

City of Priest River Planning & Zoning Department

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To: City Council

From: Jake Gabell, Planning and Zoning Administrator

Subject: Comprehensive Plan Update – Data Summary and Existing Conditions Report

Date: January 20, 2026

Attachments

Draft Comprehensive Plan Appendix B: Bibliography by Chapter

Introduction and Purpose

This Data Summary and Existing Conditions Report was prepared as part of Phase 2 of the City of Priest River Comprehensive Plan Update (2026). Its purpose is to document baseline conditions, summarize key trends, and identify notable changes that have occurred since adoption of the 2013 Comprehensive Plan. This report provides the factual foundation that informed the development of goals, policies, and implementation strategies contained in the draft Comprehensive Plan.

The report consolidates demographic, housing, land use, infrastructure, transportation, environmental, and economic data into a single reference document. Detailed analysis of these topics is integrated throughout the draft Comprehensive Plan. This report is intended to function as a supporting technical document and reference point for City Council, staff, partner agencies, and the public.

Community Context and Planning Area

Priest River is a small city that historically developed as a mill and river-oriented community. The planning area includes all land within the City's incorporated limits and reflects the City's role as a service and employment center for surrounding rural areas. Since 2013, the City has experienced gradual population growth, changing housing demands, evolving infrastructure needs, and increased regional development pressure.

Population and Demographic Trends

Population data indicate modest but steady growth since the last comprehensive plan update. The City's age distribution reflects an aging population alongside an increase in working-age residents and families. Household sizes remain relatively small, consistent with regional and statewide trends.

Key trends include:

- Gradual population growth rather than rapid expansion
- An increasing share of older adults and retirees

- Continued importance of family households and long-term residents

These trends informed policies emphasizing housing diversity, aging-in-place, and long-term infrastructure planning.

Housing Conditions and Trends

Housing data show a limited and constrained housing supply, with a predominance of single-family detached units. Manufactured housing remains an important component of the local housing stock. Rental availability is limited, contributing to affordability challenges for workforce households.

Notable housing trends include:

- Limited new housing construction relative to demand
- Aging housing stock requiring reinvestment and rehabilitation

These conditions informed policies supporting housing reinvestment, a broader mix of housing types, and coordination between housing development and infrastructure capacity.

Land Use Patterns and Development Trends

Land use within Priest River remains primarily residential, with commercial and industrial uses concentrated along key transportation corridors and historic development areas. Since 2013, development activity has been incremental, with limited large-scale projects.

Observed land use trends include:

- Stable established neighborhoods with minimal redevelopment
- Continued demand for residential lots
- Commercial activity focused along U.S. Highway 2 and downtown areas

These patterns reinforced the need for compatibility, neighborhood stability, and clear land use designations in the updated plan.

Public Services, Facilities, and Utilities

Public services and utilities are generally adequate to serve current development levels but require ongoing maintenance and long-term planning. Water, wastewater, roads, and other facilities represent significant public investments.

Key observations include:

- Infrastructure improvements completed since adoption of the 2007 capital planning documents
- Ongoing need for reinvestment in aging systems
- Importance of aligning growth with available service capacity

These findings informed policies emphasizing fiscal responsibility, infrastructure coordination, and phased growth.

Transportation and Mobility Conditions

Transportation conditions are shaped by the City's location along U.S. Highway 2 and State Highway 57. Local streets serve both local circulation and regional travel needs. Multimodal options exist but are limited in scope.

Transportation trends include:

- Continued reliance on personal vehicles
- Increasing interest in pedestrian and bicycle connectivity
- Importance of access management along state highways

These conditions influenced policies supporting coordination with state agencies and incremental improvements to local connectivity.

Environmental and Hazard Constraints

Natural features such as the Pend Oreille River, wetlands, floodplains, and surrounding forested lands influence development patterns. Hazard areas, including flood-prone lands, require careful consideration in land use planning.

Key considerations include:

- Presence of flood hazard areas
- Importance of protecting water quality and natural resources
- Balancing development with environmental constraints

These factors informed policies addressing hazardous areas, natural resource protection, and land suitability.

Economic and Employment Context

Priest River's economy has transitioned from a timber-dominated base to a more diverse mix of construction, services, manufacturing, and tourism-related activity. Many residents commute to employment centers elsewhere in Bonner County and the region.

Economic trends include:

- Reduced local employment in traditional timber industries
- Growth in small businesses and service-oriented enterprises
- Increasing importance of regional economic integration

These trends support policies focused on economic diversification and land use flexibility.

Key Takeaways Informing the Comprehensive Plan

The data and trends summarized in this report led to several overarching conclusions:

- Growth is occurring incrementally and should be managed deliberately
- Housing diversity and affordability are ongoing challenges
- Infrastructure reinvestment is essential for long-term stability
- Land use compatibility and neighborhood character remain priorities
- Environmental constraints require continued attention

These conclusions directly informed the goals, policies, and implementation strategies contained in the draft Comprehensive Plan.

Bibliography

A comprehensive list of data sources, planning documents, and agency materials used in preparing this report and the draft Comprehensive Plan is provided in the Comprehensive Plan bibliography. This bibliography documents the factual basis for the City's planning decisions and ensures transparency and defensibility.

Appendix B: Bibliography by Chapter

Applicable to All Chapters

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