

---

## Table of Contents

### **PART THREE** **ISSUES AND NEEDS**

<b>ISSUES AND CONCERNS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
General .....	1
Housing .....	1
Business .....	2
Industry .....	3
Public Services .....	4
Community Facilities.....	4
Community Issues and Concerns .....	5
<b>OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS .....</b>	<b>16</b>
General .....	16
Groundwater .....	16
Floodplains .....	17
Agricultural Land.....	18
Conservation Easements.....	19
Public Land.....	20

## ISSUES AND CONCERNS

### General

The analysis of data collected during the inventory phase, public meetings, and the Growth Policy Survey highlighted recent trends and community attitudes, and provides insight into development issues and problems that should be addressed in the plan. The issues are identified in the Goals, Objectives and Policies listed in Part Two of this report, but more specific needs are discussed in the following sections.

### Housing

Census data for population and housing in Mineral County indicates that there has been a slight increase from 1990 to 2000, a trend that is expected to continue throughout this decade and maintain a positive, steady pace for the following 15 years. The population is estimated to be nearly 5,000 people for the county in the year 2025 which is significantly above the level recorded for the 2000 census. The towns of Alberton and Superior, and the St. Regis area should accommodate over half of the expected increase if current trends continue. This will create a demand for changes in the housing supply in and around the immediate vicinity of the towns of Alberton and Superior, and will also have a significant effect on housing needs in the developing rural areas where some new housing will be required in addition to replacement of deteriorated structures.

The rural population is distributed throughout the accessible lowland areas of Mineral County with local concentrations in the unincorporated communities of Cyr, Tarkio, Lozeau, St. Regis, De Borgia, Haugen, and Saltese. The preferred areas for future growth, as identified through the public input process, are in the immediate vicinities of Alberton and Superior, and around the existing rural communities, with provisions for some expansion in designated areas (see Part Four – Land Use Plan for preferred growth areas). With a net 25% increase in total population in the county anticipated over the 25 year period after the 2000 census, there will be a demand for an additional 440 housing units. Although annexation policies in the towns of Alberton and Superior will affect the urban versus rural distribution, it is apparent that well over half of the growth will occur in the unincorporated area of the county.

Alberton and Superior should have a period of slow growth after 2010 considering the census prediction for a continuation of the county wide upward trend, the need for additional urban oriented types of housing indicated by changes in population composition, and by responses included in the 2007 Growth Policy Survey. As indicated in the survey, expansion of the urban area housing supply should include provisions for adding middle income, single family, and senior citizen housing, as well as room for expanding the family rental housing supply. Part of the housing needs for the population forecast during the planning period could conceivably be accommodated on the vacant platted land in the residential areas of Alberton and Superior and there are also some vacant lots on land around St. Regis and the other

unincorporated rural communities in the county. Recent Department of Revenue data includes a classification for vacant land that shows the location of vacant parcels. According to this information, there are some vacant residential parcels within the existing incorporated areas of Alberton and Superior, however, most of the vacant residential acreage is on private land in rural areas within three miles of Interstate 90 and within two miles of U.S. 135 north of St. Regis. It is likely that a substantial part of the growth will occur in new subdivisions on the fringe of the existing platted areas around each community. Renovation of vacant housing units may also account for a small portion of the housing needed during the next 20 years, and activity in the rest of the county will be limited by Forest Service land and steep terrain. Any unexpected growth in response to unforeseen economic factors or special development proposals may result in new residential subdivisions outside of the preferred areas and could require a review and update to the plan recommendations shown in the Land Use Plan in Part Four.

Subdivision proposals must be closely scrutinized for impacts on existing uses and public services that would be required. It is the intent of the plan to encourage any new development proposed through the subdivision process to be located on land in the preferred development areas as discussed in the Land Use Plan section. Although it is not the intent of the plan to prohibit all development in other areas (through regulatory measures), it is preferable that the existing land use in open rural areas be continued, particularly where environmental conditions are unfavorable for development or a viable agricultural operation will be negatively affected by a change in use.

It is likely that the relative demand for single-family, multiple-family and mobile home units in the urban and rural areas will change slightly from the present and past levels shown in the housing section of this report because of increasing needs for low income and elderly housing and making improvements in the rental housing market. In order to properly plan for the needs of the changing population, future residential development should include space for approximately 75% single-family, 10% mobile home and 15% multiple-family units.

According to information indicating recent trends, there is a need for more senior citizen housing and better quality rental housing. The apparent need for affordable senior housing is supported by census population data showing growth in the percentage of upper age groups and senior citizens throughout Mineral County, and lower than average per capita personal income. This trend in population composition indicates the need to increase the multiple-family housing share of the market by encouraging the use of housing assistance programs, including Board of Housing loan programs with low income assistance incentives. Programs for low and middle income housing should be promoted by local planning officials, and land use regulations should ensure that adequate area is available for multiple-family, mobile home, and modular housing. Habitat for Humanity housing may be a workable method of supplementing production of high-quality housing for fixed and low income households.

## **Business**

The commercial activities in Mineral County in recent history have been relatively static in spite of an increase in population, due in part to the influence of larger retail outlets in Missoula, Idaho

and Spokane on the local buyers. Consequently, the need for additional commercial services and land in the planning area is dictated in part by the ability of new enterprises to compete with the established neighboring business communities. The local population, particularly in the southern part of the county, will continue to depend on improvements and expansion of the local business environment in Superior, Alberton, St Regis and other communities along the Interstate to maintain a solid core of local retail services in the area. This is supported by one of the objectives of this plan regarding Community Design and Development to “Preserve and revitalize the existing business districts in Alberton, Superior, and St. Regis.” It is also desirable to provide for additional commercial activity in the preferred development areas and to support improvements needed to provide for basic retail needs and convenience in the existing rural centers in the county.

The promotion of tourism is also one of the primary concerns of the county. Providing support for tourism opportunities is one of the policies embraced by the county and the towns of Alberton and Superior as a method of improving the local economy. There has been a great deal of interest in expanding commercial development for highway and tourist related facilities along the major road network subject to standards established by Mineral County.

According to the Growth Policy Survey results, which are generally in support of economic development throughout the county, retail business improvements are a very high priority. The emphasis for improving the business opportunities should be placed on support for the preservation and enhancement of the existing business districts in Alberton and Superior, as well as improvement of commercial activities in St. Regis and other established rural communities of Mineral County. Development constraints for new commercial development in the area outside of Alberton, Superior, and St. Regis, include consideration of impacts on agricultural land, sewer and water services, and highway access. These factors will weigh heavily in the ultimate determination of development areas most suitable for commercial use.

## **Industry**

The Goals, Objectives and Policies indicate that the future vision for Mineral County should include allowances for light industrial development as well as improvement of retail trade opportunities. Because the timber and transportation service industries represent a significant share of county income, there is a need to designate adequate land for a continuation of local services for these enterprises. Preference should be given to preserving the existing operations with good access and that do not produce negative long term Impacts. New or expanded industrial uses are envisioned to be resource and transportation oriented uses with required support facilities. They should be ideally sited for connection to existing public services and future public utility extensions. The type of industrial activity allowed should be addressed in land use regulations adopted in accordance with the guidance established in the Growth Policy.

## **Public Services**

The streets and sewer and water systems are affected by expansion occurring within the service area of each system, and the impacts of development proposals on these systems must be considered before development plans are approved. Specific information and recommendations for improvements to the sewer and water systems of the urbanized areas of the county are discussed in the Public Facilities section of Part One.

Since there are no community sewer and water systems outside of Alberton, Superior, and St. Regis (St. Regis has community sewer only), the primary concern of the county is to work to improve the process of addressing the needs relating to the road and bridge system in order to maintain a high level of service for the population anticipated during the planning period. The road system in Mineral County, as in all Montana counties, is in constant need of maintenance to control the effects of winter weather and poor storm water drainage. Most roads within the county are gravel and there are also some paved sections on arterial routes that fall under the jurisdiction of the county road department. Both paved and gravel roads require constant attention and many are in need of repair. Working within the limitations of the county budget, it is difficult, if not impossible, to address all of these needs on an annual basis. The establishment of a county road and bridge capital improvements program is the most effective method of prioritizing these needs and anticipating funding levels that must be provided to maintain and upgrade the system. The use of Rural Improvement Districts may be an option for funding localized road improvements projects.

Mineral County recently completed a 911 addressing system that includes GIS mapping showing the current road network. This information was used in the production of maps for this document, and could also be useful to set up a county wide Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for roads and bridges. The creation of a data base containing information on the conditions of each component of the road and bridge network could be used to prioritize improvements in a CIP for the rural area. A similar process could be used for streets and storm drain facilities in the incorporated areas of Alberton and Superior. In addition to working toward identifying methods of increasing revenues and reducing public spending, the completion of a CIP is a primary goal of the county and town administrations. Because of the costs associated with these kinds of projects, it is likely that they will be undertaken in phases, and grant monies will be required to get some of the projects completed. In an effort to minimize additional impacts on the budgets of the towns and the county, and in order to ensure a reasonable level of service to residents, all future subdivisions should be required to meet street surfacing and drainage standards adopted by the appropriate jurisdiction of Alberton, Superior, or Mineral County. Public service needs and infrastructure planning are addressed in more detail in Part Five, Implementation.

## **Community Facilities**

Community services providing fire protection, law enforcement, health care, public administration and schools should be considered in the development of the land use plan since obvious shortages or inadequacies in existing facilities could result in the need for additional

public land for future expansion. Typically, we must depend on detailed facility plans developed by the affected public entity (through study committees) to identify facility needs. Although there may be a shortage of some resources required to provide these services in Mineral County, there were no urgent needs identified within the limited scope of the growth plan.

Although it does not appear to be practical to initiate improvements at this time, plans for future improvements to the public facilities should be undertaken to identify needs and potential budgeting shortfalls. Capital improvements for the county's public buildings should be scheduled and budgeted within a priority system addressing all capital needs anticipated within the planning period. A detailed Capital Improvements Program (CIP) would include priorities for funding and improving these facilities.

## **Community Issues and Concerns**

### 2007 Growth Policy Survey

The primary means of obtaining public input to help identify the local issues and concerns for use in preparation of the growth plan was through the distribution of a Growth Policy Survey addressing a variety of topics pertinent to community needs. It was mailed out to 1576 residents throughout Mineral County, including the incorporated areas of Alberton and Superior. The citizens of Alberton and Superior received a survey form designed to address urban-oriented issues while other county residents received a survey form addressing issues associated with the rural part of the county. The survey included 39 questions for the rural area and 43 questions for the towns, and was set up by the planning office using direction from the Mineral County Planning Board. The surveys were mailed out in February 2007 and had a good response rate with 454 returned or 28.8%.

An important part of the survey design was to allow for identification of needs for individual areas of Mineral County. Responses by rural planning unit were noted on the county form to allow for some indication of local preferences and opinions (see Figure 2 for planning unit locations). The results were tabulated in Microsoft Excel documents which were used to highlight issues that should be addressed for urban and rural areas of the county.

A summary of responses to the surveys showed the following general highlights:

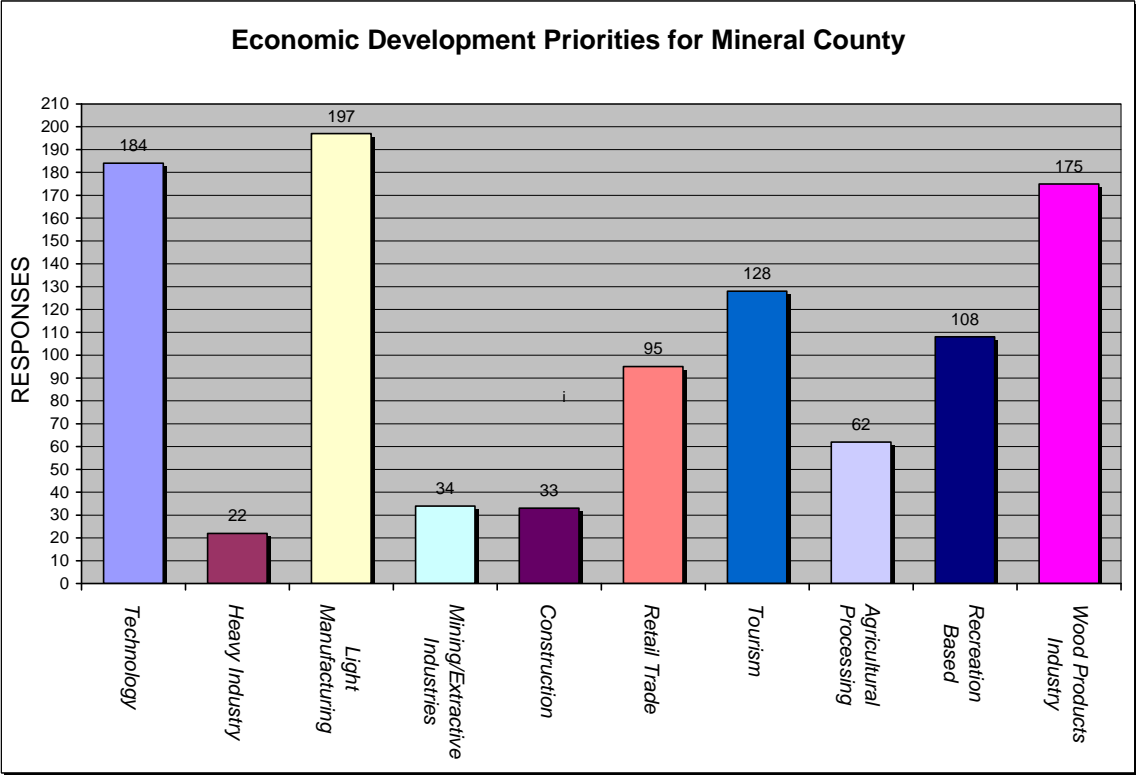
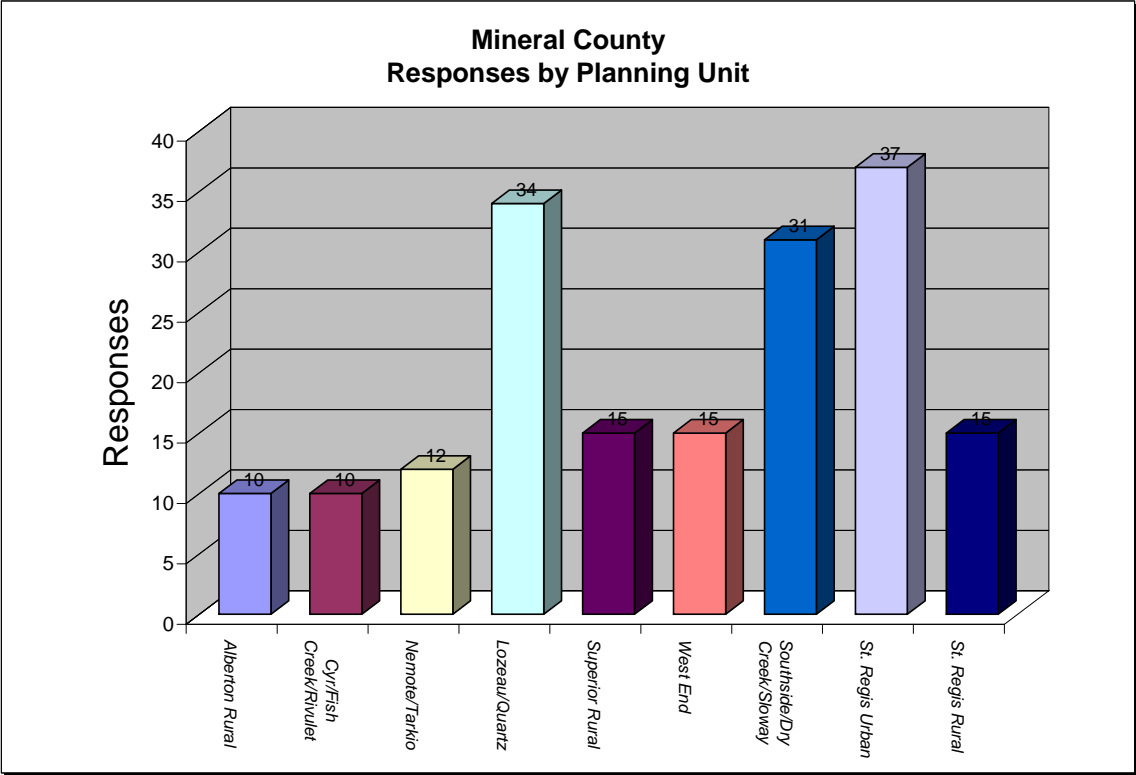
- Mineral County Rural Area
  - The majority (over 70%) of respondents are 50 or older and have lived in Mineral County for over 10 years.
  - Most responses to the survey in the unincorporated area of Mineral County were from the St. Regis area (29%), the Lozeau/Quartz area (19%), and the Southside/Dry Creek/Sloway area (17%).
  - Light manufacturing, technology, retail trade, wood products, and tourism are the highest priorities for economic development.
  - County residents are slightly more inclined to locate future growth near existing population centers than to spread it uniformly throughout the county.

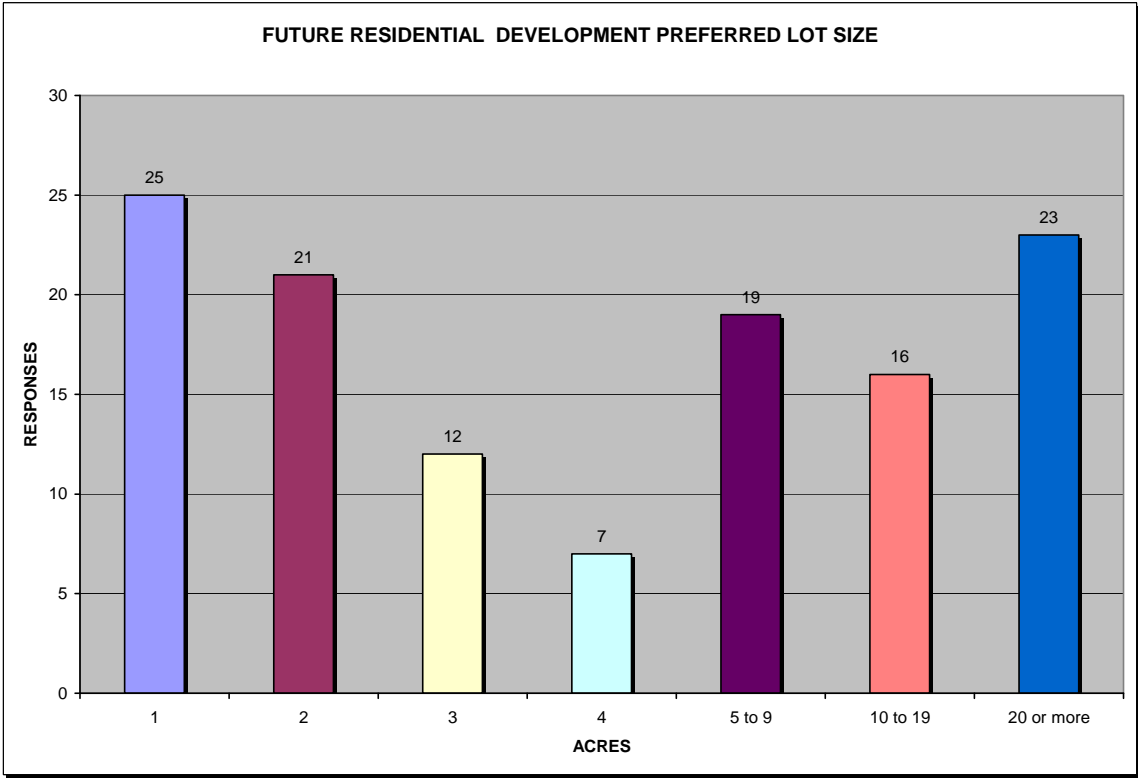
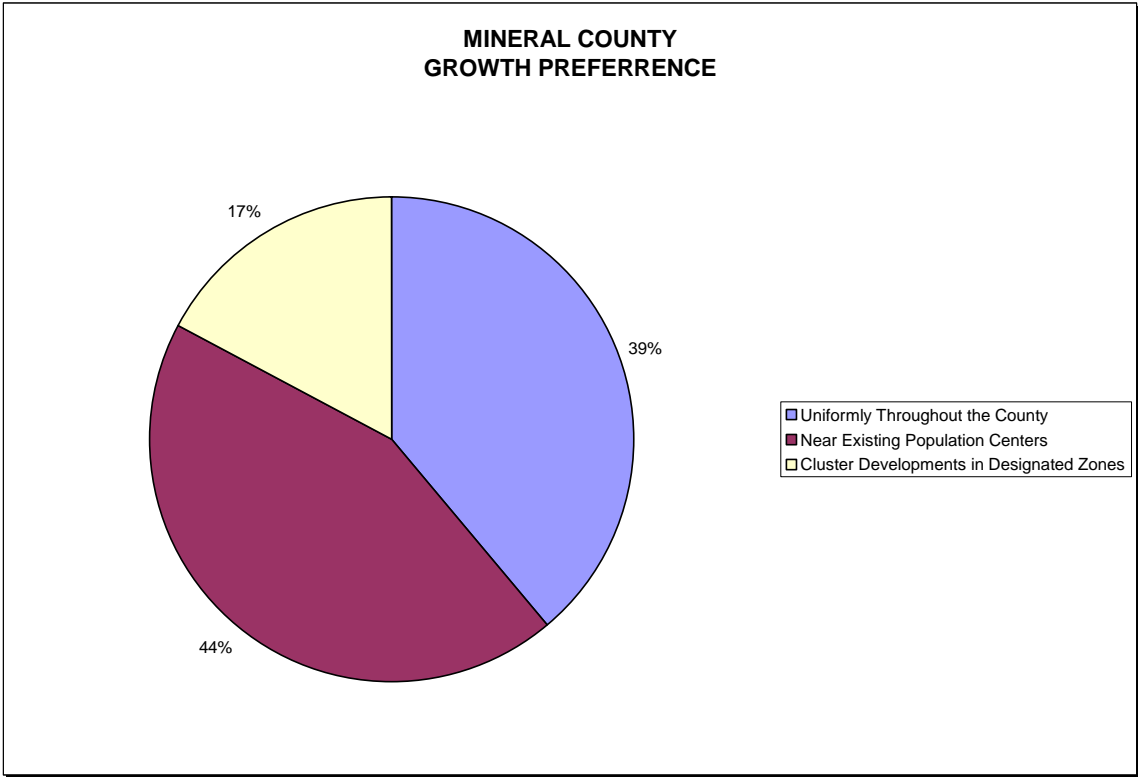
- The preferred lot size for future residential development should be in the 1 to 4 acre range according to 53% of respondents. Nineteen percent believe it should be 20 acres or more.
- The concept of cluster development is favored by 49% of respondents.
- Most respondents believe that county road maintenance is adequate.
- Preventing the loss of wildlife habitat is very important to county residents.

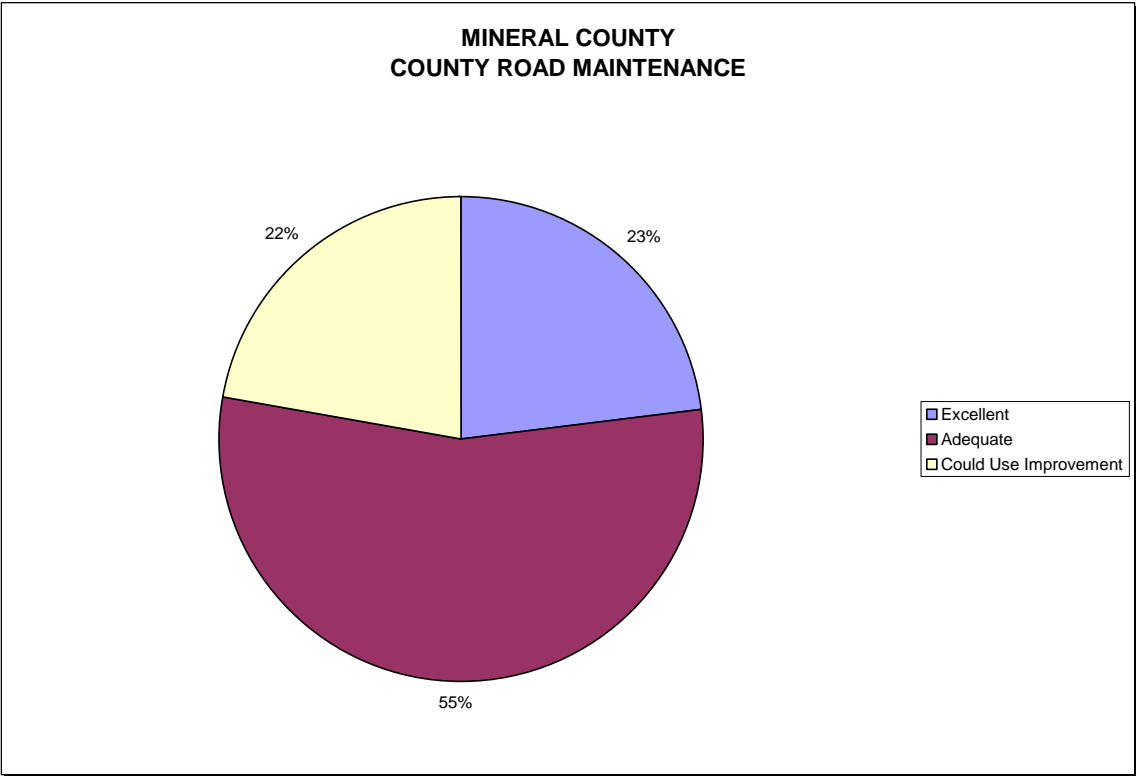
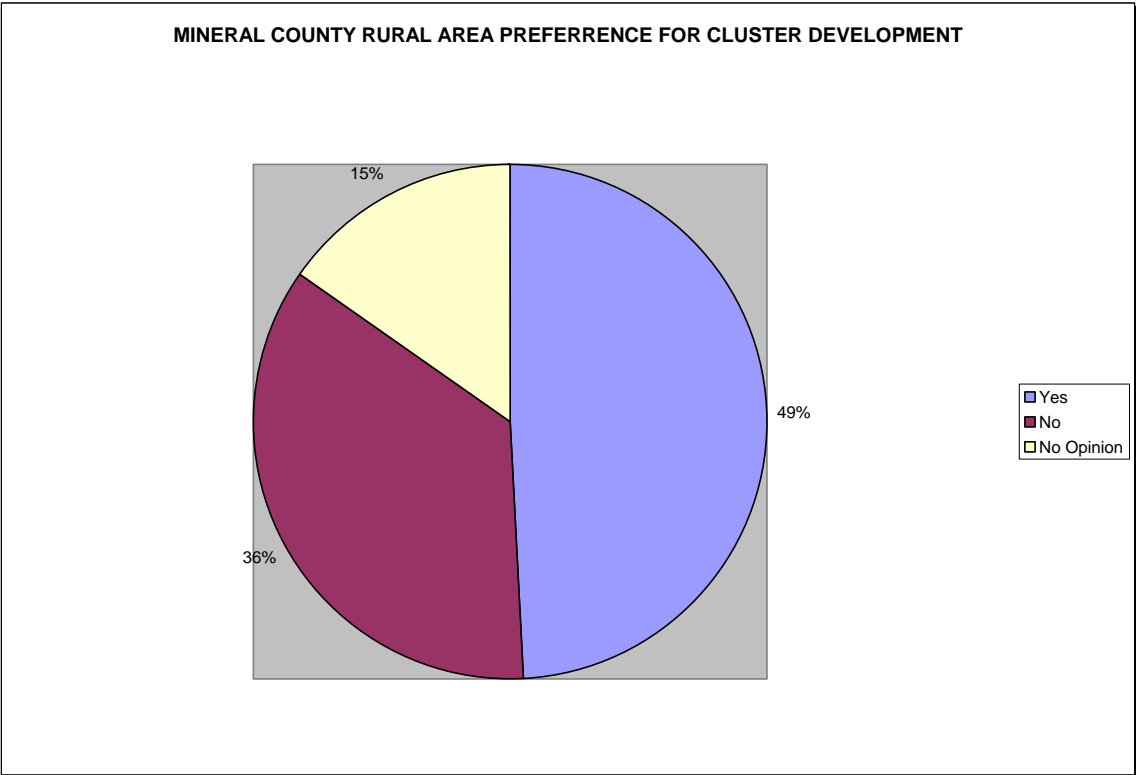
Comments more pertinent to local issues within incorporated areas were primarily centered on differences relating to the need for public services. A complete listing of the comment records is contained in the Growth Policy Survey tabulations kept in the Mineral County Environmental Health and Planning office. The following summary covers some of the major concerns for the incorporated areas of Alberton and Superior.

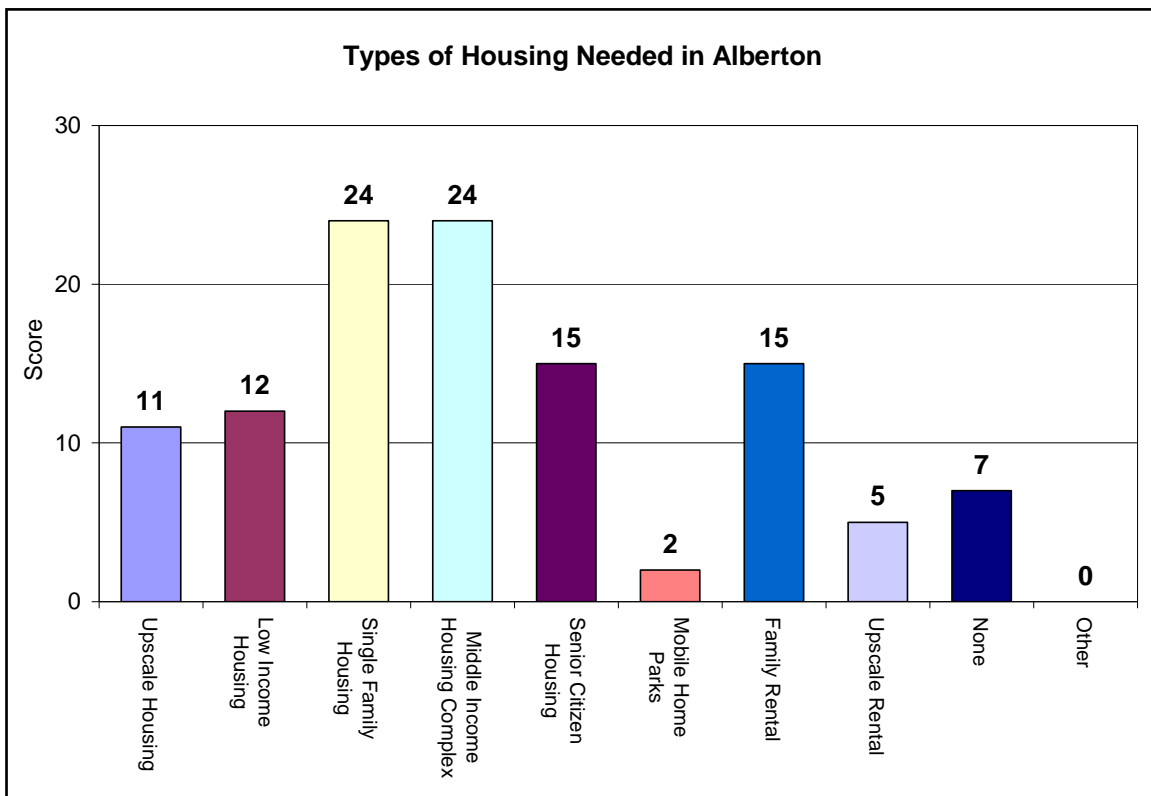
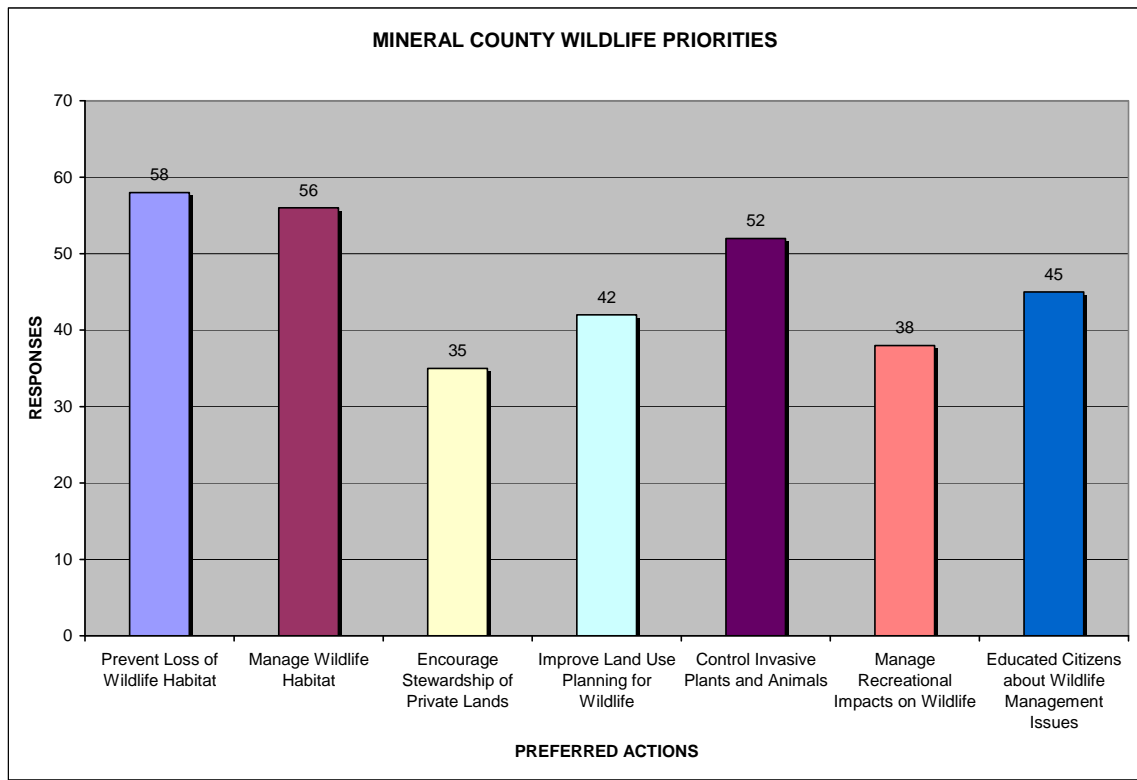
- Alberton
  - A middle income housing complex, single family housing, senior housing, and family rental units were indicated as the top housing needs.
  - The top priorities for community improvements are: improving sidewalks, community beautification, improving streets, and recycling program. Other highly rated priorities include quality law enforcement, Railroad Avenue development, and walking and bike paths.
  - Economic development priorities are retail trade, light manufacturing, and technology.
  - Over 60% of respondents said Alberton should designate areas for certain types of residential use and commercial use.
- Superior
  - Senior housing was indicated as the top housing need. Middle income housing complex, single family housing, and family rental units were also listed as important priorities for housing improvements.
  - The top priorities for community improvements are: improving sidewalks, community beautification, a community/youth center, improving streets, walking and bike paths, and recycling program. Other highly rated priorities include River Street development, and zoning and planning.
  - Economic development priorities are technology, light manufacturing, retail trade, and wood products industry.
  - Over 50% of respondents said Superior should designate areas for certain types of residential use and commercial use.

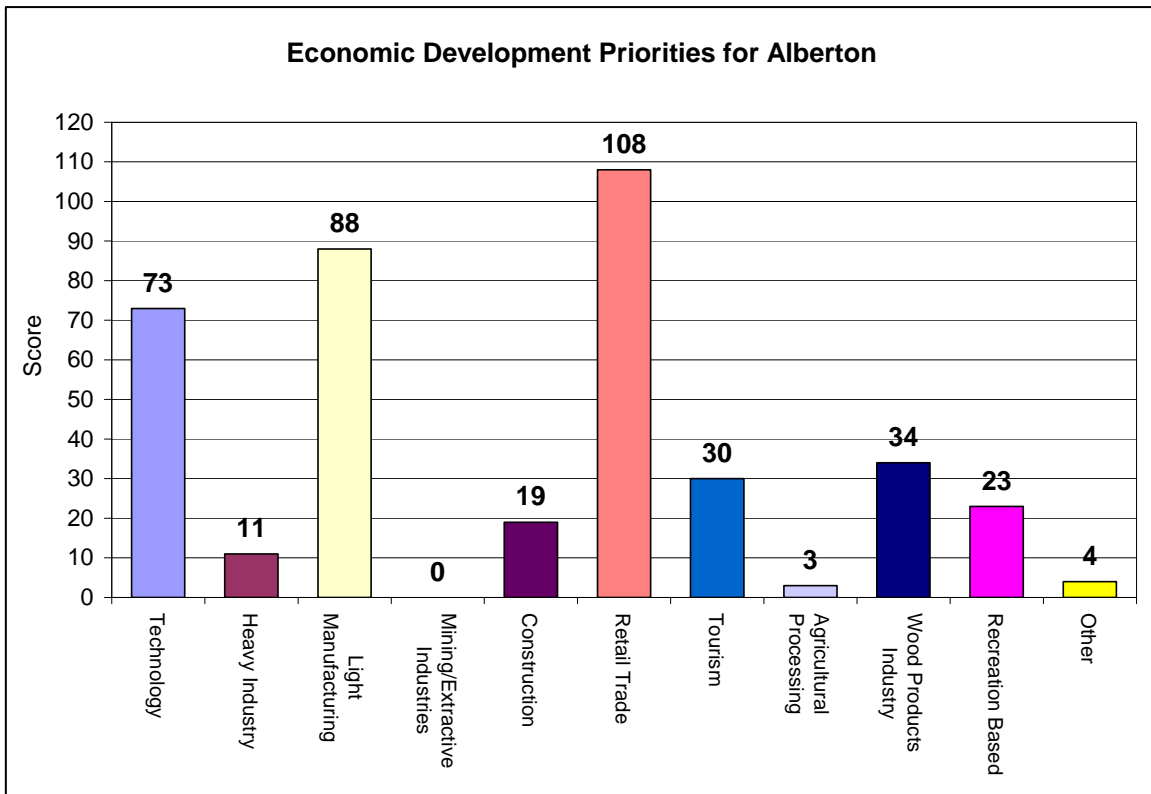
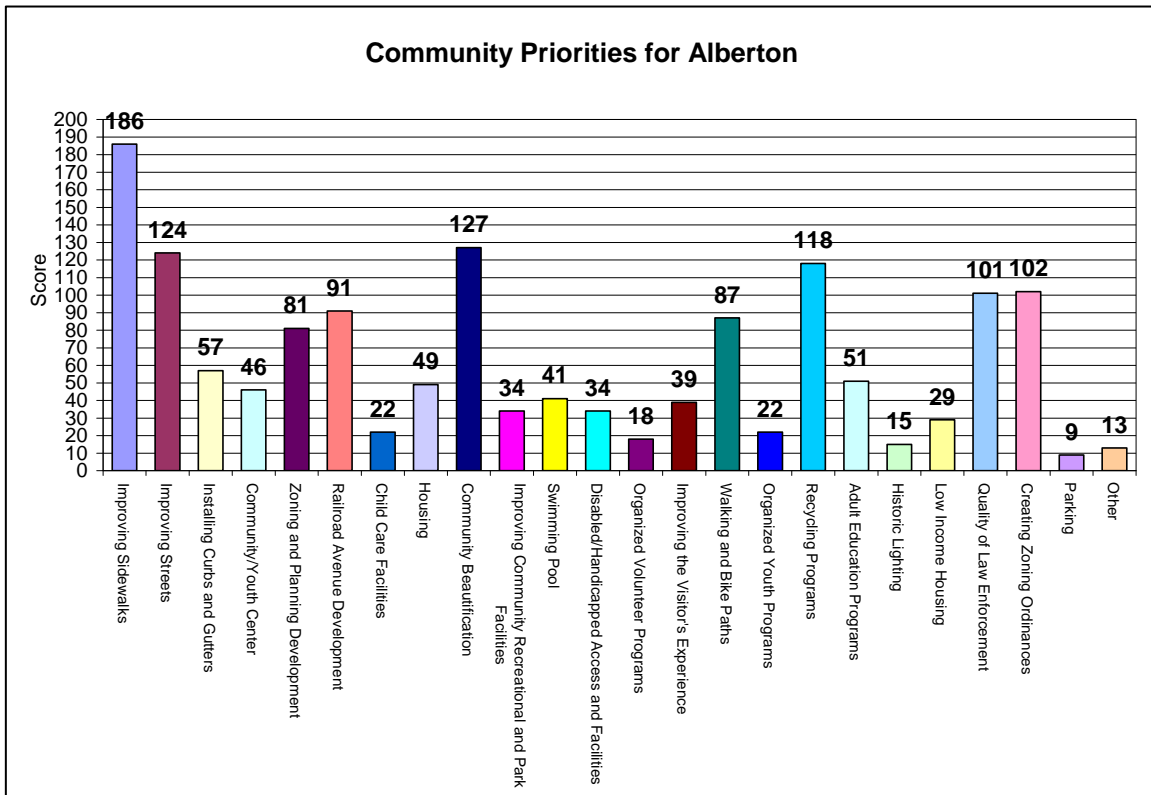
A summary of several important issues addressed in the Growth Policy Survey is shown in a series of charts on the following pages.

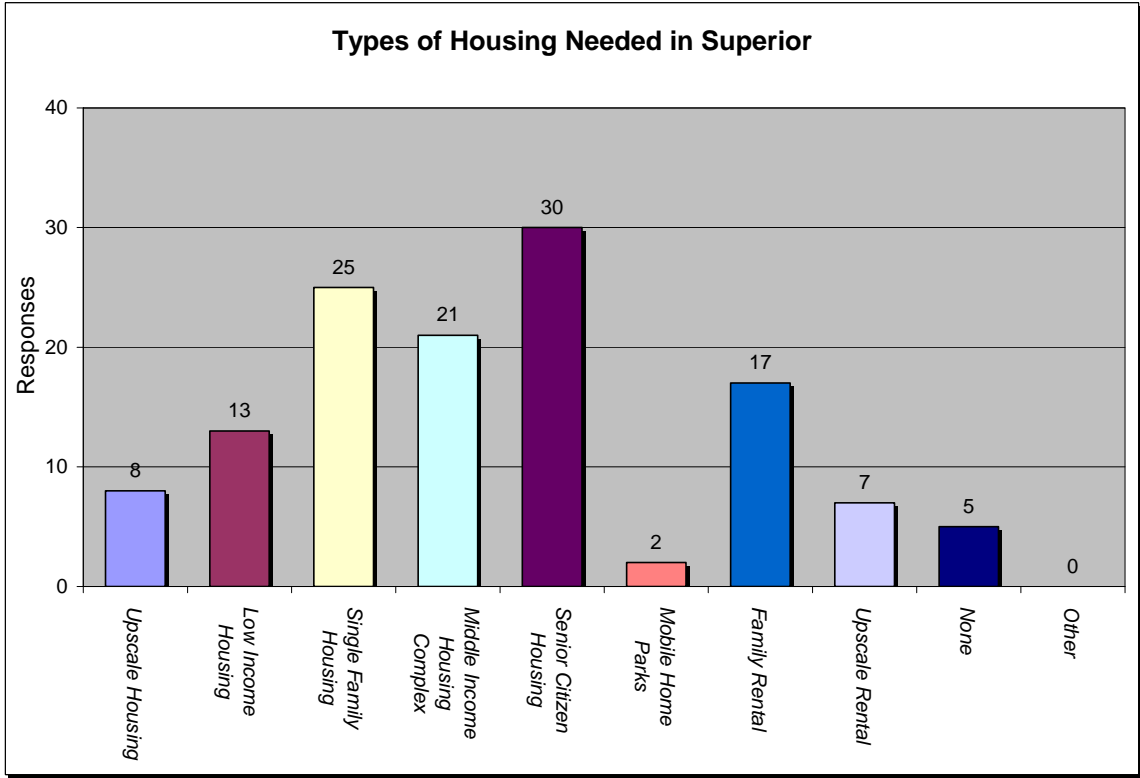
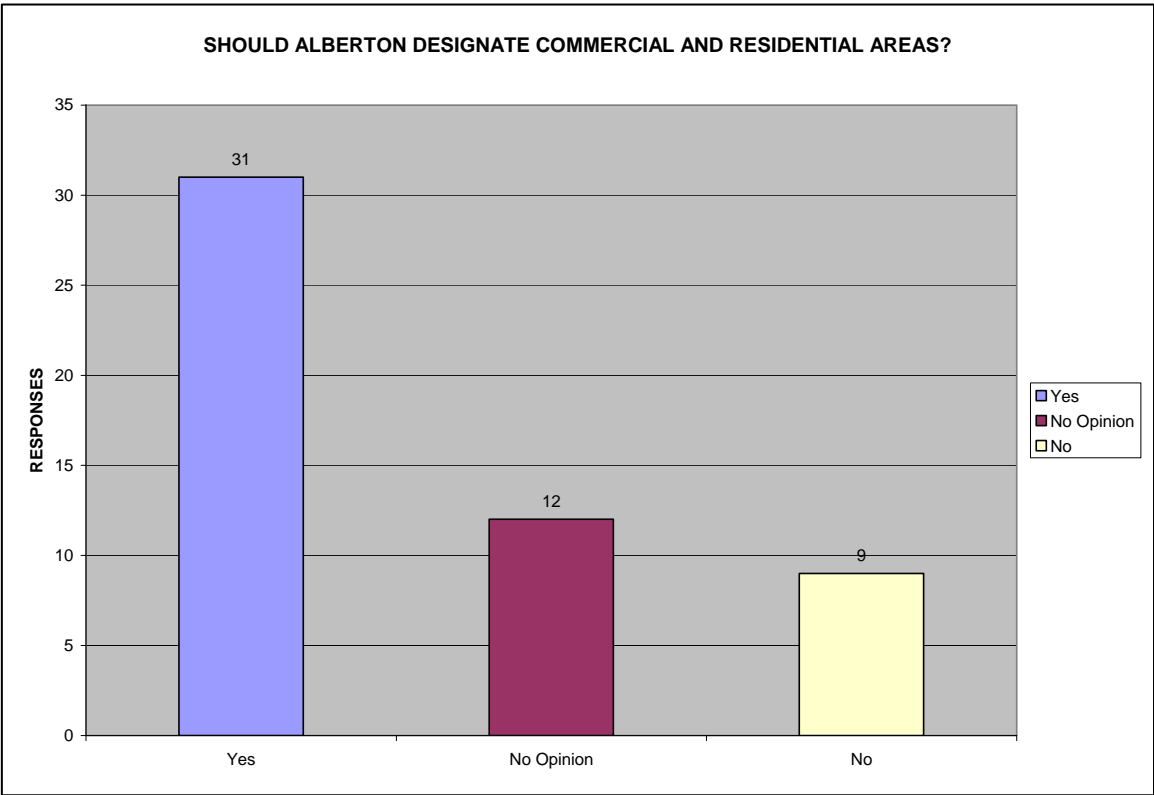


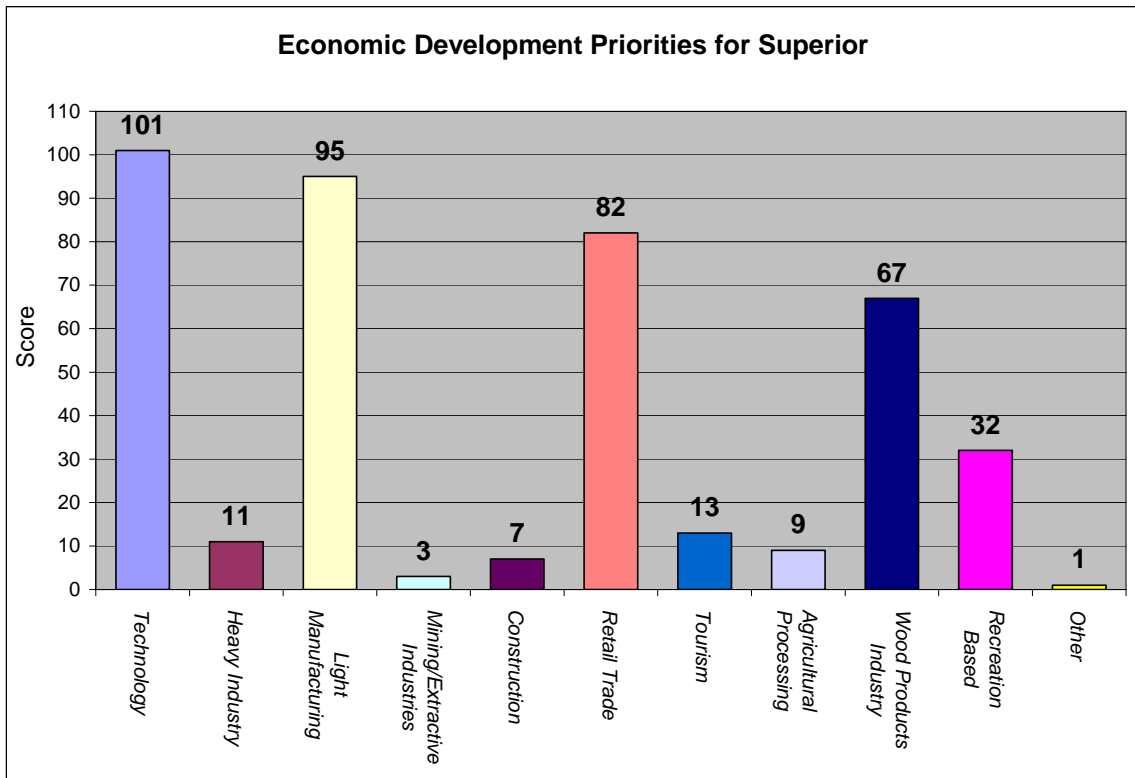
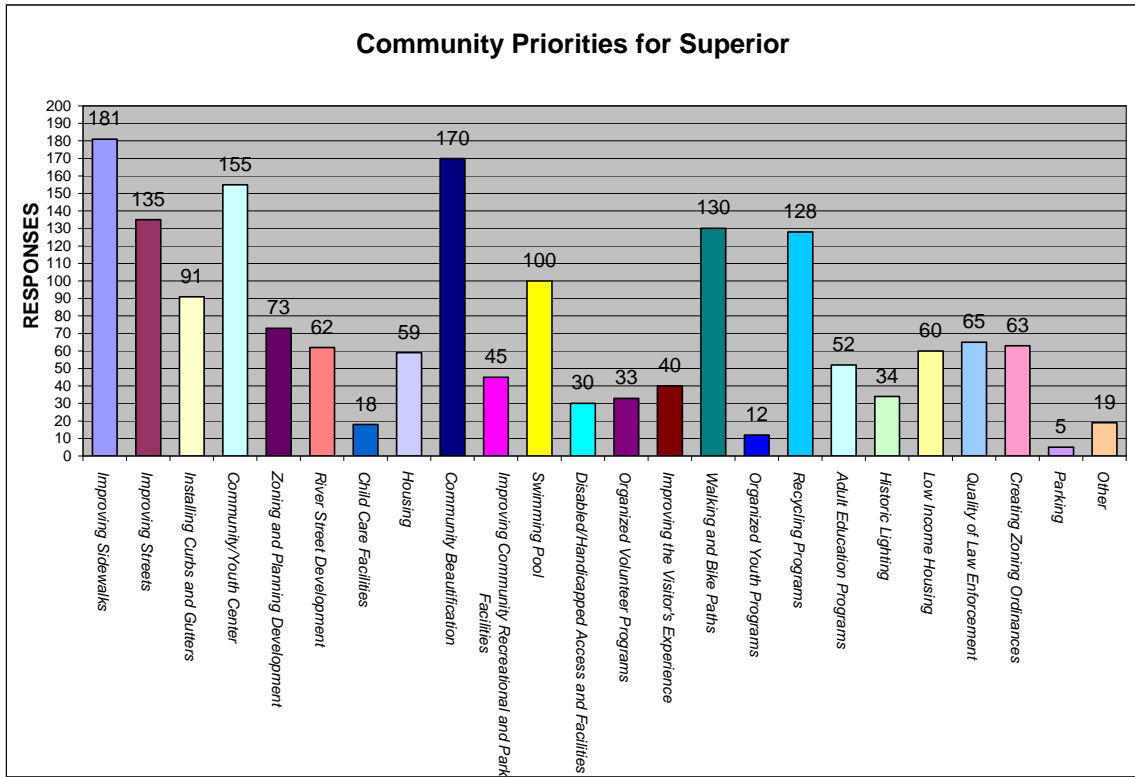


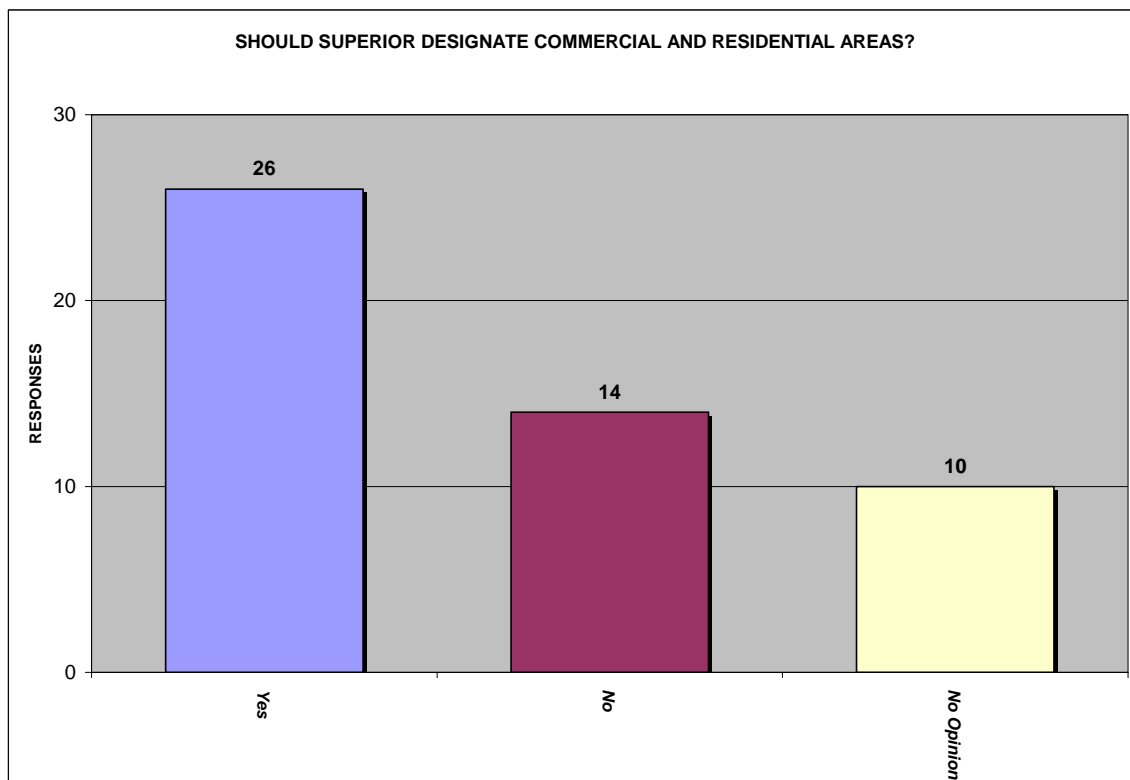












Important community issues, needs and available resources in Mineral County were the subjects of a needs assessment survey completed for the county in November 1996. The Assessment Report summarized the results of the survey and illustrated the opinions of residents throughout Mineral County, including the incorporated areas. The survey focused on more detailed income, housing and community care issues, and also reinforced many of the responses that were indicated in the 2007 Growth Policy Survey. A multitude of issues were identified and summarized under six main headings in the report for: 1) HOUSING, 2) PUBLIC FACILITIES, 3) CHILD CARE, 4) EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME, 5) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, and 6) ADULT EDUCATION. The following is a partial listing of results.

HOUSING responses showed that single family housing is the preferred choice for new housing; senior citizen low-income housing is needed; rental units are needed; specialized care facilities are needed.

PUBLIC FACILITIES concerns noted the need for a public sewer system in St. Regis (there is a system in operation now that is maintained by the county); 63% of respondents said they would be in favor of seeking state or federal funding to expand public facilities and services;

CHILD CARE comments indicated a need for more child care, especially that which would be available to low income groups.

EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME needs focused on addressing the issue of under-employment and the lack of good paying jobs; manufacturing, forest products, recreation, tourism, and retail were the preferred choices for adding employment.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT concerns dealt with the need to encourage growth (over 75% of the residents indicated they are pro-growth).

ADULT EDUCATION comments centered on the need for promotion of continuing education.

---

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

### General

In addition to land ownership patterns, the physical features of the planning area are greatly responsible for determination of the use of the land. Slope, soils and hydrology are the primary factors (in addition to climate) that dictate an area's capability to support agricultural, urban-oriented or other types of land use. In Mineral County the rugged landforms, surface water and groundwater characteristics have had a profound influence on the pattern of land use that has developed and will continue to limit the location of growth in the future. The use of the land for the timber resource in the vast mountainous area, and other agricultural commodities along the Clark Fork River and its tributaries, also has had a very significant influence in shaping the various communities throughout the county. Information showing the location of large blocks of public ownership and private agricultural parcels can be helpful in determination of suitable or likely areas for urban oriented expansion. Lands reserved for open space through the establishment of conservation easements also affect the direction of growth, and the limitations and opportunities created by the agreement can affect future plans for the area under consideration. The following discussion is concerned with limitations or opportunities that exist because of conditions found in general areas throughout Mineral County. The information is suitable for planning purposes and should not be construed as a precise description as would be obtained through on-site evaluations for particular projects. It is possible that detailed information could be submitted that demonstrates suitable development conditions on isolated sites within the broad areas described below.

### Groundwater

The Mineral County planning area covers over 1,200 square miles and includes groundwater conditions that range from water availability only at deep aquifer depth to shallow aquifer supplies in alluvial areas. Generally, the groundwater depth can present a constraint to urban use of the land because of increased costs associated with constructing septic systems to meet current environmental health standards, and also because of the difficulty in constructing stable foundations to support new structures. Groundwater quality is affected by septic tank density and by runoff from agricultural chemicals and mining activities. Data indicates that all of these groundwater conditions occur in various areas of Mineral County, indicating that evaluation of groundwater data is a critical step in reviewing the effect of development proposals on the environment. Some groundwater conditions must be considered through examination of seasonal data to determine the overall effect. Seasonal high groundwater conditions near irrigation ditches severely limit development down gradient from the ditch. The use of irrigation for local hay crops is relatively uncommon in Mineral County, however there are instances where irrigation is used in the proximity of developing areas. Evidence points to irrigation losses as one of the major sources of recharge to the shallow aquifer. Since groundwater levels vary significantly throughout the county, site specific conditions should be identified prior to authorization of new development proposals. Groundwater Information Center well data provides valuable information that can be used as an indicator of local groundwater conditions,

and more detailed information on water quality is available in established environmentally sensitive areas such as high priority wetlands or special study areas for riparian wetland research. The Environmental Health and Planning Department may also have information that could be useful in determination of groundwater conditions in certain areas of the county.

The need for additional planning for construction of foundation systems is evident for areas known to be subject to high groundwater conditions. The influence of water and soils on the foundation and the effect of hydrostatic pressure on slabs and walls must be considered in the design process before building permits are issued in these areas. Since detailed mapping information showing high groundwater locations is not readily available for all of Mineral County, well logs should be reviewed as the primary resource to anticipate approximate groundwater levels. Building codes typically require a minimum footing depth of 42" below the surface, which may be difficult to accomplish as development moves closer to irrigated land, irrigation canals, and drainage courses. These factors could result in substantial cost additives for new construction.

## **Floodplains**

### General

Floodplains are particularly sensitive areas in planning for development. Floodplains impose limitations on land uses because of physical characteristics that may not be readily apparent because the frequency of the hazard may occur only once in a hundred years.

This condition often lulls the population into a false sense of security on land near flood prone lakes and streams, and development may occur in these areas. When a design flood does occur, the damage is extensive and the health hazard and economic chaos is dramatic. The purpose of a floodplain analysis is to regulate the land uses in flood prone areas and restrict the types of activity to minimize adverse effects when and if a design flood occurs.

Flood Hazard Requirements in Subdivision Regulations - The subdivision regulations, as adopted by Mineral County, Alberton, and Superior in compliance with the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act, include a section governing floodway provisions. As stated in the document, any land located in the floodway of a flood of one hundred year frequency, or land deemed subject to flooding as determined by the governing body, shall not be subdivided for building or residential purposes, or other uses that may increase or aggravate flood hazards to life, health, or welfare. A permit must be obtained for any development in the floodplain based on information demonstrating that flood hazards can be overcome or eliminated by approved construction techniques. If the proposed subdivision is within a specified distance of a live stream and no official floodway delineation has been made, the subdivider may be required to furnish survey data, and the floodway will then be determined by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC).

Controlling the subdivision of land in flood prone areas is an effective method of regulating the land use to acceptable uses.

### Existing Floodplain Maps

The Mineral County planning area is affected by flood incidents due to occasional high volume rain events as well as rapid snow melt in the drainage areas of the county's major streams. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maps are available for some areas based on flood insurance studies for drainage conditions along the major streams in the county. The FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) for Mineral County are based on Flood Insurance Studies completed between 1978 and 1996. The official Flood Insurance Rate Maps and related information are available at the county floodplain administrator's office in the Mineral County Courthouse.

The history of flooding on the Clark Fork River and its tributaries has shown that some limitations exist that must be addressed before future development plans can be implemented. The flood affected areas include riparian zones adjacent to the river and flood prone zones near the main streams in the county. The flood affected areas are generally delineated on the Mineral County FEMA floodplain maps covering the rural areas. These maps are available on-line and should be referenced when any development is proposed in the vicinity of streams and rivers. The maps do not cover the area within the incorporated town of Alberton. Superior had a Flood Insurance Rate Map completed on January 5, 2001 with the panel number being 300128 0005 A.

The floodplain of the Clark Fork River, as well as its tributary streams, can present a serious obstacle to many types of development, and would necessarily be considered a constraint to the expansion of residential and commercial uses where flooding conditions exist. Future land use planning in the floodplain area should follow the requirements of the Floodplain Ordinance by controlling the location of structures in the floodplain and working to maintain enforceable regulations that deal effectively with the specific problems in the county area. Mineral County anticipates that the map modernization process will commence in 2008 and be completed by 2010. The map modernization will replace the 1990s Flood Insurance Rate Map with digital maps that should also address mapping inconsistencies.

### **Agricultural Land**

Considering the impact of the proportion of land area devoted to agriculture can be an important factor in assessing the potential for future growth, and the distribution by parcel size is a general indicator of an area's propensity to retain existing land use patterns. Although the opportunity for change in use through future subdivision is certainly a possibility in agricultural areas, knowledge of the general details of the agricultural parcel helps to provide insight into the impacts of future land use decisions on the industry and community. In some situations environmental conditions and demographic factors such as slope, soils and road access may support the opportunity for maintaining viable agricultural operations. In others, the data may point toward a better use of the land for another purpose.

Agricultural use of the land in Mineral County as a forest products resource is the predominant form of agriculture in the study area as shown in the land use maps in Part One (Figure 7). The land is spread out in large parcels throughout the county and is primarily on property managed by the National Forest Service. The checkerboard pattern evident on the maps illustrates the influence of the other public land holding being the State of Montana Trust lands and the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. The general location of irrigated, fallow crop and grazing land illustrated on the maps shows the limited distribution of agriculture county wide, emphasizing the need to consider the effects of taking important farmland out of production in the future. As previously mentioned, parcel size or contiguous parcels under common ownership can be an important reference when considering future plans in an agricultural area. The parcel boundaries shown on the land use maps are an indication of the size of the operation as well as the distribution of irrigated and grazing lands. The only irrigated land in the county is found along the Clark Fork River corridor.

It is important to note that this is a general planning reference only, and additional data should be obtained to evaluate development proposals. This information is based on recent data (2006) included in the state Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal (CAMA ) data base available on the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS). Parcel summaries are available on-line through the NRIS site showing ownership, parcel size, agricultural production and other information for each of the parcels in the study area. This is a valuable tool that can be used for many planning applications in the future to help identify opportunities and constraints for a given proposal.

An additional resource to aid in the identification of farmland that should be preserved is provided by the Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) through classification of prime and important farmland soils. The classification results in a listing of soil map units in the county that are considered prime for use as farmland or of statewide importance. There are some soils listed in Mineral County and they have been mapped to show the distribution across both public and private land. The Prime and Important Farmland Soils unit names and descriptions are available through the NRCS report for Mineral County on-line through the NRIS (Natural Resource Information System) site.

## **Conservation Easements**

A conservation easement is a method of preserving open space values, productive agricultural land, river corridors or similar uses from urban development and activities that would produce adverse environmental impacts. The easement is a nonregulatory means of influencing the location of new development, and has the net effect of protecting the land from encroachment by undesirable land use on a long term basis regardless of any future transfer of ownership.

According to Montana Natural Heritage records, there is only one conservation easement listed for Mineral County at this time. The use of conservation easements has increased in Montana over the past decade in response to high land values for development and recreation compared to agriculture. In the western part of the state, the easements generally place perpetual restrictions on the property for commercial and residential subdivisions while traditional

agricultural activities continue. The easements can be written to allow specific division of the property to accommodate family members and/or to limit the number of structures that can be built. The limitations reduce the value of the property potentially helping ranch families transfer land from one generation to another without high real estate taxes and the donor also reaps tax benefits from the easements since they are considered charitable contributions by the federal government.

## **Public Land**

Public ownership of land in Mineral County has had a significant influence on the pattern and characteristics of land use over history, and will continue to guide development and management decisions in the future. Federal and State agencies administer approximately 1,100 square miles of land in the county, which represents nearly 84% of the total land area. The distribution of public land is shown on the Land Use and Public Ownership map in Figure 7 in Part One of this report. The largest Federal owner is the National Forest Service which has significant holdings distributed across the entire county.

### Wetlands

Wetlands are fragile ecosystems that are sensitive to disruptions in the water table or fluctuations in surface water availability. These areas are found on the flanks of active waterways or bodies of standing water and are typically referred to as swamps, bogs, marshes or sloughs. Wetlands are recognized for their role in supporting a wide range of animals, fish, insects and plants that are an important part of the local ecology. Existing wetlands are also inherently valuable for their ability to treat and filter wastewater and runoff from agricultural operations and can help to control detrimental effects from other development including mining and road construction. Many small communities and large livestock feeding operations have created artificial wetlands that function as natural biological sewage treatment areas.

The protection of wetlands in Mineral County is a necessary part of implementing a plan that will help to perpetuate the agricultural and rural nature that has been identified as a desirable feature in many areas of the county. Wetlands exist throughout the riparian areas of the county, primarily near the Clark Fork River and its main tributaries. Wetland areas are also found around many other local drainage features throughout the county, however only a small portion of them have been identified through special study efforts.