



**Agenda
City of Laurel
City/County Planning Board
Wednesday, September 16, 2026
6:00 PM
City Hall**

Pledge of Allegiance

ROLL CALL

Public Input

Citizens may address the committee regarding any item of business that is not on the agenda. The duration for an individual speaking under Public Input is limited to three minutes. While all comments are welcome, the committee will not take action on any item not on the agenda.

General Items

1. Approval of Minutes from August 19, 2026

New Business

Old Business

2. Appoint New Vice Chair

New Vice Chair Committee Report

3. LUPA Update

Other Items

Announcements

4. LUPA Steering Committee meeting will be on October 9, 2026, at 1:00 PM.
5. Public Hearing at the October Meeting for Zoning and Subdivision for Goldberg Sporting Estates.
6. Next City/County Planning Board meeting will be October 21, 2026, at 6:00 PM.

The City makes reasonable accommodations for any known disability that may interfere with a person's ability to participate in this meeting. Persons needing accommodation must notify the City Clerk's Office to make needed arrangements. To make your request known, please call 406-628-7431, Ext. 5100, or write to City Clerk, PO Box 10, Laurel, MT 59044, or present your request at City Hall, 115 West First Street, Laurel, Montana.

**MINUTES
CITY OF LAUREL
CITY/COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2026**

A City/County Planning board meeting was held in Council Chambers and called to order by County chair Jonathan Klasna at 6:00 pm on August 19, 2026.

Board Members Present:

<u>X</u> Tom Canape	<u>x</u> Richard Herr	<u>X</u> Paul Thomae
<u>x</u> Ron Benner	<u>X</u> Laura Kirschenmann	<u>X</u> Mike Waters
<u>x</u> Judy Goldsby	<u>X</u> Jonathan Klasna	

Others Present:

Amber Hatton – Deputy Clerk Treasurer
Forrest Sanderson – Contract Planner
Kris Vogeles – City Mayor
Megan Bixler – Interstate Engineering
Tom Llewellyn – Steven Glantz LLC

Public Input: *Citizens may address the committee regarding any item of business that is not on the agenda. The duration for an individual speaking under Public Input is limited to three minutes. While all comments are welcome, the committee will not take action on any item not on the agenda.*

None

Disclosure of Ex Parte Communication - None

General Items

1. Minutes from July 15, 2026

Motion made by Judy Goldsby to approve minutes from July 15, 2026, seconded by Mike Waters. There was no public comment. Motion passed 8-0.

New Business

2. Appointing New Vice Chair:

With the vacant President position, Vice Chair-Jonathan Klasna shall fill that position until the term is expired according to the City County Bylaws Article VII, SECTION 5. Forrest Sanderson suggested to the now Chair Klasna to appoint a 3-person nominating committee to recommend to the full board at the next meeting their selection to fill that position until the End of December. Tom Canape, Paul Thomae, and Judy Goldsby were selected as committee members responsible for selecting the Vice Chair.

Old Business

3. Glantz PUB – Geotechnical Investigating Report

Chair Klasna reminded the board that the Glantz PUB was tabled on the July 15th board meeting and there needed to be a motion to pull it off the table. Judy Goldsby made a motion to pull Glantz PUB off the table and bring it back to the board. Tom Canape seconded the motion. There was no public comment. Motion passed 8-0.

Forrest Sanderson stated at the Public Hearing on July 15th, the board had several questions pertaining to the site, primarily about the water. The developer's agent, Tom Llewellyn had submitted a Geotechnical investigation report. Forrest had read through it, and he personally felt it had addressed some of the questions he had. Forrest referred to Tom Llewellyn to address the hi-lights of the report. Tom stated that the engineering firm hired the specialist that created the report and the engineers were very happy with the report and it would be easy to handle for developing the housing. Board member reminded Mr. Llewellyn that there were several issues with the water level, and the disbursement of the water runoff, and they were wanting answers on how the water run-off would be dealt with. There's no storm drains, so there's no catch pit for the water. The board would like to know what the plan is before they approve this subdivision. Mr. Llewellyn said there would be a plan made once this is approved. He can't spend the extra money on the engineering if this subdivision isn't approved.

A board member raised concerns about the LMC having old zoning codes on the website and asked the mayor if he could get the new zoning code updated.

Mr. Llewellyn looked at our zoning regulations and stated that he worked with the public works director, the police department, and fire department and the school superintendent of maintenance to make sure he could fit this subdivision in with the zoning laws.

Board member asked again about the concerns about the width of the driveway and roadway in the subdivision. Mr. Llewellyn stated that the roadway is 32 feet set by the fire department and garbage department so they can get their trucks through without having to back out. They can go around, even with the parking place. Mr. Llewellyn confirmed this was a loop road and that there were 2 access into the subdivision so the trucks could go around.

Board member noted that he addressed the water concerns but asked if he made any modifications to the concerns over the size of the garages or traffic concerns that were mentioned in the July 15th meeting. Mr. Llewellyn said that it's a cost issue, and not everyone has a garage. Board is having an issue with a larger vehicle just being able to park in the 16-foot driveway when LMC says 20 FT, anybody with anything larger than a midsize car, would have to park in the street. They asked if the garage was mainly going to be a storage shed. Board member asked if they would modify the plans. At this time, there were no modifications with a functional garage.

Board asked Forrest, contracted planner, what is the standard street width. Forrest answered depending on where it's at, the standard street width is 40 ft with parking on both sides. Board is concerned with the 32 ft width and parking on one side, if that would be wide enough. Forrest said 32 ft is adequate for parking on one side. Board asked who would be

monitoring the parking on 1 side. Forrest said that would be the Laurel PD to monitor the 1 side parking.

Chair Klansa asked if there were any other comments. Forrest reminded the board they are required to adopt the findings as is the city council, there are 4 of them.

- 1- Is it consistent with the growth policy
- 2- Is it consistent with the purpose and intent of the PUD section
- 3- Complies with the standard of the PUD section
- 4- No adverse impact or impact that that could not be mitigated on neighboring properties and natural resources.

Forrest explained to the board; you need finding before you would make a motion to either approve or recommend denial. Board members are still not satisfied with the mitigation of the water runoff. Board members stated there are still concerns that did not get address regarding the garage issue and the potential traffic issues. Board member asked if it would be better for the developer to withdraw rather than be denied. The board is not satisfied with the answers from Mr. Llewellyn about where the water is going to go and doesn't want to accept the answer of "don't worry about, it will get done." The board is asking for more in-depth engineering answers.

Chair asked the board to make a motion to either table or deny the Glantz PUB. Mike Waters made a motion to table the Glantz PUB, Paul Thomae seconded the motion. Richard Klose, 511 Cottonwood Ave, has concerns about the water issue and the traffic issue. He's worried about the traffic creating a bottleneck with the school traffic. There was no other comment, motion to table Glantz PUB passed 8-0.

4. Interstate Engineering MLUPA Update

Megan Bixler, with Interstate Engineering, updated the board on Chapter 3. See attached. They are planning some workshops and committee engagement projects. They are still working on collecting surveys. They were at the farmers markets and had good communication. They have received 270 surveys back.

Forrest asked if the City of Laurel hit the population threshold in the next 5 to 10 years with our growth factor, where they had to take an upgrade in class requirements. Will this be addressed where it pertains to fire and DEQ storm water. She said it would. Board member was concerned about this plan missing Business development, and entities to move into Laurel.

Board member asked if MLUPA is only addressing City of Laurel, in the municipality or also looking at the boarding Laurel residence. MLUPA is mainly looking at in City limits, but as they are looking at growth, the outside limits will also be considered.

Elizabeth Gilg, of Laurel, asked about the shift in demographics of Laurel, because there are students and Laurel residents that live outside City limits that are using the schools and going to the business, she feels the growth plan should reflect that demographic outside limits. Board member also mentioned that the drop of students in the school has more to do with students going to homeschooling rather than leaving Laurel.

Board member asked if he could make comments on the side and make comments that they would like to change or address.

Board member asked what Interstate Engineering responsibilities are. Forrest explained that their task order for them was to bring us into compliance with MLUPA as quickly as possible because we were supposed to be done May 16th, 2026. Forrest suggests continuing to drive toward MLUP compliance. State requires the City to be MLUPA compliant.

They are planning community workshops. Board member also asked that they involve the youth.

Richard Klose, mentioned with the growth in Laurel, at some point, Laurel will need to put in another water reservoir, and it will care of some of the growth managements.

Mayor asked that with MLUPA already being late, let's not do this fast, we need to do it right. The population around us may not be annexed right now, they are still part of our community with the potential of growth. He is hoping to work with a firm that can assist us with finding funding.

Chair Klasna asked if there was any other correspondence. There was none.

Other Items

5. None

Announcements

6. Date for next meeting will be September 16, 2026, at 6:00 PM. Plan on another MLUPA update.

Adjournment:

Motion by Judy Goldsby to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mike Waters. There was no public comment. Motion passed 8-0.

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:55 PM.



Amber Hatton
Deputy Clerk Treasurer

MONTANA LAND USE PLANNING ACT (MLUPA)

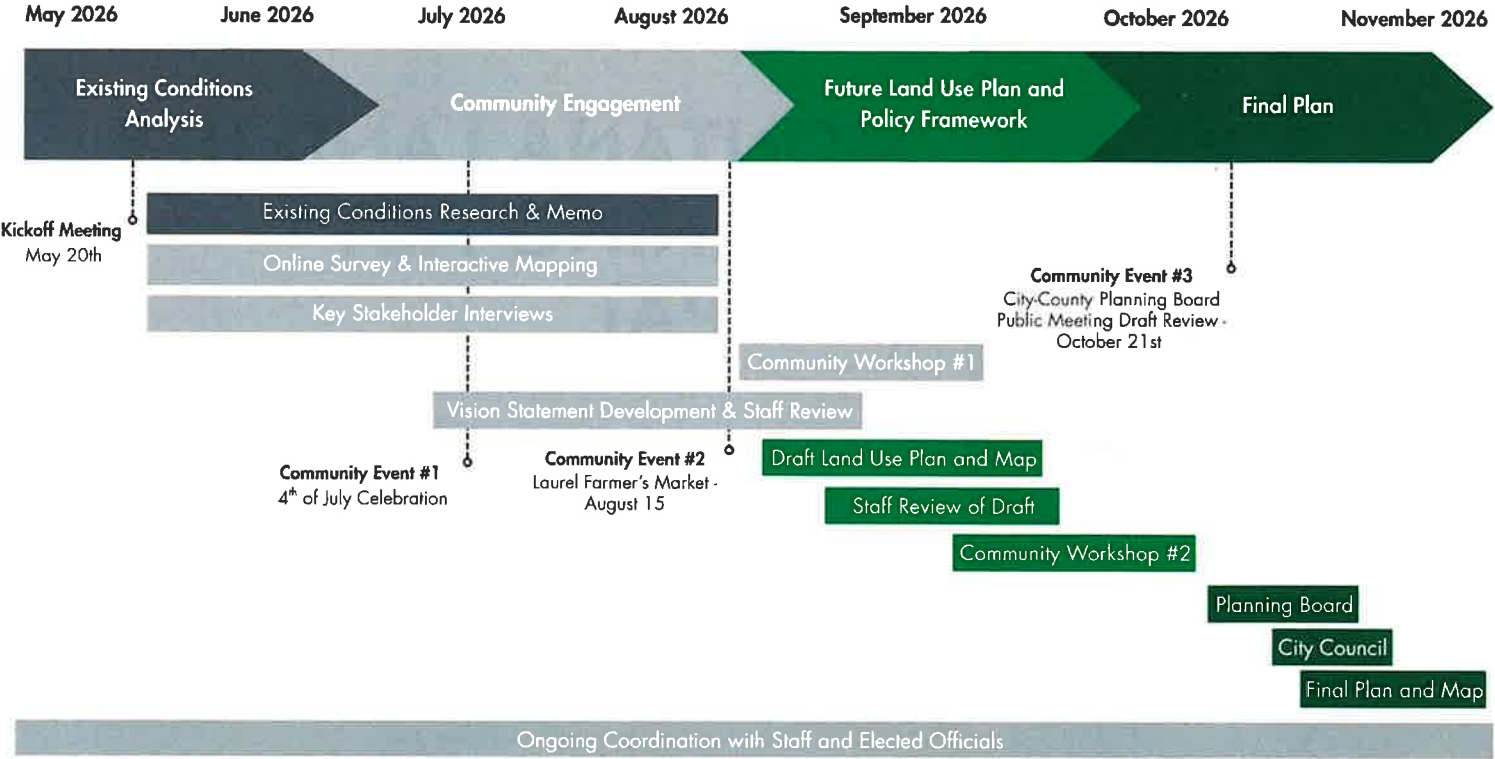
PLANNING COMMISSION, AUGUST 19



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LAUREL LAND USE PLANNING PROCESS



WHAT WE'VE DONE

- **Stakeholder Meetings**

- Superintendent Matt Torix, Laurel Public Schools (June 25th)
- Angela Klein-Hughes, A Haus of Realty (June 8)
- Laurel Chamber of Commerce (July 13)
- Laurel Rotary Club (July 21)
- Mayor Kris Vogele (July 30)

- **Community Engagement**

- 4th of July Celebration (July 4)
- Laurel Farmer's Market (August 15)
- Community Survey – **Open Until August 22**
 - 146 responses as of August 12
 - Printed surveys available at City Hall
- Email Blasts
- Project Website: www.LaurelForward.com

- **Draft Vision Statement**



Laurel Chamber of Commerce, July 13



Postcard Promoting Community Survey

WHAT WE'VE DONE

- **Existing Conditions**

- Windshield Tour (June 8)
- Public Works Discussion (June 8)
- Initial Mapping
 - Existing Land Use
 - Future Growth Areas
- Existing Conditions Review



SURVEY RESULTS *(As of August 12)*

- 146 responses
- Survey Themes:
 - Preserve small-town feel and sense of community
 - Maintain family-friendly qualities — parks, schools
 - Plan for growth thoughtfully — supportive of growth but alongside infrastructure and managed to protect community character
 - Expand housing opportunities — affordable housing remains the most frequently cited challenge for residents
 - Invest in infrastructure — roads, sidewalks, drainage, and utilities
 - Strengthen downtown and support local businesses
 - Provide more recreation for all ages — trails, pools, community centers, activities for teenagers
 - Retain Laurel's identity while remaining connected to the region

DRAFT VISION STATEMENT

Laurel is a proud and resilient community that embraces its small-town culture, strong sense of community, and pioneering past.

As Laurel grows, it will preserve its unique character while thoughtfully accommodating growth that enhances residents' quality of life. Laurel will foster diverse and affordable housing options, a vibrant local economy, high-quality public services, well-maintained infrastructure, and recreation opportunities for all ages.

Through transparent leadership, meaningful community engagement, and thoughtful stewardship, Laurel will remain Montana's hometown: a safe, welcoming, and connected place where future generations choose to live, work, raise families, and invest in the community's future.

POPULATION

- **Relatively Stable**

- Growth has been more gradual than in Billings, Yellowstone County, or Montana.

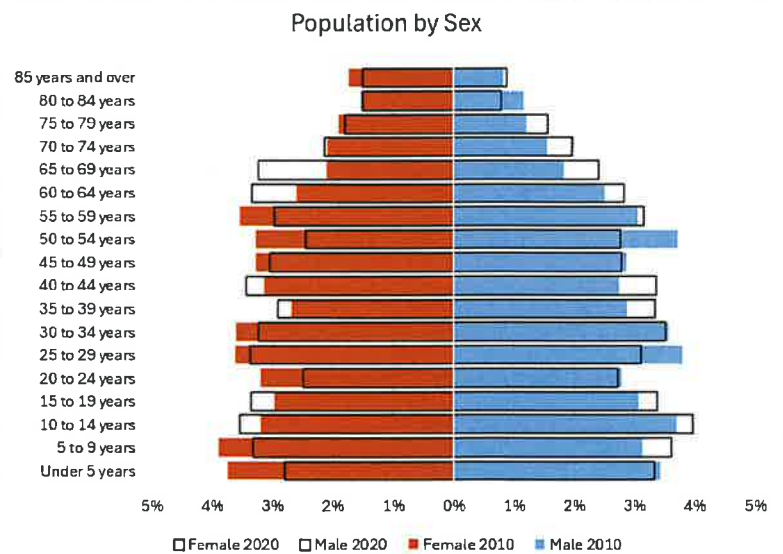
	Laurel	Billings	Yellowstone County	Montana
Compound Annual Growth Rate (2010 – 2025)	0.40%	1.11%	1.01%	0.97%

- Laurel’s population is projected to reach **7,810 in 2045**. This is an increase of just over 600 residents over the next 20 years.

POPULATION

• Shifting demographics

- Fewer children and more retirees than in 2010
- Median age of 37.1



HOUSING

- About 60% of Laurel households own their homes and 40% rent, a higher rental share than Yellowstone County, Montana, or Billings.
- Survey results show the rental market is difficult for many to navigate, but still less expensive than trying to buy a home. **A household needs to earn nearly \$96,000 a year to afford a median-priced home (\$365,000 in 2025).**
 - **Only 27%** of Laurel households earn enough to afford a home at that price.

ECONOMY

- None of Laurel's five largest industries pay enough, on their own, to afford the median-priced home.
- **Laurel's median home price has increased 59% since 2019, and wages have only increased 23%**
- Nearly half of Laurel residents commute to Billings each day and fewer than 20% live and work in Laurel.

OTHER TOPICS COVERED

- Existing Land Use
- Transportation
- Community Facilities
- Natural Resources
- Environmental Conditions
- Parks and Recreation
- Infrastructure Systems

WHERE WE'RE GOING

- **Community Workshops**
- **Draft Plan**
- **October Community Event**



DISCUSSION

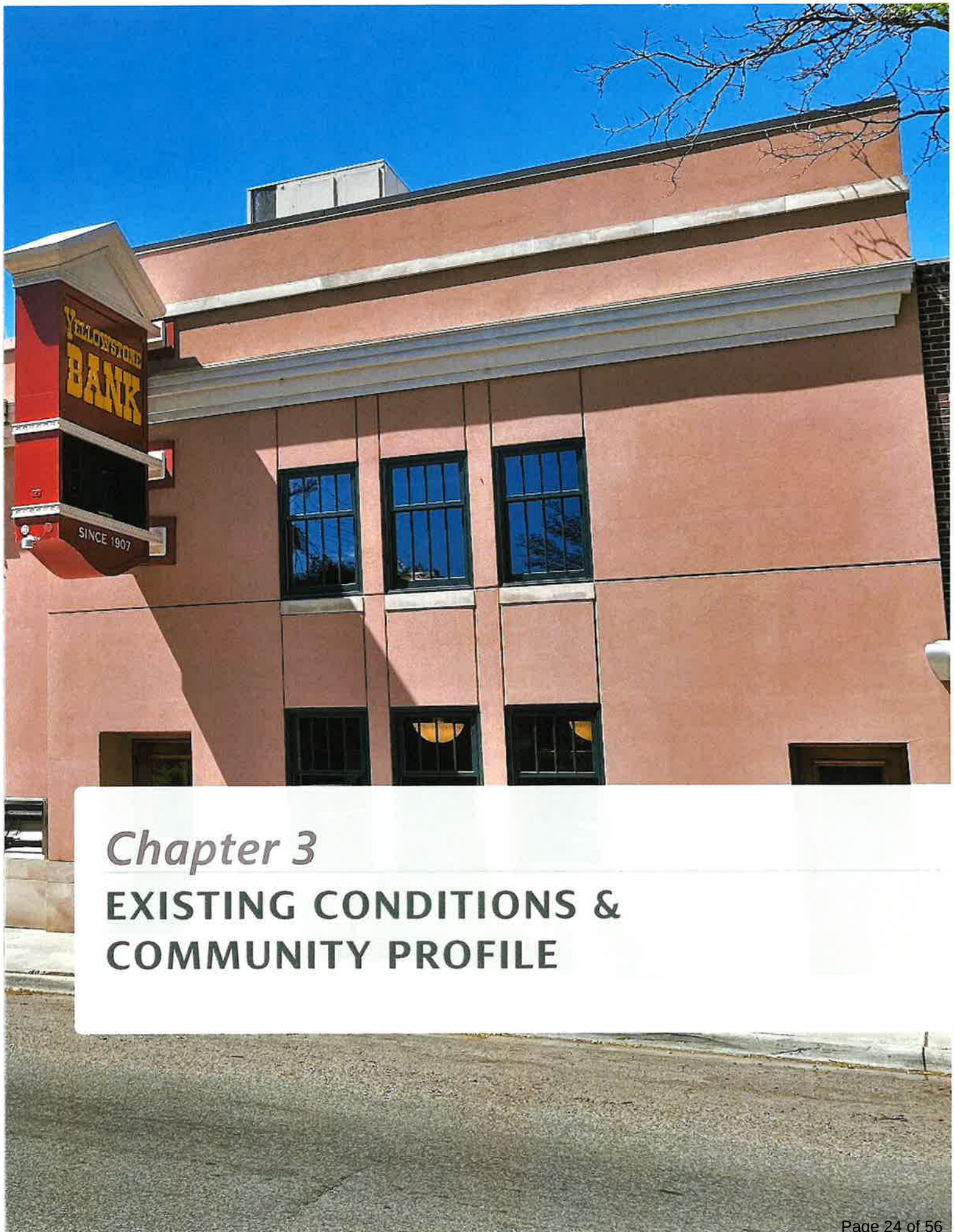
- Any comments or questions?



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Chapter 3

EXISTING CONDITIONS & COMMUNITY PROFILE

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POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS

Laurel's population has been relatively stable over the last 15 years, with the exception of a spike in residents between 2010 and 2013. Even with that increase, Laurel has experienced modest and stable population growth over the past 15 years, increasing from 6,782 residents in 2010 to 7,205 residents in 2025. This is much more gradual than the growth rates experienced in Billings, Yellowstone County, or Montana over the same period of time.

Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) & Population Projection

	 Laurel	 Yellowstone County	 Montana	 Billings
 Compound Annual Growth Rate (2010-2024)	0.4% 	1.01% 	0.97% 	1.11% 
 CAGR Population Projection (2045)	7,810 	211,264 	1,387,826 	153,800 

What is CAGR?

Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) is the average annual rate at which a population grows over a period of time. The measurement accounts for growth that builds on itself each year, meaning each year's increase will be slightly larger because the base population is larger.

Data suggests that Laurel's steady growth since 2013 can be primarily attributed to natural population shifts (i.e. births and deaths). When people do move to Laurel, they often already have a connection here. Responses from the community survey found that the most common reason people live in Laurel is because they were born and/or raised in Laurel, moved back to be near aging parents or grandchildren, or have other family ties to the City.



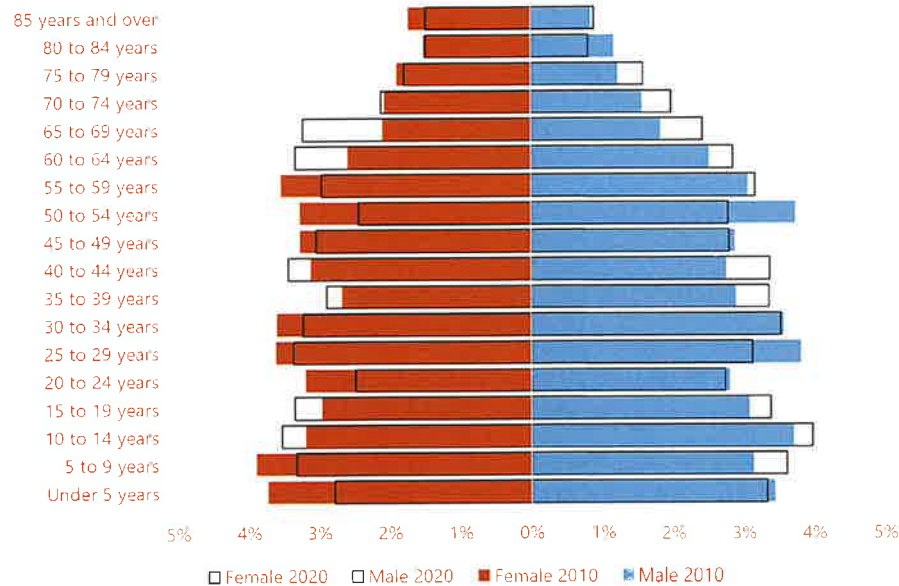
Because Laurel has not historically experienced large population shifts, it is likely to continue growing steadily into the future. Using the same CAGR of 0.40% that Laurel experienced between 2010 and 2025, Laurel's population is projected to reach 7,810 in 2045. This is an increase of just over 600 residents over the next 20 years.

However, this projection is dependent on several factors, including how much Laurel invests in infrastructure improvements and the availability of land. In April 2026, Laurel adopted an emergency moratorium on annexation applications to allow the City to evaluate infrastructure capacity, water system demands, changes to state law, and long-term growth and development needs in coordination with this planning effort. The cumulative result of these efforts and studies will allow Laurel to more effectively plan for future development.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Laurel's median age of 37.1 years is younger than Yellowstone County (40.2), the State of Montana (41.3), and slightly younger than Billings (38.8). This suggests Laurel is an attractive place to live for younger workers and families. Geographic data shows the median age of people moving to Laurel is 37.8, but 19% of new residents are(were?) between the ages of 5 and 17. The median income of the householder is \$41,017 before moving, and they are most likely to have a high school degree or college degree, or their respective equivalents. This data suggests people are moving to Laurel with their families in search of better-paying jobs available to their level of education.

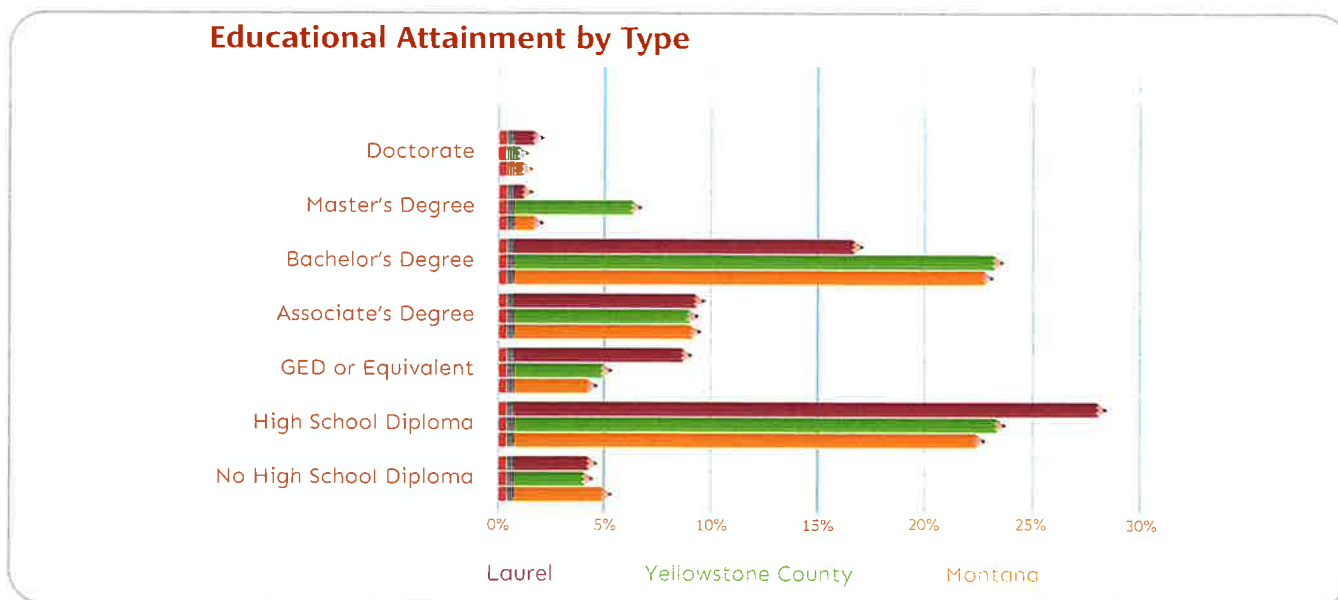
Population by Sex



While the share of Laurel residents who identify as White is similar to those in Yellowstone County and Montana, Laurel has larger populations of Asian residents and people who identify as two or more races than the county or state. The City also has more Hispanic and Latino residents than other communities. This diversity could be attributed to Laurel's job opportunities and affordability.



Laurel's educational attainment likely reflects the city's community-centric nature of Laurel and job availability. Laurel's high school graduation rate of nearly 95% is higher than the county and state, and the city's dropout rate is also lower than both. However, Laurel residents are less likely to finish any form of higher education, with the exception of doctorate/PhD. This indicates that students are well-supported through secondary school, and local jobs may not require higher education.

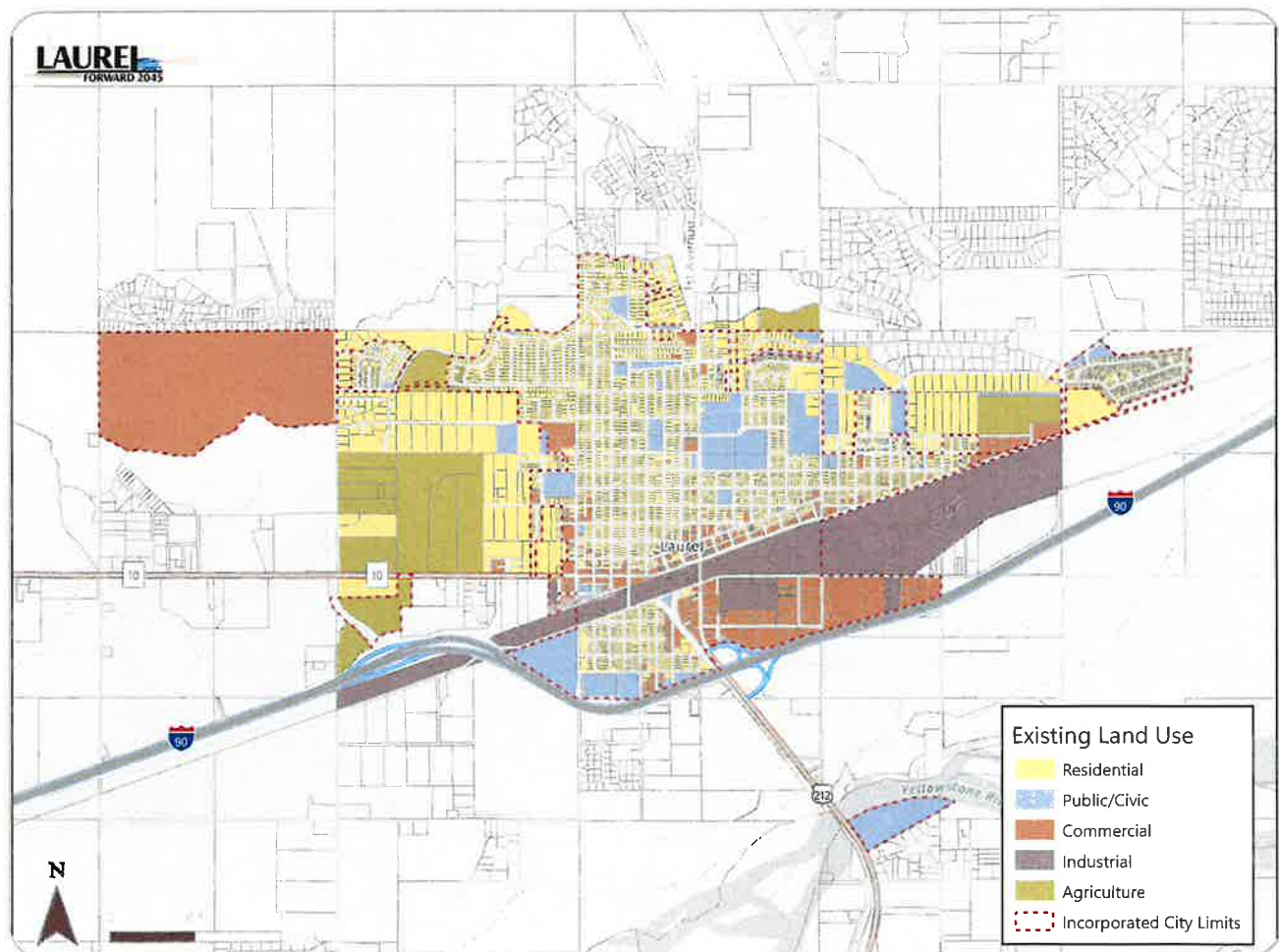


EXISTING LAND USE

Laurel is in South Central Montana, 15 miles west of Billings, the largest city in Montana. The City sits along major transportation routes, including I-90, Route 212, and Old Route 10. Laurel is 223 miles east of Helena, the state capital, 70 miles from the northeast entrance of Yellowstone National Park, 80 miles from the Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument, and 137 miles from Bozeman.

Laurel is located on the western boundary of Yellowstone County. This area has seen significant development with the City of Billings' continued growth, but the area surrounding Laurel's city limits remain sparsely populated and made up of irrigated farmland, grazing land, and riverine areas associated with the Yellowstone River Valley. These ecosystems support agricultural production, wildlife habitat, and open space that contribute to the community's economy and rural character.

Laurel has developed slowly in the past few decades. The development has focused itself north and west of the city. There are also many vacant and underused parcels within the City itself. The area adjacent to Interstate I-90 is mostly commercial and industrial. This similar land use is seen along Old Route 10 to the west of Laurel.





RESIDENTIAL

Laurel's many residential districts provide a variety of housing densities, volumes, and types. Laurel's joint city-county planning board enforces regulations to accommodate these different houses and lifestyles. The older areas of the city, such as the south side and neighborhoods adjacent to downtown, have maintained their original platted parcels and allow for smaller-scale residential buildings and higher densities.

Newer developments and additions to Laurel have generally had lower density zoning than the original Laurel townsite and are more suburban. It is important to provide a mix of residential styles and sizes to provide current and future residents with the housing that best fits their needs.

AGRICULTURAL

The Yellowstone River valley contains productive soils, established irrigation infrastructure, and favorable growing conditions to support agricultural operations. According to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, approximately 17% of Laurel contains soil classified as "prime farmland" – land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. However, only about 1.5% of land within Laurel's incorporated city limits is classified as agricultural land.

INDUSTRIAL

Laurel has a substantial industrial land base. The City developed around the commercial railyard, now operated by Montana Rail Link. This remains the largest railyard between Minneapolis and Seattle. Other major industrial properties include the refinery operated by Cenex Harvest States, Inc. (CHS) and Fox Lumber.



COMMERCIAL

Laurel is a full-service community with supermarkets, gas stations, bars, and restaurants accessible to the public, and commercial areas can be found in different parts of the city. The traditional central business district remains heavily commercial, with some buildings containing apartments on the upper floors. The area adjacent to I-90 contains commercial and industrial properties that serve residents and highway travelers. The parcels along Old Rt. 10 contain a mix of uses, including highway-focused commercial properties, and the properties located along E. Main Street contain a variety of establishments.

The Laurel Golf Club on the west side of town is a private, 18-hole course for club members and their guests. The 270-acre course is not publicly accessible and is therefore classified as a commercial use on the Existing Land Use map (Figure XX).



PUBLIC/CIVIC

Laurel maintains a full range of public facilities for residents, businesses, and institutions. The City operates City Hall, the public library, a public works shop, a water treatment plant, and a sewer treatment plant. The Laurel School District operates Laurel Elementary, Intermediate, Middle, and High Schools.

Laurel also has parks of varying sizes. Thompson Park and Riverside Park are the most significant. Thompson Park is centrally located and includes athletic fields, a public pool, and public facilities. Riverside Park is a historic park that has served residents and travelers since before Laurel was incorporated. Many smaller parks have also been established as the City has grown.

URBAN RENEWAL

Laurel established a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District in 2007 that encompasses the traditional downtown and SE 4th Street commercial area. The district has funded infrastructure projects and grants for façade, structural, signage, and technical assistance improvements. The grant program is managed by the volunteer Laurel Urban Renewal Agency board.

HOUSING CONDITIONS

The housing stock in Laurel is diverse and generally more affordable than in surrounding jurisdictions. About 96% of homes are occupied, and most vacant homes appear to be rentals. This suggests a tight, high-demand market for buyers, though survey responses also highlight limited availability and high costs as challenges for renting households.

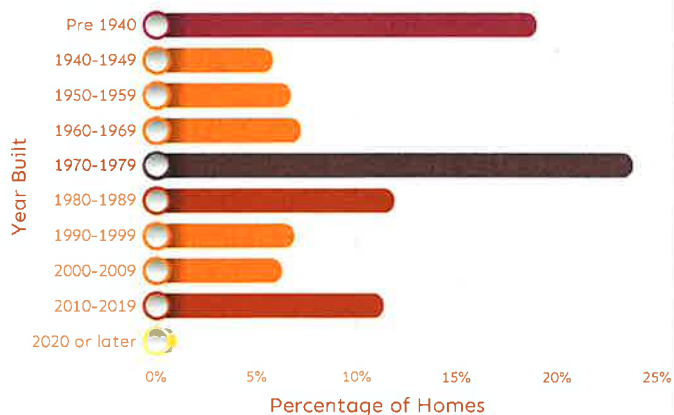
Most Laurel homes are occupied by families. Nearly 30% of households include a child under 18, and nearly 23% include a resident age 65 or older, reflecting a mix of young families and older residents.

About 60% of Laurel households own their homes and 40% rent, a higher rental share than Yellowstone County, Montana, or Billings. Rental housing has likely helped keep Laurel affordable, but renters generally have less housing stability than homeowners.

Most homeowners in Laurel live in single-family homes or manufactured homes (also referred to as mobile homes), while renters live in more diverse homes, including single-family homes, infill housing, and multi-family homes. Despite the differences in living arrangements, the majority of the homes that both owners and renters live in were built before 1980. While there are many benefits to having a stock of older homes in a community, Laurel must also make sure new homes are being built to meet residents' needs.



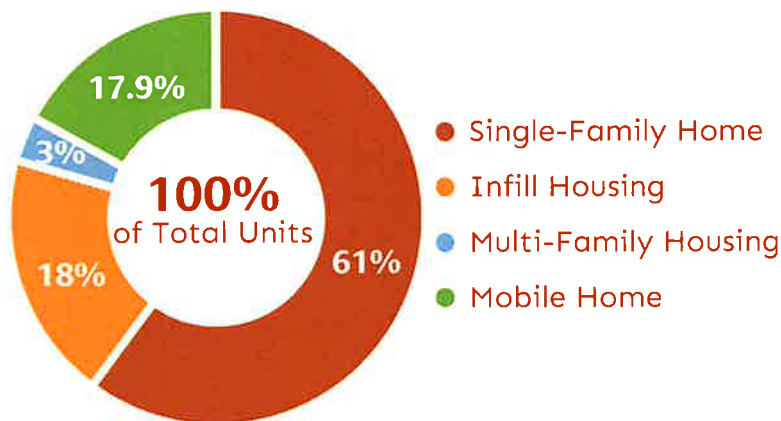
Housing Age In Laurel





Housing Breakdown

- Total Units by Structure



- Units by Tenure



Owner-Occupied
Housing Units

58.7% of Total Units

Single-Family Home	75.1%
Infill Housing	1.2%
Multi-Family Housing	1.2%
Mobile Home	23.7%



Renter-Occupied
Housing Units

41.3% of Total Units

Single-Family Home	38.3%
Infill Housing	44.0%
Multi-Family Housing	7.7%
Mobile Home	9.1%



NEARLY HALF of survey respondents say it is difficult to find a place to live in Laurel. Respondents say that young adults, working families, and first-time homebuyers face the greatest barriers to finding a home, and that adequate housing is too expensive.

Renting is currently more affordable than buying in Laurel, likely due to the age of the housing and the kinds of homes that renters are more likely to live in. According to Zillow, the average monthly rent in Laurel is \$1,250. For a household earning Laurel's median income of \$68,474, this is considered affordable since it makes up less than 30% of gross income.

Buying a home in Laurel, however, is much harder to afford. The median sales price in 2025 was \$365,000, an increase of roughly 59% since 2019. Assuming standard mortgage lending terms*, a household needs to earn about \$95,874 a year to afford a home at that price. As described in more detail in the Economic Conditions section, only 27% of Laurel households earn enough to afford the median-priced home.



LAUREL
FORWARD 2045

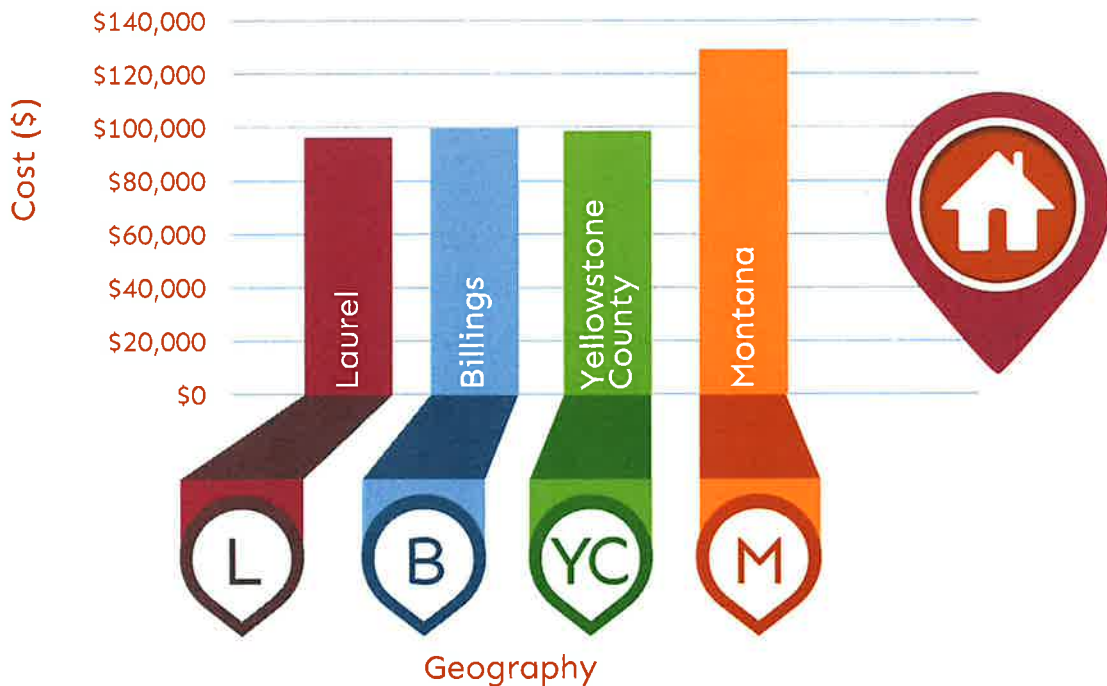
Exhibit Coming Soon...

The number of building permits that have been issued for smaller, infill homes has fluctuated over the last 15 years, but data shows single-family home permits continuing to outpace all other types of housing. Since 2020, the City has issued 29 permits for single-family homes and only 13 permits for multi-unit homes.



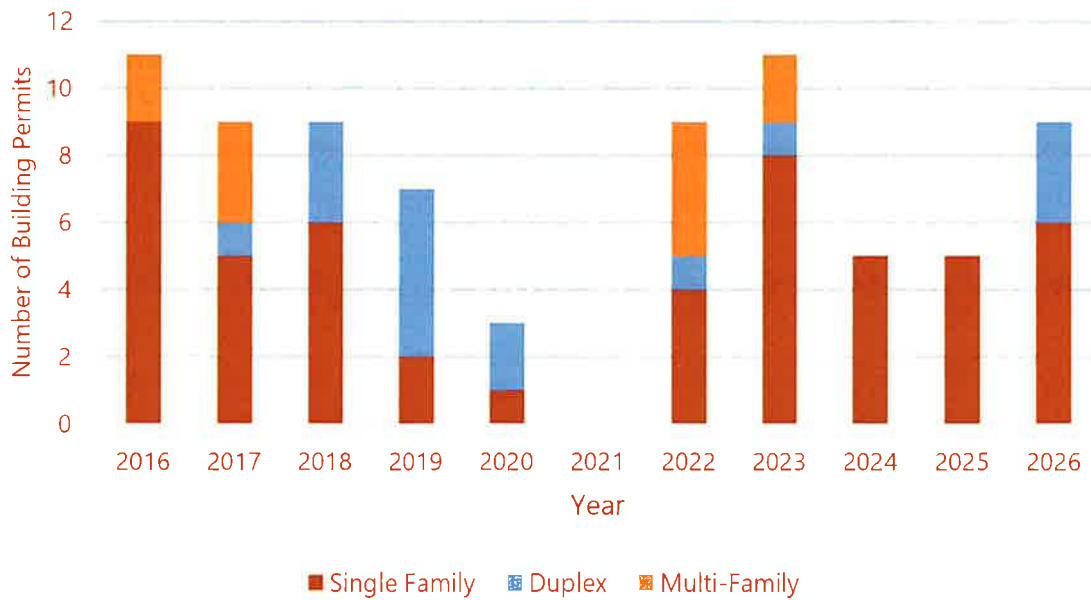
In one interview with Superintendent Matt Torix, housing affordability and availability were mentioned as constraints on Laurel Public Schools' ability to recruit and retain staff. Low entry-level teacher salaries and tight rental and ownership markets in the area make it difficult for staff to find a place to live nearby.

Annual Income Needed to Afford a Median Priced Home





Housing Permits (2016 - April 2026)



To help ease affordability challenges, Laurel should consider strategies that encourage more diverse housing types. This may be especially helpful for households who would like to buy a home. Expanding housing options will be key to meeting the community's long-term housing needs and ensuring Laurel remains affordable into the future.

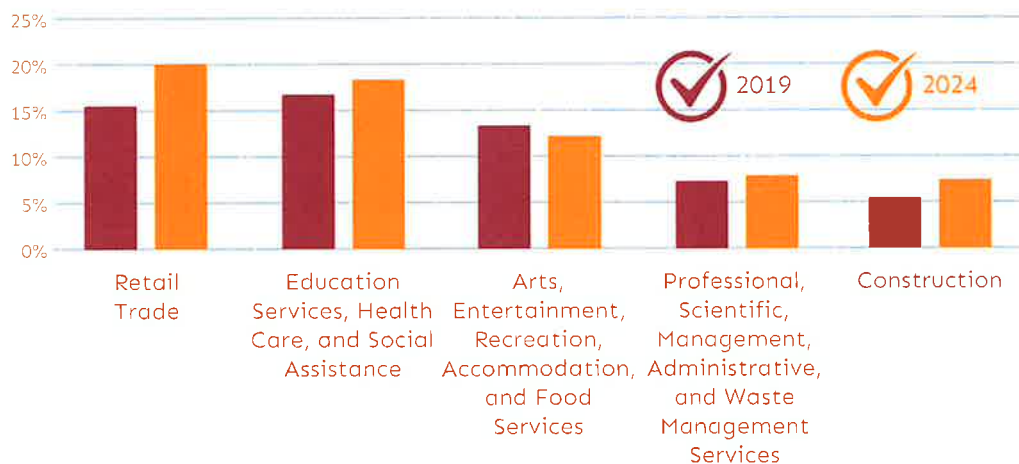


ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Laurel has a strong labor force, mostly made up of private sector employees. About 70% of residents participate in the workforce, and 68% are employed, resulting in a 1.7% unemployment rate. This is lower than both the county and state. Laurel's poverty rate is 10% and is roughly in line with Montana.

Laurel's five largest industries have not changed since the last growth policy update, though each now makes up a different share of the local economy. Retail trade is the largest industry today, accounting for 20% of Laurel's economy, followed by education services, health care, and social assistance at 18%.

Largest Industries in Laurel



None of Laurel's five largest industries pay enough, on their own, to afford the median-priced home. Only the city's highest-paying industry—mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction—exceeds that threshold, with an average annual income of \$113,750.

Since 2019, Laurel's median home price has increased 59%, while median household income has increased only 23%. This disconnect is likely making it more difficult for some residents to keep up with the cost of living, as housing costs take up more of their budget.

Nearly half of employed Laurel residents commute to Billings each day, while fewer than 20% both live and work in Laurel. This underscores Laurel's connection to the Billings economy and its role as a more affordable home base for many regional workers.



LAUREL
FORWARD 2045

Exhibit Coming Soon...

TRANSPORTATION

Laurel's downtown and original neighborhoods were developed on a traditional gridded street network that provides multiple route options and good connectivity. As the City has grown, subdivisions have not maintained that pattern, resulting in disconnected streets, dead ends, and limited east-west travel options, particularly west of 8th Avenue (2020 Growth Policy). The city's transportation is further constrained by the Montana Rail Link railyard, which bisects the community and leaves only two primary north-south crossings: the 1st Avenue underpass and 5th Avenue railroad crossing, in addition to the I-90 interchanges at East and West Laurel.



Two major highway corridors, 1st Avenue and Old Route 10/Main Street, serve as the primary north-south and east-west routes through the community. These corridors accommodate significant commercial, industrial, and commuter traffic and become congested during peak travel times.

Laurel has approximately 47 miles of roadway within city limits. Excluding alleys, nearly 96% of the city's roadway network is paved. The City of Laurel Public Works maintains local streets, while Yellowstone County Public Works is responsible for county roads in the surrounding area. Several roadway improvements have been identified in the City's CIP, including reconstruction of approximately one-half mile of West Railroad Street.

Laurel's transportation network serves residents as well as regional commuter, freight, and industrial traffic. The city's location along Interstate 90 and U.S. Highway 212 provides direct access to Billings and surrounding destinations, making Laurel an important transportation hub within south-central Montana. The transportation system also supports movement of goods and materials associated with the area's industrial facilities, rail operations, and agricultural economy. As Laurel continues to grow, it will be critical for Laurel to maintain its roadway infrastructure and consider connections between neighborhoods.

Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is limited throughout the community, although the City has identified trail and active transportation plans as future projects. These endeavors are intended to enhance connectivity, expand transportation options, and improve access to destinations around Laurel.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Laurel Transit was established in 2010 with state funding and provides on-demand service within Laurel and limited service to Billings. It operates Monday through Friday from 10:00 am until 4:00 pm within the City, and transportation to and from Billings is available on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of the month. Transportation within Laurel costs \$4 roundtrip with up to 2 stops, while trips to Billings cost \$10 round trip. Riders must schedule trips at least one business day in advance.

With nearly half of Laurel residents commuting to Billings each day, the City should evaluate opportunities to expand regional transit options. While Laurel Transit provides an important option for limited mobility seniors, individuals with disabilities, and residents without access to a personal vehicle, limited operating hours, advanced scheduling, and infrequent trips to Billings may reduce the effectiveness of Laurel Transit for commuting, employment, education, and medical appointments. As Laurel ages and attracts more families, alternative transportation options that improve access to child care, health care, and regional services may become more important.



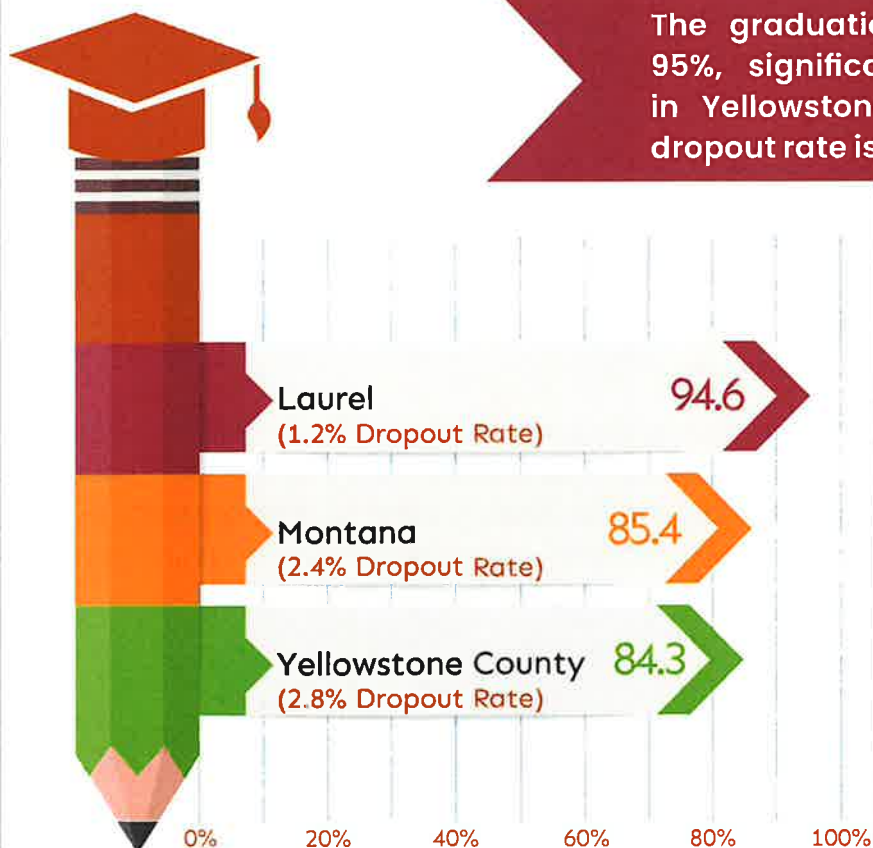
COMMUNITY FACILITIES

EDUCATION

There are two school districts in Laurel: Laurel Elementary School District and Laurel High School District. Within the districts there are four schools to serve preschool through 12th grade.



Graduation Rate



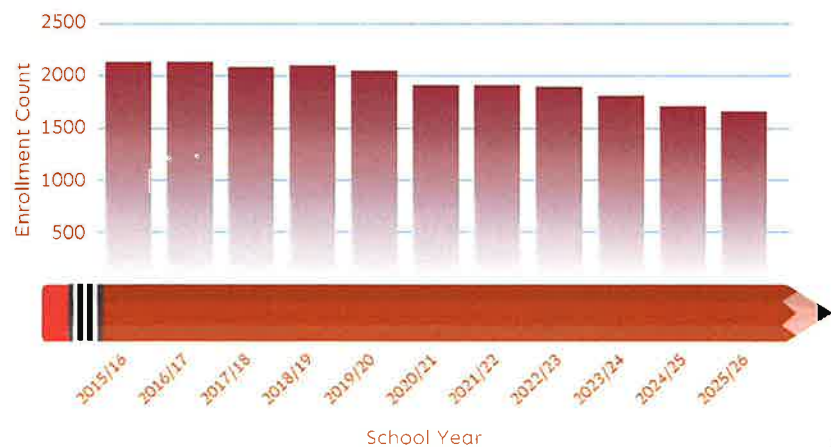
The graduation rate in Laurel is nearly 95%, significantly higher than the rate in Yellowstone County or Montana. The dropout rate is also much lower than at 1.2%.

Enrollment has slowly decreased since 2015 while the number of homeschooled students is reportedly increasing. This trend is unlikely to change in the near future and will have an impact on future staffing and facility needs.

Until 2025, Laurel Public Schools had three elementary schools. The District's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), adopted in 2022, documented critical issues across all facilities. In 2023, Laurel Public Schools successfully passed an \$88 million bond in 2023 to demolish one of their Elementary Schools, build a new intermediate school, and upgrade two others to meet student and administrative needs.

In May 2026 the school district put forward a bond for \$62.8 million for high school repairs and other upgrades, but it was not successful.

School Enrollment



Bus service is provided to students living more than three miles from school. Students living closer must arrange other means of transportation, which may be creating traffic challenges across the City for Laurel residents.

The District's total landholding is approximately 82 acres, including a 21-acre undeveloped parcel north of the Big Ditch near 8th Avenue and W. 12th Street. The original Laurel High School, built in 1910, sold to a developer for \$150,300 in July 2026. The property is zoned Residential-6000, which is intended to promote "high, urban-density, duplex residential environment on lots that are usually served by a public water and sewer system" (Laurel Code of Ordinances, 17.12).

Strategically utilizing these properties will help Laurel Public Schools remain resilient and provide a path to address several issues outlined in its Strategic Plan, including continuing long-range infrastructure planning to meet changing demographics and working more closely with the Laurel City Council to address the city's housing needs.





PUBLIC AMENITIES

The Laurel Public Library is open Monday – Thursday from 9:00 am until 7:30 pm and Saturdays from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm. The library hosts events and activities for the community as well as resources and information about voting, taxes, technology, and more. Laurel’s CIP includes \$825,000 in upgrades to the library. Top priorities include replacing the computers, roof, and fascia. Lower priorities identified in the CIP include new air conditioning units and building additions to create a larger space to meet the community’s needs.

The Laurel Municipal Airport is a public-use, non-towered general aviation facility located two miles north of the city. It is one of the busiest general aviation airports in the state, with two paved and one grass runway. Aviation activities from the airport include recreational flying, agricultural spraying, corporate and business aviation, and aerial wildland firefighting. Rocky Mountain College Aviation Program is also based at the airport and offers collegiate flight training.

Laurel Senior Center is open Monday through Friday and provides one hot meal per day, five days a week. The center also offers Meals on Wheels for residents who need food delivered to their home.

Other facilities include Riverside Community Hall, managed by the Laurel Lions Club, and the Hub, an event space and community center. The Hub is owned by Front Porch, the organization responsible for the annual Fall Festival in Laurel.



EMERGENCY SERVICES

Laurel's emergency services all operate out of the Fire-Ambulance-Police (FAP) Building. It was built in 1976 and has long been identified as inadequate. It lacks sufficient office space, a breakroom, separate locker rooms for male and female officers, secure evidence and vehicle storage, and adequate radio room fire control. The 2020 Growth Policy recommended constructing a new police station on Laurel's west side to meet anticipated growth patterns and be in proximity to the rail line and refinery.

Emergency services facility planning should be a coordinated land use priority and include an evaluation of an updated or new facility to support Laurel's future growth areas.



POLICE

The Laurel Police Department provides law enforcement services within Laurel's city limits, operating out of the Fire-Ambulance-Police (FAP) Building. The department has grown from 14 sworn officers in 2020 to 15 sworn officers today, and also handles animal control, code enforcement, and dispatch. The department coordinates with the Eastern Montana Drug Task Force, the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office, and the Montana Highway Patrol.

FIRE

The Laurel Volunteer Fire Department (LVFD), established in 1909, provides fire and rescue service to the City of Laurel, the Laurel Airport Authority, the Yellowstone Treatment Center, the Laurel Urban Fire Service Area, and Fire Districts 5, 7, and 8. The LVFD also operates from the aging FAP Building, and uses other City sites to store equipment. Services include structure and wildland fires, vehicle fires, industrial hazards, water/ice rescue, vehicle extrication, hazmat response, and rope rescue. The LVFD maintains a mutual aid agreement with Yellowstone County Fire Services.

Department capacity has shifted since 2020: total membership remains at 45, but the volunteer component has declined to 29, with the remaining roster made up of members required to be available to respond. Meanwhile, call volume is rising. There was 413 calls in 2023, a 38% increase since 2014. This shrinking volunteer base against growing call volume is a will likely intensify as Laurel's population grows and climate conditions intensify.

AMBULANCE

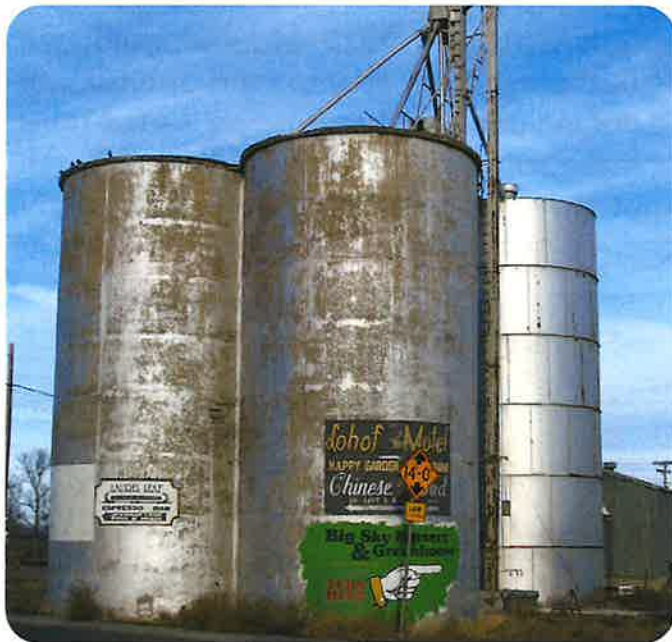
Laurel Emergency Medical Services (LEMS) and American Medical Response (AMR) provides 24/7 pre-hospital care to the City, portions of Yellowstone County, and nearby Joliet under a mutual aid agreement. LEMS is staffed by volunteer EMRs, EMTs, AEMTs, and paramedics. The service handles more than 1,300 calls annually, a figure expected to rise as the City grows. Because Laurel does not have a hospital, LEMS transports patients to medical facilities in Billings when higher-level or specialized care is needed.

The ambulance fleet has grown from three ambulance bays in 2020 to four ambulances in 2026, and in 2023, voters approved a \$450,000 annual mill levy to fund operational and staffing needs for LEMS. However, this did not include facilities funding. As the third occupant of the FAP Building, LEMS may need more space to accommodate the fourth ambulance and any additional equipment that may be needed to ensure community health and safety as discussions continue about a new facility.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Laurel sits in the Yellowstone River Valley, where relatively flat terrain, agricultural plains, open views, and distant mountain ranges shape the community's rural setting and sense of place. At about 3,300 feet above sea level, the city's location between the high plains and Beartooth foothills has influenced its development pattern and community character.



Laurel's natural resources are closely tied to agriculture and the Yellowstone River. Surrounding farmland, grazing land, wetlands, and riparian corridors support the area's rural character, water movement, floodplain functions, habitat connectivity, recreation, and regional development patterns.

These resources also support Laurel's economy. Agriculture remains an important surrounding land use, while CHS, Inc.'s fuel and asphalt production anchors the industrial economy. Together, they continue to shape Laurel's identity and future growth, conservation, and land use decisions.



SAND AND GRAVEL

The Laurel area is generally characterized by silty clay loam soil and few sand and gravel resources. The area contains a mix of fair to poor sand and gravel deposits, with some locations classified as poor sand and fair gravel. 11 open-cut mines are in the area and the average size of gravel pits is 25 acres. As Laurel grows, these resource areas should be considered alongside surrounding land uses, transportation access, reclamation needs, and potential conflicts with development.

ENERGY

Oil and gas resources have shaped Laurel's economy and industrial character for decades. Although there are no producing wells within the city, Laurel's energy infrastructure is an important part of the community's industrial base and regional economy.

The refinery, currently owned by CHS, Inc., has a significant economic impact on Laurel, both in terms of job creation and its role within the region's energy infrastructure. The facility relies on crude oil from Canada and distributes products, including gasoline, diesel fuel, jet fuel, and asphalt, throughout the northern United States. CHS, Inc. Processes approximately 60,000 barrels of crude oil per day and more than 700 million gallons of fuel annually.

As one of the region's largest industrial facilities, the Laurel refinery continues to influence local employment, transportation networks, and land use patterns. Its location along major rail, highway, and pipeline corridors allow crude oil and refined products to move efficiently throughout the region, helping establish Laurel as a regional center for energy processing and distribution.

In addition to CHS, Inc., Northwestern Energy operates the Yellowstone County Generating Station, a 175-megawatt natural gas-fired power plant, just outside the city. While there are currently no utility scale wind or solar projects in the Laurel area, the region has favorable wind and solar conditions, and the city's existing energy infrastructure may support future renewable energy opportunities.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

CLIMATE

Laurel experiences warm, dry summers and cool winters typical of south-central Montana. Average temperatures range from approximately 20 degrees Fahrenheit during the winter months to 89 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. The area receives relatively low annual precipitation, resulting in a semi-arid climate that influences local vegetation, agricultural practices, water resources, and wildfire conditions.

WILDLIFE

The Yellowstone River and its associated riparian corridors provide important wildlife habitat throughout the Laurel area. Mammal species observed within these habitats include black-tailed prairie dogs, common muskrats, Eastern fox squirrels, and North American beavers. The river and drainage features, such as the Nutting Drain Ditch, Big Ditch, and High Ditch, also serve as a corridor for a variety of bird species, including American robins, black-billed magpies, European starlings, and other migratory and resident birds. Wildlife nesting areas have been identified along the Yellowstone River and within the Sundance Lodge Recreation Area, highlighting the ecological importance of these interconnected riverine and wetland environments.

WILDFIRE

Laurel is in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), the area defined by where developed lands meet natural vegetation. WUI boundaries in Montana are established through county-level Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). Yellowstone County revised its CWPP and WUI boundaries in 2025 to include Laurel and surrounding areas.

Although the entirety of Laurel is in the WUI, most of the City is indirectly exposed to fire, meaning there is a lower risk to structures than in the direct exposure areas surrounding Laurel. Outside city limits, dry grass and grass-shrub fuels are abundant, which can rapidly spread fire during periods of drought, low humidity, or high winds.

Laurel follows the strategies identified in Yellowstone County's CWPP, which provides guidance for wildfire preparedness, fuels management, emergency response, public education, and land use planning. As part of the development process, subdivisions proposed within or adjacent to the WUI may be required to submit a fire mitigation plan that evaluates wildfire hazards and identifies steps to reduce the risk to people, property, and critical infrastructure.

WETLANDS

The Laurel area contains several important wetland resources, including the Charles M. Russell Wetland Management District and the Kindsfater Wetland Mitigation Site. These systems provide wildlife habitat, support water quality, store floodwater, and contribute to the ecological function of the Yellowstone River corridor.

FLOODING

Although the City of Laurel faces a relatively low overall flood risk, flooding remains a concern due to the community's proximity to the Yellowstone River. Historical flood events such as the 2022 Yellowstone River flood have had significant impacts on infrastructure, property, and transportation networks.

To reduce flood hazards and protect public safety, Laurel adopted floodplain regulations in 2013 to guide development within flood-prone areas. Laurel's floodplain regulations are administered in coordination with state requirements and are intended to be consistent with broader floodplain management efforts in Yellowstone County. New development within the 100-year floodplain is subject to state, local, and federal requirements to minimize risk to people, property, and infrastructure. Laurel also participates in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which provides access to federally backed flood insurance and supports local floodplain management efforts through floodplain mapping, regulatory standards, and education.

OTHER HAZARDS

In addition to flooding and wildfire, Laurel has experienced other natural hazards including severe winter weather, high winds, hail, drought, earthquakes, and occasional tornado activity. For example, a tornado was reported in the Laurel area in 2023, and severe thunderstorms have produced large hail measuring up to 2.75 inches in diameter (the size of a baseball). While these events generally occur less frequently than flooding or wildfire, they can disrupt transportation systems, damage public infrastructure and property, affect agricultural operations, and place additional demands on emergency services. Continued hazard mitigation and emergency preparedness efforts can reduce risks to residents and property. Yellowstone County is also a participating jurisdiction in the Eastern Montana Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, which identifies hazards affecting the regional hazards and outlines strategies to improve community resilience and reduce future risk.



PARKS & RECREATION

There are 17 parks in Laurel, totaling approximately 107 acres. This acreage surpasses general guidance to provide 10 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents in a community (National Recreation and Park Association).

A survey conducted in October 2013 found that the most frequently visited parks in Laurel were Kiwanis, Lions, and Thomson parks, and a significant number of respondents rarely or never visit the city's undeveloped parks.

One of the most significant parks in Laurel is Riverside Park. Located on the south side of the Yellowstone River, the park dates back to the early 1900s. The park features an historic levee and buildings that were built to house displaced men during the Great Depression and then to house German prisoners of war during World War II. In the decades following the end of the war, many of the historic buildings were used by local organizations such as the Laurel Rod and Gun Club, Laurel Rifle Club, American Legion and Laurel Jaycees. Today, the park is used for recreation and picnicking, and a concrete boat ramp provides access to the Yellowstone River. The Riverside Park Master Plan was developed in 2018 to provide a blueprint for improvements and the park's use.

Laurel's CIP identifies various park improvements and planning efforts to help the City effectively manage and maintain a cohesive park system into the future (see Table/ Figure XX).



LAURAL PARKS & CIP

Several parks projects are listed in the Laurel's CIP. Each project in the table below is slated to be paid for out of the City's General Fund and are ranked from 1 to 5 according to the following key:

①

NEED

②

COULD REALLY
USE

③

WANT

④

WOULD BE NICE

⑤

IF WE HAVE THE
FUNDING

PROJECT NAME	YEAR	PRIORITY	COST ESTIMATE	DESCRIPTION
BMX Bike Track at Fir Field	2026	①	\$250,000	BMX track for all ages
Cemetery Expansion and Road Replacement	2026	①	\$750,000	Expansion, roads, signage, kiosk
Riverside Park Water and Irrigation System	2025	①	\$360,000	Water line and irrigation for Riverside Park
Thompson Park Facility Update	2024	②	\$500,000	Tennis court demolition/ replacement
Stormwater Outfall Structure at Russell Park	2027	③	\$960,000	Stormwater outfall replacement
Underground Sprinkler Systems at Kiwanis and Nutting Parks	2025	④	\$250,000– \$325,000	Irrigation
Park Master Plan	2026	④	\$30,000	Parkland utilization recommendations
Trails Plans	2026	④	\$40,000	Trails system planning
Parks and Cemetery Equipment Replacement	2025	⑤	\$72,000	Truck, lawnmowers, crack-sealer
Trail Master Plan	2024	--	\$40,000	Integrated trails and parks planning as a part of the Active Transportation Master Plan

INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS

The Public Works Department administers Laurel's infrastructure and operates the municipal water treatment and distribution system, the wastewater collection and treatment system, and stormwater, and street maintenance services.

WATER

The Laurel Water Treatment Plant draws 12.6 million gallons of raw water per day from the Yellowstone River under a 1908 water right. The plant serves more than 6,700 people through 2,858 metered connections, including 82 residential connections and one industrial outside city limits. The plant has a treatment capacity of 5 million gallons per day and operates 24 hours a day.

The distribution system, originally installed in 1908, includes one 4-million-gallon ground storage tank, two booster pump stations, pipes ranging from 2 to 18 inches in diameter, and 301 fire hydrants. A new water treatment plant was built in 2019, and a new river intake was built in 2017.

The City's CIP identifies several projects for the City to complete to continue providing water to residents. The CIP identifies a new water tank, booster station, and piping redundancy to address water pressure concerns as high priority projects. This follows a recommendation in Laurel's 2020 Growth Policy that identifies a need for additional water storage capacity.

As Laurel grows, the City will also want to consider extending water service to the West Laurel Interchange area and to county residents in areas where future growth is anticipated to occur. More about future growth areas can be found in Chapter XX.





WASTEWATER

The Wastewater Treatment Plant was originally built in 1908 but has undergone major upgrades over its life, the most recent being sedimentation basin improvements in 2019. The plant has a treatment capacity of 1.12 million gallons per day and is staffed by three operators and one relief position. As Laurel grows, the system's capacity should be monitored closely, and a Wastewater System Master Plan is recommended to support long-range capacity planning.

Laurel's CIP identifies several projects to improve the system, including replacing a deteriorating sewer line in the alley between Main and 1st Streets, from 5th to 7th Avenue and recoating the plant's primary clarifiers. Other recommended projects include replacing the plant's boilers and embarking on a multi-year manhole lining program.

STORMWATER SYSTEM

Stormwater infrastructure is limited and concentrated primarily in the central business district and the SE 4th Street area. Laurel's history of downtown flooding caused by heavy rain runoff makes stormwater system improvements a priority for the city. Drinking water and stormwater needs are currently funded through the same water enterprise fund.

The City's CIP identifies a need for stormwater improvements on the south side of town. 1st Avenue storm water replacement, a stormwater outfall structure from Russell Park to the Yellowstone River, and a south side stormwater management plan are also identified. Laurel's 2020 Growth Policy recommended a citywide Stormwater Management Plan, incorporating stormwater planning into all roadway improvement projects, and separating the drinking water and stormwater enterprise funds.





SOLID WASTE

The City of Laurel provides solid waste services through a combination of local and regional facilities. Republic Services provides curbside garbage collection, while residents may dispose of bulky items and other non-commercial waste at the Laurel City Container Site located at 175 Buffalo Trail. Final disposal is provided by the Billings Regional Landfill.

Laurel's CIP identifies several projects to support the long-term operation and maintenance of the solid waste system. Planned improvements include constructing an indoor storage building for reserve vehicles, five new trucks, replacing containers, and expanding the transfer station.

STREETS AND ROADS

Many of Laurel's roads are in need of repair, particularly older local roads. These were built with deficiencies and antiquated design methods and now compound annual maintenance problems. Results from a community survey found that respondents gave Laurel's streets an average rating of 1.55 out of 5.

The City completed a study of its municipal road network that included an inventory and provided solutions to the system's infrastructure deficits. The CIP specifically recommends reconstruction West 12th Street (Valley Drive to 1st Avenue), completing a Road Network Master Plan, creating a road maintenance and repair program, and studying additional north-south crossing points across the train tracks.



SIDEWALKS AND TRAILS

Dedicated pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is limited in Laurel, and most responses to the community survey show people rely heavily on personal vehicles for travel. Further, survey respondents gave sidewalks an average rating of 2.01 out of 5.

The City has identified a need for a Trail Master Plan and Transportation Action Plan to guide thoughtful investments in other forms of transportation. Laurel's 2020 Growth Policy also sets goals for downtown bicycle and pedestrian improvements and a looping bicycle/pedestrian trail system to connect different areas of the community.

Laurel MLUPA Steering Committee Report

To: Laurel City-County Planning Board

Subject: Laurel Forward 2045 Scope and Timeline Discussion

Date: September 8, 2026

On August 28, 2026, Interstate Engineering met with the Laurel Forward 2045 Steering Committee to discuss next steps for Laurel Forward 2045 following discussion of the project's scope at the August 19th Planning Board meeting. The Steering Committee is comprised of Mayor Voge, Planning Director Kurt Markegard, City Planner Forrest Sanderson, and Planning Board members Laura Kirschenmann, Ron Benner, and Judy Goldsby.

The Steering Committee expressed concerns that the original timeline and project scope did not allow enough opportunity for public engagement or analysis. The committee suggested extending the timeline to June 2027 rather than December 2026 to address three main priorities. These priorities include:

1. **Expanded public engagement.** The Steering Committee would like the project to include more opportunities for public engagement. Extending the project timeline would allow for more opportunities for the community to provide feedback and ensure public ownership of the plan. If approved, additional engagement opportunities will be determined in coordination with city.
2. **Infrastructure analysis.** The city's contracted engineering firm, Morrison-Maierle, will complete an initial assessment of Laurel's infrastructure by early 2027. Laurel's infrastructure will ultimately determine the city's future growth and land use opportunities, and ideally Laurel Forward 2045 would include a recent and comprehensive analysis of the city's infrastructure systems. The Steering Committee supported extending the project timeline to allow for additional infrastructure coordination with Morrison-Maierle to strengthen the land use plan's recommendations and ensure the plan is realistic, actionable, and compliant with MLUPA.
3. **Expanded analysis.** The Steering Committee expressed concern that the requirements outlined in MLUPA do not meet Laurel's needs. Extending the project timeline and broadening the scope of the project would allow additional analysis on topics such as major local employers, development opportunities, and/or expanding the planning area. If approved, additional analysis will be determined in coordination with city.

The decision before the Planning Board today is to decide whether the land use plan's timeline, scope, and budget should be revised to advance the priorities above. Following that decision, Interstate Engineering will convene discussions with appropriate city staff and Steering Committee members to recommend a path forward.