

Proposed Kalispell Prerelease Center Public Feedback and Questions (Sept. 19, 2024)



General Prerelease Center Processes

Q: What is a prerelease center?

A: A prerelease center (PRC) is a residential facility which provides a structured, supervised environment for people under the custody or supervision of the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) to obtain treatment and programming, employment, and reentry support as they return to life outside of custody.

Q: Are PRCs successful?

A: As reported by PRC operators in Montana, the recidivism rate for individuals participating in their programs is approximately 13% lower than Montana's general recidivism rate. (<https://mbcc.mt.gov/docs/Events/Educational-Power-Hour/Program-PowerPoint-2023-MBCC.pdf>)

Q: How will this PRC be operated?

A: This facility will house up to 90 adult males under the supervision or custody of the DOC. While other PRCs around the state are operated by private, non-profit partners, the DOC will operate this PRC. The DOC will hire approximately 40 employees to serve in jobs related to case management, treatment, security, facility services, and administration. As state employees, they will enjoy competitive wages and a comprehensive benefit package that includes health insurance and retirement benefits. As part of the DOC team, they will have access to career development and training opportunities. All employees undergo background checks and intense training to ensure qualification for their position. Because it is a residential facility, the PRC will be staffed 24 hours per day. The PRC will provide evidence-based programming and treatment, shown to reduce risk of recidivism.

Q: How is a resident selected to go to a PRC?

A: Residents may come to the PRC from anywhere in the DOC system—prison, treatment centers, assessment/sanction centers, jail, or community supervision. To qualify, they must be willing to fully participate in the program, have achieved a period of appropriate conduct, and have needs which can be addressed at the PRC without posing a risk to the public, facility staff, or other facility residents. In general, people with all types of convictions (property, drug, violent, sexual,

etc.) may be placed in a PRC. Placement also depends on criminal history, placement history, risk level, identified needs, and conduct.

Q: What is the daily schedule for a PRC resident?

A: PRC residents are expected to have full-time employment, or the equivalent of productive, scheduled activities such as treatment, programming, volunteer work, or vocational training. Residents have individualized case plans designed to reduce the risk of recidivism and address needs impacting success. Some services are provided at the facility, but PRC residents will travel outside the facility according to schedules approved by facility staff. They only travel outside the facility when approved to do so for employment, activities supportive of program success, prosocial passes, or shopping for necessary personal items. PRC residents may not linger unnecessarily at approved or unapproved locations. PRC residents may not travel or socialize with unapproved parties.

Q: How does a PRC resident travel when outside of the PRC?

A: PRC residents often walk or ride bikes to their destinations. They also use public transportation. When approved, PRC residents may travel to work, etc. with co-workers, employers, or family members. Facility staff may provide transportation in times of inclement weather or other circumstances necessitating transport.

PRC residents are required to travel along pre-designated, facility-approved routes. These routes are designed to be as direct as possible, minimizing travel through residential areas. Designated routes also minimize resident travel to community gathering areas (like parks) or to areas that may be risky to resident safety. Facility staff will coordinate with local Probation & Parole, law enforcement, and residents to identify pre-approved routes.

Q: How does a PRC monitor residents while they are not in the facility?

A: All PRC resident travel is in accordance with pre-approved schedules. Facility staff conduct random, in-person visual spot checks on residents to monitor compliance with the schedule. In addition, PRC residents may be allowed to have cell phones allowing for telephone confirmation via video chat of the resident's location. Facility staff conduct frequent check-ins with employers, treatment providers, sponsors, and other parties to monitor resident locations.

Q: How does a PRC ensure safety of residents at the facility?

A: PRCs have controlled entry and exit points. No one may enter or exit without signing in or out. All PRC residents are subject to regular, random or for-cause drug testing and searches of their person or property. Common areas, bedrooms, offices, and immediate exterior areas may be searched at any time. PRC residents may not gather out front of the facility but may use an enclosed recreational area behind the building. The facility will be equipped with internal and external security cameras and all external doors will be controlled centrally by staff.

It is a primary function of the PRC to know where its residents are at any given time. Residents are counted at random intervals throughout every 24-hour period. Facility staff also conduct location verification for off-site residents.

PRCs have strict rules designed to support program success and community safety. When a PRC resident violates the rules, swift intervention occurs through a structured disciplinary process which may impose sanctions up to and including termination from the program and placement in jail or another correctional facility.

Q: How will the PRC handle escapes or walkaways?

A: Most escapes occur when a resident does not return to the facility at the required time. PRCs have processes in place to alert when a resident has not returned to facility, at which time they take steps to locate the resident. If the facility is unable to locate the resident, the facility notifies local law enforcement, Probation & Parole, the media, and a pre-designated contact list and an arrest warrant is issued. If an offender leaves the facility without authorization, the same processes are initiated. In 2023, at an equivalently sized PRC, six escapes or walkaways (out of 276 residents at that facility during that year) occurred.

Prerelease Center Impacts on the Neighborhood and Community

Q: How will the PRC and its residents impact the local neighborhood?

A: The DOC is committed to being a good neighbor and public safety is a key component of our mission.

- Traffic - The department expects no more vehicle traffic than exists with the property's use as a hotel. As PRC residents are not allowed to drive vehicles, vehicle traffic will be primarily limited to facility staff and visitors. Most pre-authorized visits for PRC residents occur in the community, so the department expects limited visitors to the facility. PRC residents will use specific walking and bicycle routes designed to minimize travel through residential areas.
- Security - The facility will be well lit, and the department will install a fence between the facility and residential area. Facility staff will routinely patrol the PRC property to ensure residents or other parties are loitering outside of approved areas. Uniformed facility staff may conduct neighborhood walk-throughs as part of a Neighborhood Watch effort if area residents support that. Facility staff are well-trained in first response protocols. In addition, DOC's local Probation & Parole office will station a PO at the facility to aid in any incident response and may send additional staff to the facility if warranted. Local first responders or law enforcement will be called when incidents warrant a higher-level response.

Q: Our community resources related to counseling, housing, and law enforcement are at capacity. How will the DOC mitigate the PRC's impact on those services?

A: The DOC strives to connect those under our supervision and custody with services that positively impact their ability to be successful citizens and understands community concerns

about service availability. The facility will have behavioral health providers on staff, with 24-hour crisis service availability, for residents. All facility staff will be trained in crisis intervention and first response, to mitigate impacts to local resources. Facility case management staff will develop relationships with local property managers and community assistance agencies to identify appropriate housing options for PRC residents upon release. The DOC has financial resources available to assist PRC residents with housing expenses, but the department is committed to helping them develop professional skills to support career advancement and financial self-sufficiency.

Q: How will the location of this facility impact local property values?

A: The DOC is not aware of any objective data showing that PRCs decrease property values of surrounding properties.

Q: Will the location of this facility impact the ability to rent surrounding homes or decrease the value of long-term rentals?

A: It is difficult to predict how the rental market will be impacted, if at all. No statistics associated with this specific correlation are available.

Q: How does a community benefit from a PRC?

A: PRCs benefit communities in many ways:

- PRCs residents are required to work—they provide a valuable workforce to support community businesses.
- PRC residents are often required to complete community service activities through pre-approved locations.
- PRC residents often earn a good wage and are required to pay victim restitution, taxes, fines, and fees. They also provide financial support to their families, lessening the reliance of families on public resources.
- PRCs provide a stable, structured environment to serve as a transition environment for those who might otherwise be released to the community with limited support services or supervision.

Q: How do employers benefit from PRCs?

A: PRCs provide specific benefits to employers:

- PRC residents provide a stable, reliable workforce that is required to maintain employment which means they show up and do a good job.
- The PRC provides regular monitoring of residents, including drug and alcohol testing.
- Facility staff serve as resources to support the employee-employer relationship.

- Facilities provide treatment and programming to residents that aid in improving decision-making skills, which helps residents in all areas of their lives, including employment.
- PRC residents transitioning from other facilities may come with valuable skills and training, including automotive technology, welding, computer programming, light manufacturing, CDLs, and general construction.
- Employers who hire PRC residents may qualify for tax credits:
 - Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit
 - Montana Trades Education and Training Tax Credit
 - Montana Apprenticeship Tax Credit
 - Montana Job Growth Incentive Tax Credit

Prerelease Center Siting and Approval Process

Q: How was this site selected? Were other properties, including the Outlaw Inn, considered?

A: The 2023 Legislature granted funds to the department to purchase and establish a new prerelease center in the Flathead area. The state of Montana worked with local real estate agents to identify multiple properties for consideration, including the Outlaw Inn. Four sites were viewed by DOC staff. The Greenwood Village Inn and Suites was selected as an appropriate location following consideration of the characteristics of each site, including condition, and funds available for purchase and improvements.

Q: What governs the process for establishing a PRC?

A: The process to establish a PRC is governed by state law and subchapter 20.7.5 ARM. The process can vary based on the specific characteristics of the PRC. Generally, the process requires a determination of need, notice of a formal public hearing, and a resolution of approval from the local governing body. The PRC must also comply with local zoning, which in this case, includes a conditional use permit. For more information, please refer to the governing administrative rules.

Q: Why didn't I get a mailed notice of either public meeting?

A: Public notices for the Neighborhood Meeting on Sept. 5, 2024, were distributed to residents located up to 300 feet from the subject site. For the Sept. 10, 2024, public hearing, written or electronic notices were sent to individuals on the department's list of interested people. The Neighborhood Meeting was not required through the Flathead County CUP approval process or by state law. Instead, the meeting was held as a courtesy by the department. An additional notification was sent to a local newspaper. Flathead County will distribute official public notices for the Board of Adjustments meeting to residents within 150 feet from the subject site according to Section 2.06.040 of the Flathead County Zoning Regulations.

Q: Why does it feel like the decision to allow a PRC has already been made? Who makes the final decision?

A: The final decision on siting a PRC at the proposed site has not been made. The Flathead County Board of County Commissioners and Board of Adjustments will hear presentations from the Flathead County Planner and WGM Group/DOC as well as hear comments from the public prior to making any final decisions.

Q: Can the public comment on this process, either in person or in writing?

A: The DOC will continue to take comments throughout the approval process period and will post comments not yet addressed on the DOC website. Both the Flathead County Commissioners and Board of Adjustments will hold public meetings and may take public comment at those meetings.

Comments Received in Support of the Facility

- PRCs provide supervised gradual steps for people transitioning back into the community.
- There is more supervision in a prerelease center than the homeless population.
- PRCs provide structure and accountability and shape people into contributing members of society.
- PRCs give people purpose again and is the first step to proving that they deserve a second chance.
- Residents can gain valuable life skills through the program by receiving education and finding a new career.
- PRC residents are surrounded by people who are going through the same process as them.
- Without a PRC, these people would be released directly into the public – good to have a program to go through before full release.
- Local business owner has employed roughly 50 people who have previously been incarcerated.
- Local real estate agent - property values are just as bad if the hotel is vacant and not kept.
- Employers in the immediate area of the railroad park are eager to give jobs to PRC residents.
- PRC residents have support from Probation & Parole to help them find affordable housing.
- People who are in prerelease have much higher stakes as they will go straight back to prison if they commit a crime, and they absolutely will be caught with how heavily they are monitored.
- PRCs create job opportunities in the community.