wikimap. The survey will be easily accessed through the plan website with a short list of questions aimed at understanding community travel habits, opinions on traffic and safety matters, and priorities for various transportation system improvements. While more traditional and less interactive, the survey will be easy to distribute and more accessible to a broader audience including less technologically inclined individuals.

Video Summaries

Our team will use short video presentations to document key milestones of the planning process. The videos will be concise and easy to understand, tailored for a broad demographic. Videos will be posted to the plan website and will be easily accessible to the public. An initial video will be created to outline the planning process, engagement opportunities, and intended outcomes. Subsequent videos may be used to share plan updates as needed.

SOCIAL MEDIA

RPA will provide content to post to local social media accounts to promote engagement in the planning effort. Content will include status updates, meeting announcements, general information about the LRTP, and promotion of other outreach and engagement opportunities. RPA hopes to leverage existing Facebook and Twitter social media accounts hosted by the City of Great Falls, Visit Great Falls Montana, and Downtown Great Falls to engage the community.

EMAIL UPDATES

RPA will provide informal progress updates via email to plan contacts, stakeholders, and interested members of the public throughout the planning effort. Interested parties can join the email list by contacting either the RPA or Great Falls project manager. These updates will be an easy way to maintain communication and keep interested parties aware of progress and key milestones throughout the planning process.

3.2. TARGETED OUTREACH

The targeted outreach strategies listed in the following sections are intended to obtain meaningful input and dialogue about the plan and share information during specific scheduled events. The goal will be to reach a diverse a cross section of interests.

PUBLIC OUTREACH EVENTS

The planning team will host two (2) public outreach events over the planning duration. Both events will be formatted as an in-person open house with virtual accommodations also provided. A newsletter/flyer will be developed before each open house announcing the event and describing work in progress, preliminary findings and recommendations, and other relevant topics. The newsletter/flyers will be distributed by the planning team, posted to the plan website, and shared with stakeholders through email communication. Printed copies of newsletters will be available at in-person events.

Prior to each public outreach event, RPA will prepare a press release with meeting details, an overview of the planning process, participation deadlines, and other relevant information. RPA will coordinate with the City of Great Falls to issue these press releases to local newspapers, television stations, and radio stations to develop stories and advertisements. Paid advertisements announcing the public open houses will be coordinated by Great Falls as needed.

In-person meetings would follow an open house format, enabling the public to drop in at their convenience to view exhibits and speak with planning representatives. The planning team would offer extended hours to facilitate access and to encourage higher attendance. The consultant team will also host live virtual presentations for those unable to attend in-person open houses. The meetings would consist of a presentation covering the content presented at the open houses followed by a question-and-answer session. The presentations will be recorded and posted to the plan website.

Both live formats would enable participants to learn about the planning process, ask questions, and receive responses from the planning team in real time. All materials and engagement tools developed for the live events will be added to the plan website so community members who are unable to attend live can still participate and provide their feedback. For those without access to the internet, alternative access would be provided through mailed copies of printed materials and telephone accommodations.

Public Outreach #1

The first public outreach event will be held mid-way through the planning process. The event will consist of both an in-person open house and live virtual presentation. At the in-person open house, our team will present existing conditions information and engage the community in identifying a vision, goals, and opportunities for improvement. The planning team will use interactive engagement tools to help document community feedback at the open house. RPA will also host a live virtual presentation covering the purpose of the plan, a summary of existing conditions, and identified areas of concern. Participants will be invited to ask questions and share their feedback.

Public Outreach #2

During the public review period for the draft LRTP, the team will host a second public outreach event with both virtual and in-person engagement opportunities. The intent of the second open house will be to share the draft LRTP and its accompanying recommendations with the public and stakeholders for feedback. RPA will prepare various informational materials and ArcGIS Online maps to help convey key points. These materials would be used at both the in-person open house and posted to the plan website for virtual participants.

An in-person open house will be held to allow for direct, one-on-one conversations with the community. The in-person format will be supplemented with a live virtual presentation covering the contents of the plan, key information, and recommendations, with an opportunity for public comment. The presentation will be recorded and posted to the plan website for those unable to attend live. RPA will also use the plan website to allow the public to share feedback virtually through voting and commenting tools. The public will have access to the virtual engagement tools for a 30-day period, corresponding with the public review period. The virtual platform will allow continuous access to content, providing more convenient access for interested parties to review information and provide feedback.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

During the visioning phase, RPA will schedule individual or small group interviews to talk directly with key stakeholders to understand what is important to them and what they would like to see from the plan. In-person interviews would be scheduled for the day of the first public open house. Representatives from RPA would also be available to meet with interested stakeholders virtually at alternate times if needed. Periodic email updates will also be sent to stakeholders to keep them informed of the plan progress, offer opportunities for comment, and invite them to public outreach events to allow for efficient dialogue with the project team.

COUNCIL OF COUNCILS MEETINGS

RPA will attend the Great Falls Council of Councils meeting(s) to solicit feedback from the nine neighborhood councils. RPA's coordination with these councils in the past has been extremely well received and has helped us gain invaluable feedback for the planning process. Coordination with the Council of Councils will occur early in the planning process to understand community needs and then later in the process to share and refine draft recommendations. Council of Council meetings are currently scheduled for May and October of 2023.

4.0 ACCESS AND VISIBILITY

The consulting team will be available to all interested parties for the purposes of receiving comments and answering questions. All information published regarding the plan will provide contact information for the project managers.

INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

Technical and planning-level information related to the data or content used in the development of the plan will be available in memoranda, updates, graphics, and other miscellaneous materials. The materials will be made available on the plan website.

CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC INPUT

Input and comments from stakeholders and the public will be considered by the team throughout the planning process. Public comments received on the draft report will be documented, considered, and included as an appendix in the final LRTP.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Additional efforts are necessary to involve traditionally underserved segments of the population, including disabled, minority, and low-income individuals. The following steps will help with these efforts:

- Provide appropriate accommodations: Appropriate non-discrimination statements and alternative accommodation contacts will be provided on all printed materials. Accessibility accommodations will be offered for all public outreach activities, including virtual meetings. In-person open houses will be held in locations that are accessible and compliant with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Upon request, alternative participation methods and materials will be made available.
- Seek help from community leaders and organizations: To facilitate involvement of traditionally underserved populations, we will consult with community leaders and organizations representing these groups about the most effective ways to reach their constituents.
- Be sensitive to diverse audiences: At meetings and in printed materials, the planning team will attempt to communicate as clearly and understandably as possible. Printed materials will be developed using easy-to-understand language. Presenters will avoid using technical language, and staff will wear appropriate dress and adhere to professional conduct.

5.0 OUTREACH SUMMARY

This PIP establishes guidelines and procedures for encouraging public and stakeholder participation during development of the LRTP. The following strategies will be used to share information and seek input from interested parties.

- Plan development will be overseen by the planning team and TAC.
- A plan website with online engagement tools will be developed to provide information throughout the planning process.
- Various content, including public engagement opportunity announcements, will be provided for sharing on existing City social media channels.
- An electronic mailing list will be developed to contact interested stakeholders and members of the public at key milestones.
- Targeted outreach meetings will occur with key stakeholder groups.
- Newsletter/flyers will be developed in advance of public informational meetings.
- Two public outreach events will be held to solicit feedback on key findings, concept alternatives, and draft documents. The events will consist of in-person open houses and virtual presentations. All materials will be posted on the plan website for easy access.
- Public comments will be collected and considered throughout the planning process.
- Published materials will be sensitive to diverse audiences.