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Zoning consultants get numerous ideas from residents

By KEILA SZPALLER of the Missoulian

Downtown buildings should rise as high as nine stories. Planned neighborhood clusters could be better designed. And farmland needs to be protected.

Those ideas are among the many suggestions Missoulians provided this fall to consultants who are working with the community to rewrite decades-old zoning and subdivision regulations.

Some 200 lay people and professionals attended 44 whirlwind listening sessions, the beginning of a process expected to last at least 24 months.

"I think it's a wonderful process. How could it not be - to listen to people?" said Harold Hoem, a citizen who participated in one neighborhood session and observed another.

Hoem said consultants from Duncan Associates impressed him with their ability to listen to people and their experience working in other communities. Given the amount of money the Chicago planning consulting firm is being paid, Hoem said he expects the result to be more orderly development in Missoula.

"I think that their experience should be really invaluable for a community like this that has sort of had its ups and downs in the growth management area. I'm really hopeful that something good will come out of it," Hoem said.

For more information, read Monday's Missoulian or watch Missoulian.com.