



# I. OVERVIEW

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Richland County is at an important junction. Geographically, it is located at the doorstep of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers confluence, a key factor in how the county has developed. The county is also at the crossroads of its future—how will the county develop in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Richland County has varied and valuable resources that make it unique among other rural Montana counties.

Richland County's land and water resources have enabled the county to become one of the top agricultural producers in Montana, and the potential for expanded irrigation provides opportunity for continued agricultural expansion. Surface and ground water supplies are plentiful and available for new uses, making the area attractive for major industries finding water a limiting factor in other parts of the country.

The county has essential energy resources. The current oil development from the Bakken formation has been noted as one of the most important fields in the United States. Coal from the mine at Savage is used to fuel generation of electrical power at the Lewis and Clark Station in Sidney. The irrigated valleys have potential to grow most synfuel resources. There is potential for expanded energy-generation as well.

Transportation infrastructure in Richland County provides tremendous opportunity for economic growth. With annual enplanement of more than 10,000, the Sidney-Richland airport is classified as an air carrier, making it eligible for Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) funding of \$1 million per year. Major improvements over the past five years and more that are planned make the airport a considerable attractant for new and expanding businesses. The railroad line through the county serves as a critical alternative link during times of derailment on either the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe line to the south or the Great Northern line to the north. This importance adds security for the continuance of this line. And although there is no 4-lane highway, Highway 16 is designated as a National Highway of Significance, which elevates the highway for project consideration.

Richland County has important human resources as well—rural worker ethic, can-do attitude, a regional medical center, and progressive leadership.

All of these resources make Richland County uniquely situated to look to the future and to address issues that were surfacing *prior* to the recent oil development activity including housing shortages, affordability of housing, desire to expand and diversify businesses, and public infrastructure needs. The recent oil and gas activity has also brought both benefits and concerns, but overall residents agree that the potential adverse impact is significantly different and reduced from what occurred in oil boom of the 1970s.

Richland County, Sidney, and Fairview are taking this opportunity to look to the future and utilize the county's many resources to continue positive growth and development.

## **Richland County History**

For hundreds of years, Native Americans hunted herds of buffalo, elk, and deer in the Richland County area. The area was scouted for fur trade as early as the mid-eighteenth century. The strategic location of the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers was noted in 1806 by William Clark when he remarked that whoever controlled the confluence could control the fur trade. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Fort Union was the center of the Upper Missouri fur trade.

Richland County was part of a larger area in eastern Montana that was one of the last frontiers in the continental U.S. The last of the U.S.-Indian wars were fought in the area including eastern Montana and western North and South Dakota. In 1881, Chief Sitting Bull surrendered at Fort Buford.

In 1877, the first permanent settlers came to Richland County. John O'Brien's trading post, located on Fox Creek, became a well-known stage stop, store, and general headquarters for the area. Settlement increased during the 1880s, aided with completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad line. The first train arrived in Glendive on July 4, 1881.

The Lower Yellowstone Valley Irrigation Project, begun in 1905, was a trigger for development. Between 1910 and 1920, Dawson County's population grew from 2,500 to 25,000. The rapid expansion justified the creation of Richland County in 1911 out of what had been the northern portion of Dawson County. Between 1905 and 1915, the towns of Sidney, Fairview, and Lambert had incorporated, and the town of Savage had been platted. Crane, Mona, Elmdale, Girard, Enid, and dozens of other communities grew during this time frame.

The completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad line between Sidney and Glendive in 1923 provided the county with the ability to transport goods out of the region, and contributed to development of crop production generally and the sugar beet factory in 1925. Agricultural production continued to expand in the next few decades. Richland County has been the state's number one beet producer for years. Consistently one of the state's highest producers, Richland County ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the state in crop production in 2003.

The first discovery of oil in the Williston Basin area was in 1951, but that was not the first time energy resources had been identified in the area. In 1913, the Jennison coal mine began operations northwest of Fairview. The coal contributed to the expansion of the town with jobs, a power source, and a related industry, the production of bricks from the clay that had to be extracted to reach the coal. The coal mine at Savage was opened to fuel the Lewis and Clark Station power generation facility, constructed in 1958 southeast of Sidney.

Oil production began in earnest in the county in the 1970s, then tapered off in the early 1980s. After 2000, oil exploration and development once again took off with advancements in drilling techniques that allow production from the oil-rich Bakken formation.

Richland County has worked to expand and diversify businesses since the 1990s. The U.S. Department of Agriculture constructed a new Agriculture Research Station in Sidney in addition to and in complement with the existing Montana State University agricultural research facility. Other new businesses developed since 1990 include Busch Ag, Hiland Partners' Bakken Gathering System, and two new dairies.

<b>Richland County Time Line</b>	
1600s	Great Plains area between Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers inhabited by Indians and site of one of the largest buffalo herds in existence—common hunting ground for Blackfeet, Arikara, Assiniboines, Gros Ventre, Sioux, and Crow Tribes
1740s	French fur trader Sieur de la Verendrye scouts area
1803	Area is officially acquired as part of the USA through the Louisiana Purchase
1805	Lewis and Clark expedition first comes to the area (returns in 1806)
1828	Fort Union Trading Post established by American Fur Trading Company
1832	First steam boat arrives in Fort Union
1837	Small pox wipes out local Assiniboine tribe
1842	Union Fur Company opens post (later became Fort Buford)
1864	Area becomes part of Montana Territory
1877	First permanent white settlers come to Richland County. Jimmie Crain on Crane Creek and "French Joe" Seymore on Fox Creek
1881	Chief Sitting Bull surrenders at Fort Buford (5 years after Battle of Little Big Horn)
1905	Lower Yellowstone Reclamation Project began; completed in 1909
1908	Sidney Herald established
1910	Savage community platted
1911	Sidney is incorporated
1913	Fairview is incorporated
1914	Richland County established (formerly part of Dawson County) Sidney tree planting campaign
1917	Lambert incorporates
1923	Completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad Line between Sidney and Glendive
1925	Holly Sugar Company built refinery in Sidney
1928	Lambert becomes unincorporated after suffering major fires in 1925 and 1927 that damaged many blocks, and a winter storm in 1927 that left drifts 20 feet deep
1930s-1940s	Expansion of irrigated agriculture, sheep and cattle production growth
1951	First crude oil discovery in the Williston Basin
1958	Lewis and Clark Station constructed by Montana Dakota Utilities Company
Mid 1970s-1982	Oil boom in Richland County began roughly in 1975-1976 and peaked in 1981-1982
2000-2006	New technologies allow access to the oil-rich Bakken formation—setting off a new era of oil production in the area

Sources: Richland County Comprehensive Plan, 1983  
*A Traveler's Companion to Montana History* by Carroll Van West

**Figure 1.1 Richland County Planning Area, showing planning jurisdictional areas around Sidney and Fairview**

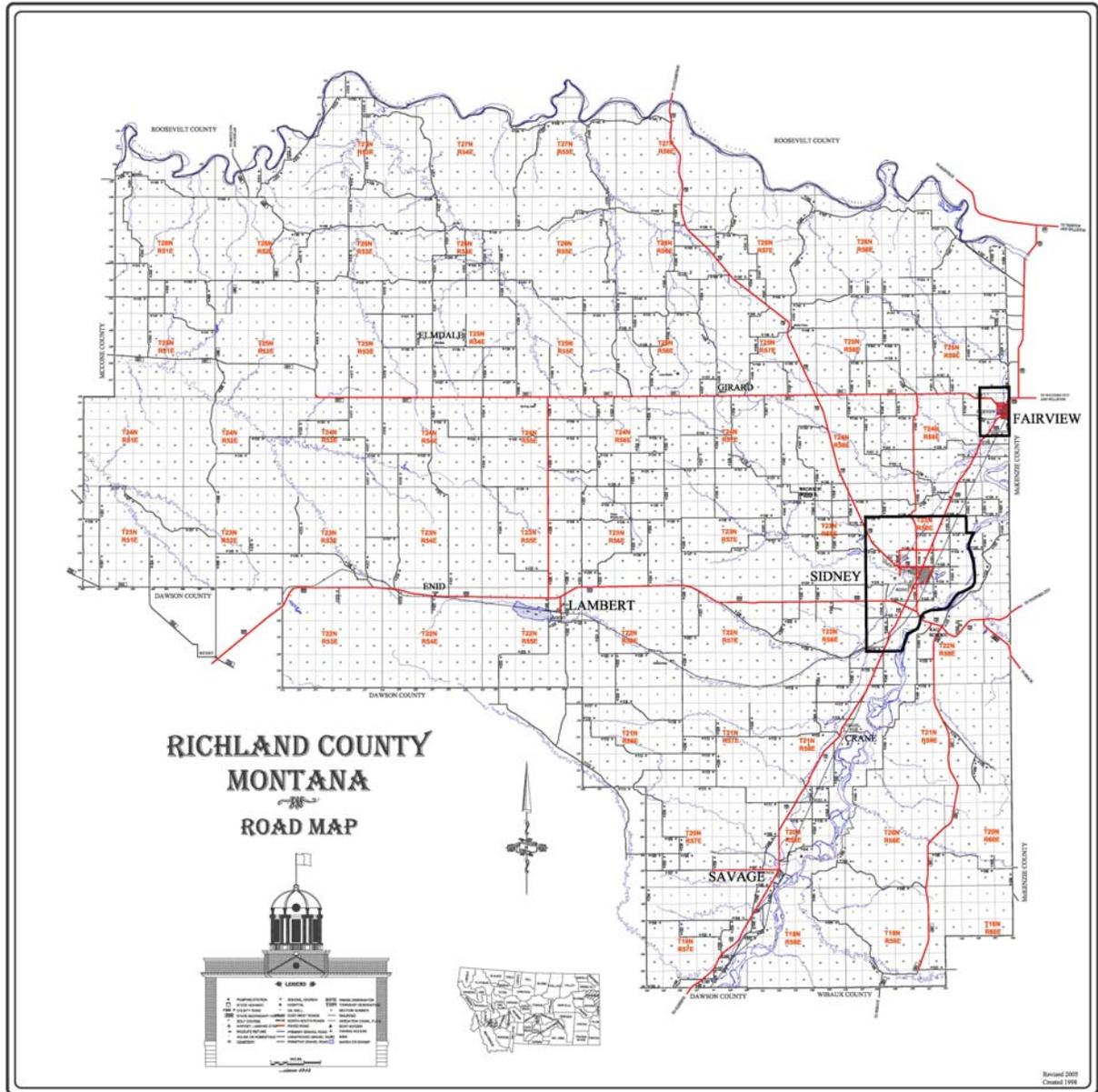


Figure 1.2 Sidney City-County Planning Jurisdiction

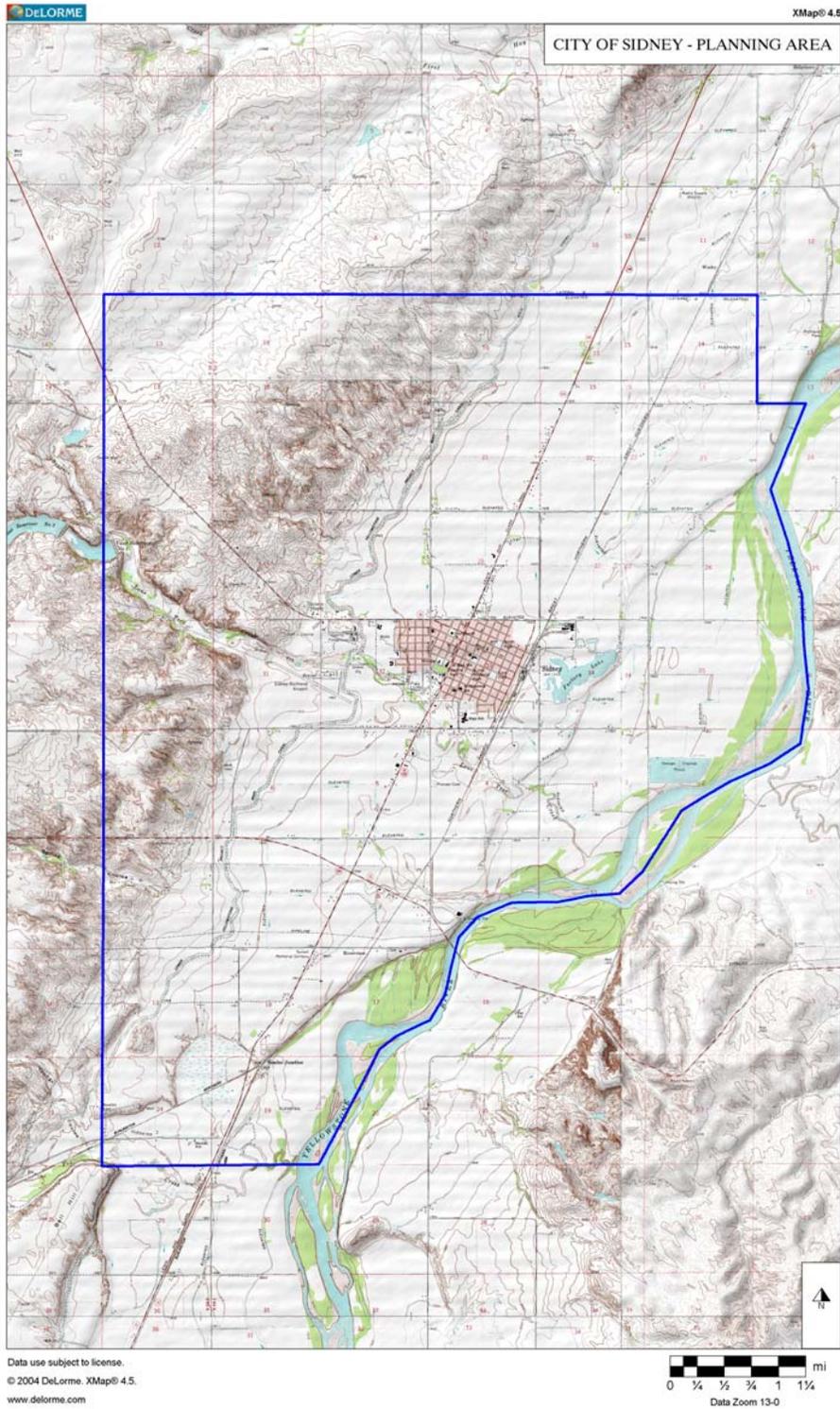
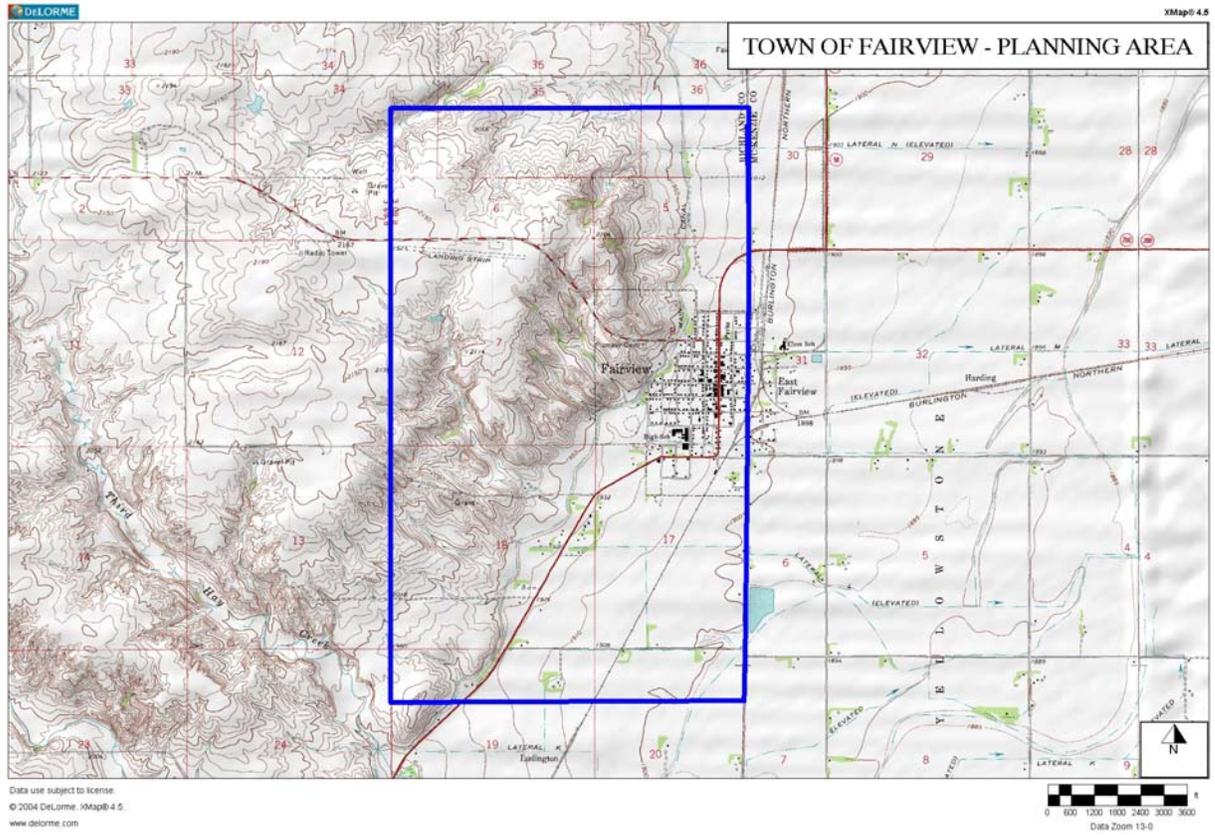


Figure 1.3 Fairview City-County Planning Jurisdiction Area



## Background on Planning

Richland County and the municipalities of Sidney and Fairview are preparing this Growth Policy to provide for long-range planning, associated opportunities (such as increased competitiveness for grants for entities with long range plans), and to comply with requirements of state law.

Richland County and Sidney adopted a comprehensive plan for the city and a “city-county” area around the city in 1980. Richland County adopted a comprehensive plan in 1983. This Growth Policy is an update to those plans. Growth Policy is the term used in state law to refer to comprehensive plans or master plans.

Counties and municipalities are authorized under Montana state law (Title 76, Chapter 1, Part 6, MCA) to prepare growth policies. In accordance with state law (76-1-106, MCA) the governing bodies of the county, Sidney, and Fairview directed the Planning Boards to prepare a draft Growth Policy. The law specifies what is to be included in a Growth Policy, sets requirements for public comment, and identifies how it is to be used.

## Area Covered by this Growth Policy

The Growth Policy covers the entire area of Richland County. It includes the two municipalities—Sidney and Fairview—and an area of county around each that is identified as a “city-county” planning jurisdictional area (Refer to Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3).

## Planning Process

The governing bodies of the county and municipalities initiated the process of updating the existing plans and preparing a Growth Policy in 2005. The Planning Board for the entire area was re-activated to spearhead the Growth Policy effort.

The Richland City-County Planning Board includes representatives from Sidney, Fairview, and the county. Standing committees on the Planning Board represent the Sidney Jurisdictional Planning Area and the Fairview Jurisdictional Planning Area.

Work on the Growth Policy began in earnest in the winter of 2006. Major steps in the process are described below.

March 2006	Cossitt Consulting hired as contractor to work with Planning Board in plan development
April 2006	Planning Board begins work on Growth Policy, meeting twice monthly
Summer 2006	County wide telephone survey of approximately 400 persons completed by Communities in Action, a program sponsored by the Richland County Public Health Department
Aug 2006	Initial findings of Growth Policy and community survey released and public meetings held around the county

Sept 2006	Draft goals and objectives released and public meetings held around the county
Oct 2006	Review draft of plan completed
Oct -Nov 2006	Planning Board meets with local groups; holds public hearings, and incorporates comments into final document submitted to the governing bodies
Dec 29, 2006	Richland County Commissioners adopt the Growth Policy
Jan 2, 2007	City of Sidney adopts the Growth Policy
Jan 8, 2007	Town of Fairview adopts the Growth Policy

This Growth Policy document, dated January 2007, incorporates the changes recommended by the Planning Board, as adopted by the three governing bodies (Richland County, City of Sidney, Town of Fairview). It also includes the additional change identified in the Commissioners' Resolution of Adoption.

Public comment has been important in shaping this Growth Policy. Comments from public meetings held in August and September, at which residents shared their visions for the future and their concerns, were used to formulate the goals and objectives and other elements of this Growth Policy. Results of the various surveys conducted by the Communities in Action program, including the telephone survey of approximately 400 persons in the summer of 2006, were also used in the development of the Growth Policy.

### **How this Growth Policy is Organized**

This Growth Policy is organized into three main sections:

#### **I. Overview**

Provides the overall context of the Growth Policy

#### **II. Goals-Objectives and Implementation**

There are separate sections for the Richland County, Sidney, and Fairview to make it clear what decisions and actions are being made by each county and municipal jurisdiction. Each section addresses information required by state law for:

- Goals and Objectives
- Implementation Strategy
- Strategy for Public Infrastructure
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Subdivision Review Policies
- Implementation Measures-Action Plan

There is considerable duplication among the sections. The intent was to provide each jurisdiction with each of the components required for a Growth Policy.

### **III. Inventory of Existing Characteristics and Projected Trends**

This provides the baseline inventory for the county, Sidney, and Fairview. Components include:

- Land Use
- Population
- Housing
- Economy
- Public Services
- Public Facilities
- Natural and Cultural Resources

This section also includes

- Sources  
References and materials used in preparing the entire Growth Policy