

# CITY OF ATHOL

KOOTENAI COUNTY, IDAHO



## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword .....	5
Private Property Rights .....	9
Population .....	10
School Facilities and Transportation .....	12
Economic Development .....	13
Natural Resources .....	15
Hazardous Areas .....	16
Public Services, Facilities and Utilities .....	17
Transportation .....	<del>21</del> <u>22</u>
Recreation, Parks, and Special Sites .....	<del>24</del> <u>25</u>
Housing .....	<del>26</del> <u>27</u>
Community Design .....	<del>27</del> <u>28</u>
Agriculture .....	<del>28</del> <u>29</u>
Public Airport Facilities .....	<del>28</del> <u>29</u>
Future Land Use .....	<del>29</del> <u>30</u>
Implementation .....	<del>33</del> <u>34</u>
Appendix A, Future Land Use Map .....	<del>36</del> <u>37</u>
<u>Appendix B, Timberlake Fire Protection District Impact Fee Study and Capital Improvement Plan .....</u>	<u>39</u>
<u>Appendix C, Kootenai County Emergency Medical Services System Impact Fee Study and Capital Improvement Plan .....</u>	<u>40</u>

## FOREWORD

### Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan is a community document. It is a broad outline for guiding the growth and development of a community. The function of a plan is to organize and display, in maps and policy statements, the hopes and dreams of the community's future and to provide guidance for how to achieve the future. The Comprehensive Plan is an official policy guide used to establish zoning districts and guide land use decisions. Idaho code, in 67-6511, requires that "zoning districts shall be in accordance with the policies set forth in the adopted comprehensive plan".

Change will occur over time, additional data will become available, the community's vision will change, and external and internal events will occur that have lasting impacts on the future. Therefore, it's important that the plan be reviewed periodically and modified when necessary to assure that it reflects the goals and policies of the community.

Goals and policies should be clear, concise, meaningful, and oriented to the issues that the City faces. Having a few well-crafted goals and policies that can be implemented is better than a long list that is largely ignored. It is from the goals and policies of the community that land use regulations are crafted.

It is much easier to write regulations based on sound policies. The regulations that the community adopts should always be consistent with the broad intentions of the comprehensive plan.

**Goals** are broad directions that describe ideal, agreed upon, future conditions. They provide a direction of travel not a destination.

**Policies** provide specific directions to guide decision making and provide clear intent. Policies provide the guidance for land use regulations. They are not inflexible but should provide clear direction.

### Purpose of the Plan

The Athol Comprehensive Plan is the document through which the community envisions future growth, development and redevelopment. Basic overriding goals of the plan are intended to maintain the vision and values of the community by:

Designating adequate land to meet future growth needs.

Contributing towards a stable and diversified economy in Athol.

Providing for the retention of natural and cultural resources which contribute to the livability of the community.

Providing for fair and consistent regulations.



### Local Planning Act Compliance

This Plan is adopted pursuant to the Act. The Plan addresses the statutorily authorized purpose of protecting the "health, safety, and general welfare" of the people of the City of Athol (the "City"). It also fulfills many of the specific purposes for local planning listed in I.C. 67-6502, including: protecting and enhancing property values, ensuring the provision of adequate and affordable public services, avoiding the undue concentration of population, and ensuring that development is commensurate with the physical characteristics of the land.

The Plan considers existing conditions, trends, and desirable goals and policies for the community. Section 67-6508 of Idaho Code requires that Comprehensive Plans address the following topics:

- (a) Property Rights
- (b) Population
- (c) School Facilities and Transportation
- (d) Economic Development
- (e) Land Use
- (f) Natural Resources
- (g) Hazardous Areas
- (h) Public Services, Facilities, and Utilities
- (i) Transportation
- (j) Recreation
- (k) Special Areas or Sites
- (l) Housing
- (m) Community Design
- (n) Agriculture
- (o) Implementation
- (p) National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors
- (q) Public Airport Facilities

## Public Participation

In crafting this plan, the City obtained citizen input from several sources. In October of 2016, the Idaho Rural Partnership conducted a “Community Review,” likely the most substantive discussion of issues in the City of Athol conducted in the last 30 years. The Community Review resulted in a 114-page report which details the 3-day effort and contains numerous recommendations that were considered for this plan.



Once an initial draft of the comprehensive plan was completed, the City held an Open House to gather input on the draft. The meeting was held on June 27, 2018 at Athol City Hall. Unfortunately, only 2 members of the public attended.

On August 11, 2018, a booth was set up at Athol Daze, the annual community event, in an effort to solicit additional input on the plan. There were 22 completed surveys turned in, most of which were from individuals that did not live within the City. The survey results for city residents are as follows:

What direction should city take on growth?

Proceed with caution	5
Oppose and resist	0
Embrace and encourage	2

What future programs or plans are most important for the city? Please prioritize:

Water system improvements	1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 1	-- highest priority
Transportation/streets master plan	3, 1, 3, 3, 3	-- lowest priority
Downtown corridor plan	1, 1, 2, 2	

Comment – downtown corridor plan will happen when it happens

Should the City adopt building codes?

Yes - Adopt	1
No - Continue without / As is	2
Evaluate options for partial adoption	4

Should the City pursue options for a municipal wastewater system

Yes – hi priority	2
Yes – low priority	2
No – too expensive and unnecessary	2

- Comments
- if no system, you won't grow
  - Athol isn't big enough to support this – too expensive
  - Depends, what is cost, can't afford on SS/fixed budget



The final element of the public participation process for this plan is the City Council's public hearing process, prior to adoption of the plan. The Council held its first hearing on March 19, 2019. While there was no testimony from the public at this hearing, the Council made several changes to the draft, as recommended by Staff. This caused a need for a second public hearing on May 21, 2019 where the plan was adopted by resolution.

## PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS

Idaho Code requires that the comprehensive plan consider private property rights. Athol supports and respects property rights and should follow due process in enacting regulations and use the Idaho Attorney General's process for evaluating new regulations. The process states that a government action:

Must address a legitimate state interest

Must substantially advance these interests, and

Must not deny an owner the economic viability of his land.

In order to address these issues, the Attorney General has identified the following criteria. Though one of the following may be answered in the affirmative, it does not mean that there has been a "taking". It does mean that there could be a constitutional issue and that agency staff should carefully review the proposed action. The criteria are as follows:

Does the regulation or action result in a permanent or temporary physical occupation of private property?

Does the regulation or action deprive a property owner of the ability to dedicate a portion of property or to grant easement?

Does the regulation or action deprive the owner of all economically viable uses of the property?

Does the regulation or action have a significant impact on the landowner's economic interest?

**GOAL:** Athol will continue to support private property rights and will carefully consider all of its land use decisions with regard to citizens' private property rights.

**POLICY:** Avoid adopting unnecessary regulations and consider and support private property rights when implementing plans and regulations in accordance with Idaho Code.

## POPULATION

The City of Athol has experienced wide variations in its rate of growth and decline throughout the last century. The period of greatest population gain was from 1990 to 2000, when the population increased from 346 to 676; an increase of 95%! This represents an average annual growth rate of approximately 7%.

Since 2000, population growth within the City has been relatively modest, reaching its current estimate of 741 in 2018. This represents a rate of growth of approximately .07%; or less than 1% annual growth.

Population growth is expected to be moderate for the next several years. With continuing effort toward economic diversification, development, and improvements in the economic environment the population is expected to begin a slow but stable increase.

While various population projections were considered as part of this planning effort, the City elected to use 2.84% – the average 25-year growth rate from 1990 to 2015 – as their assumed future growth rate. Future projected populations using this assumed growth rate, along with historical populations, are provided in the following table.

Historical and Projected Populations

Year	Population	Avg. Annual Growth Rate
1970	190	
1980	312	5.08%
1990	346	1.04%
2000	676	6.93%
2010	692	0.23%
2011	696	0.58%
2012	694	-0.29%
2013	694	0.00%
2014	693	-0.14%
2015	696	0.43%
2016	716	2.87%
2017	757	5.72%
2018	778*	2.84%
2020	823*	2.84%
2025	946*	2.84%
2030	1089*	2.84%
	* projected	

**GOAL:** Plan for modest, stable population growth that is consistent with the community's vision and within the city's fiscal and service capabilities.

**POLICIES:**

1. Athol should continue to monitor the rate of population growth and to evaluate the effects of growth on the city's ability to deliver services.
2. Population data and demographic forecasts should be reviewed periodically. Significant changes in forecasts may trigger the need for changes to the comprehensive plan.
3. Capital improvement plans and other plans should be reviewed and updated to reflect significant changes in growth.
4. Annexation decisions should be based on the city's ability to provide services and the desired rate of population growth.



## SCHOOL FACILITIES & TRANSPORTATION

Athol is part of the Lakeland School District No. 272. The boundary of the school district encompasses most of northern Kootenai County with schools located throughout the district. The district provides basic educational programs from kindergarten through high school. District enrollment in 2018 was 4158 students in eleven schools.

There is one school, Athol Elementary, located within the City of Athol. This school serves kindergarten through sixth grade and has an enrollment of approximately 366 students.

Athol, the School District, and Kootenai County need to continue to work together to ensure the district can anticipate and plan its facilities for the future. This would include planning for safe bus routes since most pupils are bused within the district.

**GOAL:** Continue to cooperate with the Lakeland School District in the development of educational facilities and opportunities within the community.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Continue working with the Lakeland School District to plan for and implement the District's long-range plans.
2. School and park facilities should be located together when possible to reduce costs.
3. In processing new residential development, Athol should consider safe routes for students to and from school and efficient bus routes.
4. Request dedication of school sites when appropriate as part of large annexations.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The City of Athol has a growing business community. Prior to 2018, the City did not require business licenses so it does not have an accurate count of the number of businesses in the City. It is estimated that there are approximately 40-45 businesses, most of which are locally-owned small businesses with just a few employees.

According to the US Census Bureau, in 2015 (the most recent year for which data is available) there were a total of 205 jobs within the City of Athol. The majority of these jobs fell into 3 categories: Manufacturing (48), Educational Services (42), and Accommodation and Food Services (41).



A Chamber of Commerce for the Athol area was formed in 2017 and they are actively working to promote the area and local businesses. Their website is <http://www.atholchamberofcommerce.org>

As an indicator of the change that is coming in this area, in 2018, a Super 1 grocery store opened in the new commercial development known as The Crossings at Athol. This was a significant step for Athol and is expected to result in numerous additional commercial businesses locating in this development. The Super 1 grocery store is anticipated to bring 125 new jobs to the area.

Also in 2018, the former Merritt Brothers Lumber mill was purchased by Idaho Forest Group (IFG). IFG anticipates making several upgrades at the mill and expects to employ 60-80 people at the site when they are fully operational.

To retain the small-town feel that is an important characteristic of Athol, the City has a preference for locally-owned businesses over large / franchised operations.

**GOAL:** The City of Athol will continue to encourage a balance of residential, commercial, and light industrial uses in order to provide a well-balanced tax base. The City seeks to retain and promote healthy existing business and industry and to help attract new business and industry through its regulations and administration.

### POLICIES:

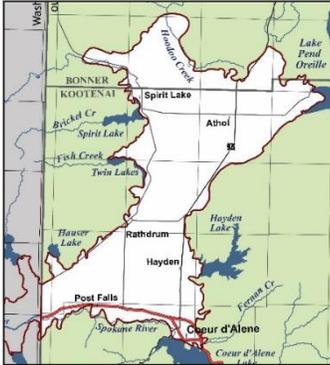
1. Encourage a positive business environment by educating city employees, local citizens, and local business about the benefits of the area.
2. Explore options for funding public services, facilities and utilities necessary for the location of new and expanded businesses.

3. Continue to coordinate with and support the Athol Chamber of Commerce.
4. Provide fair and streamlined permitting procedures and reasonable regulations to encourage businesses to locate within the City.
5. Consider creating a Highway 54 and Old Highway 95 corridor plan or plans to further define the opportunities that exist in those locations.
6. Using careful design and location selection, encourage intense land uses to minimize negative influences to adjacent land from traffic congestion, parking, noise, air quality, etc.
7. Continue to network with other communities and jurisdictions to foster economic development within the area.
8. Consider enhanced standards for landscaping and parking lot design along the high visibility corridors in the City.



## NATURAL RESOURCES

Athol shares in the abundant natural resources that are found in northern Idaho. There are over 50 lakes within a couple hours of driving time from the City, the closest of which is the incomparable Lake Pend Oreille, just 10 minutes to the east. National Forest lands are a similar distance away.



Within the City limits, the Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer is arguably the greatest natural resource. Approximately 350 feet below the ground surface this aquifer provides abundant water resources for drinking, irrigation and commercial and industrial uses for the City and a large part of Kootenai County. Its pristine water quality allows the City to pump and distribute the water in the City water system without treatment.

Because the soils over the aquifer are very permeable, the aquifer is vulnerable to contamination from activities on the surface. Septic system density is limited by the Panhandle Health District in accordance with the City's Sewage Management Agreement. Stormwater runoff is another potential source of contamination that warrants careful management.

There are no delineated creeks or streams within the City, nor are there any areas that have been identified as wetlands.

At the City's western boundary, there is a parcel owned by the Idaho Department of Lands that is managed as industrial forest land.

The Athol area is relatively flat with elevations ranging from approximately 2,510 to 2,170 feet. The highest elevations in the planning area are the western bench area. Elevations generally drop as they move to the east.



**GOAL:** Plan for future development that makes good use of natural resources without undue degradation. Athol will continue to cooperate on a regional level to help enhance the significant natural resources of the area.

### POLICIES:

1. Establish and enforce regulations that protect the Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer.
2. Re-seeding and/or replanting of cleared or poorly developed areas should be encouraged. Existing trees should be maintained whenever possible.
3. Encourage property owners to actively manage property to reduce noxious weeds.
4. Athol should continue to participate and cooperate with other agencies to reduce the potential for wildfires.
5. Continue to coordinate with the Panhandle Health District on the Sewage Management Agreement and management of septic systems within the City.

## **HAZARDOUS AREAS**

Athol has very little land that could be considered hazardous to land development. Hazardous areas may include land subject to flooding, steep or unstable slopes, areas that may contain contamination, areas with a high water table, springs, and other hazards. Hazards may also result from sewer/water limitations, geologic faults, slides, or man-made hazards.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) has completed flood hazard area studies and maps for Kootenai County. There are no identified areas of special flood hazard within the City of Athol, or within the Area of City Impact. Accordingly, the City does not participate in the federal flood insurance program.

Athol participates in the Kootenai County multi-jurisdictional All Hazard Mitigation Plan (AHMP). This plan encompasses the entire county with coordination and oversight provided by the county.

Wildfire and weather related events are likely the greatest hazards that the City faces. With the regular railroad traffic through the City, there is some risk of a catastrophic event related to that activity. Potential mitigation measures to reduce the road crossing hazards are addressed in the Chapter on Transportation.

**GOAL:** Ensure the safety of residents, community well-being, and the protection of property and property values through judicious review of activities and development projects.

### **POLICIES:**

1. The City will continue to identify and monitor potential hazardous areas and make provisions to mitigate any existing or potential adverse impacts and hazards.
2. Continue to work with State, Federal, and Local agencies to ensure hazardous areas and activities are identified and regulated appropriately.

## PUBLIC SERVICES, FACILITIES, AND UTILITIES

Athol provides and is served by a variety of public services, facilities, and utilities. These are some of the primary activities that define the community and also serve as a cornerstone of the local economy.



Public services provide for the well-being of the inhabitants of the community and may include health services, police and fire protection, animal control, solid waste collection, land use planning and permitting.

Public facilities are buildings and sites where services are located. These may include criminal justice facilities, libraries, schools, post office, city hall, and other governmental buildings.

Public utilities are systems necessary for the community to function, and include such things as water, wastewater collection and treatment, storm water collection and treatment, electrical power, and solid waste disposal.

Athol provides a portion of these services, facilities, and utilities and relies on and cooperates with others for the balance. The degree to which the community can finance and maintain basic public services within its jurisdiction can significantly impact economic development.

The goals and policies of this chapter of the plan address general issues related to public facilities and services as well as policies concerning utilities, police and fire protection, schools, libraries, and local government facilities.

### CITY SERVICES:

Athol offers a range of community services including city administration, road maintenance, water system operation, the city cemetery, and land use permitting and planning. Athol's government consists of the mayor and four councilors; all elected by the citizens. The City Council acts as the Planning & Zoning Commission. In 2018, the city staff consisted of a public works / water operator, city clerk / treasurer, and deputy city clerk. The city planner, city attorney and city engineer are contracted consultants.

### FIRE PROTECTION:

Timberlake Fire Protection District provides fire protection for the community of Athol and is a separate taxing district with its own elected commissioners. The District provides services to an area of approximately 80 square miles around Athol from Chilco to Bayview. The District has its main station on Highway 54 in Athol.



## **MEDICAL SERVICES:**

Kootenai Health, located in Coeur d’Alene, provides medical services to Kootenai County and Athol. Its vision is a county-wide healthcare system that assures the provision of quality services.

## **WATER SERVICE:**

The City of Athol operates a water system that provides water service to all properties within the City. City records indicate there are 305 accounts for water service. A water system master plan was completed in 2018 and contains numerous recommendations for improvements to the water system. Some improvements are necessary to bring the system into compliance with State of Idaho requirements. Refer to the water system master plan for more details on the existing system and proposed improvements.



## **WASTE WATER SERVICE:**

Athol has no municipal wastewater collection or treatment facilities. Wastewater is managed through the use of subsurface sewage treatment facilities consisting of a septic tank and drainfield. Permits for such systems are issued by Panhandle Health District, located in Hayden, Idaho. Panhandle Health District (PHD) is the public health authority for the five northern counties in Idaho.

The use of such septic systems is limited through an agreement between PHD and the City, known as the Sewage Management Agreement (SMA). Through the SMA, existing parcels were evaluated and “dwelling equivalents” (DE) were assigned to each parcel. The number of DEs assigned to a parcel determines the intensity of the land use that is allowed, relative to the amount

of wastewater they are expected to generate. As the name suggests, one “dwelling equivalent” is equal to the average wastewater flow from a residential property. The 2015 agreement assigned 541 DEs to parcels in the City. Parcels annexed into the City or newly created parcels within the City are limited to one DE per 5 acres.

This arrangement restricts residential and commercial development in the City. Residential growth at urban or suburban densities and certain commercial uses will require an alternative wastewater treatment approach.

An example of an alternative approach is currently being developed to service the new commercial development known as “The Crossings at Athol”. A privately owned and operated collection and treatment system will be constructed to service the uses in this development. It will include treatment and storage lagoons, and will dispose of the highly treated effluent in landscaped areas adjacent to the development.

### **ELECTRICITY AND NATURAL GAS:**

Electricity is provided by Kootenai Electrical Cooperative (KEC) and natural gas is provided by Avista Utilities. The City works closely with these providers to coordinate these services.

Idaho Code, Title 67, Chapter 65, Local Land Use Planning, specifically 67-6508 requires an analysis showing the existing location of and possible routing of transmission lines. There are no National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors within the planning area.

### **WIRELESS AND INTERNET SERVICES:**

The predominant internet provider for Athol is Frontier Communications. There are several providers of wireless telephone service in the community of Athol including Verizon, ATT, and Sprint. The City has wireless communications facilities located on City owned property, within the City.

**GENERAL GOAL 1:** Athol will continue to provide levels of service based on the current and projected future needs of the community and will maintain city services at acceptable levels using standard management practices. Athol will continue to deliver high levels of service to the public for building location permits, development review, and code administration.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Athol should maintain its’ facilities and personnel at a level that provides services that are reasonable and affordable.
2. Continue to provide professional and timely efficient processing of development and land use permits.

3. Continue to look for improvements to public services and utilize new and improved technology whenever feasible.
4. City services and facilities should not be extended beyond City limits prior to annexation.
5. Athol city government should be responsive to the needs and desires of the citizens.

**GOAL 2:** Establish and maintain positive working relationships with other local governmental entities, namely the Timberlake Fire District and the Kootenai County Emergency Medical Services Systems, that provide services to City residents and to ensure that new growth and development in the City pays its proportionate share of the costs necessary to continue to provide those services.

**POLICY:**

1. In order to ensure that new growth and development in the City pays its proportionate share of the costs of capital improvements necessitated by new growth and development needed by the Timberlake Fire Protection District and the Kootenai County Emergency medical Services Systems to maintain their current levels of fire prevention and emergency medical services within the City, the City shall adopt the following Impact Fee Studies and Capital Improvement plans into the City’s comprehensive plan:
  - i. The Timberlake Fire Protection District Impact Fee Study and Capital Improvements Plan final report, dated October 11, 2021 and amended January 22, 2022 as Appendix B to this Plan.
  - ii. The Kootenai County Emergency Medical Services System Impact Fee and Capital Improvement Plan final report dated October 11, 2021 as Appendix C to this Plan.

**WATER SERVICE GOAL:** Athol will continue to deliver potable water to its citizens and maintain a healthy water delivery system.

**POLICIES:**

1. Implement the Athol Water Master Plan and update it as necessary.
2. Create a fee structure for water service that provides for capitalization, operation and maintenance, and connections.
3. Water service will only be provided within the municipal boundaries of the City.
4. Consider creation of a policy manual for water system administration.



5. Consider upgrading water meters to allow for simplified and year-round reading of meters.

**WASTEWATER GOAL:** Protect the Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer and continue to coordinate with Panhandle Health District to implement the Sewage Management Agreement while exploring possibilities for long-term solutions to wastewater collection and treatment.

**POLICIES:**

1. Athol should continue to explore the potential of planning, funding and constructing a municipal wastewater collection and treatment facility.
2. Continue to look for opportunities to tie into existing or new wastewater treatment facilities.



## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation planning is one of the most important ways a city can help determine where future growth takes place. Commercial and industrial activities depend on traffic. A city can, in large measure, affect the location of non-residential growth through careful planning and maintenance of its street system.

Residential development, while also dependent on adequate facilities, needs a street network that is safe and efficient and designed to minimize the impacts on residents of through traffic on major streets.

The capacity of any street is determined not only by its size, but by the kind of traffic it is expected to receive, the size and number of trucks versus cars, number of intersecting streets and access points, and the traffic generation characteristics of the adjacent land uses. Transportation planning and land use planning must go hand in hand to achieve the joint goals of a safe and efficient transportation system and a wise and beneficial distribution of land uses.



Athol maintains approximately 5.7 miles of roadway. Public roads adjacent to the City are maintained by the Lakes Highway District and Idaho Transportation Department (ITD). There are a few privately maintained lanes that provide access to parcels in the City and there are a number of rights of way where a road has not been constructed. The parcels adjacent to these un-built roads are not eligible for building location permits until an appropriate access road is constructed.

Athol cooperates with the Idaho Transportation Department, the Lakes Highway District, Kootenai County, and neighboring communities to plan transportation.



Trucking is the primary mode of transportation to bring goods to the Athol area. There are 2 major train crossings within the City, but only the Idaho Forest Group mill (formerly Merritt Brothers Lumber Company) has access to the rail lines for shipping product. Because of the frequent rail traffic on these lines, the at-grade crossings have a significant impact on vehicle traffic. Emergency service response can be delayed several minutes as trains cross, and vehicle traffic

occasionally backs up causing temporary mobility challenges.

In 2005, a study known as “Bridging the Valley” was completed to evaluate the railroad crossings on the Rathdrum Prairie and Spokane Valley. It identified 75 crossings along 42 miles of railway.



The study recommended combining the Union Pacific Railroad corridor into the BNSF corridor and providing grade separations at

most of the remaining crossings. At the BNSF crossing in Athol, the study proposed that Highway 54 would be lowered approximately 20 feet to cross under a concrete girder railroad bridge carrying 3 tracks. A 10-foot wide pedestrian/bicycle walkway would be constructed along the south side of the highway, elevated above the roadway but passing under the new bridge. The proposed improvements are very expensive to construct and while some portions of the plan have been completed elsewhere in the corridor, there are currently no funds available to complete the improvements. The City strongly supports this initiative and would like to see the improvements in Athol completed as soon as possible.

The automobile will continue to be the major mode of transportation in the future and adequate consideration should be made for parking for residents and visitors. In recent years, the City has started to evaluate their policies with regard to parking alongside public streets. The City has also expressed interest in creating a “safe routes to school” program.

**GOAL:** Support and maintain a transportation system designed to promote livable neighborhoods, reduce traffic congestion, facilitate safe and efficient movement of people and goods, and consider pedestrians and cyclists in transportation plans and improvements.



**POLICIES:**

1. Athol should protect future corridor rights of way from encroachment and preserve adequate rights of way for future improvements.
2. Continue to maintain and improve streets, based on available funding, to meet present and future needs.

3. Coordinate street improvements with the requirements of other public facilities (water and sewer lines and other underground utilities).
4. Complete a transportation/streets master plan for the City that evaluates current and future road needs.
5. Carefully review requests for connection to, or extension of, existing streets. Future uses and traffic should be evaluated to determine and mitigate impacts on the City. Determine whether annexation of the area to be served by the new road is appropriate prior to allowing for connection/extension.
6. Partner with the school district to develop a “safe routes to school” program for the City.



## RECREATION, PARKS & SPECIAL SITES

### CITY PARKS AND RECREATION:

Park and recreation space is essential to a community's quality of life. The nature and amount of space required for community parks & recreation should be based upon the desires of the community and the ability of the community to fund and maintain a level of service. This level of service will vary from one community to another and is influenced by a number of factors, such as geography, climate, employment, population characteristics, and tradition.



The City has one city park, Athol City Park, which is approximately 3.5 acres in size. This park, located adjacent to City Hall, includes a baseball field, basketball courts, playground equipment, and a skate park.

### SPECIAL SITES:

Athol does not have any special sites within its boundaries and there are no locations listed in the National Register of Historic Places. However, Athol is located near several outstanding special sites; the Farragut trail, Farragut State Park and Lake Pend Oreille.



**GOAL:** Maintain the established city park for the benefit of the community. Continue to support efforts to increase recreation opportunities in the city and the region.

### POLICIES:

1. The city should develop and maintain a park and recreation master plan utilizing an acceptable level of service, identifying future areas for parks and recreation.
2. Plan for areas and facilities that are easily accessible to all residents and those with disabilities utilizing ADA guidelines.
3. Develop a program to generate funding for the improvement and acquisition of parks, open

spaces, and other public facilities.

4. Plan for a pedestrian/bicycle trail system within the city and provide connection to the Farragut Trail.
5. Request dedication of parkland or recreational sites when appropriate as part of large annexations.



## **HOUSING**

Athol supports a wide range of housing types within the community. While new housing is limited by lack of wastewater treatment and collection, citizens have expressed a desire to plan for additional housing for the future.

The 2010 U.S. Census determined that there were 305 housing units in the City. A significant portion of those are manufactured homes. The City has recently updated the City Code to simplify the regulations related to manufactured housing in the City. Building codes for site-built structures have never been adopted in Athol, and that situation continues today. There are also a number of residents that live full or part-time within recreational vehicles on individual lots or within a recreational vehicle park in the City.

**GOAL:** Athol continues to promote adequate choice of housing within the community to meet the needs of all socio-economic backgrounds, the elderly and disabled. Housing should be maintained in an attractive, safe, and sanitary condition.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Establish and apply consistent standards for new subdivisions and residential developments regarding landscaping, street & lot layout, construction, and utilities that enhance the livability of the community.
2. Residential neighborhoods should be protected from the intrusion of incompatible land uses, excessive traffic and other negative impacts.
3. Encourage upgrading and rehabilitation of existing housing stock, and preservation of existing historical, neighborhood housing.
4. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of adopting and administering building codes within the City. Consider alternatives for partial adoption if such alternatives are legal under state law.
5. Discourage the use of recreational vehicles as housing in the City.

## COMMUNITY DESIGN

The types of land uses, their intensity, and the arrangement of activities and buildings in Athol should reflect the vision and cultural values of its citizens. Athol's appearance is important in several ways by contributing to the visual fabric that invites investment and promotes tourism and economic development.

Athol should continue the work of creating a welcoming vision for visitors and citizens. A good start has been the Community Review, completed in 2016. Residents expressed a desire to remain the rural, small-town feel for the community, but wanted to improve the community's image and the "walkability" of the town. "Big box store" commercial development was something they would rather avoid.

With the opening of the new grocery store in the Crossings at Athol development, and availability of additional commercial sites with sewer service, significant change is likely coming for the commercial uses in the City.



**GOAL:** Continue to foster the sense of community pride that Athol residents feel for their community and promote a positive image for those who wish to invest in or visit Athol.

### **POLICIES:**

1. The community should encourage rehabilitating and reuse of existing structures.
2. Continue to provide fair and effective code enforcement to manage blight and unsightly conditions.
3. Provide clear, consistent and fair regulations and ordinances that support a positive community image and promote attractive design.
4. Consider creating a Highway 54 and Old Highway 95 corridor plan to consider economic opportunities, opportunities to define a town center as well as community values and amenities.
5. Consider enhanced landscaping and design standards for non-residential uses along the Highway 54, Highway 95 and Old Highway 95 corridors.
6. Protect the rural character and "small town feel" that Athol exemplifies.



## **AGRICULTURE**

Athol does not have significant agricultural uses within the City. There are some agricultural uses in the area, mainly livestock production, but these uses do not contribute significantly to the local economy nor does the city have much impact on area agricultural uses. Areas that the city could possibly annex in the future do not have significant agricultural uses or potential for significant agricultural uses. Athol recognizes the value of agriculture to the community and supports those uses where they exist.

## **PUBLIC AIRPORT FACILITIES**

The closest public airport is the Coeur d'Alene Airport, located approximately 13 miles southwest of the City of Athol. This airport does not have passenger service, but is considered to be a thriving general aviation facility. It is owned and operated by Kootenai County. Airport operations do not have a noticeable impact on activities within the City.

The Spokane International Airport is the closest facility for passenger service. It is located approximately 53 miles to the west, on the west side of the City of Spokane, Washington.

## FUTURE LAND USE

### **Background:**

The Future Land Use section of the Comprehensive Plan establishes land use designations that can be used to create a future land use map. The Future Land Use Map is intended to show the proposed designations to preserve the integrity and amenities of residential neighborhoods as well as the economic vitality of industrial and commercial areas. The map graphically displays desired predominant types of uses. The chapter also establishes goals and policies that provide guidance for development within the land use designations portrayed on the map.

The Future Land Use Map indicates the desired mix of uses that will foster the community's goals as expressed within the plan. Land use recommendations as set forth in this plan emphasize the importance of planning and cooperation among the jurisdictions and agencies within the area of northern Kootenai County.

The land use designations are based upon the following overall objectives:

1. Encouraging compatible land uses to maintain the quality of community life;
2. Designating sufficient land for residential, commercial and industrial uses;
3. Promoting well planned residential neighborhoods within Athol;
4. Encouraging the development of public and private parks and recreational facilities;
5. Promoting potential land reserves or areas for community services such as schools, public buildings, open space, trails, etc.;
6. Respecting the responsibilities and rights of land ownership;
7. Reinforcing the role of the city in regulating the use of land for the benefit of future generations;
8. Prohibiting uses which violate obscenity statutes and restricting lawful adult oriented business so that they will not adversely affect adjacent and neighboring uses and will not initiate or cause deterioration of property values within the neighborhood.

The existing land use regulations and traditional development practices have effectively classified land uses and created a development pattern which is practical, realistic, and has worked in guiding development in proper locations while protecting land values, reducing land use conflicts, and allowing for a mix of land uses that have been well-suited to their particular location. That pattern is not perfect however, and some adjustments are warranted. Additional recommendations are warranted to inform future growth beyond the current city limits.

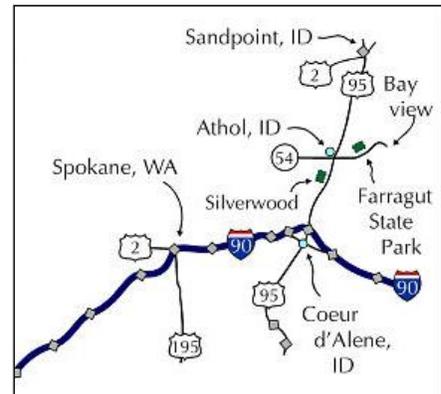
Much of the property within the incorporated city limits is developed, leaving little available space for growth. This is typical of older communities and more predominant in Athol due to the limitation that arises from the lack of municipal sewer service. It is expected that the City will see significant replacement and reconstruction of the existing housing stock in the coming years.

Land uses in Athol did not see the significant changes that most of Kootenai County experienced in the last 25 years. This was the result of deliberate decisions made by the City's elected officials. With a change in leadership and philosophy in recent years, the City has started to plan for growth and started entertaining requests for annexation. From this new approach, the City has a substantial new commercial development in the northeast corner of town and a new grocery store opened in 2018.

### Area of City Impact:

An Area of City Impact (ACI) is the area between the existing city boundary and an agreed upon future boundary that is negotiated with the County and established by County ordinance. The purpose of establishing a specific area is to identify areas within the County where the City may grow. It is important for Athol and Kootenai County to cooperatively work together with regard to an Area of City Impact that reflects the goals of the citizens, respects the natural resources, recognizes service capabilities, and protects the resources that all citizens share.

The current Area of City Impact is approximately 9.9 square miles in size, extending from the Bonner County line on the north, approximately 1 mile east of Old Highway 95 on the east, approximately ½ mile south of Parks Road to the south, and to Clagstone Road for much of the western boundary. For reference purposes, the area within the incorporated city limits is approximately 0.9 square miles in 2018.



The current ACI far exceeds the area that the City will grow into in the near-term future. However, if it chooses to, the City could occupy a significant portion of the ACI within the 25 to 50 year planning horizon.

This plan uses the current ACI as the planning area, recognizing that the recommendations of the plan have greater certainty and specificity closer to the existing City boundaries than the more distant areas. The City should remain open-minded on the standards and extent of the ACI and consider amendments to it as conditions change in the area.

### Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map:

The proposed future land use designations are shown on the Future Land use map (**appendix A**), which is adopted as a part of the Comprehensive Plan for Athol. The map is intended to show generalized patterns for future growth and development. When viewing the map, it is important to look at the adopted goals and policies found within the plan and recognize that the map designations represent a general guide for the arrangement of uses.

### Land Use Designations:

The following designations are used on the Future Land Use Map:

**Residential:** Residential is the largest designation on the future land use map. It is intended to support and guide establishment of zoning districts permitting a range of housing types and densities and encompasses all types of residential use from single to multi-family. Densities may vary depending on location, traffic patterns, utility availability, existing and future development patterns, and neighborhood compatibility. The residential designation would also be suitable for planned unit developments (PUD), public and quasi-public uses such as parks, schools, and other public facilities.

**Commercial:** The commercial designation supports zoning districts for commercial and office uses, public buildings, mixed uses in planned unit developments, recreation and park uses, and school uses. Residential may also be permitted.



**Light Industrial:** The light industrial designation supports both light and heavy industrial zoning usually requiring access from a higher order street. This designation may also support zoning for commercial/ office uses and public/quasi-public uses.

**Government / Public:** This designation reflects lands that are public or are otherwise owned by a government agency. Their uses vary from timber production, parks, government buildings, and parcels containing infrastructure. The City has land use jurisdiction over some, but not all of these parcels.

**GOAL:** Maintain and enhance Athol’s quality of life and develop land use regulations and zoning districts that protect existing and future neighborhoods, promote well-designed development, and are appropriate in meeting the needs of the community as expressed within the policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

**POLICIES:**

1. Encourage a balance of land uses, through appropriate zoning districts and administration, to help Athol remain a desirable, stable and sustainable community.
2. Provide a thorough and timely land use review process that involves public input at the appropriate stages of development review and utilizes staff time effectively.
3. Encourage infill development and redevelopment of property within the City.
4. The zoning ordinance of Athol should reflect and be in accordance with adopted policies of the Comprehensive Plan.
5. When land is annexed into the City, the appropriate zoning designation should be applied after consideration of the future land use map, future street classifications, surrounding land uses, and the goals and policies found within the plan.
6. Review the area of city impact agreement with the County, when appropriate.

7. Industrial and commercial land uses should be encouraged to locate near similar-type development in order to minimize traffic through residential areas.
8. Development decisions should be based on adequate information, analysis, and citizen input, considering the impacts on transportation systems, water and utility services, and other land capability conditions and standards adopted within the zoning and subdivision ordinances.
9. When considering annexation, the City should require adequate plans and studies so that the benefits and impacts of the annexation can be fully evaluated.
10. Subdivision of residential property into 5-acre (or larger) lots should be discouraged in areas that may be served by municipal-type sewer at some point in the future.



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## **IMPLEMENTATION**

It is the responsibility of the City Council to see that this Plan is implemented and reviewed and revised in a timely manner. The primary tools to carry out the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan include the zoning regulations within the municipal code, the city budget, grants, other funding sources, and other supporting agencies.

Public participation and involvement of the citizens of Athol in the review and revision of plan goals and policies should continue so that the community is guided by relevant, up to date plans and regulations.

Comprehensive planning also includes cooperation with regional planning efforts with other communities, regional groups, and other government agencies.

### **IMPLEMENTATION GOAL:**

Through education, public awareness, and the use of available resources, Athol will continue to update the comprehensive plan on a timely basis utilizing current and timely information. The City will implement its planning efforts into codes and regulations that reflect on the goals and policies found within the comprehensive plan and other planning efforts.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Review and update the zoning ordinance so that zoning regulations are in accordance with the goals and policies of the adopted comprehensive plan.
2. Utilize the City Council acting as the Planning & Zoning Commission for the review of the comprehensive plan on a timely basis and in accordance with the law.
3. Continue to use citizen involvement, public education, technological resources and training in review, approval and implementation of the plan to promote better understanding by all parties.
4. Continue participation with other agencies and communities to better coordinate planning efforts on a local and regional basis.

### **IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS:**

There are several tools which can help with plan implementation. These tools include but are not limited to:

**Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map.** The policies of the comprehensive plan help establish a framework for the zoning ordinance and zoning map. This helps guide and establish regulations and standards for land uses and development. Idaho law requires that all zoning ordinances be in accordance with the adopted comprehensive plan.

**Specific Plans and Regional Planning Efforts:** Athol may engage in specific planning efforts that may focus on a particular area of the community. These efforts are a more focused, detailed look at a portion of the community. Examples of specific planning efforts may include:

Athol Water Master Plan

Transportation / Streets Plan

Old Highway 95 and Highway 54 Corridor Plan(s)

**Continuous Planning Programs:** Athol is responsible for initiating actions to implement the comprehensive plan. Some of these actions may include:

Coordinating local plans with regional efforts of neighboring communities and Kootenai County.  
Reviewing and updating the municipal codes to ensure conformance with the goals and policies found within the comprehensive plan.

Evaluating the relationship between projected municipal costs/revenue and land use changes.

Analyzing alternative financing approaches to reduce tax burden and continuing to provide quality public services.

Ensuring that information on planning issues is available in an easy-to-use format and available to the public.

**Capital Funding Sources:** The funding options available to municipalities in Idaho to do public improvements include the following:

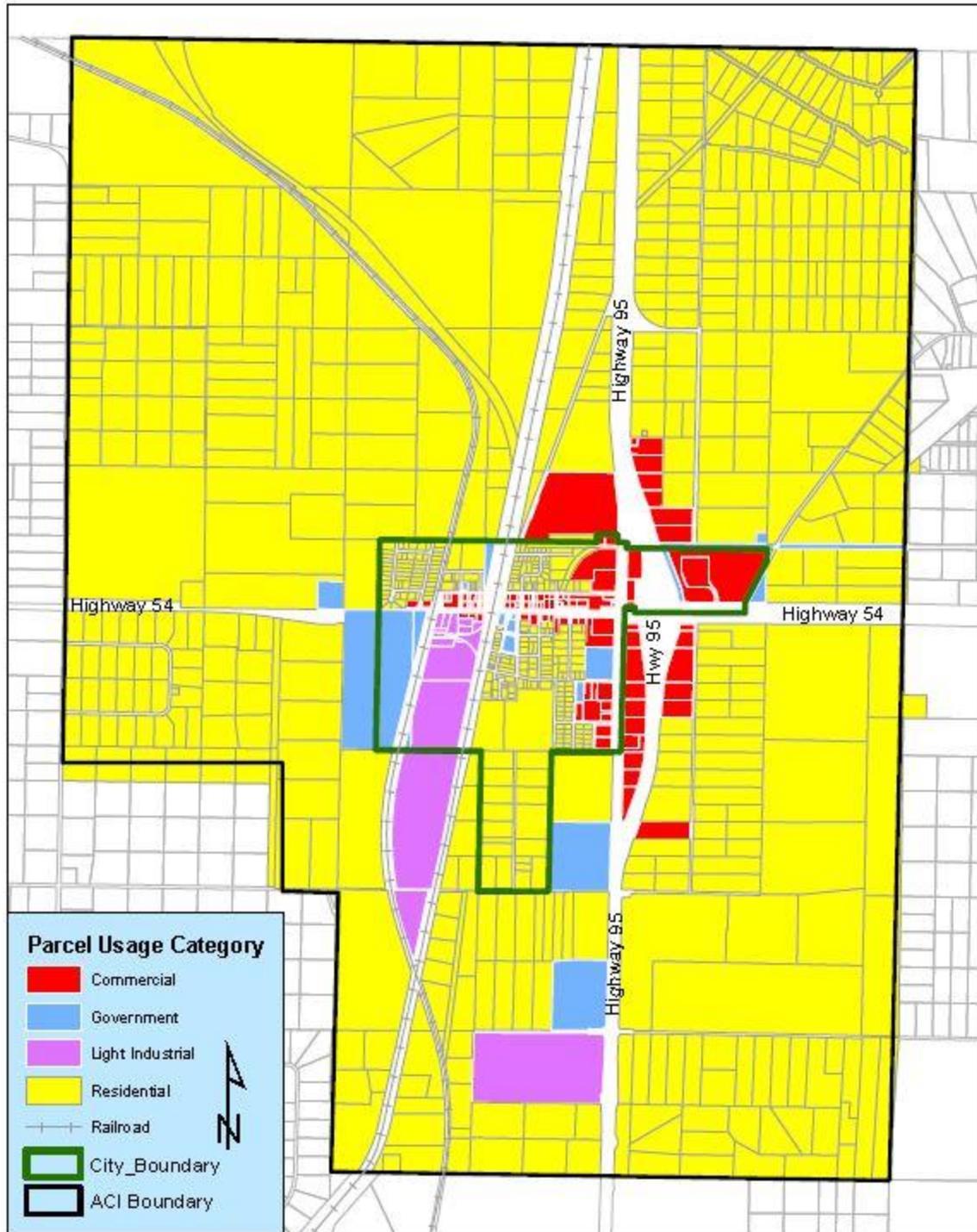
- Franchise Fees
- General Funds
- General Obligation Bonds
- Revenue Bonds
- Enterprise Funds (for example, the City's water fund)
- User Fees
- Local Improvement Districts
- Tax Increment Financing
- Community Fund Raising
- State Grants
- Federal Grants
- Private Foundations
- Private Donations
- Development Impact Fees

- Permits/Licenses
- Local Option Non-Property tax

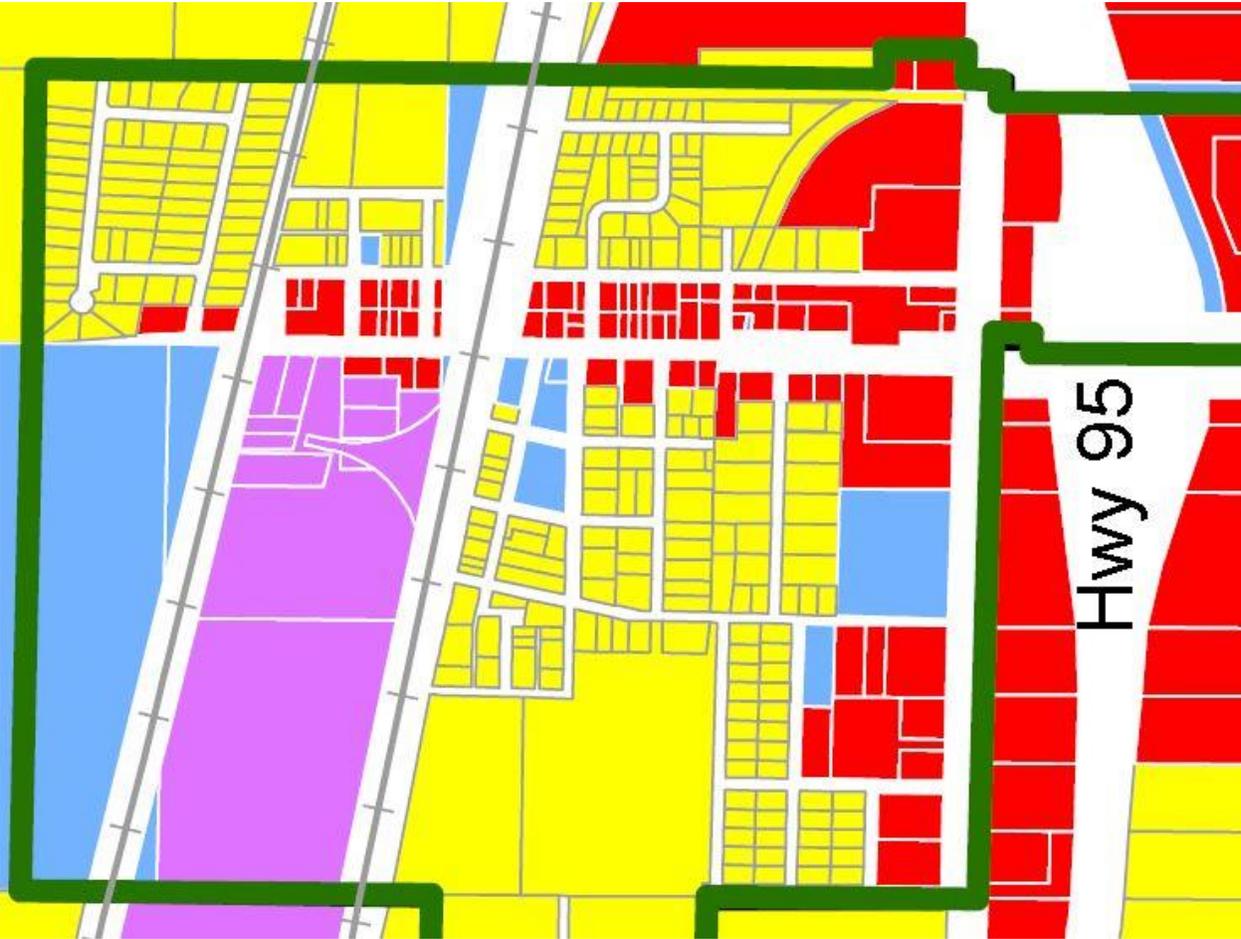
**Comprehensive Plan Amendments:** To remain useful and effective, the plan should be reviewed and updated periodically. The goals and policies within the plan should not be interpreted as unalterable commitments, but rather as a reflection of the best foreseeable direction at a given point in time. It is recommended that a timely review of the plan elements and goals and policies be conducted to update and/or reaffirm the plan to fit changing circumstances as well as unforeseen planning problems and opportunities. Citizen involvement is an important part of this review/update process and any amendments should be made in accordance with state law.

The Idaho Land Use Planning Act provides for amendments to the comprehensive plan. Any group or person may petition the City for a plan amendment. On its own initiative, the City Council, acting as the Planning and Zoning Commission, may also initiate amendments to the comprehensive plan.

# CITY OF ATHOL - COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Appendix A - Future land use map – enlarged portion for greater clarity and detail



## Appendix B

Timberlake Fire Protection District Impact Fee Study and Capital Improvement Plan

Final Report dated October 11, 2021, Amended January 11, 2022

## Appendix C

### Kootenai County Emergency Medical Services System Impact Fee Study and Capital Improvement Plan

Final Report dated October 11, 2021