

# **Transit, Downtown on Minds of Residents**

## **By KEILA SZPALLER of the Missoulian (15 Feb. 08)**

Missoula should build up its downtown and invest in infrastructure for bikes, pedestrians and transit.

That's the direction a crowd leaned Wednesday at a meeting held to narrow down a plan for the future of transportation and development in Missoula.

The Office of Planning and Grants holds an identical "Envision Missoula" session from 3-5 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 14, at the University Center ballroom on the University of Montana campus. At the UC on Wednesday, some 130 people gathered to see results of earlier brainstorming sessions about how Missoula should grow. Then, they began carving those results into a map for the future.

With electronic voting pads - which look like handheld calculators - roughly 95 participants ranked different priorities. They prefer many small streets over a few large streets, for example.

They want more attached homes and multi-unit homes built over more single-family homes. They want to discourage sprawl and encourage growth in town. And they believe getting around on foot, by bike or on public transit are good options.

A consultant who led the process said it wasn't a winner-take-all kind of game. However, when the final results came in, some

75 percent liked the idea of expanding Missoula's downtown and packing more people and businesses into it.

Matt Simms agreed with that notion. Simms bought a home last year near the old Champion mill site, and he said he is ready to see it come to life.

"If people like what is in their area, they'll stay there and take better care of it," Simms said.

Toward the end of the meeting, consultants fielded questions from the audience.

Brian Walter, a neighborhood leader in the Grant Creek area, said he did not believe the audience accurately represented Missoula. Rather, he said, it was mostly made up of people who lived nearby.

Office of Planning and Grants director Roger Millar said officials were taking that idea into consideration. They planned to conduct a public opinion poll to "calibrate" meeting results.

But Millar also said he was urging elected officials to listen to people who take the time to attend meetings and give their opinions.

"You guys showed up. And you must be present to win," he said.

In the next couple months, consultants will create a map that reflects the transportation and growth priorities residents shared at the meetings.

OPG will incorporate that map into a long-range transportation plan. An updated plan is required to unlock federal transportation dollars.

This year is the first that Missoula ties transportation planning with land use planning.

*Reporter Keila Szpaller can be reached at 523-5262 or at [keila.szpaller@missoulian.com](mailto:keila.szpaller@missoulian.com).*