



Doughnut fix is slam dunk

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The long-simmering feud between Whitefish and Flathead County over planning jurisdiction in the so-called “doughnut area” may finally be close to resolution.

Thanks to a lot of hard work, and a serious effort to understand each other’s concerns, the city and county have hammered out a compromise that tries to square jurisdictional and legal concerns with the needs and responsibilities of property owners in the area immediately outside of the Whitefish city limits.

The City-County Planning Jurisdiction Interlocal Agreement Committee reached a consensus last week that officially restores some power to the county commissioners for land-use decisions in the doughnut area that extends two miles outside the city.

Basically, the new agreement gives the county commissioners a kind of veto power over any Whitefish City Council decision about land use in the doughnut area. If the commissioners do not sign on, the council’s decisions cannot take effect in county territory.

In addition, the commissioners will be able to review 65 doughnut-area ordinances passed by Whitefish since Feb. 1, 2005, under the authority of the previous interlocal agreement. That plan was rescinded unilaterally by the county back in 2008, then tied up in litigation since.

Rather than continue to nip at each other’s heels in court, the city and county have now worked out a plan that seems to meet the needs of everyone for a fair and equitable solution.

This seems to meet the constitutional requirement of ensuring that the residents and property owners affected by land-use decisions would have representation in the process. Under the prior plan, the county had put doughnut area residents’ fate in the hands of the city, even though they could not vote in city elections. That was patently unfair, however well-intentioned.

The plan now has to be approved by the Whitefish City Council and Flathead County commissioners. We hope they do so quickly, and that a new era of accountability will begin.