COMMUNITY PLANNING:
Livability

WOOD
RIVER
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TRUST

Baseline Characteristics:

LIVABILITY

Among planners, livability is generally regarded as "the sum of various elements that add up to a community's quality of life– including the built and natural environments, social stability and equity, economic prosperity, educational and cultural opportunity."[1] The AARP measures livability for every neighborhood and community across the country, based on assessments of "the services and amenities that affect people's lives the most."[2] AARP's Livability Index relies on housing, neighborhood location, transportation environment, health, engagement and opportunity indicators— because livability is largely influenced by the physical qualities of a place and community.

In seeking to maintain and enhance quality of life for the diversity of people in Blaine County, the Wood River Land Trust's community planning program will focus on land use decisions that impact livability locally. Livability factors hinge on connection or access to basic needs, access that reduces stress and supports independent living. Local policy statements prioritize livability; valuing access to healthy food, enjoyment of nature, participation in the local economy, social connection to each other and representative leadership, reflecting the diversity of people and cultures in Blaine County.[3]

If these are the elements that make for a happy life in Blaine County—if they underpin and amplify "quality of place" in the parlance of Sun Valley Economic Development—some cracks are starting to show. Aspects of this small-town self-image are challenged by growth accelerating in resort areas and gateway communities across the mountain west, including the Wood River Valley.[4]

The 2022 Resident Opinion Survey from Visit Sun Valley found that 43% of full-time residents said that the quality of life in the Wood River Valley was in decline, compared to 26% of second-home owners.[5] Locals were also more likely to say that the valley was too crowded, too expensive and changing in ways that concerned them. A smaller percentage of locals (47%) than seasonal residents (63%) said that they were "very proud" of the Wood River Valley as a place to live.[6]

These polls, though, fail to capture the whole valley; the south valley communities were underrepresented. Overrepresentation of the northern cities means that respondents were more likely to be older, whiter and wealthier than the valley as a whole— 97% of respondents were white. These older residents are also better equipped to weather the valley's mounting costs,[7] including housing and food, and are less likely to rely on wages from the local economy for money.[8] While the survey asked important and insightful questions– worthwhile asking again, across the County– its methodology and findings ought to be considered as a symptom of local disparities, rather than representative findings. Why did the survey unintentionally overrepresent the north valley? And, had it considered the opinions of people living in the south valley, would its findings have been different?

The county's southern cities are not only younger but also more diverse, supporting a large and growing Latino population. In 2023, 45.8% of students in Blaine County School District were Hispanic or Latino; 50.5% were white.[9] Carey, the county's youngest community, is already majority Latino.[10] Compare that to the whole county,

Teens and staff share a nutritious meal at The Hunger Coalition.[29]

Children practiced safe-cycling skills through place-based education with Mountain Rides' former Safe Routes program in 2021.

where 23.7% of people identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 73.2% said they were white.[11]

Ketchum and Sun Valley, the cities with the highest housing costs, have median ages of 51 and 64 respectively.[12] The population skews younger moving south: 41 in Hailey; 37 in Bellevue and 30 in Carey.[13] Overall, Blaine County's median age rose from 38.8 in 2009 to 45.9 in 2023. From 2021 to 2022, Blaine County had the joint highest jump in median age of any county in the country.[14] The shift in median age is not solely attributed to growth but also population change.[15] People have migrated out of the County, and the people moving in are significantly older and wealthier.[16,17]

With population change, the County has grown increasingly racially segregated. Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's racial dissimilarity index, Blaine County is the second most segregated county in Idaho.[18] To achieve integration in neighborhoods and cities throughout the County, so that "each neighborhood's racial/ethnic composition [would] match that of the larger area"[19] or County, nearly 40% of residents would have to move census tracts.[20]

Zooming out, the picture is one of a county with stark disparities– a county that is home to extreme wealth, as well as to a working class struggling to keep pace with the high cost of living. The United Way found that, while Blaine County's median household income was higher than Idaho's average, 41% of households here can't afford the basic cost of living in the area.[21] In 2018, the nonprofit Economic Policy Institute announced Blaine County to be the most unequal county in Idaho, with the top 1% of earners making on average 46.8 times more than the bottom 99%.[22] That coefficient makes Blaine the 27th most unequal county in the United States. Looking at other resort mountain towns– Teton County, Wyoming is the most unequal in the country, where the 1% make 142.2 times more than the bottom 99%.[23] Only three other mountain resort town counties experience greater inequality than Blaine County– two in Colorado and one in New Hampshire.[24]

How inequality affects livability– including access to the recreational, social and cultural amenities in Blaine County– is anecdotally understood yet understudied. "Livability is frequently used as an umbrella of indicators. However, in many cases, the indicators are chosen first

and then gathered under the livability 'umbrella' rather than following from a distinct conceptual framework."[25] As a community, the planners in Blaine County have not settled on a set of core community values, nor a distinct conceptual framework for livability. Once there is consensus on a local definition for livability, recent studies and data points can be referenced to measure it. From afar, the AARP rates Blaine County as having an Overall Livability Score of 57– ten points above the average county score in the nation and eleven points below the highest scoring county. Within the County, Hailey and Bellevue achieved the highest score of 62. Ketchum scored 61, Sun Valley scored 57 and Carey scored 48.

Acting as a buffer, the local philanthropic community supports a suite of non-profit organizations providing access to basic needs– including housing, food, education and more. The non-profit community significantly offsets the consequences of the socioeconomic disparities in Blaine County, oftentimes "supply[ing] community support where government funding falls short."[26] Across sectors, health and human services organizations consist of the largest number of non-profit organizations in Blaine County; locally, the sector also experienced the most significant increase in non-profit organizations since 2017.[27]

According to Spur Community Foundation, 8% of annual Blaine County revenue, or $96 million, comes from nonprofits.[28] "The nonprofit sector is a major player in the local economy, supplying 10% of the jobs in Blaine County and paying out about $30 million in salaries and wages annually to local workers."

At the height of the COVID pandemic, the City of Ketchum piloted the long-term "open street" vision for downtown 4th Street by closing it to cars and opening it up to people.[31]

Shared Goals

PROCESS

Recognizing the significant overlap in Comprehensive Plan policy statements from Blaine County and its cities– Carey, Bellevue, Hailey, Ketchum and Sun Valley– the Wood River Land Trust scoped the Community Planning program and its action plan objectives (Chapter 3) to stem from goals shared between three or more municipalities. This Chapter 2: Shared Goals presents shared goals backed by Comprehensive Plan policy statements, as displayed in the following tables. Furthermore, the following tables present aspirational ideals meant to house and guide shared goals.

POLICY BACKING

For each focus area, see the policy statements that support the shared goal. From the Land Trust's perspective, shared goals in each focus area work towards the following set of ideals.

LIVABILITY

IDEAL: Land use decisions enhance quality of life for the diversity of people in Blaine County, across demographics.

SHARED GOALS	SUPPORTING POLICIES
L.1 – Community design supports access to basic needs.	[Blaine County](#) - Chapter 1: Transportation, Policy Statements A-2, A-4, A-6, A-7, A-11, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, B-5, D-2, E-1, E-3, E-4, E-5, E-7. Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements E-5, E-9, F-6. Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statements C-1, C-11, C-13. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements LW-5, LW-13.
	[City of Carey](#) - Transportation System, Desirable Goal 3. Housing, Desirable Goals 1, 5, 6. Recreation, Desirable Goals 4, 5. Education Facilities, Desirable Goal 6
	[City of Bellevue](#) - Chapter 2: Population, Goal 3, Objective 1. Chapter 3: School Facilities and Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 3. Chapter 4, Economic Development, Goal 1. Chapter 5: Land Use, Goal 3, Objectives 1, 3. Chapter 7: Hazardous Areas, Goal 2, Objective 5. Chapter 9: Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Chapter 10: Recreation, Goal 1, Objective 5. Chapter 12: Housing, Goal 1, Objective1. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 2.
	[City of Hailey](#) - Section 6: Economic Development, Goal 6.2. Section 10: Transportation, Goal 10.1. Section 13: School Facilities and Transportation, Goal 13.2.
	[City of Ketchum](#) - Chapter 3: Housing, Goal H-1, Policies 1.2, 1.4; Goal H-2, Policy H-2.1. Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation and Open Space, Goal OS-1, Policies OS-1.1, 1.2, 1.5. Chapter 7: Mobility, Goal M-2, Policies M-2.1, 2.8; Goal M-4, Policies M-4.1; Goal M-5, Policies M-5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4; Goal M-6, Policies M-6.1, 6.2, 6.3. Chapter 10: Community Health and Wellness, Goal CHW-4, Policies CHW-4.1, 4.2; Goal CHW-5, Policies CHW-5.1, 5.2, 5.3. Chapter 11: High Performing Community, Goal HI-8, Policy HI-8.1.
	[City of Sun Valley](#) - Principle I, Goal 3, Objectives 3.1, 3.5. Principle II, Goal 6, Objective 6.1; Goal 7, Objectives 7.1, 7.2, 7.3. Principle III, Goal 8, Objectives 8.1, 8.3, 8.4.
L.2 – Increase community inclusion, representation and connectedness in the planning and design of public spaces.	[Blaine County](#) - Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements E-1, F-4. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statement A-, LW-1.
	[City of Carey](#) - Historical Background, Special Areas and Sites Section, Desirable Goal 1
	[City of Bellevue](#) - Chapter 2: Population, Goal 5, Objective 1. Chapter 10: Recreation, Goal 1, Objective 1. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2.
	[City of Hailey](#) - Section 7: Demographic, Cultural Vitality, Social Diversity & Well-Being, Goal 7.1. Section 11: Community Design, Goal 11.1.
	[City of Ketchum](#) - Chapter 11: High Performing Community, Goal HI-3, Policies 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4; Goal HI-5, Policies HI-5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5; Goal HI-7, Policies HI-7.1, 7.2, 7.3; Goal HI-8, Policy HI-8.1.
L.3 – Land use decisions support healthy environments and lifestyles.	[Blaine County](#) - Chapter 1: Transportation, Policy Statements A-2, A-4, A-6, A-7, A-11, B-1, B-2; Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements B-3, B-4, C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4, C-5, C-6, C-7, C-8, D-1, D-2, D-3, D-4, D-5, D-6, E-4, E-6, E-8, F-1, F-2, LW-7. Chapter 5: Natural Environment, Policy Statement C-11, C-16, Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements A-6, A-9, SC-9, NV/G-5, C&Y-3, C&Y-4.
	[City of Carey](#) - Recreation, Desirable Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
	[City of Bellevue](#) - Chapter 4, Economic Development, Goal 1. Chapter 5: Land Use, Goal 3, Objective 3. Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 2, Objective 3, 4, 7, 8. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statement A-9. Chapter 9: Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; Chapter 10: Recreation, Goal 1, Objective 1, 5. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 3.
	[City of Hailey](#) - Section 1: Natural Resources, Energy and Air Quality, Goals 1.1, 1.5. Section 4: Recreation, Parks and Lands, Goal 4.1. Section 5: Land Use, Population and Growth Management, Goals 5.4, 5.5.
	[City of Ketchum](#) - Chapter 4: Community Design and Neighborhoods, Goal CD-2, Policy CD-2.1. Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation and Open Space, Goal OS-1, Policies OS-1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8; Goal OS-2, Policies OS-2.1, 2.2; Goal OS-3, Policies OS-3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5. Chapter 10: Community Health and Wellness, Goal CHW-4, Policies CHW-4.1, 4.2, 4.3; Goal CHW-6, Policies 6.1, 6.2.
	[City of Sun Valley](#) - Principle I, Goal 1, Objectives 1.1, 1.3, 1.4; Goal 3, Objective 3.2. Principle II, Goal 7, Objectives 7.4. Principle III, Goal 8, Objectives 8.2.

Action Plan

OBJECTIVES

For each focus area and shared goal, see a subset of high-level objectives. The objectives are intended to be broad, so that they offer flexibility in implementation. The following Implementation section provides information about how the objectives will be prioritized over time.

APPROACHES

In shaping the scope and objectives of the Community Planning program at the Land Trust, the leaders in local government identified five approaches through which they welcome our support and partnership. Every objective adopts one of the following approaches:

ENGAGE:
Centering the community, the "engage" approach describes how the Land Trust will listen to, share information with, and involve stakeholders in land use planning. On various levels and through a mix of mediums, we will facilitate and host conversations about how to steward a more livable future for the people and wildlife of Blaine County.

EVALUATE:
The "evaluate" approach prioritizes access to up-to-date information. Reliable and relevant data is necessary to respond to the community's concerns, inform planning decisions, and prioritize solutions. Importantly, accurate information can also help build consensus. We see where there are gaps in knowledge and understanding, then collaborate with partners to investigate the dynamics behind community needs and potential solutions.

EDUCATE:
When community issues or needs arise, they generally stem from a complex combination of factors. Ecological, hydrologic, geographic, economic and social trends influence the baseline characteristics of the Community Planning focus areas– summed up in our lived experience. Education supports us to understand the complexity of our lived experience, including the challenges we need to resolve and the solutions that support our shared goals.

ENCOURAGE:
The Land Trust recognizes the remarkable alignment between its vision for conservation and the shared goals of our leading partners, in local government. All the while, the Land Trust understands the pressures of competing priorities and developmental markets that threaten to compromise the bountiful environment and quality of life that the local community cherishes. The Land Trust is prepared to encourage its partners to act in alignment with our core values, when it's most important to do so.

COORDINATE:
When the community needs a leader to address a community need or problem, the Land Trust is poised to coordinate solutions. Coordination involves going between people and groups to organize deliberation, resolution and action. Being flexible– plus overseeing a service area that is regional, not just local– the Land Trust is well positioned to work up and down the valley, between jurisdictions. Coordination is needed to coexist and make efficient use of resources.

LIVABILITY

Ideal: Land use decisions enhance quality of life for the diversity of people in Blaine County, across demographics.

SHARED GOALS	OBJECTIVES
L.1 - Community design supports access to basic needs.	L.1.a - Engage the community to share and better understand how the physical environment supports their access to basic needs.
	L.1.b - Educate the community about the overlap between livability and the other, aforementioned program focus areas: habitat conservation, water availability, transportation mobility, and community housing.
	L.1.c - Educate the community about the benefits of mixed-use development to mobility and social connectedness, as well as to smart growth.
	L.1.d - Encourage the creation and enhancement of public spaces with universal access.
	L.1.e - Encourage higher density development along transit corridors.
	L.1.f - Coordinate the development and piloting of Municipal Codes that introduce mixed-uses in single-use zoning districts.
L.2 - Increase community inclusion and representation in the planning and design of public spaces.	L.2.a - Engage groups of people, especially those who are underrepresented in government, to identify and voice aspects of their environment that promote or detract from their well-being.
	L.2.b - Engage a diversity of people to participate in land use planning and decisions.
	L.2.c - Engage regional and local food system partners in land use planning and decisions.
	L.2.d - Encourage the local governments to build capacity for Spanish language translation and community engagement.
	L.2.e - Coordinate regular updates to the Resident Opinion survey to understand and track sentiments about quality of place, including groups of people who are underrepresented in the community.
L.3 - Land use decisions support healthy environments and lifestyles.	L.3.a - Engage the local cities to join the Main Street America Network, and other rural development initiatives that center environmental and social sustainability.
	L.3.b - Engage the community experience and discuss the benefits of compact development patterns to community health.
	L.3.c - Educate the community about land use decisions that support social connectedness.
	L.3.d - Encourage the development and improvement of Municipal Code that enhance view corridors, dark skies, air quality, noise control, and water quality across Blaine County.
	L.3.e - Coordinate placemaking demonstrations and events that encourage physical activity and social connectedness.
	L.3.f - Coordinate a case study on Blaine County communities as part of the Gateway and Natural Amenity Region (GNAR) Initiative.

WOOD RIVER LAND TRUST

**SCAN HERE
to view the
full report**

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