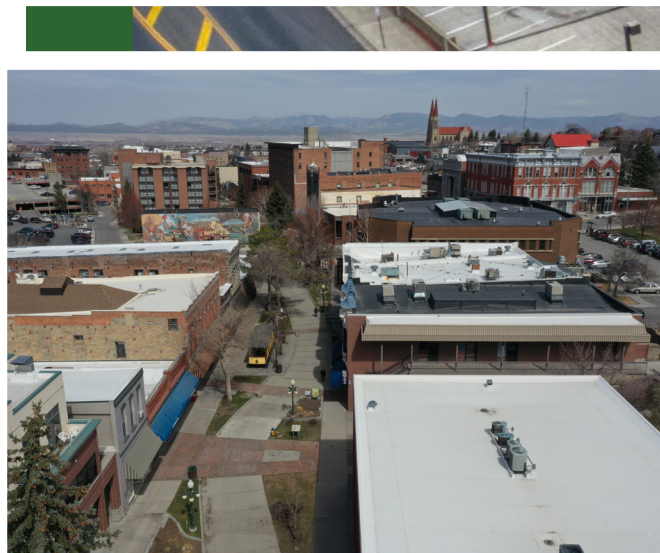


July 14, 2023

DRAFT



# DOWNTOWN HELENA

## MULTIMODAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Prepared for:



Prepared by:









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# ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act	<b>LRTP</b>	Long Range Transportation Plan	<b>RiNo</b>	River North Business Improvement District
<b>BaRSAA</b>	Bridge and Road Safety and Accountability Act	<b>MBAC</b>	Montana Business Assistance Connection, Inc.	<b>RPA</b>	Robert Peccia and Associates (Consulting Firm)
<b>BID</b>	Helena Business Improvement District	<b>MCA</b>	Montana Code Annotated	<b>RRFB</b>	Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon
<b>BSTF</b>	Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund	<b>MDT</b>	Montana Department of Transportation	<b>RTP</b>	Recreational Trails Program
<b>CDBG</b>	Community Development Block Grants	<b>MEGA</b>	National Infrastructure Project Assistance Grants	<b>RURAL</b>	Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program
<b>CDE</b>	Community Development Entities	<b>MIG</b>	MIG, Inc. (Consulting Firm)	<b>SID</b>	Special Improvement District
<b>CVB</b>	Convention & Visitors Bureau	<b>mph</b>	miles per hour	<b>STP</b>	Surface Transportation Program
<b>DCIP</b>	Downtown Capital Improvements Plan	<b>NACTO</b>	National Association of City Transportation Officials	<b>STPU</b>	Surface Transportation Program - Urban Highway System
<b>DHI</b>	Downtown Helena, Inc.	<b>NH</b>	National Highway Performance Program	<b>STPX</b>	Surface Transportation Program for Other Routes
<b>FHWA</b>	Federal Highway Administration	<b>NHPB</b>	National Highway Performance Program Bridge	<b>SUP</b>	Shared Use Path
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year	<b>NHPP</b>	National Highway Performance Program	<b>TA</b>	Transportation Alternatives Program
<b>GO</b>	General Obligation	<b>NHS</b>	National Highway System	<b>TBID</b>	Tourism Business Improvement District
<b>HOV</b>	High Occupancy Vehicle	<b>NMTAC</b>	Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council	<b>TIF</b>	Tax Increment Financing
<b>HSIP</b>	Highway Safety Improvement Program	<b>NMTC</b>	New Market Tax Credit	<b>TSEP</b>	Treasure State Endowment Program
<b>ICT</b>	Indiannapolis Cultural Trail	<b>PLP</b>	Polyethylene	<b>TWLTL</b>	Two-Way Left Turn Lane
<b>IIJA</b>	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act	<b>PROWAG</b>	Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines	<b>UPP</b>	Urban Pavement Preservation Program
<b>IM</b>	Interstate Maintenance	<b>PVC</b>	Polyvinyl Chloride	<b>URD</b>	Urban Renewal District
<b>INFRA</b>	Infrastructure for Rebuilding America Grants	<b>RAISE</b>	Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity Grants	<b>US 12</b>	US Highway 12
<b>LMI</b>	Low- to Medium-Income	<b>RCP</b>	Reinforced Concrete Pipe	<b>USDOT</b>	US Department of Transportation







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## **Helena Business Improvement District**

**John Dendy** – BID Executive Director (*Jan 2023 - Present*)

**Micky Zurcher** – BID Executive Director (*Dec 2017 - Dec 2022*)

**Jordan Conley** – Operations Director

**Rex Seeley** – Chair

**Lee Shubert** – Vice-Chair

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

**T**he *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* provides a combination of planning for the multimodal transportation network in Downtown Helena with infrastructure improvements to support redevelopment and investment opportunities Downtown. The plan blends several of the City's past efforts into one document to help identify feasible options to improve and promote safe and efficient multimodal connections, prioritize projects, and identify areas of infrastructure potential and inadequacy. This work was initiated by the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) and the City of Helena with funding support from the Montana Main Street Program.

The multimodal piece of this plan aims to encourage more activity Downtown by identifying feasible options to better link the Centennial Trail, Great Northern District, Downtown core, the pedestrian mall, and the broader Fire Tower District. A key focus of the planning effort was to identify ways to promote an inclusive and connected Downtown by establishing primary non-motorized connections. The plan also targets ways to promote a unified Downtown by outlining standards, providing policy guidance and best practices, and identifying branding opportunities.

The infrastructure component of this plan included development of a Downtown Capital Improvement Plan (DCIP). The projects recommended in the DCIP were developed in coordination with City of Helena staff, the BID, and the public to reflect infrastructure improvement needs. The intent of the DCIP is to support the initiatives of the *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan*, including: providing safe and efficient multimodal connections; promoting and encouraging redevelopment and investment opportunities in underserved areas; and identifying areas of infrastructure inadequacies in Downtown Helena. Together, these components are intended to provide guidance for the City and BID as they work together to improve infrastructure and seek investment opportunities in Downtown Helena over the next 20 years.







## 1.1. PLANNING AREA

The area of focus for this planning effort is within the Helena Downtown Business Improvement District, with consideration of connections between the broader Helena transportation system and the Downtown area. The planning area is shown in **Figure 1**.

## 1.2. BACKGROUND

In 1964, a group of Downtown business owners assembled to create Downtown Helena, Inc. (DHI) which works to ensure that local businesses in the Downtown Helena community thrive. DHI's mission is to promote and publicize Downtown Helena, encourage cooperation among members, and cultivate positive public relations for Downtown Helena.

Shortly after DHI was formed, a nationwide movement called urban renewal was prevalent and communities across the nation worked to eliminate the old and create the new. Urban renewal shaped what Downtown Helena is today with the demolition of several historic structures and the creation of the State's only pedestrian mall.

In 1986, a group of Downtown business and property owners collaborated to form the Helena BID, the first BID in Montana, to promote economic growth in downtown Helena. The Helena BID is a 501(C)(6) non-profit created by State Statute through a resolution of the City of Helena. Creation of the BID allowed property owners to tax themselves through a special assessment to fund the BID programs and services for the betterment of Downtown.

In the 1990s, the former Great Northern Railroad rail yard just north of the historic core of Downtown was redeveloped into the Great Northern Town Center. Infrastructure construction began in 1998 and has since attracted several thriving commercial businesses, government buildings, restaurants, and more.

Since its formation, the BID has striven to maintain a thriving Downtown working closely with DHI to market and promote Downtown Helena. After its initial creation, the BID has been renewed in 2000, 2010, and 2020. On October 20, 2019, the Helena City Commission adopted the Downtown Urban Renewal District (URD) to help advance revitalization of the Downtown, building on the vision and goals set out by the BID.<sup>1</sup> The URD recognizes the need to update Downtown infrastructure and buildings, improve pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, provide better wayfinding and gateways to Downtown, develop more housing, and support business opportunities.

To fund the efforts of the URD, a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program was established. TIFs are widely used across Montana as a tool to finance public infrastructure and stimulate private investment in areas needing targeted economic development. Downtown property owners' taxes are dispersed to both the local government to fund general government services and to the URD as TIF revenues to reinvest in the Downtown URD.

Over the years, the BID and URD have invested in the revitalization of Downtown Helena, completing comprehensive and visionary plans as well as implementing several programs and improvement projects. Recent conversations with Downtown property owners, business owners, and community partners identified a need for a strategic plan to guide future development efforts. A comprehensive document prioritizing projects identified in past plans and looking more in-depth at ways to improve Downtown infrastructure and services while also identifying opportunities for redevelopment was desired. The result of these needs is the *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* which identifies and prioritizes capital improvement projects, guidelines, and strategies to address deficiencies and make Downtown Helena unified, inclusive, and connected for all.

**Figure 1: Planning Area**





### 1.3. PAST PLANNING EFFORTS

Over the past decade, several planning efforts have been conducted for the City of Helena and Downtown Helena, specifically. These plans address a variety of topics and issues including transportation, utilities, parks and recreation, redevelopment, growth planning, and general future visioning. The goal of this *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* is to blend several of the City's past plans and studies into one document that will help identify areas of inadequacy and opportunities for improvement. This plan will synthesize the needs of the Downtown and prioritize projects to maximize the impact of limited funding. The plan will consider and complement the following plans and studies:

**City of Helena Budget (Fiscal Year 2023)**<sup>2</sup>: Each year, the City of Helena updates its operating budget to reflect the current goals of the City Commission and the needs of the community. The budget provides a framework for supporting city services and implementing necessary improvements.

**City of Helena Multimodal Traffic Study – 5-Point Intersections and Corridor Connections (2021)**<sup>3</sup>: This study assesses and provides recommendations for improving the five-point intersections and corridors connecting the Downtown and Midtowne areas of Helena.

**Downtown Renewal Vision for Cruse Avenue (2020)**<sup>4</sup>: This effort was completed to identify redevelopment options for the portion of Cruse Avenue from Park Avenue to Lawrence Street. Options included multimodal accommodations, land use changes, and green space.

**City of Helena Growth Policy (2020)**<sup>5</sup>: The Growth Policy guides future growth and development within Helena city limits and adjacent areas. It serves as a basis for zoning and land use development and is intended to help with decisions related to budgeting, capital improvements, and annexation.

**City of Helena Water Master Plan (2020)**<sup>6</sup>: This plan provides a guide for capital improvements to the City's municipal water supply system. It is intended to proactively address water system challenges to ensure sustainable operations.

**City of Helena Comprehensive Capital & Inventory Program (2019)**<sup>7</sup>: This effort is completed before the City's annual budget is prepared. It provides an inventory and assessment of infrastructure and equipment and prioritizes capital improvements over a 10-year period.

**Helena Downtown Urban Renewal District Plan (2019)**<sup>8</sup>: The plan establishes the Downtown URD and provides a vision, goals, and objectives to improve the area while addressing issues described in the *Helena Downtown Master Plan*.

**Helena Storm Water Master Plan Update (2018)**<sup>9</sup>: The updated plan includes a storm water model that helps define needs and evaluate capital improvements for the municipal storm drain system in Helena.

**City of Helena Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2018)**<sup>10</sup>: The primary purpose of this plan was to develop goals and recommendations for managing parks and providing continued access to recreation services in the City of Helena.

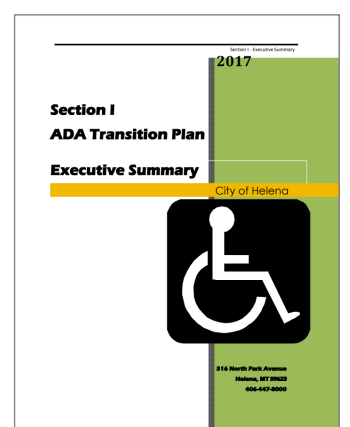
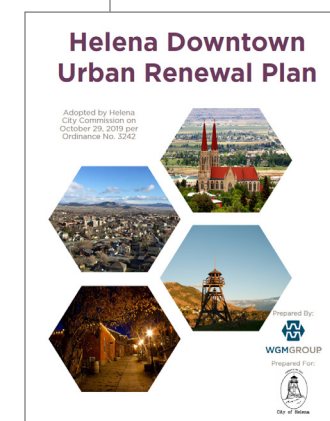
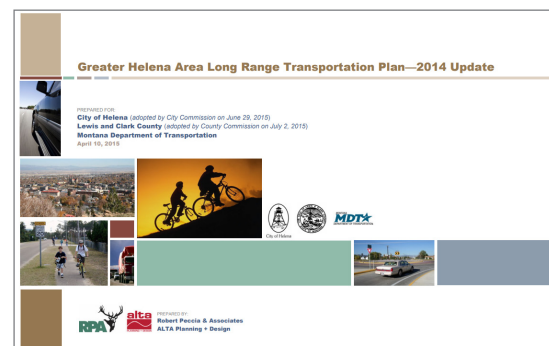
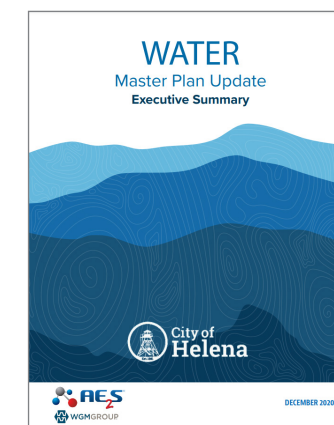
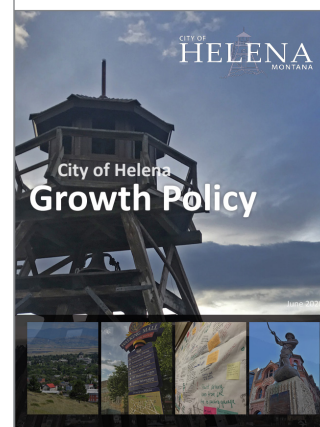
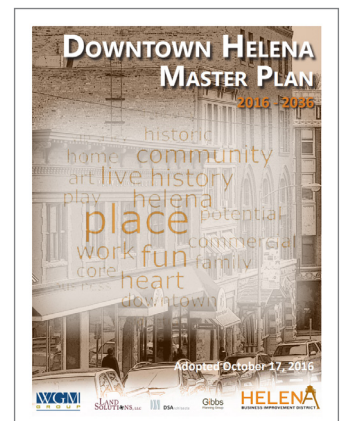
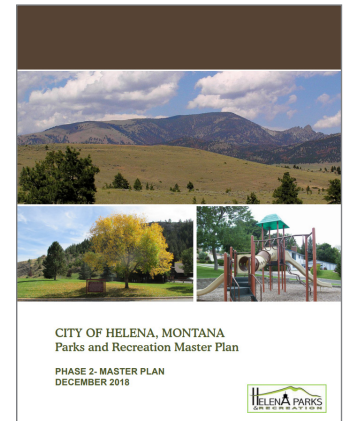
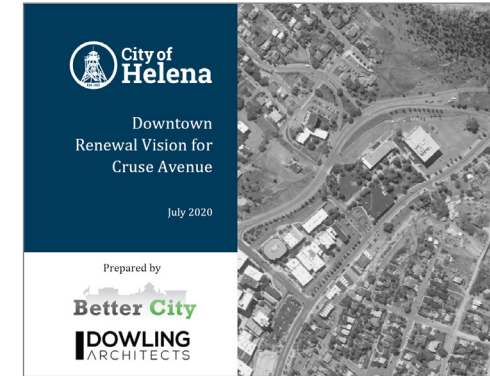
**City of Helena Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan (2017)**<sup>11</sup>: This plan documents the City's ongoing commitment to providing equal access to all its public facilities, programs, services and activities for citizens with disabilities.

**Downtown Helena Master Plan (2016)**<sup>12</sup>: The plan is intended to guide growth and investment in Downtown Helena over the next 20 years through a diverse range of policy actions, physical changes, and marketing steps. Recommendations in the plan are based on five guiding principles: Walkability, Connected to Community, Desirable Place, Alive, and Convenient.

**City of Helena Storm Water Management Program (2016)**<sup>13</sup>: Per Environmental Protection Agency regulations, the program includes management practices, control techniques, systems, designs, good standard engineering practices, and such other provisions necessary to reduce the discharge of pollutants to the municipal storm sewer system.

**Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) (2014)**<sup>14</sup>: The LRTP is a summary of the existing transportation system with an in-depth analysis of projected transportation conditions. The plan identifies recommendations for the vehicle and non-motorized networks as well as additional transportation considerations and a financial analysis.

**Greening Last Chance Gulch (2013)**<sup>15</sup>: Completed under the Environmental Protection Agency's Greening America's Capitals program, this study considers ways to redesign Last Chance Gulch to support all transportation modes, incorporate green infrastructure, and make better use of existing assets.







# **DOWNTOWN HELENA**

## **MULTIMODAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN**





# CHAPTER 2: PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

**P**ublic and stakeholder involvement was an important component of this planning process. Sharing information was critical to identify needs, understand constraints and opportunities, and solicit support for improvements. Throughout the development of this plan, a variety of informational materials were provided electronically for public review to enable convenient, on-demand opportunities to learn about the plan. Additional outreach efforts included attendance at community events, targeted stakeholder outreach events, and public meetings to discuss ideas, concerns, and potential solutions within the planning area. Initial public outreach efforts were strictly focused on the multimodal component of the plan while later efforts discussed the infrastructure components. These conversations were critical to understand the perspectives of residents, businesses, and everyday Downtown consumers reflecting their observations of Downtown Helena. Public and stakeholder input directly influenced the identification, evaluation, and prioritization of improvements. Copies of meeting presentations, notes, exhibits, and other outreach materials are provided in **Appendix A**.





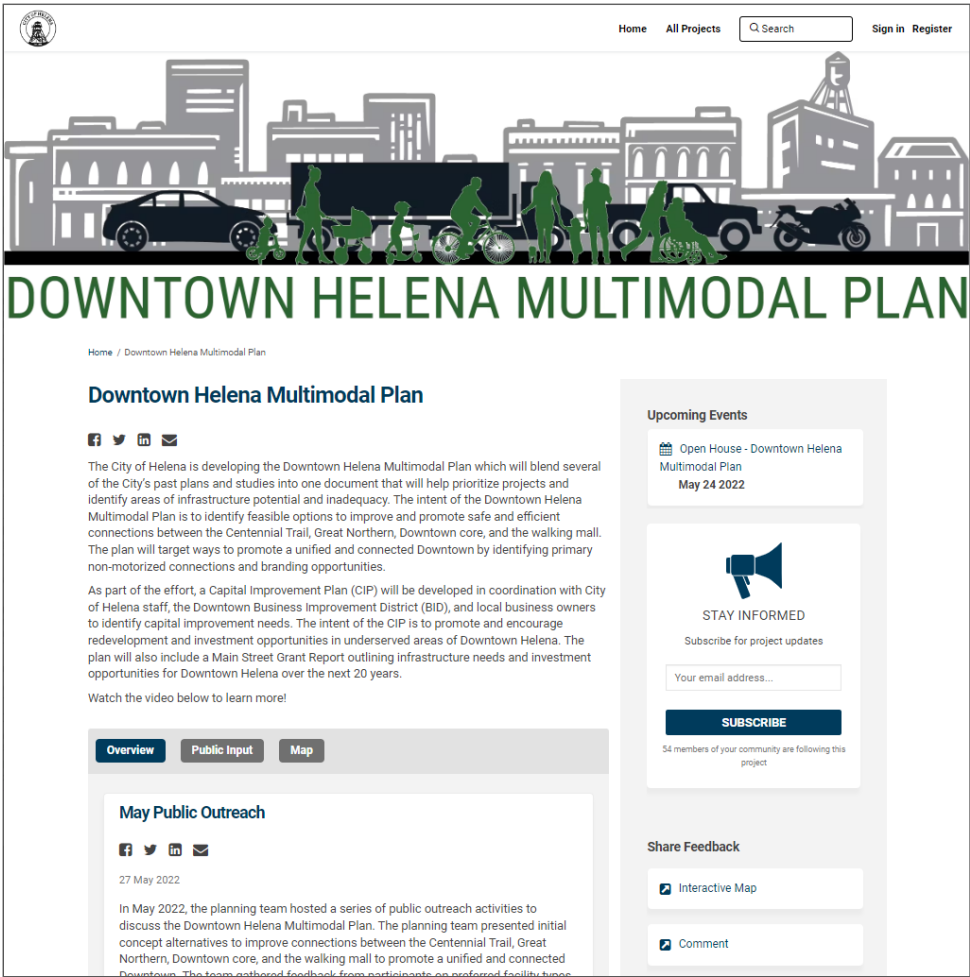


## 2.1. ELECTRONIC ENGAGEMENT

As people lead increasingly busy lives, providing the public the ability to access information and provide input on-demand has helped the planning team gather meaningful feedback. Multiple electronic public engagement strategies were used to solicit input and provide information throughout development of the plan, as discussed in the following sections.

### Plan Website

A plan-specific website was hosted by the City of Helena on its Be Heard Helena platform to encourage public and stakeholder participation and to provide information about the planning process. The website was updated throughout the planning process with status updates and content as it was developed. Information posted to the website included an overview of the planning effort, background information about previous planning efforts, plan contact information, meeting announcements, various materials available for public and stakeholder review, and online engagement tools.



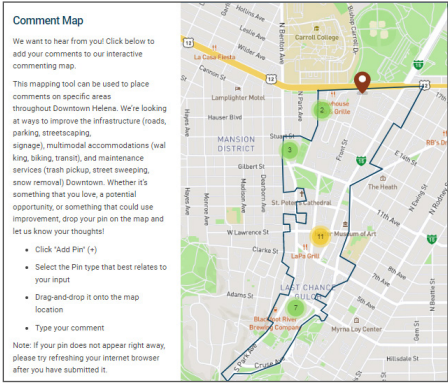
The BeHeardHelena platform hosted a webpage dedicated to the Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan. The website was used as a landing page for all public engagement throughout the planning study.

### Online Engagement Tools

A variety of interactive content was developed for the plan website to allow the public and stakeholders to engage with the planning effort in real time. The online engagement tools employed for this plan are described below.

#### COMMENTING MAP

An interactive commenting map was available on the plan website throughout the planning process. The commenting map served as a commenting platform for users to provide feedback on the needs within the planning area. Visitors to the platform were able to drop pins in specific locations representing concerns relating to infrastructure (roads, parking, and signage), multimodal accommodations (walking, biking, transit), and maintenance services (trash pickup, street sweeping, snow removal) within the Downtown. This tool allowed the public to engage with the plan and share their concerns and ideas just as if they were present at an in-person event. A total of 24 pins were placed on the map throughout the planning period.



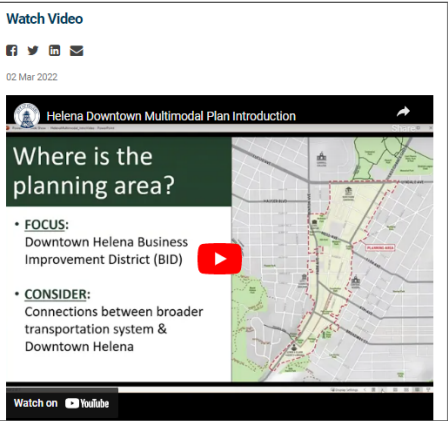
#### ELECTRONIC SURVEY

To assist in identifying needs and areas of focus for the plan an online survey was developed and made available on the plan website. The survey was intended to collect opinions and general feedback from the public to establish baseline conditions and identify potential issues and challenges. The survey also helped the planning team understand what is important to Helena residents, community members, and stakeholders.

A total of 168 responses were received for the survey. Participants were given a month-long timeframe able to complete the survey. The survey consisted of nine questions aiming to understand community travel and visitation habits within Downtown Helena, opinions on the condition of the City's infrastructure, priorities for various improvements and upgrades, and demographic information. A summary of the results is provided in **Appendix A**.

#### VIDEO PRESENTATIONS

Two video presentations were created and posted to the plan website to document key milestones of the planning process. The first video provided an introduction to the plan including the planning area, the purpose of the plan, the planning approach, and instructions for staying involved in the planning process. The second video consisted of a short presentation video discussing the highlights and recommendations from the draft planning documents.



### Social Media

Content was periodically posted to the City's social media platforms to promote engagement in the planning effort. Content included status updates, meeting announcements, and promotion of other outreach and engagement opportunities.

### Email Updates

Informal progress updates were sent via email blasts to plan contacts, stakeholders, and interested members of the public throughout the planning effort. Interested parties were able to join the email list by contacting project representatives or by subscribing to the project website. Updates were sent in advance of public engagement opportunities and when deliverables were available for review.



## 2.2. TARGETED OUTREACH

The planning team conducted several targeted outreach activities to obtain meaningful input from the public and stakeholders. The events offered in-person opportunities to share information about the plan, solicit feedback, and engage the Helena community in the planning effort. A variety of opportunities were provided to reach a diverse cross section of interests.



### 2.2.1. Spring Art Walk

The planning team set up a booth at the DHI office on May 13, 2022, during the Downtown Helena Spring Art Walk. The purpose of this activity was to generate interest in the plan and announce the upcoming public open house (May 2022). Representatives of the planning team were available to answer questions and hand out flyers which provided an overview of the plan and details on how to get involved in the planning effort. Several community members stopped by the booth to speak with the planning team and the engagement was generally positive.

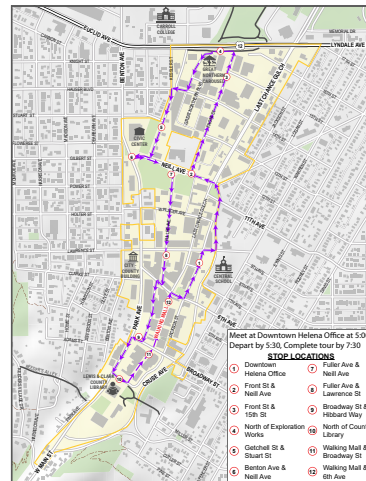
### 2.2.2. One-on-One Stakeholder Meetings

Emails were sent to key stakeholders announcing the opportunity to sign up for a time slot to meet with the planning team outside of the public open house in May 2022. The planning team was available for individual stakeholder meetings on Monday, May 23, through Wednesday, May 25, 2022. Only one meeting was requested, but the feedback from the individuals that attended was valuable.



### 2.2.3. Bike Tour

To engage the walking and biking community, the planning team hosted a field review of the planning area with stakeholders from the Non-Motorized Technical Advisory Committee (NMTAC). The purpose of the event was to gather feedback and brainstorm ideas to improve non-motorized connectivity within the Downtown. Five NMTAC members were able to attend the tour. The group rode bikes through the downtown, stopping at key locations to discuss connectivity, safety, enforcement, and other needs.



#### 2.2.4. Public Open House #1 (May 2022)

A public open house was held on May 24, 2022, at the DHI office from 3:30 to 6:30 PM. The open house was announced through the BeHeardHelena page, the City's Facebook page, an email to key stakeholders, emails sent to the Helena BID contact list, and a press release sent to local media outlets.

The purpose of the open house was to present initial concept alternatives to improve multimodal connections in Downtown Helena. The team gathered feedback and opinions from participants on preferred facility types, network connections, and conceptual ideas for the walking mall.

The open house had a series of four stations for participants to view and members of the planning team were available for questions throughout the evening. The first station presented the existing bicycle network and three proposed network concepts for consideration. This station was intended to discuss broader connectivity and routing options in the downtown area. The second station presented four different bicycle facility types that could be applied on downtown streets discussing the tradeoffs of each type given the existing width and configuration of existing streets. The third station provided three concepts that could be applied to the walking mall to accommodate both bicyclists and pedestrians. The fourth station was an aerial map of the planning area that participants could draw and write on to provide site specific comments or ideas.



Each participant was handed a comment card to record their preferences for each of the concepts presented. A total of 23 participants signed in for the open house. Of those 23 participants, 17 completed the comment card.

### 2.2.5. Public Outreach #2 (TBD)

A second public outreach event will occur in coordination with release of the draft *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan*.

## 2.3. PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

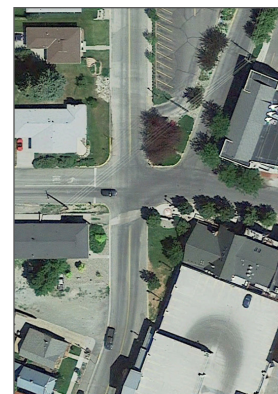
Public and stakeholder comments were collected and considered throughout the planning process. Opinions about issues, needs, and preferred improvements often varied according to geographic and modal area of interest, with multiple instances of contradictory perspectives. Common themes are summarized below.



**BICYCLE ACCOMMODATIONS:** The public desires various accommodations to make bicycling in Downtown Helena more accessible. Such accommodations include dedicated facilities (bike lanes, shared lane markings), bike detection at signals, and bike racks at logical locations. There is mixed opinion on whether the walking mall should remain pedestrian only or allow bicycles.



**PEDESTRIAN ACCOMMODATIONS:** To improve pedestrian safety, mobility, and accessibility, it is desirable to complete the sidewalk network Downtown, repair deteriorating sidewalks, and widen sidewalks. The public would appreciate more raised intersections or Rectangular Rapid-Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) at intersections to enhance visibility, improve non-motorist safety, and slow vehicle speeds, especially at jogged intersections (such as Neill Avenue/Getchell Street) and high-volume roadways (such as Benton Avenue and Park Avenue).



**CONNECTIVITY:** To enhance non-motorized connectivity, it is desirable to provide logical pedestrian and bicycle routes through the Downtown through wayfinding and infrastructure. For example, south of Pioneer Park, where Reeder's Alley meets Park Avenue, the entrance to the walking mall should be more prominent. The Centennial Trail should connect to Front Street. It is desirable to allow two-way bike traffic on Hauser Boulevard between Benton Avenue and Getchell Street. Consider where residences are located within the BID when recommending improvements and provide logical connections.



**SAFETY AND OPERATIONS:** The public noted that the Placer Avenue and Lawrence Street intersections on Fuller Avenue feel illogical and may operate better as four-way stops. The public encourages the City to consider decreasing vehicle lane widths to improve safety for all users by slowing travel speeds and making space to provide multimodal accommodations.



**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT:** When identifying improvements, it is important to consider opportunities for redevelopment Downtown. Developments that make the Downtown area more livable, such as grocery stores and markets are encouraged. It is also desirable to promote more retail development on the pedestrian mall instead of professional office space to make the mall more inviting for visitors.





# DOWNTOWN HELENA

## MULTIMODAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN





## CHAPTER 3: DOWNTOWN FRAMEWORK

**D**owntown Helena offers a wide variety of merchants, restaurants, small and corporate businesses, public institutions, entertainment venues, open space, and residential developments. The Downtown is centered around Last Chance Gulch and the pedestrian walking mall which gives residents and visitors alike a unique way to experience the history and the shopping in the area. Activities are hosted Downtown year-round with art walks and holiday strolls in the winter, and weekly concert series, music festivals, farmers markets, and craft fairs held during the summer. The BID, URD, and DHI are actively strive to redevelop and revitalize the Downtown to continue to make it a thriving community destination for business owners, residents, and visitors.







### 3.1. DOWNTOWN SUBAREAS

The *Downtown Master Plan* defines three distinct subareas within the BID—the Great Northern District, the Last Chance Gulch Retail Core, and the Fire Tower District—each serving different roles and functions. In the visionary Downtown Framework, the modern Great Northern Town Center is linked to the Historic Downtown with a strong retail backbone along Last Chance Gulch. The two districts are given distinct identities but remain strongly connected by the retail core. It is envisioned that each district is anchored by employment and entertainment opportunities that support the retail core. This vision is achieved through strengthened multimodal connections and robust wayfinding in addition to business support and downtown revitalization efforts. Each district is discussed in the following sections.

#### 3.1.1. Great Northern District

The Great Northern District is generally defined as the BID area south of Lyndale Avenue and north of Neill Avenue. The district is currently characterized by modern mixed-use buildings and contemporary architecture with a number of government developments, including the Federal Courthouse, Montana State Fund, and Federal Reserve Bank. The district’s focal point is the Great Northern Town Center, which includes restaurants, a premier hotel and conference center, movie theater, carousel, and kid’s science museum. Residential housing is limited, although one condominium building was recently constructed and plans for more residential housing are on the horizon. The district is laid out in a pattern and density comparable to traditional downtowns.

It is envisioned that the Great Northern District will cater to the modern professional who lives and works Downtown by providing upper-level housing, coffee shops, fitness centers, family entertainment, and lively nightlife. Opportunities exist to strengthen the connection between Carroll College, the Great Northern District, and the broader Downtown. There is also opportunity to create gateways from other parts of Helena with enhanced wayfinding leading into the Downtown.



Source: Ginny Emery



Source: Ginny Emery

#### 3.1.2. Last Chance Gulch Retail Core

The Last Chance Gulch Retail Core stretched between 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Neill Avenue north of the pedestrian mall. The area includes a traditional Downtown shopping street, local shops, bars and restaurants, breweries, offices, local and state government, a hotel, and a small amount of residential housing. Along Last Chance Gulch and Fuller Avenue, ground floor use includes commercial-retail, services, and professional offices. Upper floors contain offices and some residential units. The far western and eastern areas include single and multi-family residential developments. The retail core is characterized by historic buildings made of late 19th century architecture and materials, and continuous buildings fronting the street.

The vision for the Last Chance Gulch Retail Core is a traditional, historic downtown shopping street with appeal for both tourists and residents. The envisioned core maintains the historic architecture and charm of Last Chance Gulch while also promoting an active street atmosphere. The areas surrounding the retail core would provide a foundation to support and sustain the other BID districts by providing opportunities for workforce housing, business incubators and start-ups, and parking.

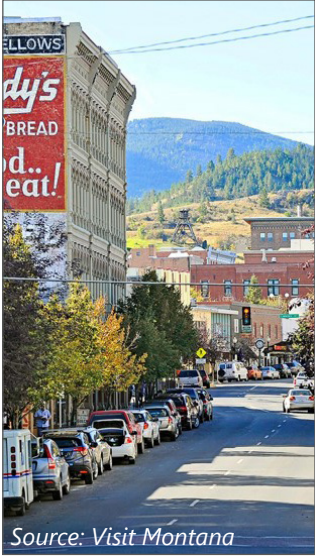
#### 3.1.3. Fire Tower District

The Fire Tower District is generally bounded by Park Avenue, Broadway Street, and Cruse Avenue. The Fire Tower area includes the historic downtown core that was developed soon after the discovery of gold in 1864. The area includes the pedestrian mall, Reeder’s Alley, the Lewis and Clark Library, retail and commercial development along Park Avenue, and residential development south of Cruse Avenue and on the eastern and western edges of the area. Multiple trailheads and access points are accessible from the district.

It is envisioned that the Fire Tower District will be a hub of entertainment, recreation, history, arts and culture where locals and visitors can hang out in a brewery, meet up with friends before hitting the trails, or pick up dinner from a local vendor at the public market. Condos and townhouses will bring demand for restaurants, outdoor gathering places, and cultural vibrancy. Opportunity exists to strengthen connections to adjacent residential neighborhoods, other community centers, and popular destinations surrounding the district.



Source: Thom Bridge, Independent Record



Source: Visit Montana

### 3.2. DOWNTOWN OFFERINGS

Downtown partnerships, including DHI, the Helena BID, and local businesses, offer several events, business development opportunities, and other initiative to help promote Downtown Helena and support Downtown property and business owners. These offerings are described in more detail in the following sections.

#### 3.2.1. Community Events

Several community events are offered throughout the year to help support businesses in the BID and promote community engagement. The events are organized and sponsored by a variety of groups including DHI, BID, and local Downtown businesses. Annually recurring events are described below.

##### Alive at Five

Every Wednesday of the summer, DHI puts on the Alive at Five concert series. The 2022 season marks the 24<sup>th</sup> year of this popular Downtown Helena event. In addition to live music from a variety of different bands, the event features local food trucks, vendors, and children’s activities. In 2022, the series was expanded to 10 Wednesdays (starting on June 1<sup>st</sup> and running until August 3<sup>rd</sup>) from 5:00 to 8:00 PM. Since there is not a permanent stage in Downtown Helena, the location of the event varies. The 2022 series was hosted in four different locations across Downtown Helena, including Women’s and Pioneer Parks and block parties on Lawrence Street and The Great Northern Town Center.



During each week of the 2022 series, DHI showcased a specific downtown non-profit so that the community could learn more about what they do in Helena. There are also six sponsorship levels for local businesses to help support execution of the event and receive advertising benefits at the events.

##### First Thursdays

For several years, Helena promoted First Fridays as a way to support Downtown businesses later in the evening. In 2022, the event changed to First Thursdays to boost attendance. The event occurs year-round on the first Thursday of every month from 4:00 to 8:00 PM. As of August 2022, there are 16 participating businesses for the event including small businesses, restaurants, and art galleries. Some of these businesses offer in-store specials and promotions. Events, such as live music or outdoor movie screenings, sometimes accompany First Thursdays.







### Art Walk

DHI typically coordinates two Art Walk events in Downtown Helena, one in the spring and one in the fall, to support and promote local businesses and artists. The annual events are co-sponsored by the BID. The event is dedicated to displaying Helena's local artists hosted by Downtown businesses. Free food and beverages, live music, various activities, and door prizes are typically offered at select locations. During the 2022 Spring Art Walk, DHI and the BID partnered with adjacent businesses to shut down Jackson Street for a block party featuring live music, food trucks, and games.

### Helena Farmer's Market

Since 1973, the Helena Farmers Market has been a standard Saturday morning event for the community. The market features local farmers, crafters, musicians, food vendors, and other artisans selling Montana-made products. Although the dates shift each year, the market generally operates from May through October. In 2022, the market operated April 30<sup>th</sup> through October 29<sup>th</sup>. The market takes place on Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM on Fuller Ave between Lawrence Steet and Neill Avenue.



The Farmers' Market is free to the public to attend and shop. Vendors are charged for a 10' X 10' space on any given Saturday. During the event, a 20-foot fire lane down the middle of the street must be kept open before, during, and after market hours, from the time the road closure signs are put up to the time they are taken down. Sidewalks must also remain clear of vendor property during operating hours.

Generator use at the market is limited and subject to inspection for noise level, fumes, disturbance to neighboring vendors, and safety. In the future, it is desirable to provide electrical outlets for vendors, such as food trucks, to use during the markets to limit generator use.

### Other Events

Other events occurring Downtown included the Out to Lunch Concert Series sponsored by the Great Northern Town Center and Live on the Gulch sponsored by Ten Mile Creek Brewery, The Hawthorn, and The Rialto.

In 2021, the Out to Lunch Concert Series was initiated as a free summer concert series for the Helena community. The event occurs on Thursdays at the Great Northern Town Center Amphitheater. A local food vendor is featured at each event. In 2022, the event took place from 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM in June, July, and August.

Live on the Gulch features live music on the pedestrian mall on Saturdays from 5:00 to 8:00 PM. The event first occurred in 2018 and has continued to provide entertainment to the community in subsequent years. In 2022, the event ran weekly from May through August.

### 3.2.2. Business Development Opportunities

The BID provides property owners with opportunities to enhance their property through a variety of programs and services as described in the following sections.

#### Parklets

In spring 2021, the BID collaborated with the City of Helena to initiate a Parklet Program that allows businesses to install a temporary sidewalk extension to provide additional seating or display space. The term "parklet" originated in 2005 in the City of San Francisco to describe the conversion of a parking space into a small public open space. Since then, many cities across the country have initiated parklet and pedlet programs to activate streets, create vibrant neighborhoods, and promote economic vitality. Both parklets and pedlets are sidewalk extensions, often installed as curb-height platforms, that repurpose one or more parking spaces. Parklets offer space for a myriad of uses, including public seating, greenspace, or public art. Pedlets, on the other hand, provide an alternative path for pedestrians to move down the street while leaving the sidewalk space open for businesses to use as seating and merchandising. Both are acceptable under the City's new program.

The City must approve all proposed parklets or pedlets. Proposals are required to meet design standards, including installation of metal railings and providing accessible paths for people with disabilities. Parklets are intended to be temporary structures which may be installed on or after April 15<sup>th</sup> and must be taken down on before November 1<sup>st</sup>. A City parklet permit costs \$55/week or \$220/month fee per parking spot occupied. Businesses are required to renew their parklet applications on an annual basis.

The BID offers financial assistance to offset costs associated with the City's parklet application process. The Parklet Grant was initiated by the BID in 2021 and is available annually through an application process which is due April 15<sup>th</sup>. The maximum grant award is \$500 and requires that the applicant accept ownership and responsibility for all costs, including maintenance, in excess of the award amount. The BID sets aside \$2,000 annually to fund this grant.



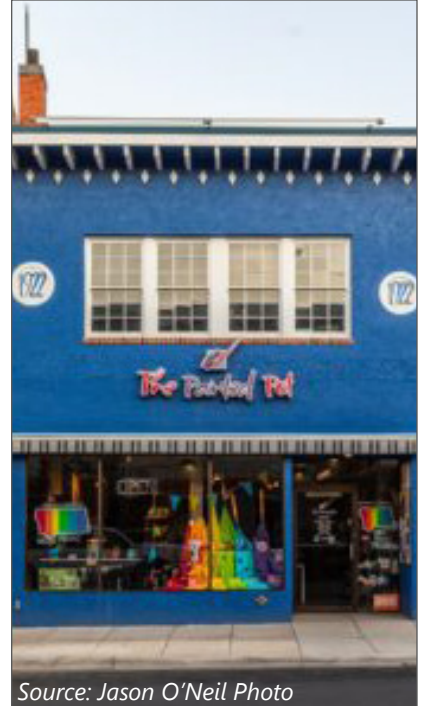
Source: Thom Bridge, Helena Independent Record

Blackfoot River Brewing Company on Park Avenue created the City's first parklet in 2022.

#### Façade Improvements

The BID Façade Improvement Grant program was initiated in 2018 to promote the improvement of commercial and multi-use properties in the BID by helping property owners upgrade, rehabilitate, and preserve the facades of eligible structures in Historic Downtown Helena. It is intended that projects will draw upon the history and architecture of the building while still reflecting the current use. The program aims to make revitalization efforts affordable by providing matching grant funds up to \$5,000. Grants are available annually through an application process which is due April 15.

As of August 2022, 19 applications have been received for the Façade Improvement Grant and 12 have been awarded. Nearly \$45,000 has been awarded to grant recipients to implement over \$500,000 in improvement projects. The BID sets aside \$10,000 annually to fund this grant.



Source: Jason O'Neil Photo

The Painted Pot recieved one of the first BID façade grants in 2018.

#### Business Development

The BID developed a pilot program in 2022 to assist with partner outreach opportunities. The BID sets aside \$5,000 annually to fund this grant.

### 3.2.3. Redevelopment Initiatives

Underutilized properties, or properties where the land value exceeds the value of improvements, comprise about 30% of the BID. The *Downtown Master Plan* specifies that 188 properties encompassing approximately 80 acres of land in the BID have building values exceeding the land value, while 85 parcels encompassing approximately 33 acres have land values that exceed the value of buildings or other improvements. Many of these underutilized properties are city-owned surface parking lots that could be converted to new Downtown buildings with structured parking. Other underutilized properties within the BID include the following:

- School District property on 14th and Front Street
- City-owned property on 13th and Last Chance Gulch
- Budget Inn property on the 500 block of Last Chance Gulch
- Blue Cross Blue Shield property on Park Avenue
- US Bank drive thru/parking structure on the 300 block of Last Chance Gulch
- City-owned property on 6th and Last Chance Gulch (Constitution Park)
- City-owned parking structure on the pedestrian mall
- Holiday Inn parking lot at Park and Broadway
- Cruse Ave right-of-way between Cutler at Park Avenue





The BID seeks to explore opportunities to utilize city-owned surface lots, right-of-ways, and surplus properties for redevelopment initiatives including public/private partnerships, housing co-operatives, or long-term land leases for specific uses that are desirable in the Downtown. For example, Cruse Avenue has been identified as having potential to be redesigned to accommodate land for residential purposes on the south end of Downtown.



Source: Dowling Studio Architects  
The Cruse Avenue revisioning project provides a plan for redeveloping Cruse Avenue including residential properties, streetscaping, and multimodal accommodations.

In March 2017, the BID received grant funding to conduct a feasibility study for development of a permanent, year-round, mixed use, downtown marketplace that will offer goods and services to consumers. The market could be established through repurposing existing underutilized structures, land-only locations, or a combination of both. It is envisioned that market would be named the Marlow Market after the former Marlow Theater in Downtown Helena and would act as a commercial anchor to increase attraction and consumer spending in the Downtown. The market is still under review and consideration with no formal plans for implementation.

Following completion of the *Downtown Master Plan*, the Helena City Commission also adopted the Downtown URD to help advance Downtown revitalization and achieve the vision of the Downtown and the BID. The URD aims to incentivize private investment, fund public infrastructure that improves Downtown properties, and promote redevelopment.



Source: Dowling Studio Architects  
The Downtown Helena Master Plan provided an initial concept for the Marlow Market, a public market with year-round space with unique food options.

### 3.3. MARKET CONDITIONS

Information gathered from a variety of sources was used to understand historic economic trends and future outlooks. These trends and forecasts aid in understanding how demand fluctuates throughout the year and gives a glimpse of future market demands Downtown. When planning infrastructure improvements, it is important to not only meet current needs, but to also anticipate and plan for needs several years or decades in the future. It is also important to consider fluctuations in demand through the year and determine whether it is most appropriate to plan for and accommodate peak demand or average demand. Answering this question can help determine what level of investment needs to be made to achieve desired outcomes, whether it be traffic operations, utility availability and capacity, or number of non-motorized facilities.

#### 3.3.1. Market Demand

Gibbs Planning Group prepared a Retail Market Study focused on Downtown Helena for the *Downtown Master Plan* effort. The results of the market analysis found that, in 2015, Downtown Helena had an existing demand for up to 142,900 square feet of new retail development which could potentially produce up to \$41.4 million in sales. By 2020, this demand was expected to increase to \$46 million in gross sales. The study estimated that this new retail demand could be absorbed by existing businesses and/or with the opening of 45 to 60 new stores and restaurants. The supportable retail could include grocery stores, limited-service eating, apparel and shoes, full services restaurants, general merchandise, and special food services.

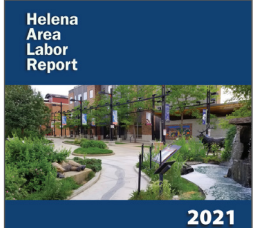
While there have been many changes to the development within Downtown Helena, without another market analysis it is difficult to quantify the impacts of new and changed development. An analysis of Covid-19 impacts on the retail market in Downtown Helena is also not readily available.



There is considerable redevelopment potential in Downtown Helena. The population and local labor market are both expected to continue growing over the next several years.

#### 3.3.2. Labor Market

In 2021, Helena Workforce Innovation Networks commissioned the *Helena Area Labor Report*<sup>16</sup> to provide local information on the Helena area labor market. The following summarizes key findings from the report which could influence future demands Downtown.



- The Helena area experienced steady population and employment growth. Labor force growth in the Helena area lags slightly behind population growth, averaging 0.5% annual growth between 2014 and 2019 compared to 1.7% population growth. The population aging into retirement counters the labor force gains from in-migration (people moving to Helena from other parts of Montana).
- Population growth in the Helena area is primarily driven by in-migration – affordable housing and opportunities for remote work are important factors for in-migrants.
- The Helena economy is historically the most stable economy of larger cities in Montana due to its stable base of government employment. This enabled the Helena area to weather the 2020 COVID-induced recession better than the rest of the state. Employment in Helena reached pre-recession levels a month before the rest of the state.
- The Helena area labor market is unique due to its larger concentration of high-wage jobs, and the presence of a more educated workforce compared to the rest of the state. The high-tech industry has become a bright spot of the Helena area labor market, making up 6% of the private sector, and paying higher than average annual wages.
- Total employment in Helena is projected to grow by 1.4% annually through 2029, resulting in growth of over 600 jobs per year. Most of Helena's job growth is concentrated in government, healthcare, accommodations, and food service industries.



### 3.3.3. Tourism

The City of Helena is a popular tourism destination for a variety of reasons. Helena is the capital city of Montana and has a rich history rooted in gold rush era. With over 75 miles of trails originating from the Downtown area, Helena offers visitors a world-class mountain biking or hiking experience. Helena also offers a convenient half-way destination for tourists exploring Montana's National Parks, being located 178 miles from the west entrance of Yellowstone National Park and 187 miles from the eastern portion of Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park.

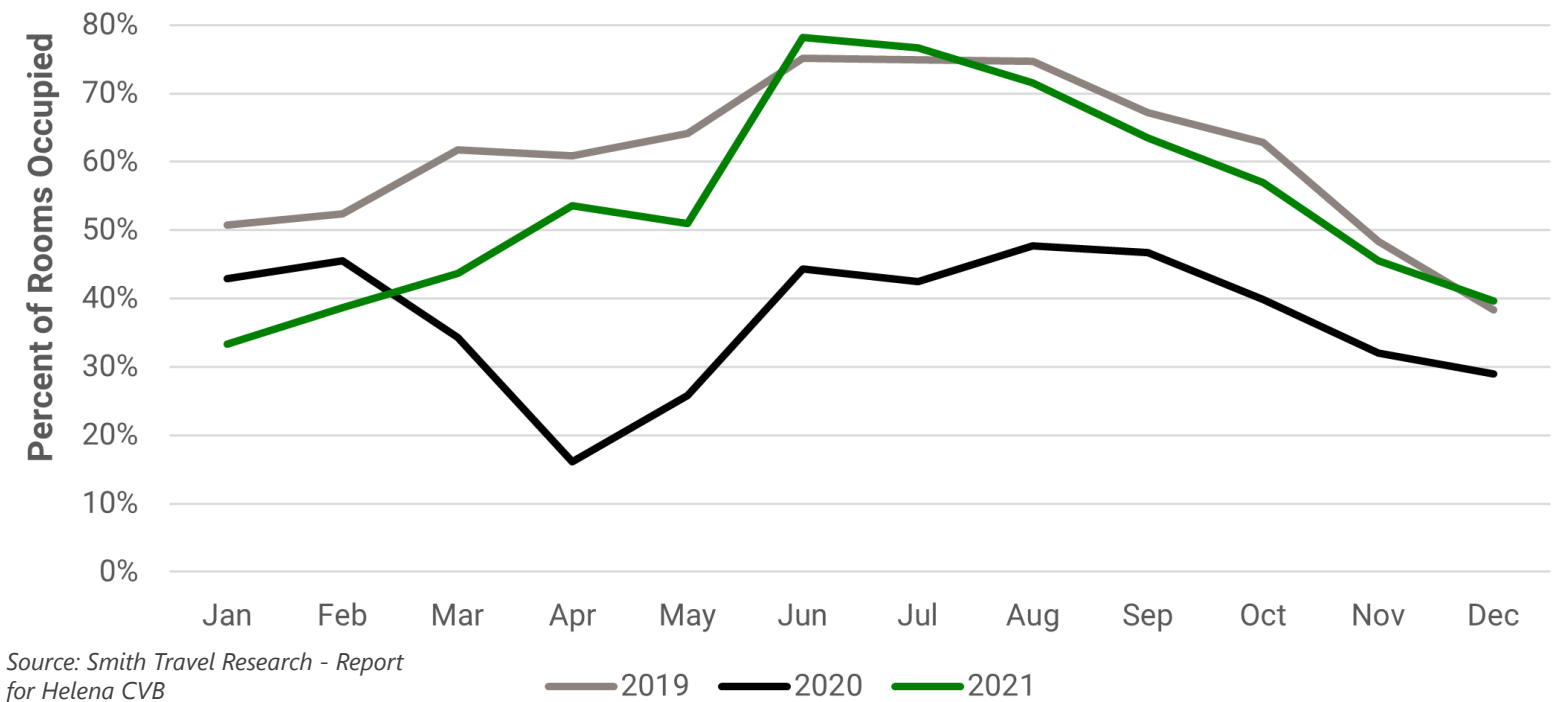
Information from January 2020 and April 2022 Smith Travel Research Reports prepared for the Helena Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB)/Helena Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) illustrates tourism trends in the area based on hotel data.<sup>17</sup> **Figure 2** shows the average hotel occupancy and **Figure 3** shows the total revenue generated from hotel operations each month. Both figures are based on data for hotels within the Helena CVB/TBID. Statistics from 2019, 2020, and 2021 are shown on **Figures 2** and **3** to illustrate the economic and tourism impacts experienced during and after the 2020 pandemic.

As shown in **Figure 2**, the tourism industry was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic with hotel occupancy rates dropping to about 15 percent in April 2020 (compared to about 60 percent in April 2019). Summer brought more tourism in 2020, but hotels never passed 50 percent occupancy that year. In 2021, hotel occupancy began rebounding back to pre-pandemic levels, even surpassing 2019's June and July occupancy rates. Both 2019 and 2021 show similar trends in terms of seasonal tourism. June, July, and August are the most popular months for tourism with fall months having slightly more hotel occupancy than spring months, and both fall and spring occupancy rates outpacing winter occupancy rates. Legislation sessions in the state capital typically run from January through April and help give the economy a boost during slow off-seasons due to an influx of government workers.

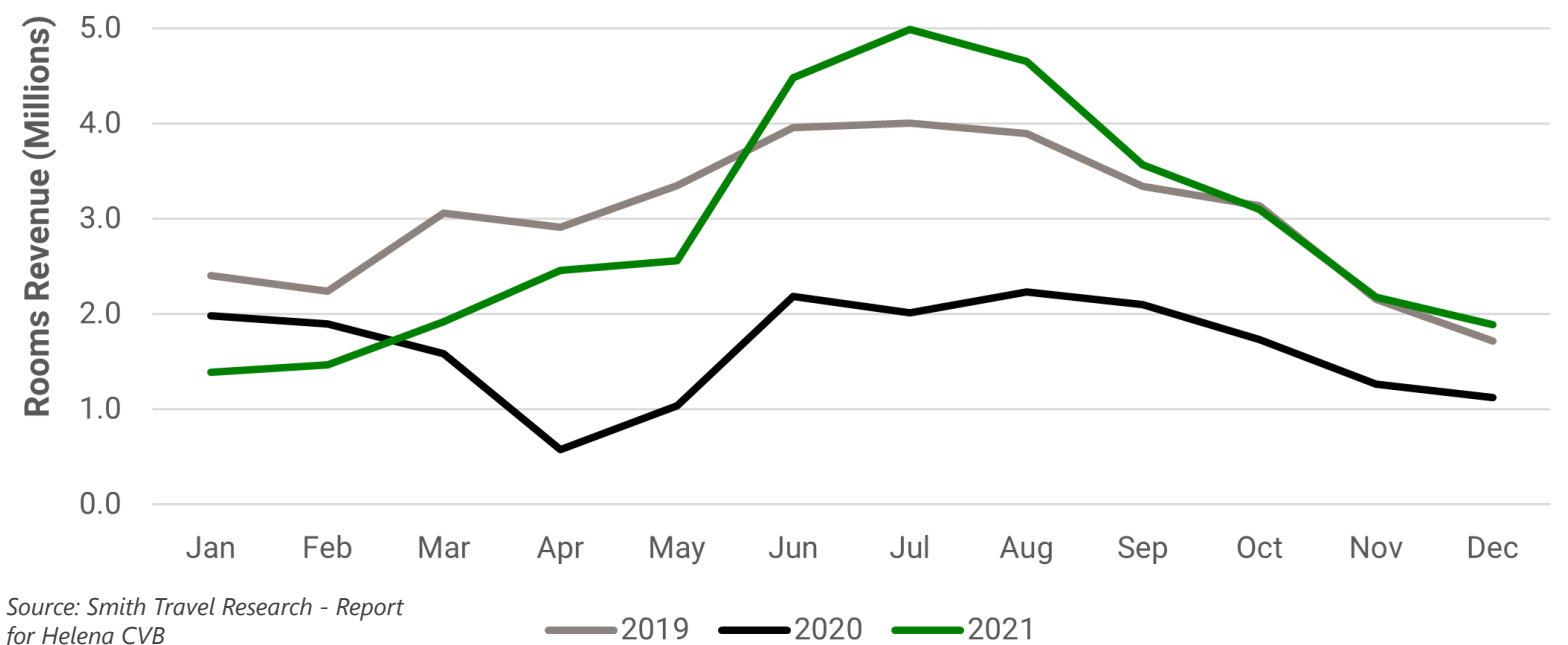
The revenue generation data in **Figure 3** shows similar trends as the hotel occupancy data, especially from January to May and September to December. In the summer months (June through August), however, the total revenue in 2021 exceed the 2019 revenue by nearly \$1 million in each month. This data indicates that hotels charged more per room in the summer 2021 months, likely as a result of an increase in demand.



**Figure 2: Hotel Occupancy**



**Figure 3: Revenue Generated from Hotel Operations**







# **DOWNTOWN HELENA**

## **MULTIMODAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN**





## CHAPTER 4: EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

**E**xisting transportation features were examined to understand the City's existing multimodal transportation network, determine characteristics and needs of transportation users, and identify any opportunities for improvement. A review of the City's existing utilities infrastructure was also conducted to understand the condition, location, and function of water, wastewater, and electric services. These efforts helped identify areas of inadequacy and helped prioritize infrastructure needs within Downtown Helena. Review and synthesis of these findings led to the identification of multimodal improvements and capital improvement project investments to support revitalization of the Downtown.







4.1. TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

In the past, transportation improvements have placed a high priority on vehicle operations and circulation within Downtown. Most Downtown streets have adequate vehicular capacity and operate at acceptable levels of service, making driving within the Downtown relatively easy. However, wide multi-lane streets that prioritize vehicular travel and parking can negatively affect the comfort of navigating Downtown by foot or on a bicycle. Modifications to the transportation system to better accommodate all travel modes help can promote equity and economic vitality.

4.1.1. Primary Transportation Corridors

Within the planning area, there is designated system of both federal and state highways as shown in **Figure 4**. These system designations qualify routes for non-discretionary federal funding programs. As shown in the figure, Lyndale Avenue is a Non-Interstate National Highway System (NHS) route while Benton Avenue, Park Avenue, Last Chance Gulch, Neill Avenue, 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and Broadway Street are designated as state urban routes. All other roads within the BID are considered local streets owned by the City of Helena. Existing physical and geometric conditions such as lane widths, presence of parking, and other controlling criteria for these routes and other key transportation corridors within the BID are described in the following sections. A map of the existing roadway network including striping, traffic control, and roadway widths is contained in **Appendix B**.



Lyndale Avenue

Within the planning area, Lyndale Avenue is part of US Highway 12 (US 12) and is functionally classified as a principal arterial. The highway generally consists of two travel lanes in each direction and dedicated left-turn lanes at intersections. The speed limit along Lyndale Avenue is 35 miles per hour (mph). The corridor is bordered by the Great Northern Town Center to the south, Centennial Park to the northeast, and Carroll College to the northwest. The roadway is situated several feet above these adjacent developments and a pedestrian underpass, located approximately 350 feet east of Getchell Street, connects the developments on both sides of the roadway.

Last Chance Gulch

Last Chance Gulch is functionally classified as a principal arterial between Lyndale Avenue and Neill Avenue. This segment consists of one lane in each direction, center two-way left turn lane (TWLTL), with parking and sidewalks on both sides. Last Chance Gulch intersects with Neill Avenue, Helena Avenue, and Cruse Avenue at a five-point intersection and transitions into a one-way street south of the intersection. The one-way segment provides two lanes in the southbound direction with parking and sidewalks on both sides. This segment is functionally classified as a minor arterial. The speed limit on the entire length of Last Chance Gulch is 25 mph. At 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Last Chance Gulch turns into a pedestrian walking mall.



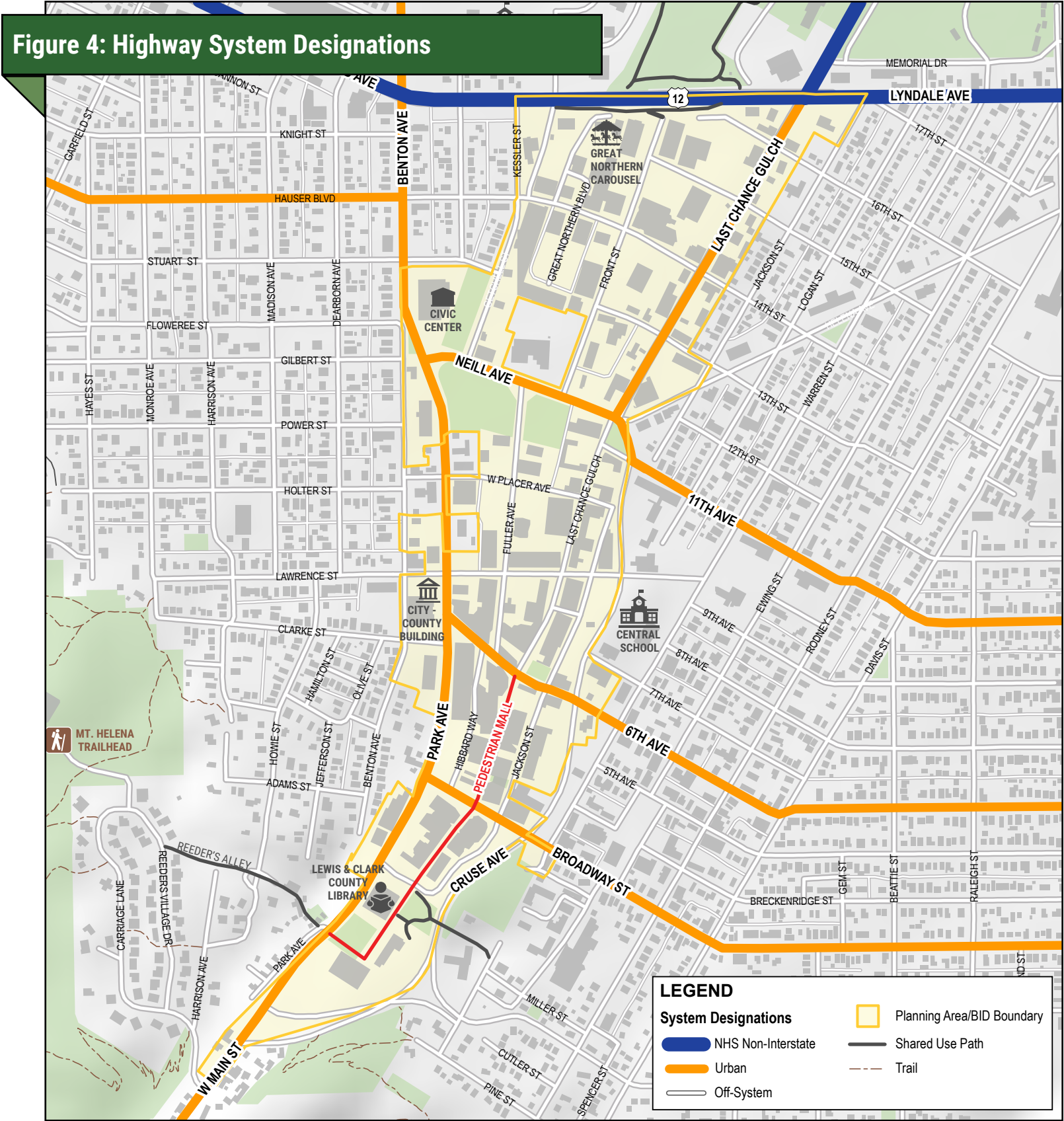
Last Chance Gulch from Lyndale Avenue to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue is flanked by commercial, retail, and service-oriented businesses as well as professional business offices. The pedestrian mall is occupied by retail merchants, restaurants, service providers, and offices on lower floors and residential units on upper floors. The Great Northern District, to the west, can be accessed via Last Chance Gulch between Lyndale Avenue and 13<sup>th</sup> Street.



Benton Avenue

Between Lyndale Avenue and Neill Avenue, Benton Avenue is functionally classified as a principal arterial. This segment consists of two travel lanes in each direction with sidewalks on each side. Benton Avenue is primarily bordered by residential units to the west. On the east side, Benton Avenue is bordered by some residential units and office space as well as the Helena Civic Center and Helena Fire Department which are collocated at the Benton Avenue/Neill Avenue intersection.

Figure 4: Highway System Designations







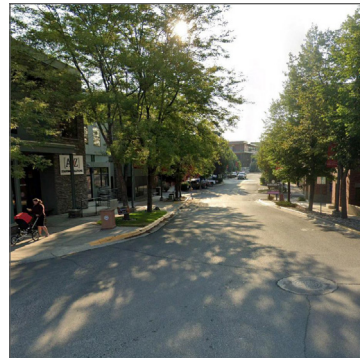
### **Park Avenue**

South of the Neill Avenue intersection, Benton Avenue becomes Park Avenue which is functionally classified as a minor arterial. The roadway consists of one travel lane in each direction with parking and sidewalks on both sides. South of Broadway Street, angled parking is provided on the west side of Cruse Avenue. The roadway carries nearly 11,000 vehicles per day.

The land use surrounding Park Avenue varies considerably along its length including government buildings, professional offices, a theater, apartment complexes, restaurants, the Lewis and Clark Library, parkland and parking lots. Reeder's Alley, a historic district, extends west of Park Avenue across from the end of the pedestrian mall. South of Cruse Avenue, Park Avenue turns into West Main Street continuing south down the gulch.

### **14<sup>th</sup> Street/Hauser Boulevard**

14<sup>th</sup> Street extends west from Ewing Street (outside the BID) to Hauser Boulevard, bisecting the Great Northern Town Center as a two-lane roadway with both angled and parallel parking sporadically provided. Between Benton Avenue and its intersection with 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Hauser Boulevard is a one-way street with two eastbound travel lanes and parking on both sides of the roadway. West of Benton Avenue, Hauser boulevard is a two-way, two-lane street providing access to the neighborhoods on the west side of Helena. Sidewalks are provided on both sides of the roadway with several gaps still existing. The Hauser Boulevard/14<sup>th</sup> Street corridor provides an important link between the Great Northern Town Center, adjacent neighborhoods, Last Chance Gulch, Helena Avenue, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Ward/Railroad District. A new traffic signal was recently installed at the 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Last Chance Gulch intersection to improve access and circulation.



### **Front Street**

Front street is a local, off-system route extending north from its intersection with Neill Avenue to a dead-end at the northern extent of the Great Northern Town Center. Front Street was recently reconstructed to provide one lane in each direction with angled parking on one side, alternating at each block, with sidewalks lining each side of the roadway. Sharrows are painted on the roadway to indicate a shared vehicle-bicycle corridor. Front Street is bordered by professional offices, federal, state, and local government buildings, food and retail merchants, and banks.



### **Getchell Street**

Getchell Street is a local street bordering the western side of the Great Northern Town Center. South of Lyndale Avenue, the roadway consists of one travel lane in each direction and parking provided periodically on both sides. Sidewalk connectivity is generally lacking in this segment and pedestrians must cross long driveways to adjacent businesses. At 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Hauser Boulevard, Getchell Street meets Kessler Avenue at a jogged intersection.

South of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Getchell Street and Kessler Avenue continue as one street with one lane in each direction with parking on both sides. Sidewalks are generally present on both sides of the roadway with a small segment missing on the west side just south of 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Just north of Stuart Street, there is a raised parking area on the west side of the street which effectively creates double parking.

Traffic volumes on this segment are generally low as Getchell Street is flanked by retail, bank, and professional offices with some residential units. Parkland borders the west side of the roadway between Neill Avenue and Stuart Street. The Getchell Street parking garage is located on the east side of Getchell Street between Stuart and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets.



### **Neill Avenue**

Neill Avenue is functionally classified as a principal arterial. The roadway extends from Park Avenue to the five-point Last Chance Gulch/Helena Avenue/Cruse Avenue/Neill Avenue intersection, bisecting Downtown Helena. The street provides one travel lane in each direction with parking and wide sidewalks on both sides. Along its length, Getchell Street, Fuller Avenue, and Front Street all intersect Neill Avenue at three-legged intersections. A raised

intersection was recently installed at the Neill Avenue/Front Street intersection to help calm traffic. Neill Avenue is primarily bordered by public parkland with some retailers and banks. The wide street, higher travel speeds, and exclusively three-way intersections present a barrier between the historic Downtown core and the Great Northern District, especially for non-motorists.

### **Fuller Avenue**

Fuller Avenue extends south from Neill Avenue to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue as a local roadway consisting of one travel lane in each direction with parking and sidewalks on both sides. At the northern end of the segment, Fuller Avenue bisects Hill Park and Women's Park. South of the parks, Fuller Avenue is lined by food and retail merchants, banks, local government buildings, professional offices, and large surface parking lots reserved for customers and tenants of the adjacent businesses.



At the Placer Avenue and Lawrence Street intersections, Fuller Avenue is stop-controlled while the east-west streets are uncontrolled. The US Federal Reserve Bank, located directly north of the Neill Avenue/Fuller Avenue intersection, prevents Fuller Avenue from extending north into the Great Northern Town Center. A recent improvement project was completed to square up the Neill Avenue/Fuller Avenue intersection to remove the two irregular two-way flares.



### **Placer Avenue**

Placer Avenue is a local street that begins at Benton Avenue and extends east to Last Chance Gulch where it transitions into Jackson Street. The roadway consists of one travel lane in each direction with parking and sidewalks on both sides. Placer Avenue is bordered by office space, commercial retail services, a US Post Office, and large surface parking lots owned by adjacent businesses.

### **Jackson Street**

Jackson Street is a local street which transitions from Placer Avenue at Last Chance Gulch, extends east one block, then extends south until Broadway Street. The roadway consists of one travel lane in each direction with parking on one or both sides (parallel and angled), and sidewalks on both sides. Land uses lining Jackson Street include a museum, retail, office space, banks, and medical services. There are several public parking areas located along Jackson Street.

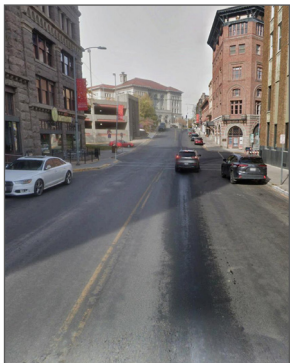


### **Lawrence Street**

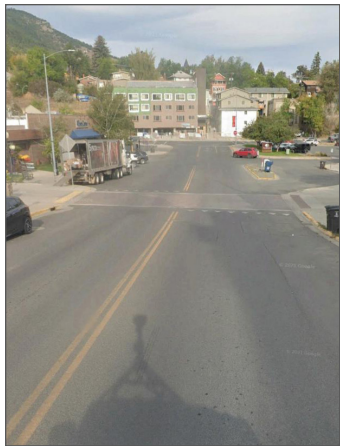
Lawrence Street is an east-west minor arterial bisecting the Downtown core. The street extends from the neighborhoods west of the BID east to Warren Street and the Cathedral of Saint Helena. The corridor consists of one travel lane in each direction with parking on both sides. Within the BID, Lawrence Street is designated as a signed bike route. Adjacent land uses include government services, retail, restaurants, banks, offices, and performing arts.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

6<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a minor arterial consisting of one travel lane in each direction with parking and sidewalks on both sides. Within the BID, the street is primarily bordered by restaurant frontage with some professional offices. The 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue parking garage is located in the southeast quadrant of the 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue/Park Avenue intersection and the City-County Building is located on the west edge of the intersection. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue extends east to the Montana State Capitol complex. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue also marks the beginning of the Last Chance Gulch pedestrian walking mall.





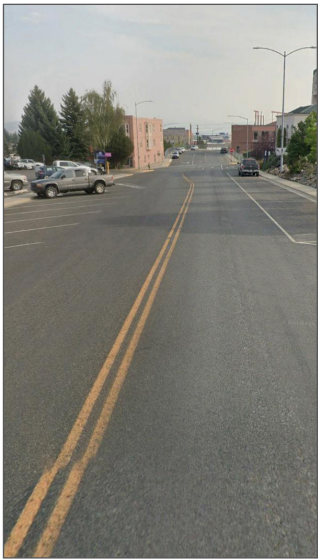


### Broadway Street

Broadway Street is a minor arterial consisting of one travel lane in each direction with parking lanes and sidewalks on both sides. The street is primarily bordered by retail and restaurant frontage and there is an apartment complex located directly west of the Broadway Street/Park Avenue intersection. Broadway Street bisects the pedestrian walking mall but provides a prominent colored-brick crosswalk to enhance safety for pedestrians on the mall. Broadway Street begins at Park Avenue and extends east to the southern edge of the Montana State Capitol complex.

### Cruse Avenue

Cruse Avenue begins at the five-point Last Chance Gulch/Helena Avenue/Cruse Avenue/Neill Avenue intersection and extends south, acting as a bypass around Downtown until it meets Park Avenue. The segment is a major collector typically consisting of one travel lane in each direction and parallel parking on both sides. Between Broadway Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, angled parking is provided on one side, alternating between the east and west sides of the road depending on where the adjacent public parking lots are located. Protected non-motorized facilities with poor connectivity are generally provided between Cutler Street and Broadway Street. Sidewalks line both sides of Cruse Avenue from Broadway Street to the five-point intersection. Cruse Avenue carries between 1,500 and 2,800 cars per day.



At its intersection with Park Avenue, Cruse Avenue splits into one-way east- and westbound segments divided by a grassy area. A trailhead extends south from the eastbound segment, but there is no adjacent parking area or accessible pedestrian route from nearby parking to the trailhead. The southern half of Cruse Avenue is primarily bordered by state and local government buildings with large surface lots. A church, art museum, Central Elementary School, the Helena Chamber of Commerce, and a large apartment complex are also located adjacent to Cruse Avenue in the northern half of the segment.

### 4.1.2. Parking

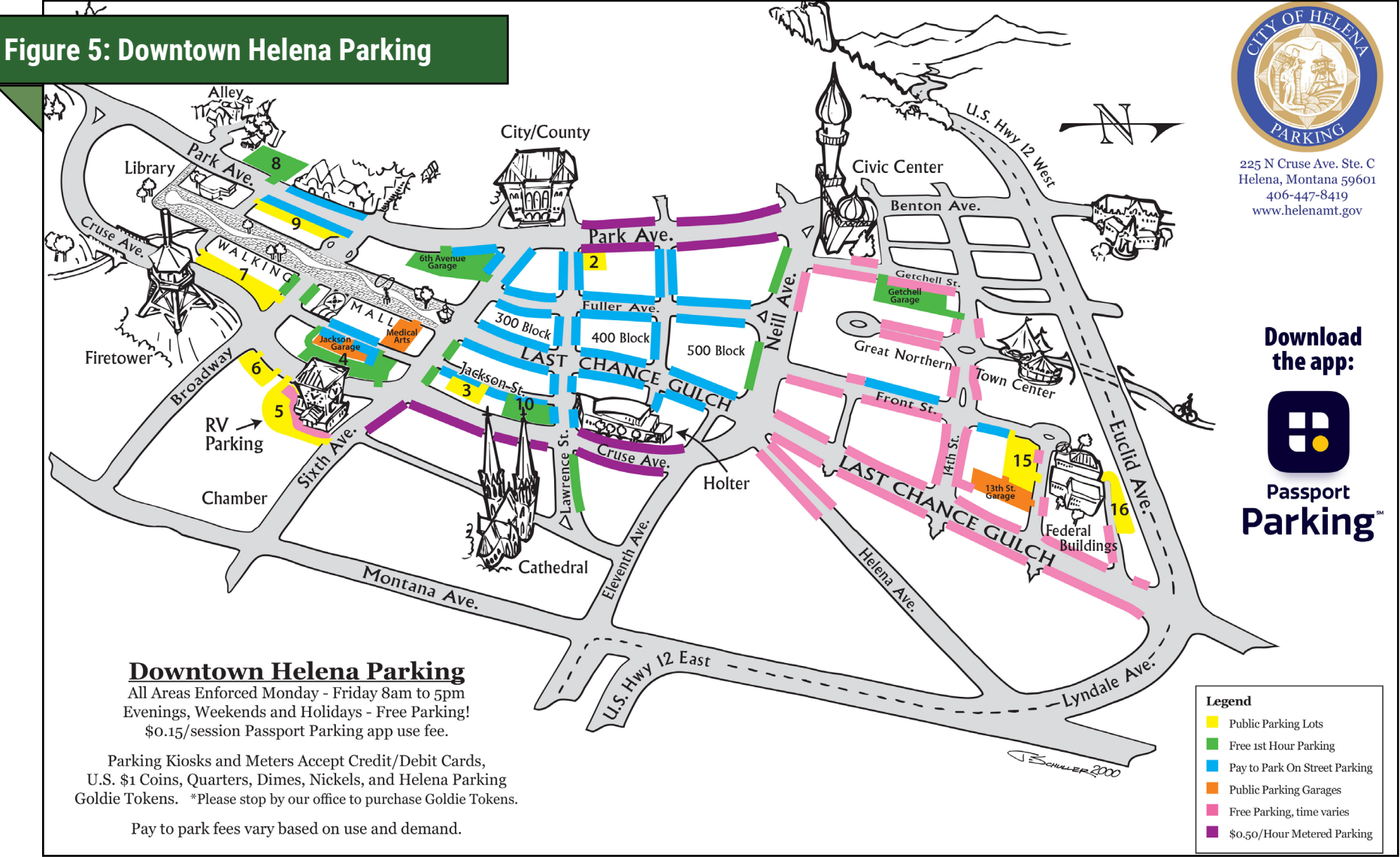
According to the *Downtown Helena Master Plan*<sup>18</sup>, the Parking Commission manages over 3,000 on-street parking spaces and over 2,200 off-street parking spaces in surface lots and parking structures. Private surface lots and structures provide approximately 2,300 additional parking spaces. In total, the Downtown parking supply consists of approximately 7,500 spaces. A map of the parking lots in the BID is shown in **Figure 5**.

In September 2019, the Parking Commission implemented a new parking meter/kiosk program using the Passport Parking app. Users can easily pay, extend, and manage parking sessions within the app or at the smart meters and kiosks. Enforcement hours are Monday through Friday 8 AM to 5 PM. Parking is always free on weekends, after 5 PM on weekdays, and on federal holidays.

Downtown parking lots charge \$0.50 for the first 30 minutes and \$1.00 for every hour after. Lots 4 (Jackson Street between Broadway and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue), 8 (South Park Avenue), and 10 (Jackson and Lawrence Street) as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Getchell Street garages offer 1-free hour of parking per license plate per day. The on-street parking fee structure begins with a charge of \$0.50 per hour and increases as more time is used with a maximum daily rate of \$13.50. Convenient 15-minute quick stop parking is also available on each city block. Parking permits are also offered for Downtown employees who park downtown all day more than two days a week. The permits allow users to park all day in designated areas—lots, parking structures, or on-street.

Several residential areas surrounding the Downtown require residential parking permits for on-street parking. In March 2014, the City Commission passed resolution 20071 which consolidated all previous residential parking district resolutions and established the criteria for designation of new residential parking districts and fee structures.

The *Downtown Helena Master Plan* indicates that there is an adequate supply of parking in the Downtown area. The plan also suggests that the current off-street parking requirements in the zoning code for new developments is a barrier towards achieving the vision of Downtown Helena. Providing adequate ADA accessible parking is also a challenge due to existing conditions and topography. The plan provides several recommendations for improving the availability and accessibility of parking for residents, visitors, and employees within the Downtown.





### 4.1.3. Non-Motorized Facilities

In 2010, the City of Helena adopted a Complete Streets resolution that requires all new and reconstructed roadways to accommodate all modes of transportation and people of all ages and abilities.<sup>19</sup> The American Community Survey 2020 five-year estimates indicate that 7.5 percent of Helena workers walk to work while 1.7 percent bike to work. This percentage has decreased since the statistics published in the 2014 *Helena LRTP* which indicated that in 2012, a combined 11 percent of workers commuted by walking or bicycling. Helena has also experienced an increase in workers who work from home (7.8 percent in 2020). The existing non-motorized facilities are discussed below and mapped in **Figure 6**.

#### Pedestrian Facilities

The sidewalk network within the planning area is generally complete with sidewalks existing on both sides of most roadways within the BID. Throughout the planning area, sidewalk widths vary from approximately 5 to 12 feet on each side. The City of Helena's 2022 *Engineering and Design Standards*<sup>20</sup> recommend a minimum sidewalk width of five feet. For downtown and commercial areas, the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) *Urban Street Design Guide*<sup>21</sup> recommends a pedestrian through zone width of 8 to 12 feet. The pedestrian through zone is the primary accessible path for pedestrians and should be free from street furniture (lighting, benches, utility poles, bicycle parking, or tree pits) and building frontage amenities (entryways, sidewalk cafes, or sandwich boards). Although the sidewalks in the Downtown meet the minimum width, the majority of sidewalks, especially in the Retail core, are obstructed by various street furniture and building frontage amenities making them difficult to navigate, especially for disabled users.



Some sidewalks are also in poor condition, exhibiting vertical displacements, spalling, chipping, or cracking. This deterioration may be attributable to frost heaving, tree roots growing under the sidewalk, or application of chemicals such as ice melt. These deficiencies may create a safety concern for pedestrians and limit mobility of disabled individuals. In Helena, adjacent property owners are responsible for maintenance of the sidewalks in front of their properties. The City can issue complaints to property owners to fix or replace sections of deteriorated sidewalk in front of their property. The response and action from property owners varies, some are prompt with repairs while others need several notices. Some owners do not take any action despite several notices from the City. When repairs are completed, property owners are free to choose their own contractor. Although there are various standards that must be adhered to, general sidewalk design can vary in execution while still meeting minimum standards. This nuance has resulted in non-uniform sidewalks throughout the Downtown with variations in material, clearance, cross slope, and overall quality.

The City of Helena sidewalk improvement program helps property owners construct new sidewalks in locations where sidewalk is missing or where the existing sidewalk is old, damaged, or otherwise in need of replacement. Through the program, the City consolidates all the sidewalk projects into one bid, which helps keep installation costs low and ensures all sidewalks are constructed to the same standard. The City offers a zero percent interest loan that is repaid via the property owner's annual tax bill over 10 years.

The City of Helena's *ADA Transition Plan* identifies the Downtown (Last Chance Gulch plus the area bounded by Neill Avenue, Cruse Avenue, Park Avenue, Clark Avenue, and Benton Street) and as one of its top five priority areas for accessible pedestrian routes. Mapping completed in 2011<sup>22</sup> indicates that most intersections and mid-block crossings within this priority area have ADA curb ramps that are non-compliant but in good condition. The same is generally true of the remaining portions of the BID (as of 2011) but there are several intersections without curb ramps and/or connecting sidewalk.

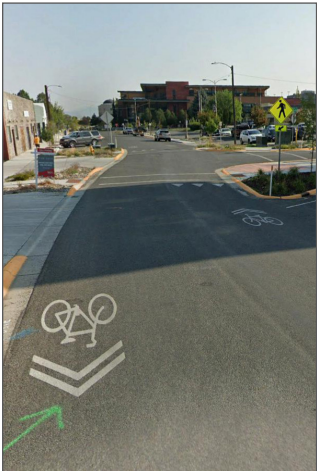






Crosswalks are marked on the legs of most controlled (stop sign or signal) intersections within the planning area, especially within the retail core. Crosswalk design varies throughout the BID, including parallel white lines, piano key style crosswalks, and crosswalks using colored brick pavers. Currently, no pedestrian-specific signals, such as HAWK signals, RRFB, or leading pedestrian intervals, are used within the BID. Curb bulb outs are installed at several intersections to enhance visibility of crossing pedestrians.

South of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Last Chance Gulch transitions to a pedestrian-only walking mall. Per City Ordinance 2295, bikes, skateboards, roller blades, and other wheeled vehicles are not allowed on the mall. Furthermore, City Ordinance 3241 states that motor vehicles, except self-propelled wheelchairs or scooters, are prohibited on the pedestrian mall. Emergency vehicles and City maintenance vehicles are allowed on the mall in the event of an emergency or whenever necessary for construction or maintenance activities. Law enforcement vehicles may be driven on the mall for routine patrol purposes. Field observations indicate that enforcement of the bicycle prohibition is inconsistent.



**Bicycle Facilities**

Within the planning area, the only physical accommodations specific to bikes occur on Front Street, which provides sharrows along the entire segment. There is also a signed bike route that follows Hauser Boulevard east to Dearborn Avenue south to Flowerree Street east to Benton Avenue, then south to Lawrence Street and a jog to 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue via Warren Street. Bike lanes are located on Helena Avenue east of the planning area and Benton Avenue north of Lyndale Avenue. Despite the lack of dedicated bicycle facilities, bike activity is prominent in the Downtown area and multiple bicycle racks are provided.

**Shared Non-Motorized Facilities**

The Centennial Trail runs north of the planning area through Centennial Park. The nearly five mile long trail provides an east/west bicycle and pedestrian route through Helena connecting Spring Meadow State Park to the East Helena Bike Path. The trail connects to a larger network of trails within Centennial Park which cross into the planning area via a pedestrian tunnel under Lyndale Avenue near the Great Northern Carousel and ExplorationWorks. The crossing connects to a shared use path running parallel to Lyndale Avenue which provides a connection to Getchell Street and Lyndale Avenue.



On the southern end of the walking mall, there is a network of pathways which connect through the adjacent parks to Reeder’s Alley to the west and a pedestrian underpass to the east. The underpass provides a non-motorized connection to the Rocky Mountain Development Council on the west side of Cruse Street and the Helena Housing Authority on the east side. The trails within Mount Helena City Park and the South Hills can be accessed from a variety of access points and trailheads which are generally accessible from Downtown.

**4.1.4. Transit Services**

Transit services within the Downtown BID are offered by several providers. All services are discussed in the following sections.

**Capital Transit**

Beginning on March 14, 2022, Capital Transit started offering a new ride scheduling service model. Fixed route service was terminated on March 21, 2022. Within City limits, the new service model replaced fixed route bus stops with an app-based door to door service. Users can download the Capital Transit App to schedule rides within Helena City limits, choosing custom pick-up and drop-off locations up to one day in advance. The buses run Monday through Friday from 6:30 AM to 6:00 PM.



Source: Capital Transit

Fares can be paid electronically on the app, bought in advance at the transit office, or paid with exact change to the driver. Riders can choose to pay by ride (\$0.85) or choose from several punch pass options. ADA attendants and children under the age of 6 may ride for free. Input from the City of Helena indicates that ridership has nearly doubled since the service change due in part to increased convenience as well as rising gas prices in the area.

**Last Chance Tours**

Last Chance Tours provides a summer tour train through the Downtown Helena area. The train operates on a fixed schedule and tickets are available for tours. The train travels along Last Chance Gulch from Neill Avenue south to the end of the study area. The company also operates the Last Chance Trolley which can be chartered by groups for private tours or general shuttles. The trolley is also used for Haunted Helena tours through the downtown and surrounding areas in October.



Source: Lively Times

**Trail Rider Program**

The Trail Rider Program was previously a free community hiker/biker shuttle from Downtown Helena (Broadway Street/Last Chance Gulch) to various trailheads in the South Hills/Mount Helena City Park.

The program began operation in the mid-2000’s with support from the Downtown BID and Helena Area Transit System. Responsibility for the shuttle changes over the years and up until 2021, the program was operated under a partnership between the City of Helena, Visit Helena, and Bike Helena with support from various local sponsors. In 2021, Vigilante Shuttles and Tours, a privately owned company, began operating the service using equipment supplied by the City. Funding and regulation issues have caused the program to cease with no plans to bring it back. The local community has expressed support for its return.

**4.2. UTILITIES NETWORK**

As new development and redevelopment occur, upgrades and replacement of utility infrastructure within the planning area will be necessary to accommodate increased demand. The following sections describe the existing utility infrastructure and known deficiencies. Much of the information contained in this section is a summary of the information provided in the *Downtown Helena Master Plan Existing Conditions Report*<sup>16</sup> with updated information from City of Helena infrastructure plans and staff where available.

**4.2.1. Electrical**

Northwestern Energy provides electricity in Downtown Helena. The main service lines for Downtown come from the north, branching out at various locations. In areas north of Neill Avenue and south of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, power lines are generally placed underground while power lines are generally found above ground for the rest of Downtown. Northwestern Energy has short-term plans to shift load and improve reliability of the electrical grid Downtown including a project to remove redundant power lines over Jackson Street between 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Lawrence Street. Any other projects would not result in any visual changes Downtown and all overhead power lines would remain approximately in the same location.

Northwestern Energy has not supplied mapping of the electrical grid, so it is difficult to identify major deficiencies. The City has some mapping but it is not comprehensive. The City conducted a walkabout with Northwestern Energy in September 2021 to understand needs. Ownership of power lines and electrical outlets is generally unclear, though the City Parks Department, BID, and the Parking Commission currently share responsibility. The BID has noted concerns about the functionality of electrical outlets in the Downtown and the lack of outdoor electrical outlets in areas such as Fuller Street.

Electric infrastructure on the pedestrian mall is operated by the Parks Department sourced by a kiosk on the Bullwhacker Block and from services at the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Last Chance Gulch. Electricity at Performance Square is sourced by a backstage panel. The parking garage at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Last Chance Gulch has outlets that are used for concerts on the mall. Electric services at Constitution Park and on the south end of the 300 block of Last Chance Gulch are also provided for event purposes.

Several outlets are provided on posts along the pedestrian mall. Some outlets are functioning while others are not. The conduit for the wires is in poor condition, so re-wiring through the existing conduit is not possible and any electric upgrades would have to occur as part of a major pedestrian mall renovation.



There are also outlets on the light posts along the pedestrian mall which are controlled by a photocell, so they are functional from dusk to dawn.

Electricity needs have become a forefront issue as the City pursues infrastructure for electric vehicles. The City is currently implementing new electric car charging stations for public use. The City has encountered challenges with supplying adequate electricity for the charging stations to the Downtown, especially in the parking garages.

#### 4.2.2. Water, Sanitary Sewer, and Stormwater

The City of Helena owns and operates municipal water, sanitary sewer, and storm drainage utilities within the Downtown. The oldest infrastructure dates back to the early 1900s. While upgrades and replacements have been performed throughout the years, much of the infrastructure is comprised of outdated or failing materials. Upgrades to failing infrastructure and the addition of new infrastructure to promote and encourage new development is desired.

##### Water

Water is delivered to the Downtown area from the City's treatment plants through City-owned distribution mains, reservoirs, and pump stations. The water distribution system in the Downtown area consists primarily of cast iron and ductile iron pipe and several major backbone segments that are more than 75 years old as shown in **Figure 7**.

The *Helena Water Master Plan* conducted a system evaluation for the city's water mains based on a review of water pressure, storage adequacy, total supply, fire flow capacity, and overall likelihood and consequence of failure. The evaluation indicates that Downtown planning area has several areas with undersized and outdated pipe. There are also several locations with inadequate fire flow capacity. The water main risk assessment indicates that the majority of the pipes in the planning area are in Level 1 (Negligible) and Level 2 (Low) risk categories. Several areas have been identified as Level 3 (Medium) risks and very few segments are considered Level 4 (High) risks. No Level 5 (Extreme) risk mains are located within the planning area. None of the medium or high risk water mains within the planning area are included in the City's short-term or long-term budgets. One capital improvement, however, is identified for completion in the short-term within the planning area and includes installing a new water main connection between the Upper Hale and Reeder's Village pressure zones.

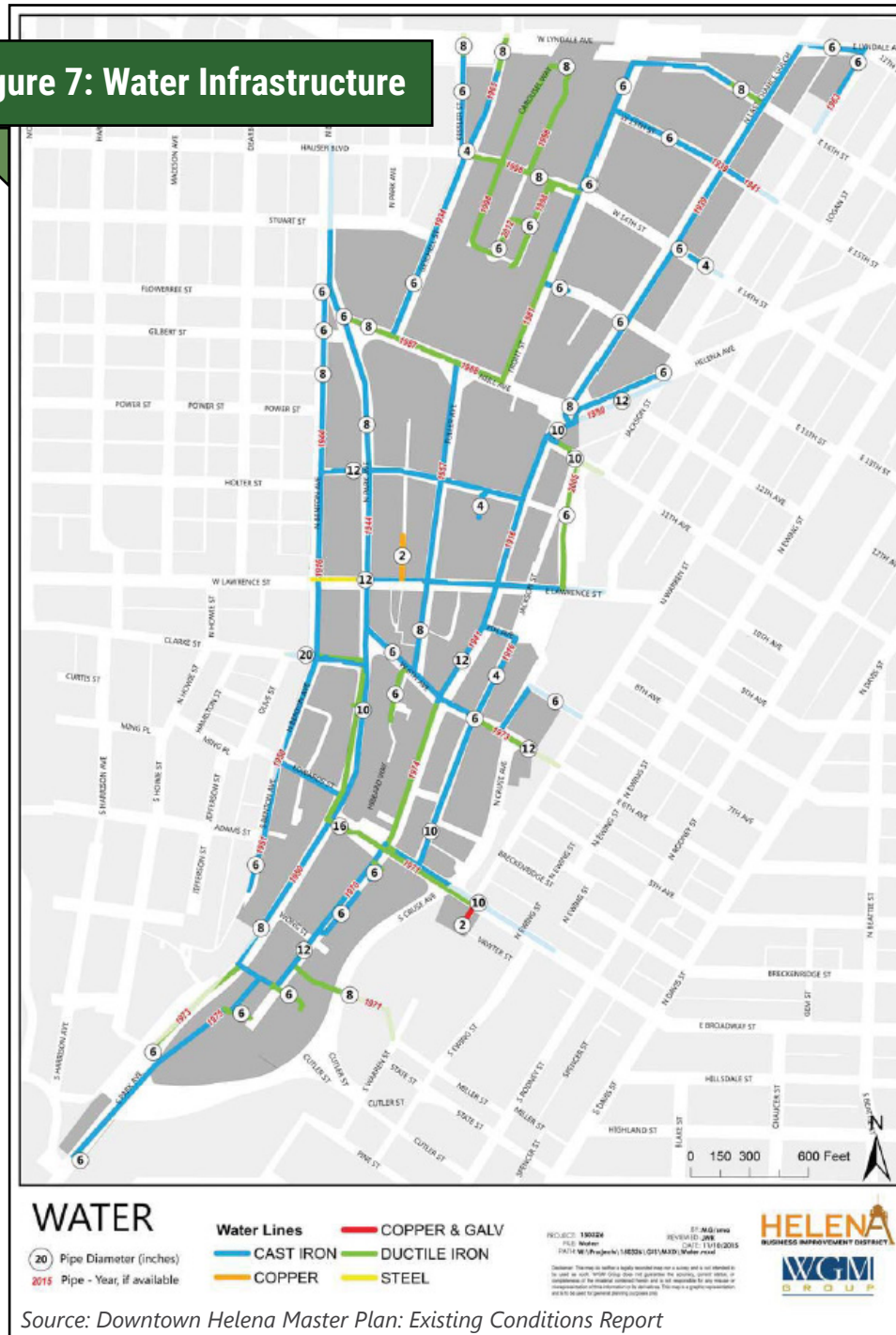
##### Stormwater Drainage

An underground storm drain system with street inlets accommodates urban drainage Downtown and conveys stormwater runoff from the Last Chance Gulch watershed. Large diameter pipes traversing the Downtown are needed to enable passage of high peak water flows from the large watershed. There are currently no substantial stormwater detention or water quality treatment facilities Downtown, however, a large regional pond at the Nature Park provides both storage and treatment.

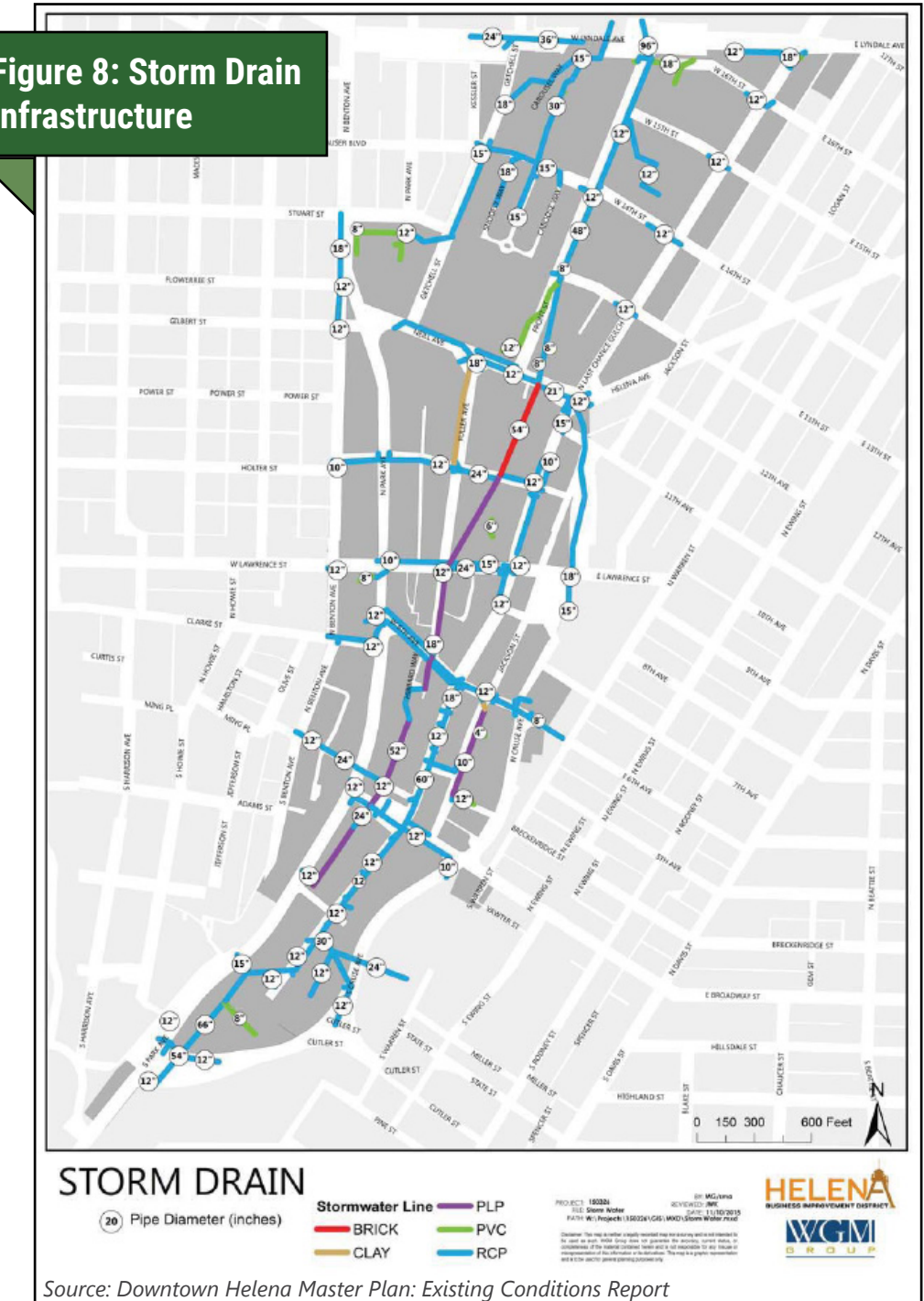
The 2003 City of Helena *Stormwater Master Plan* indicates that the majority of the stormwater backbone interceptor is undersized or in poor condition and needs repair or replacement. As shown in **Figure 8**, most of the pipe system is comprised of reinforced concrete pipe (RCP), though some older sections are comprised of clay, poured-in-place concrete, and brick-and-mortar construction techniques. Some segments of the pipe system have been slip lined to improve structural integrity and reduce infiltration and exfiltration.

The 2018 *Helena Storm Water Master Plan* found that most of the condition assessments in the 2003 plan were still applicable. These condition ratings were analyzed to identify 76 capital improvement projects for the storm drain system which were then prioritized based on flood risk, physical condition, hydraulic capacity, and water quality. The top 34 projects, including 16 in the Last Chance Gulch Basin (6 within the BID/planning area boundary), were forwarded as recommended storm water capital improvement projects.

**Figure 7: Water Infrastructure**



**Figure 8: Storm Drain Infrastructure**







In 2022, the City renewed its stormwater general discharge permit with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to satisfy requirements in the Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System for Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems. The permit and associated Storm Water Management Program outlines requirements for stormwater management in the City by using best management practices to control both quantity and quality of stormwater runoff. The permit was is effective from April 1, 2022 through March 31, 2027.

A flash flood event on July 3, 2022, caused flooding and water damage to buildings within Downtown Helena. The large amounts of rainfall in a short period of time overwhelmed the storm drainage system in the Downtown causing some infrastructure damage and revealing weaknesses in the existing stormwater system.

**Sanitary Sewer**

Gravity sewer main serves the entire Downtown area. The pipes were installed as early as the 1940s, but most pipes were installed between 1950 and 1998. As shown in **Figure 9**, pipes within the planning area consist of vitrified clay, concrete, RCP, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), and pipe slip lined with polyethylene (PLP). Clay pipe was mostly installed in the Downtown in the 1950s and is typically more susceptible to damage during seismic events.

Although no known capacity deficiencies currently exist within the Downtown, aging pipe infrastructure continues to be a long-term challenge. The City has been proactive about addressing this issue by slip lining old pipes with polyethylene. It is desirable to continue improving aging sanitary sewer infrastructure through pipe replacement and slip lining, prioritizing older segments of concrete and vitrified clay pipe first. According to 2015 data, priorities include Last Chance Gulch, 13<sup>th</sup> Street, 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Getchell Street, Kessler Street, Benton Avenue, and Lawrence Street.

The City is currently in the process of updating the 5 and 20-year Sanitary Sewer CIP. The City’s Wastewater Collection and Treatment Master Plan will prioritize the sewer mains to be included in the CIPs, based on a number of factors including risk of failure, consequence of failure, age, and material. The City is currently executing a contract to rehabilitate sanitary sewer mains in 26 locations across Helena. These locations include the Last Chance Gulch pedestrian mall from 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue west to Pioneer Park.

**Figure 9: Sanitary Sewer Infrastructure**



**4.2.3. Irrigation**

Within the Downtown area there are several parks, trees, and other landscaped areas within the public right-of-way that must be irrigated and otherwise maintained. All of the parks, trees, and public recreation facilities in Helena are maintained by Parks Maintenance staff and the Urban Forestry Division. Responsibility for landscaped areas within the public right-of-way, such as grassy boulevards or planters, is generally unknown. The BID, adjacent property owners, and the City share some responsibility although there doesn’t appear to be widespread documentation on ownership and responsibility. It is known, however, that irrigation for the bulb-outs on the 300 and 400 blocks of Last Chance Gulch is operated by the Parks Department. The irrigation valve boxes and timers for the 300 and 400 blocks are located at 301 N Last Chance Gulch and 418 N Last Chance Gulch, respectively. The BID pays for water on the 300 block and the Parks Department pays for water on the 400 block. There is also an active maintenance agreement in place between the City of Helena and the Parks department for the pedestrian mall. Although the City owns the right-of-way, the Parks department maintain the landscaping, per the agreement.

Recently, the City initiated an effort to convert many of its major parks from using treated water for irrigation to utilizing groundwater wells. As of 2020, Both Hill and Women’s Parks have been converted to well water for irrigation.<sup>23</sup>



Source: Helena Independent Record



# CHAPTER 5: MULTIMODAL NETWORK

A primary outcome of the *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* is to outline a vision for a multimodal network that promotes a unified and connected Downtown. To help identify recommended improvements to the network, an inventory of existing features and available physical constraints was first completed. This information was used to establish existing conditions and identify the amount of space available to accommodate potential facility types. In general, the goal was to identify recommendations that fit within existing curb widths to minimize construction needs and reduce costs.

A high-level assessment of potential facility types was conducted to understand the tradeoffs between infrastructure requirements, level of non-motorist protection and comfort, maintenance, and general cost. Given the tradeoffs of facilities, several conceptual networks and improvement types were evaluated. These concepts were vetted through a public involvement process then refined based on public feedback and additional site reviews. This process and the recommended multimodal network are described in more detail in this chapter.







## 5.1. BICYCLE FACILITY TYPE ALTERNATIVES

To accommodate bicycles within the Downtown, several types of facilities could be implemented. The types vary in terms of purpose, configuration, level of protection, infrastructure needs, and relative cost. Potential facility types that could be accommodated within existing right-of-way Downtown are described in the following subsections and potential implementation of these facilities on the Downtown roadway network is discussed in **Section 5.3**. The facility types presented do not represent an exhaustive list, rather the types presented are considered the most appropriate for implementation in Downtown Helena given existing right-of-way, infrastructure, and transportation needs.

Each facility type presented is intended to fit within existing City right-of-way on streets within the BID. During implementation, all bicycle facilities should conform to the *City of Helena Transportation Standards (Section 5.2.3)* and the *American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities*.<sup>24</sup>

### 5.1.1. Existing

Most roadways in the Downtown currently include one travel lane in each direction, on-street parking on both sides, and no dedicated bicycle facilities. The surfacing width varies by roadway, ranging from 30 feet to nearly 70 feet, with alleyways and secondary transportation corridors typically having less width. Sidewalks are typically provided on each side of the Downtown roadways as well, although a few gaps still exist. Sidewalk widths vary, ranging from 5 to 12 feet, with wider sidewalks being present in retail core. Within the planning area, bicycle accommodations are limited to sharrows on Front Street and a signed bike route on Lawrence Street bisecting Downtown. Photos of existing Downtown streets are shown in **Figure 10**.



Figure 10: Existing Downtown Streets

### 5.1.2. Bike Route (Signed)

A signed bike route is typically designated along lower volume, lower speed residential or secondary roadways and is marked only by signs. Adding pavement width or removing amenities, such as parking, from roadways signed as bike routes is not normally required, however, choosing direct routes with minimal hazards is typically beneficial. Bike routes can be a simple, low-cost solution to direct bicyclists to safer and less-congested roadways. However, the lack of dedicated facilities marking right-of-way specifically designated for bicyclists, makes a bike route less comfortable for the average user and less likely to alert drivers to the presence of bicyclists on the roadway.



### 5.1.3. Bike Boulevard (Sharrows)

Bike boulevards are roadways where bicycles and vehicles share travel lanes. Additional signage and striping are added to increase bicycle priority. Shared lane markings, or sharrows, are painted in the travel lane to indicate to motorists that they should expect to see and share the lane with bicycles. This treatment type is most applicable on roadways with low motorized traffic volumes and speeds. Sharrows are used to indicate recommended bicycling corridors and help bicyclists navigate gaps where there are not dedicated bicycle facilities. Like signed bike routes, it is not necessary to add pavement width or remove roadside amenities such as on-street parking to accommodate bike boulevards. The combination of signage and additional striping helps increase the visibility of bicyclists. While sharrows can complement bike lanes and other bicycle infrastructure, they are not often linked to an increase in bicycle use or an improvement in bike safety. Example renderings of bike boulevards are shown in **Figure 11**.



Figure 11: Bike Boulevards

### 5.1.4. On-Street Facilities (Bike Lanes)

Dedicated bike lanes can typically be added to roadways using striping, signage, and pavement markings to designate right-of-way for the exclusive use of bicyclists. Bike lanes create a dedicated space for bicyclists and allow riders to travel at their own pace without interference from vehicle traffic. Bike lanes are installed parallel to vehicle travel lanes and require bicyclists to travel in the same direction as traffic.

City standards dictate that on-street bike lanes should be a minimum of 5 feet in width, exclusive of the gutter pan. However, on existing streets where bike lanes are being added and available right-of-way is restricted, the width of the bike lane may be reduced to 5 feet, inclusive of the gutter pan. Depending on the width of the roadway, bike lanes can sometimes be accommodated within the existing pavement width by narrowing travel and parking lanes; other times, at least one side of on-street parking may need to be removed. Bike lanes are typically configured in two ways, standard bike lanes and buffered bike lanes, as described as follows and illustrated in **Figures 12** and **13**, respectively.

#### Standard Bike Lanes

Due to the existing surfacing widths, most roads in the downtown would likely require the repurposing of at least one side of on-street parking to accommodate dedicated bike lanes. Where room allows, a two-foot clear zone should be included between the bike and parking lanes. The clear zone helps bicyclists stay clear of the door zone, or the area where an opening door on a parked vehicle could be in conflict with a cyclist.





**Figure 12: Standard Bike Lanes**

#### **Buffered Bike Lanes**

Buffered bike lanes provide for additional protection and comfort for bicyclists. The additional space is desirable along roadways with higher traffic volumes or travel speeds. Buffered bike lanes appeal to a wider cross-section of bicycle users, including less experienced riders, because they provide greater physical separation between vehicles and bicyclists. Buffers are also favorable to more advanced riders because they provide space to pass another bicyclist without encroaching in the adjacent vehicle travel lane. Without full reconstruction, buffered bike lanes would require removal of on-street parking from both sides of most roadways within the downtown.



**Figure 13: Buffered Bike Lanes**

#### **5.1.5. Protected Facility (Cycle Track/Path)**

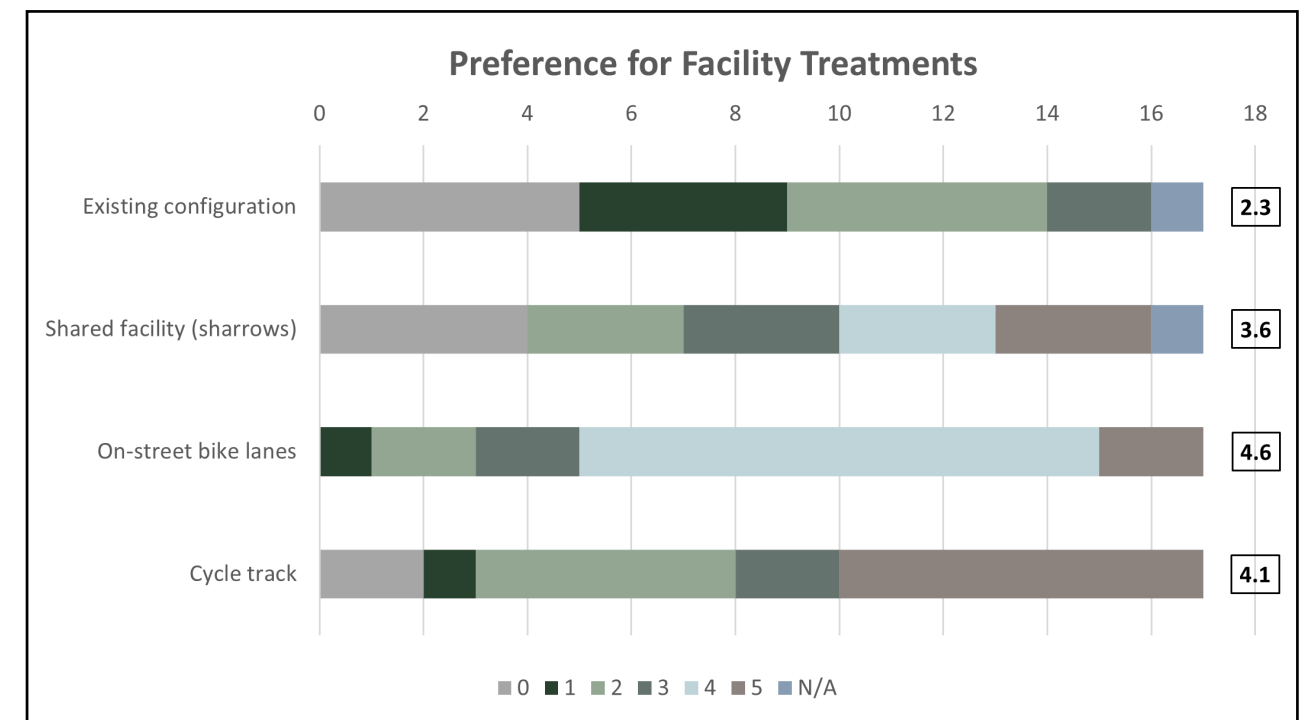
A cycle track is an exclusive bike facility that combines the user experience of a separated path with the on-street infrastructure of a conventional bike lane. Cycle tracks offer a higher level of comfort and security compared to bike lanes because they separate bicycle traffic from both vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Although there is a variety of cycle track designs, a two-way cycle track or on-street bike path, was considered for this effort. An example rendering of a two-way cycle track is shown in **Figure 14**. Two-way cycle tracks allow bike movement in both directions on one side of the road. Physical barriers, such as a raised median or bollards, could be used to enhance bicyclist safety and comfort, however, simple painted buffers are also an option. Two-way cycle tracks may require additional design considerations at intersections, driveways, and side-street crossings.



**Figure 14: Protected Cycle Track**

#### **5.1.6. Public Input**

At the first public open house, participants were presented with the bicycle facility type options described previously and asked to rate each option on a scale of 0 (not preferred) to 5 (preferred). **Figure 15** shows the ratings received from open house participants. Overall, on-street bike lanes received the highest composite score (4.6), but cycle track received the most '5' ratings. Based on verbal feedback, cycle tracks were most preferred by inexperienced riders and families whereas bike lanes were most preferred by more confident riders. However, some participants expressed a dislike for cycle tracks due to maintenance requirements and the removal of on-street parking. Sharrows were preferred by fewer participants due to the low level of protection for bicyclists but still received some positive feedback due to the retention of on-street parking. The existing configuration received the lowest composite score (2.3) and the most '0' ratings.



**Figure 15: Public Preference for Bicycle Facility Types**





5.2. PEDESTRIAN MALL CONCEPTS

Three potential concepts were developed for transforming the pedestrian walking mall into a space that could be shared by both pedestrians and bicyclists while still restricting use by motor vehicles. These options inherently rely on amendments to the City Code to allow bicycles, and potentially other wheeled vehicles such as scooters, rollerblades, and skateboards, on the pedestrian mall. This topic has long been debated by community members and city leaders. These concepts are presented for discussion purposes only and would require decision making at the city-level to advance. Further feasibility studies may also be required to determine the appropriateness of a change to the long-standing ordinances.

Use of the pedestrian mall is covered in Chapter 9, Title 7 of the Helena City Code (Ordinance No. 2295, implemented in 1983). Clause 7, Bicycles Prohibited, prohibits bicycles, skateboards, and other wheeled devices on the mall.<sup>25</sup> Initiative 2005-1 of the City of Helena election held on November 8, 2005, dictated that the use of the Downtown pedestrian mall would be restricted to pedestrians only. The initiative also determined that no motor vehicle traffic, other than emergency vehicles or specially permitted vehicles, will be allowed on the Downtown pedestrian mall unless the use is approved by a majority vote in a regular or special City of Helena election.<sup>26</sup> Through ordinance, the City may choose to allow the use of bicycles on the pedestrian mall.



The City Code prohibiting bicycles and other wheeled non-motorized vehicles on the pedestrian mall may be revised via City Ordinance.

5.2.1. Existing Configuration

On average, there is approximately 50 feet of right-of-way between building frontages. This space is generally configured with six-foot sidewalks against each frontage with a 38-foot pedestrian/amenity zone in the middle. The central zone is made up of meandering path with landscaped areas, public artwork, and activity zones scattered along the outer edges of the meander. The sidewalk zones are typically clear of obstructions, however some business fronts, especially restaurants, have used this space to provide patio seating, blocking the pedestrian pathway. The existing configuration provides a slow space for pedestrians to enjoy the walking mall but somewhat lacks cohesion. Emergency vehicles are allowed on the mall, and a clear zone should be maintained for fire and emergency services to access the mall with any improvements. Imagery of the existing pedestrian mall configuration is provided in **Figure 16**, the northern part of the pedestrian mall (between 6th Avenue and Broadway Avenue) is shown in the upper photo, and the southern part of the mall (between Broadway Avenue and the Lewis and Clark Library) is shown in the lower photo.



Figure 16: Existing Pedestrian Mall Configuration

5.2.2. Concept 1 – Enhance Existing Configuration

Concept 1 is illustrated in **Figure 17**. This concept was developed to enhance the existing configuration to better define amenity and travel zones without requiring full reconstruction of the mall. This option could allow for mixed use with slow moving bicycles, if desired by the community.

In the enhanced configuration, the first 6 to 12 feet in front of the adjacent businesses would be used for a sidewalk and an amenity zone. The configuration of this zone could vary, either providing the amenity zone next to the building then the sidewalk, or vice versa. The amenity zone could be used for retail displays, patio seating, bicycle racks, planters, or landscaped areas. The central area, approximately 25 feet, would be used for a common space, providing the same meandering path in the center but with more definition through the use of colored bricks or other aesthetic materials. Additional amenities could include planters, public art, benches, picnic tables, or raised landscaped areas with built-in seating. The mall could continue to be used exclusively by pedestrians or become a shared space with pedestrians and slow-moving bicyclists.



Figure 17: Concept 1 - Enhanced Mall Configuration



### 5.2.3. Concept 2 – Center Cycle Track

Concept 2 includes a center cycle track and is illustrated in **Figure 18**. This option would require full reconstruction of the mall and would rely on bicycles being allowed on the mall. This option redefines the center, meandering portion of the mall by providing a protected bicycle facility with pedestrians and business frontage on the edges.

In Concept 2, bistro areas would be provided adjacent to business frontages. The bistro area could accommodate patio seating, retail displays, bike racks, waste bins, benches, or planters. Abutting the bistro zones, a sidewalk could be provided for the exclusive use of pedestrians. Next to the sidewalk, protected bike lanes would be provided in the center of the mall with each direction divided by a center amenity zone. The protected bike lanes could be depressed one-way lanes for exclusive use by bicyclists. Periodically, raised crossing zones could be provided to allow pedestrians to cross and slow down bicyclists. The meandering nature of the existing configuration could remain to retain visual interest and maintain slower bicycle speeds.



**Figure 18: Concept 2 - Center Cycle Track**

### 5.2.4. Concept 3 – Multimodal Central Path

Concept 3 would also require full reconstruction of the mall and rely on an amendment to the current bicycle prohibition on the mall. The revised configuration would provide a reimagined space with business amenity zones on the edges, bike accommodation zones, and a mixed-use pedestrian area in the center.

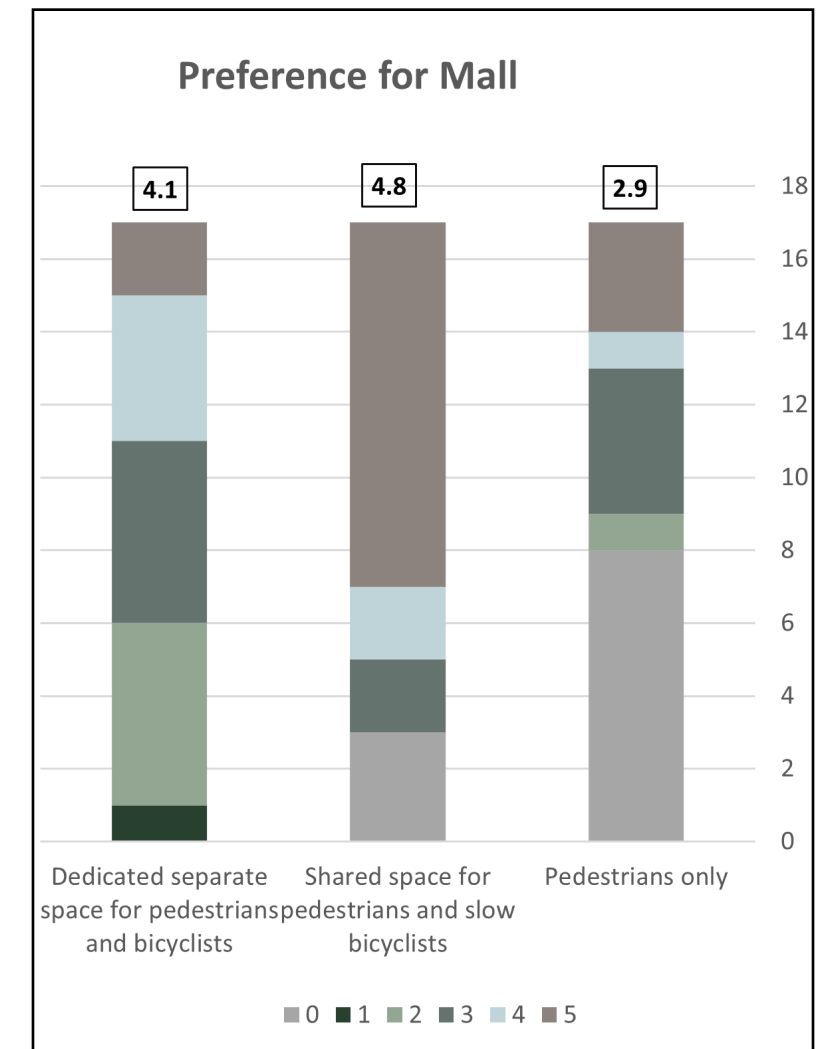
In the multimodal central path option, bistro zones are provided against building frontages and bordered by landscape amenities. Bicycle lanes would then be provided in each direction with a pedestrian space provided in the center. The path would provide mixed uses such as walking area, seating areas, a lighting corridor, or landscaping. Since this option requires full reconstruction, the amenities on the mall could be straightened to provide direct paths. Or, the meandering path could be retained to avoid existing amenities, such as the trolley car or prospector fountain, and slow bicycle speeds.



**Figure 19: Concept 3 - Multimodal Central Track**

### 5.2.5. Public Input

As with the facility type alternatives, participants at the first public open house were presented with the pedestrian mall concepts and asked to rate each concept on a scale of 0 (not preferred) to 5 (preferred). Ratings from open house participants are shown in **Figure 20**. The shared space for pedestrians and slow bicyclists (Concept 1) was preferred by the majority of participants, receiving the most '5' ratings and a composite score of 4.8. The option providing dedicated space for pedestrians and bicyclists (Concepts 2 and 3) received fewer high ratings but still received a composite score of 4.1. There is some preference for retaining a pedestrian only space (existing configuration) from a handful of participants, although many rated the pedestrian only option as '0'. Participants who supported the options allowing bicycles noted that if the mall were to remain pedestrian only, it would be preferable to provide bike racks at key entrance locations to still promote biking in the Downtown but also discourage biking on the mall.



**Figure 20: Public Preference for Pedestrian Mall Concepts**





### 5.3. MULTIMODAL NETWORK CONCEPTS

Three initial multimodal network concepts were identified to illustrate potential options for improving multimodal accommodations and connectivity within Downtown Helena. The concepts were developed as an interim step to gather feedback from the public about their priorities and understand the public’s perception of acceptable tradeoffs. The components of each concept include various bicycle facilities (discussed in **Section 5.1**) and changes to the pedestrian mall (discussed in **Section 5.2**). To achieve the multimodal networks presented in the following sections, small-scale improvements, such as signing, striping, or repurposing available space, as well as larger investments and reconstruction may be required.

#### 5.3.1. Existing Network

The existing multimodal transportation network was shown previously in **Figure 6**. The existing network has limited dedicated non-motorized accommodations in the Downtown. Sidewalks line both sides of most City streets, although there are some gaps, and some sidewalks are in disrepair. Within the BID, bicycle accommodations are limited to sharrows on Front Street and a signed bike route bisecting Downtown using Lawrence Street. Other bicycle facilities extend beyond the BID boundary but lack connections to facilities within the BID. The pedestrian mall is limited to pedestrians only. Designated non-motorized connections to trails beginning outside the planning area boundary are limited. Although less than half a mile apart, the Great Northern District and Last Chance Gulch Retail Core generally function as two distinct destinations, rather than subareas of the broader Downtown, due to lack of non-motorized connectivity, lack of wayfinding, and perceived barriers to pedestrians and bicyclists.

#### 5.3.2. Concept A

Concept A, as presented in **Figure 21**, focuses on improving bicycle connections through dedicated facilities without opening the pedestrian mall to bicycle use. While conceptually providing the most comfortable bicycle network for most users, this concept also requires the highest level of investment. In this concept, the Benton Avenue/Park Avenue and Cruse Street/Neill Avenue corridors serve as primary bicycle routes for commuters using bike lanes which connect to existing bike lanes on Benton Avenue and Helena Avenue outside the planning area. The 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Hauser Boulevard corridor uses sharrows to provide a connection between the existing Helena Avenue bike lanes and the Hauser Boulevard bike route through the Great Northern Town Center. The Getchell Street corridor is repurposed to include a cycle track connecting to the Downtown core. The cycle track continues along Fuller Avenue which is repurposed to accommodate bicyclists and slow-moving traffic. The cycle track then extends on Hibbard Way to provide a comfortable bicycle route on a roadway currently functioning as an alley. In this option, the pedestrian-only walking mall remains and bicycles are routed around the mall at Broadway Street to the bike facilities on either Cruse Avenue or Park Avenue.

#### 5.3.3. Concept B

Concept B illustrated in **Figure 22**. The network is the same as Concept A except bicycles would be allowed on the pedestrian mall. By allowing bikes on the mall, the Hibbard Way cycle track connection isn’t necessary. Bicyclists could still use Broadway Street to connect to the bicycle only facilities on Cruse Avenue and Park Avenue.

#### 5.3.4. Concept C

Concept C is presented in **Figure 23**. The concept provides a well-connected multimodal network at a lower level of investment compared to Concepts A and B. This concept also provides a comparatively less comfortable network for the novice cyclist by utilizing sharrows to traverse the Downtown rather than a cycle track. The Benton Avenue/Park Avenue and Cruse Street/Neill Avenue corridors continue to serve commuters by providing bike lanes to bypass the Downtown core. Bike lanes are also provided on Getchell Street to provide a connection from Downtown to Carroll College and the Centennial Trail. Connectivity to the Centennial Trail is further promoted by providing a shared pedestrian-bicycle zone through the Great Northern Carousel area. The 14<sup>th</sup> Street/Hauser Boulevard and Front Street corridors remain as shared facilities. To provide parallel routes both through and around the retail core, shared facilities are also provided on Fuller Avenue, Hibbard Way, and Last Chance Gulch south of Neill Avenue. In this concept, bikes would be allowed on the pedestrian mall.

Figure 21: Multimodal Network Concept A





**Figure 22: Multimodal Network Concept B**



**Figure 23: Multimodal Network Concept C**







5.3.5. Public Input

Each of these network concepts were presented at the first public open house and participants were offered an opportunity to rate each concept on a scale of 0 (not preferred) to 5 (preferred). **Figure 24** shows the aggregated responses from participants who completed the comment card. Of those who participated, Concept C was the highest favored concept receiving the highest composite score (4.6). Concept A (4.5) then Concept B (4.1) were ranked next in terms of preference, however Concept A received the highest number of ‘5’ ratings of all concepts presented. The existing network received a rating of 0 from many participants and was generally not satisfactory (2.4 composite score).

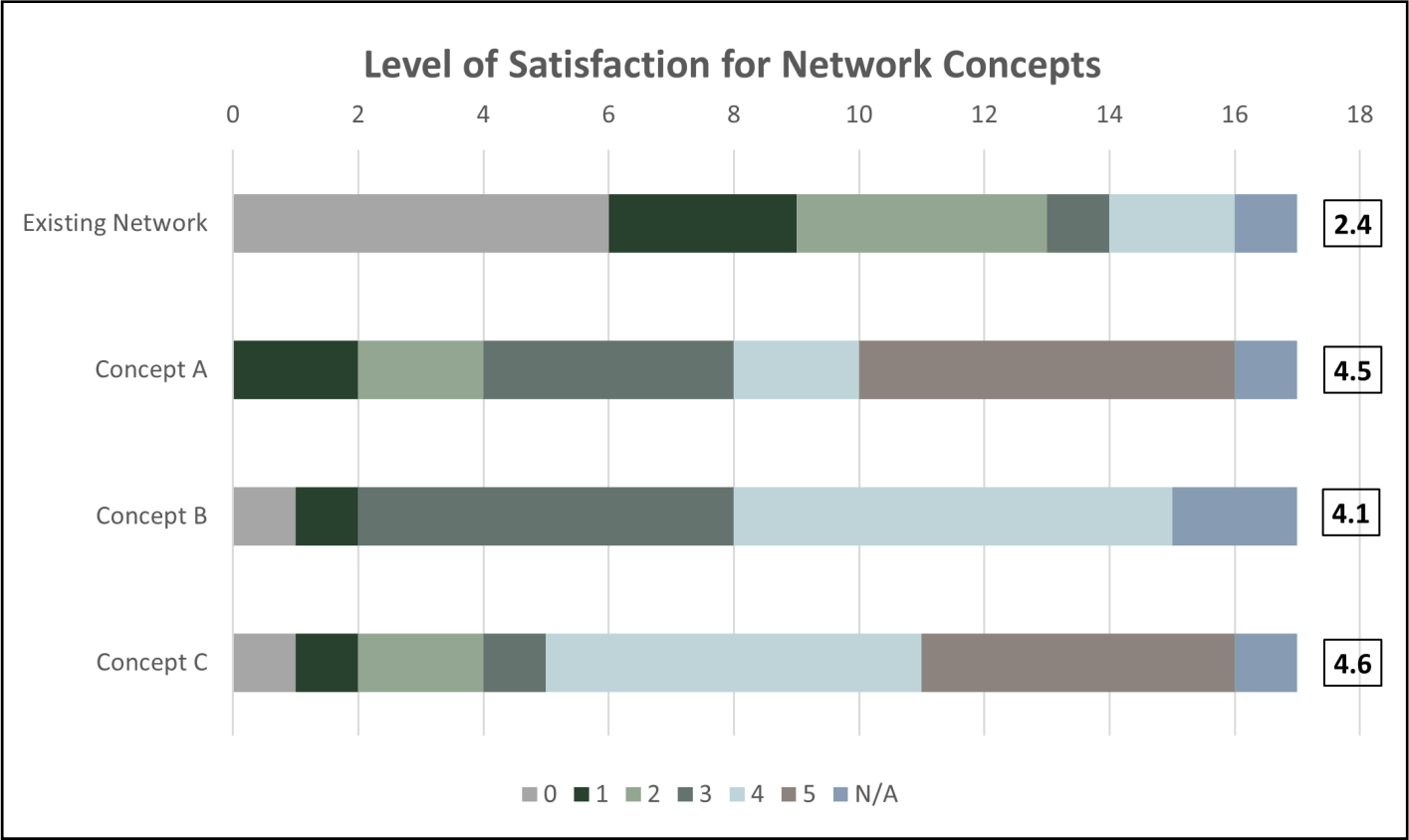


Figure 24: Preference for Network Concepts

5.4. RECOMMENDED MULTIMODAL IMPROVEMENTS

Based on public and stakeholder feedback and further inspection of the existing infrastructure Downtown, a preferred multimodal network was developed. The network is shown in two stages, a network that can be implemented in the short-term (**Figure 25**) and a network that represents a long-term vision (**Figure 26**). The short-term network is intended to be simple to implement without substantially impacting parking or requiring reconstruction. The long-term network consists of more desirable accommodations but requires some on-street parking removal and some reconstruction. Detailed striping plans for each network are contained in **Appendix C**.

Recommended changes to the pedestrian mall to facilitate the proposed networks are also discussed. Both the short- and long-term recommendations for the pedestrian mall rely on the City to change the ordinance restricting bicycles on the pedestrian mall. It should be discussed by city leaders whether revision of the city ordinance would apply to bicycles only, or to other wheeled vehicles such as scooters, rollerblades, and skateboards as well. Changing the city ordinance may require a vote, as discussed previously.

With both the short- and long-term networks, the on-demand transit service is anticipated to remain. The Downtown multimodal network was developed to be easily navigable by foot or by bike from transit riders’ desired pick-up or drop-off locations.

5.4.1. Short-Term Multimodal Network

The short-term multimodal network was designed to be easily implemented within existing curb lines primarily through striping and signing. For bicyclists, the network consists mainly of bike boulevards, or sharrows, with some bike lanes on wider streets where space allows. The existing signed bike routes remain. Although potentially less desirable for less confident bicyclists, this network can be achieved relatively quickly and will help enhance visibility of bicyclists on the roadway. For pedestrians, no specific changes are recommended for the short-term network except continued replacement of deteriorating sidewalk, ADA upgrades, and filling in sidewalk gaps.

The short-term network assumes that the city ordinance would be changed to allow bikes on the pedestrian mall. To enhance connectivity from the Centennial Trail through the Great Northern Town Center, creation of a shared pedestrian and bicycle space is recommended (recommendation T-10). Enhanced crossings (recommendations T-01 and T-16) throughout the network are also recommended to enhance safety and visibility of pedestrians. The enhanced crossings could also serve bicyclists who are less confident crossing at uncontrolled intersections.

These recommendations could be implemented as stand alone projects, or could be completed with other roadway maintenance activities such as chip sealing. Appropriate bike guide signs and other wayfinding should also be installed to help bicyclists better navigate the new network. The striping for these facilities requires only white paint, however, the City could choose to upgrade to epoxy or thermoplastic paint to increase durability and longevity of the markings. To be effective, bike facility markings should be repainted periodically when the paint begins to wear or fade. Bike facilities should also be kept clear of debris and snow to maximize use and enhance safety.

A summary of the bike boulevards and bike lanes to be installed for the short-term network is shown in **Table 1**. The short-term network is illustrated in **Figure 25**.

Short-Term Pedestrian Mall Recommendation

In the short-term, the mall would be a shared space with no physical improvements except signage reflecting the new city ordinance allowing bikes on the mall. It is recommended that appropriate language be added to Title 7 – Chapter 9 of the City Code to require that bicyclists yield to pedestrians and maintain a reasonable, slow speed. Clear, visible signage reflecting this change and any additional guidelines should be placed throughout the mall.

No bicycle-specific physical changes, such as a designated path, are proposed in the short-term. Rather, the lack of clarification and the obvious pedestrian nature of the mall should be leveraged to maintain slow bicyclist speeds. If desired, improvements such as those presented in **Figure 17** could be implemented to better separate business amenity zones from travel ways. Bicycle racks could also be installed at the ends of the mall or periodically throughout to attract bicyclists to the mall but limit the number of users pedaling along the mall.

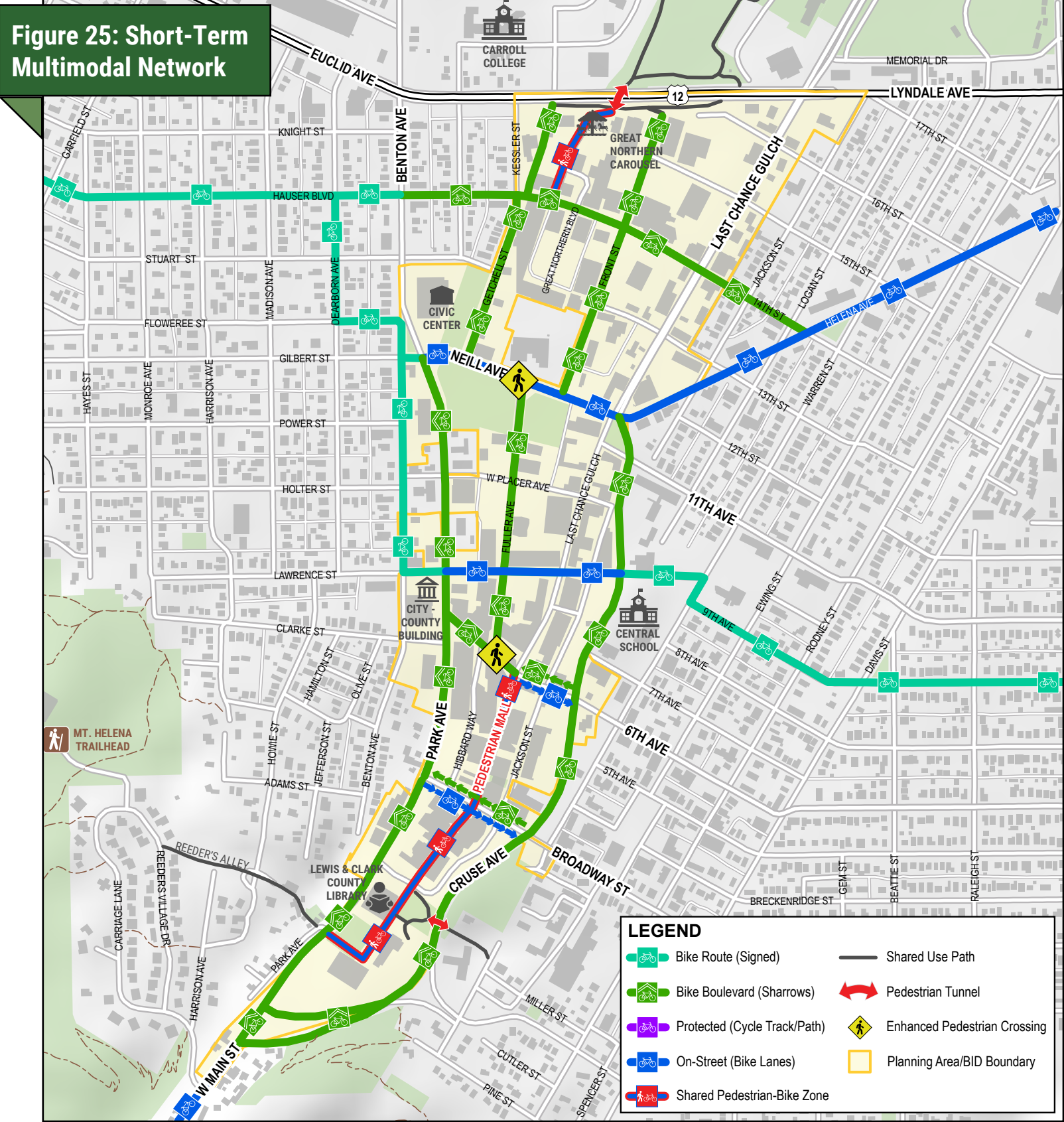
Allowing bicycles on the mall may help attract less confident bicyclists who may not be comfortable accessing downtown via Park Avenue or Cruse Avenue. When combined with the other short-term multimodal network changes, making the mall a shared space would help provide a connected network for all non-motorists to enjoy and experience Downtown Helena.





Table 1: Short-Term Network Bicycle Facilities

Street	Length (ft)	Anticipated Parking Spaces Removed	Notes
Bike Boulevards			
<b>Carousel Way</b> <i>Centennial Trail – 14<sup>th</sup> Street</i>	650	0	• Requires coordination with private landowners
<b>14<sup>th</sup> Street</b> <i>Helena Avenue – Kessler Street</i>	1,900	0	--
<b>Hauser Boulevard</b> <i>Kessler Street – Benton Avenue</i>	650	0	• Complete in conjunction with conversion of Hauser Boulevard to a two-way street (see T-03)
<b>Getchell Street</b> <i>Lyndale Avenue – 14<sup>th</sup> Street</i>	500	0	--
<b>Kessler Street/Getchell Street</b> <i>14<sup>th</sup> Street – Neill Avenue</i>	950	0	--
<b>Fuller Avenue</b> <i>Neill Avenue – 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue</i>	1,550	0	--
<b>Park Avenue</b> <i>Neill Avenue – W. Main Street</i>	4,700	0	• Requires coordination with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) (Park Avenue is an Urban Route)
<b>Lawrence Street</b> <i>Cruse Avenue – Park Avenue</i>	275	0	--
<b>6<sup>th</sup> Avenue</b> <i>Cruse Avenue – Park Avenue</i>	850	0	• Requires coordination with MDT (6 <sup>th</sup> Avenue is an Urban Route) • Install in the downhill direction only (bike lanes in the uphill direction)
<b>Broadway Street</b> <i>Cruse Avenue – Park Avenue</i>	600	0	• Requires coordination with MDT (Broadway Street is an Urban Route) • Install in the downhill direction only (bike lanes in the uphill direction)
<b>Cruse Avenue</b> <i>Park Avenue – Last Chance Gulch</i>	4,800	0	--
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>17,425 (3.3 mi)</b>	<b>0</b>	
Bike Lanes			
<b>Neill Avenue</b> <i>Last Chance Gulch – Park Avenue</i>	1,200	0	• Requires coordination with MDT (Neill Avenue is an Urban Route)
<b>Lawrence Street</b> <i>Last Chance Gulch – Park Avenue</i>	625	6	--
<b>6<sup>th</sup> Avenue</b> <i>Cruse Avenue – Park Avenue</i>	850	0	• Requires coordination with MDT (6 <sup>th</sup> Avenue is an Urban Route) • Install in the uphill direction only (bike boulevards in the downhill direction)
<b>Broadway Street</b> <i>Cruse Avenue – Park Avenue</i>	600	0	• Requires coordination with MDT (Broadway Street is an Urban Route) • Install in the uphill direction only (bike boulevards in the downhill direction)
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>3,275 (0.6 mi)</b>	<b>6</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20,050 (3.8 mi)</b>	<b>6</b>	







5.4.2. Long-Term Multimodal Network

The long-term vision for the multimodal network would incorporate more bike lanes and protected bicycle facilities to appeal to a wider cross-section of the community. This vision would build upon the short-term network, converting some bike boulevards into roadways with bike lanes. It is also envisioned that a branded “Gulch Trail” would be constructed, extending from the Centennial Trail south through the Downtown and connecting to Reeder’s Alley. The Gulch Trail could be installed as a two-way cycle track or shared use path (SUP) with branding to make it stand out as the primary north/south artery spanning the BID, see **Section 6.3**.

Installation of the long-term network facilities would require removal of at least one side of on-street parking on most roadways within the Downtown. To adjust to this loss of parking, some of the parking management strategies discussed in **Section 6.8** could be explored. Maintenance of the new facilities should also be considered, especially for the Gulch Trail. Physical separation of the cycle track, such as through use of bollards or grade separation, may make snow removal and sweeping activities difficult without the purchase and use of specialized equipment (see **Section 6.9**). Instead, a painted buffer could be used to separate non-motorists from vehicular traffic but would have the trade off of a less comfortable facility for some users.

When installing the Gulch Trail, traffic control and design of each intersection along the route should be assessed to ensure proper operations and safety. For example, the intersection of Getchell Street/Kessler Street/Hauser Boulevard/14<sup>th</sup> Street could be redesigned to improve safety and better define right-of-way priorities. Incorporation of enhanced crossings at the Neill Avenue/Fuller Avenue and Fuller Avenue/6<sup>th</sup> Avenue intersections as mentioned in the short-term network is also recommended.

The long-term network is illustrated in **Figure 26**. A summary of the bicycle facilities recommended for the long-term network are listed in **Table 2** on the next page. Facilities from the short-term network are intended to remain, unless otherwise noted in the table.

Mid-Term Pedestrian Mall Recommendation

Before funding is acquired to implement the long-term vision for the mall, smaller scale improvements can be implemented to achieve similar benefits in the mid-term. Recommended improvements include striping bike lanes on the mall to designate a bicycle-only zone. To enhance visibility of the bike lanes, green paint could be used to clearly define the bicycle travel way. Streetscaping improvements, such as planter boxes and benches, could also be installed to beautify the mall and help define the travel way. Minor modifications to curbing may be required to accommodate streetscape amenities and provide a clear travel path for both pedestrians and bicycles.

Long-Term Pedestrian Mall Recommendation

In the long-term, it is recommended that the BID and the City work towards development of a shared space that caters to the needs of business owners, patrons, pedestrians, and bicyclists alike. A configuration such as that presented in **Figure 19** (Concept 3 – Multimodal Central Path) is envisioned.

In implementing Concept 3, the premise would be to try to retain the form, geometry, and spatial distribution of existing spaces on the mall as much as possible. To better define spaces, different surfacing types could be used. Specific utility upgrade needs are currently unknown, but it is assumed that electric conduit would be needed in some locations to support pedestrian lighting along the length of the mall. To improve aesthetics, seat wall planters, moveable furnishings, landscaping, and other low-cost improvements could be pursued.

Further evaluation is needed to develop a configuration that is agreeable to business owners, community leaders, and residents. During future planning and design phases, topics such as maintenance requirements, snow storage space, and utility or emergency vehicle access must be considered. An assessment of utility upgrades or repairs should also be performed to determine if any utility improvements could be conducted in conjunction with future construction projects on the mall. Recently, the BID discussed potential efforts to develop a *Pedestrian Mall Master Plan* in order to address redevelopment opportunities on the mall and further explore the decision to reconfigure the mall to better create a multimodal space.

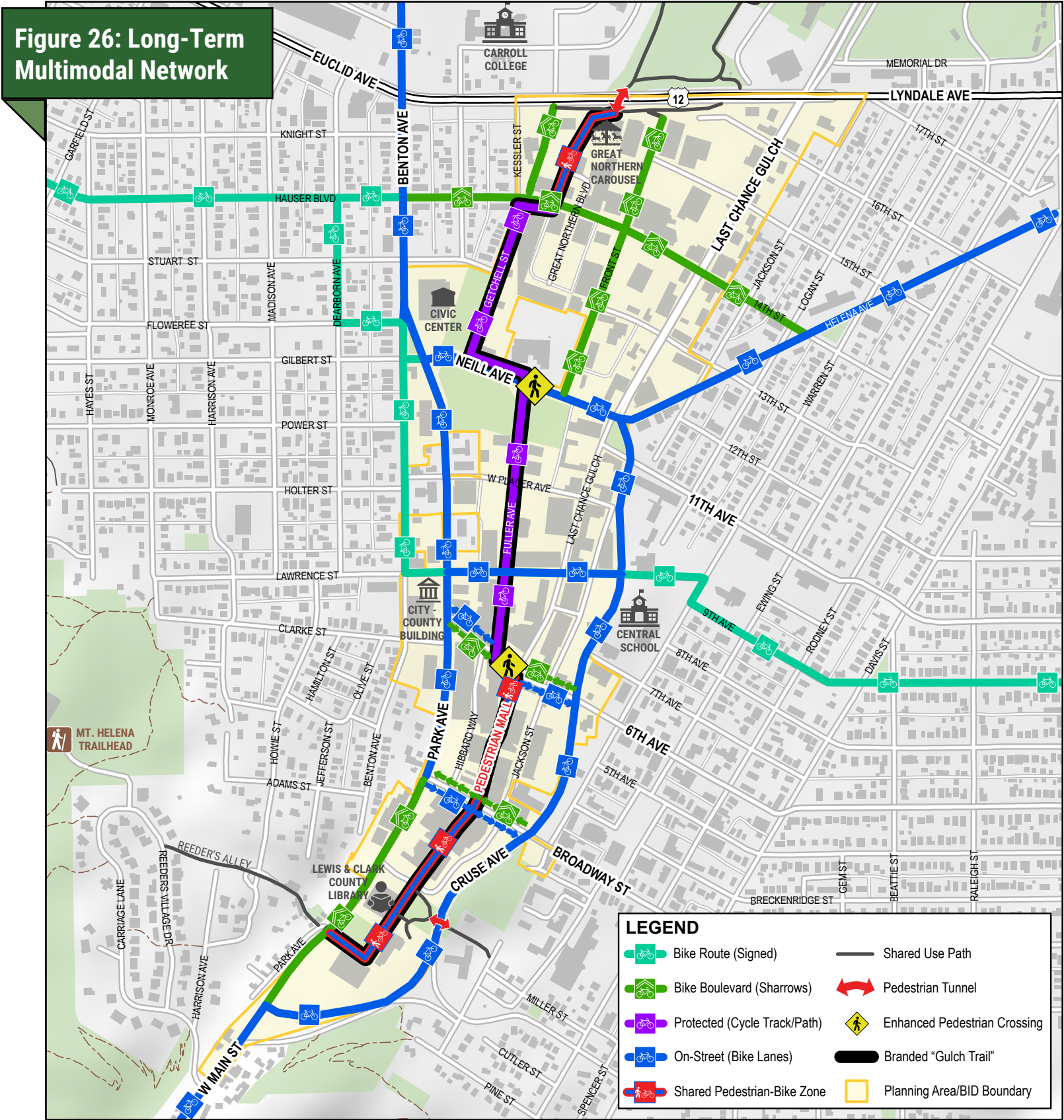




Table 2: Long-Term Network Bicycle Facilities

Street	Length (ft)	Anticipated Parking Spaces Removed	Notes
Bike Lanes			
<b>Benton Avenue</b> <i>Lyndale Avenue – Neill Avenue</i>	1,450	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Complete if a road diet is constructed on Benton Avenue</li><li>Requires additional evaluation and coordination with MDT since Benton Avenue is an Urban Route</li></ul>
<b>Park Avenue</b> <i>Neill Avenue – Broadway Street</i>	2,400	34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Requires coordination with MDT (Park Avenue is an Urban Route)</li></ul>
<b>Cruse Avenue</b> <i>Park Avenue – Last Chance Gulch</i>	4,800	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Complete with Cruse Avenue streetscaping enhancements (see D-01)</li><li>Conversion of angled parking to parallel parking between Broadway Street and 6th Avenue results in a net loss of 12 parking spaces</li><li>90+ parking spaces added between Park Avenue and Broadway Street with reconstruction</li></ul>
SUBTOTAL	8,650 (1.6 mi)	46	
Gulch Trail (Cycle Track/SUP)			
<b>Carousel Way</b> <i>Centennial Trail – 14th Street</i>	650	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Install on west side of travel way</li><li>Requires coordination with private landowners</li></ul>
<b>14<sup>th</sup> Street</b> <i>Carousel Way – Kessler Street</i>	225	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Install on north side of roadway</li></ul>
<b>Kessler Street/Getchell Street</b> <i>14th Street – Neill Avenue</i>	950	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Install on east side of roadway</li><li>Requires reconstruction to widen roadway</li></ul>
<b>Neill Avenue</b> <i>Getchell Street – Fuller Avenue</i>	375	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Install on north side of roadway</li><li>Requires coordination with MDT (Neill Avenue is an Urban Route)</li></ul>
<b>Fuller Avenue</b> <i>Neill Avenue – 6th Avenue</i>	1,550	52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Install on east side of roadway</li></ul>
<b>6<sup>th</sup> Avenue</b> <i>Fuller Avenue – Last Chance Gulch</i>	150	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Install on south side of roadway</li><li>Requires coordination with MDT (6<sup>th</sup> Avenue is an Urban Route)</li><li>Remove 1 parking space plus a loading zone</li></ul>
SUBTOTAL	3,900 (0.7 mi)	109	
TOTAL	12,550 (2.4 mi)	155	





# **DOWNTOWN HELENA**

## **MULTIMODAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN**





# CHAPTER 6: PROGRAMS, POLICIES, AND STANDARDS

**T**his chapter addresses several topics that provide broader guidance for planning and implementation considerations such as streetscaping, wayfinding, parking management, and asset preservation and maintenance. These considerations are intended to supplement the recommended short-, mid-, and long-term capital improvements to provide a cohesive, multimodal transportation system and support Downtown redevelopment initiatives.







### 6.1. PEDESTRIAN MALL REVITALIZATION

The pedestrian mall is currently owned and maintained primarily by the City of Helena through the Public Works and Parks departments. Past discussions have considered changing the mall to ownership of the BID. Changing ownership, however, may have implications on eligibility for future funding opportunities. For example, for many transportation-related funding programs, the primary applicant must be a governmental organization. Conversely, the BID may be eligible for different funding programs or discretionary grants that the City would otherwise be ineligible for. In regard to reconstruction efforts, the mall under private ownership may not be subject to the same rules and regulations that a public entity would. Regardless of any potential ownership changes, it is important to understand who is responsible for on-going management of the mall to ensure that it remains in proper working order for its entire useful life.

The BID has discussed the potential of preparing a Master Plan for redevelopment of the mall based on the recommendations in this plan, which include changing the City Code to allow bikes on the mall. During future planning efforts, some key considerations and guidelines for successfully revitalizing the mall include:

- If bicycles are allowed on the mall, calm bicycle traffic and improve pedestrian conditions so high-speed bicycle traffic does not dominate the space.
- The mall should be both a destination and a thoroughfare that connects diverse attractions such as shopping, housing, offices, and more. Encourage development that attracts a broad range of customers and clients including retail, housing, education, and employment.
- Develop a pleasant environment, with landscaping, shade, and public amenities. Building features and street furniture should be pedestrian scale and attractive. Maintain high standards for security, cleanliness, and physical maintenance.
- Design the mall to allow vehicles as required for emergency access, with potential restrictions based on need, time of day, and vehicle type. This may include transit vehicles, resident and hotel pickup, service and emergency vehicles, or other appropriate categories.
- Ensure the area has good access to public transit, parking, and adjacent pedestrian facilities. Slow vehicle traffic on cross streets.
- Develop a variety of artistic, cultural and recreational amenities (statues, fountains, playgrounds) and activities (concerts, fairs, markets). Highlight historical features.



Source: RealImaginaryLife  
The Denver 16th Street Mall provides multimodal access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. Motor vehicles are prohibited from the mall.

### 6.2. WAYFINDING AND BRANDING

Wayfinding refers to information systems that guide people through a physical environment and enhance their understanding and experience of the space. Wayfinding is particularly important in complex and high stress built environments, such as transportation facilities, and can be developed for all user types including pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists, who each have unique challenges navigating roadway corridors. Comprehensive wayfinding systems often combine signage, maps, symbols, colors, and other communication techniques to help guide visitors to their destinations and reduce confusion.

In 2017, Lewis and Clark County completed the *Greater Helena Area Active Living Wayfinding System*<sup>27</sup> which provides a uniform and consistent wayfinding system to help users navigate and access the community's parks, connecting trails, daily services, cultural destinations, and healthy living sources. The Active Living Wayfinding System includes standardized sign design styles, accessible alternative formats and supporting materials to be used by the City of Helena, Lewis and Clark County, and East Helena to create a well-defined and cohesive system of wayfinding signage.

During recent implementation efforts, the City of Helena found that some elements in the wayfinding system were cost-prohibitive. Further implementation efforts have not been completed due to lack of funding. Since the City of Helena does not have its own sign fabrication shop, it can be much more expensive to erect new signs using a fabricator and/or contractor. However, it could be more cost-effective to install a large grouping of signs in phases to gain efficiencies in standardization and reduce overall production costs.

Implementing a cohesive wayfinding system would help build awareness of travel routes and destinations for community members and visitors. The wayfinding system would help all users, regardless of transportation mode, efficiently and safely navigate the area. Coordinating wayfinding with areas outside the BID would also help boost visitation to parts of the community other than a user's originally intended destination. Providing average travel times or distances between destinations may also help encourage residents and visitors to navigate Helena using alternative transportation modes. For example, knowing that the distance between the State Capitol and the Downtown pedestrian is less than one mile, or about 18 minutes walking, visitors may be more inclined to walk or bike between destinations rather than driving a vehicle.



Source: Greater Helena Area Active Living Wayfinding System  
Directional signs clarify safe and expeditious routes for users. Signs typically consist of a system brand mark, space for up to three destinations, and distance in miles and/or time.

While the Active Living Wayfinding System is well defined for the existing infrastructure in Helena, it is recommended that the system be expanded to include new multimodal facilities as recommended in the multimodal street network. Furthermore, branding the Gulch Trail through the BID could help with awareness of the bicycle route and promote increased use. Branding can be achieved through signage incorporated in the existing wayfinding system, marketing, campaigns, and physical infrastructure. Two examples of such branding include the Indianapolis Cultural Trail and the River North (RiNo) BID Bike Lanes.



The Indianapolis Cultural Trail is an 8-mile urban bike and pedestrian path in downtown Indianapolis, Indiana, managed by non-profit organization, Indianapolis Cultural Trail Inc (ICT Inc). The trail was constructed within city right-of-way using private donations and federal transportation grants. The trail provides an opportunity for pedestrians and bicyclists to seamlessly navigate between neighborhoods, cultural districts and entertainment amenities. Branding for the trail includes the ICT logo, rules of the trail guide signs, textured materials to designate the trail, and various paint or inlays to designate routes.

The RiNo Bike Lanes are a low-cost example of branding for a bike route. During a reconstruction project, the RiNo BID funded the project to brand the bike lanes in important bike corridors using custom imagery of a rhinoceros riding a bike. Other communities in the Denver Metro area are beginning to consider their own custom bike lane artwork to distinguish areas of the community such as neighborhoods, entertainment districts, and more.



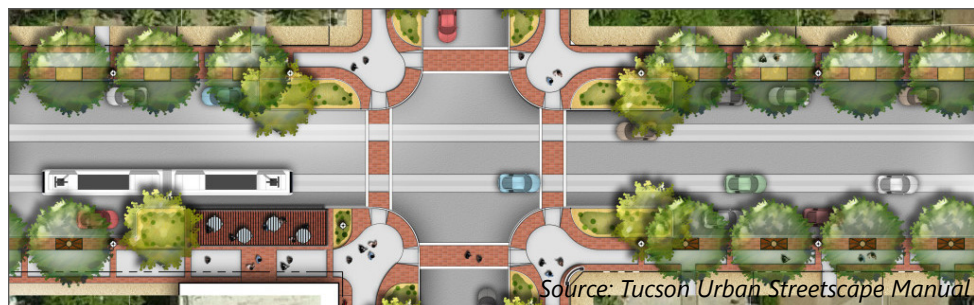


### 6.3. STREETSCAPING

The term streetscaping typically refers to programs or standards aimed at improving the urban roadway design and conditions for users. Streetscaping recognizes that streets are places where people engage in various activities, including but not limited to vehicle travel.<sup>28</sup> Streetscapes are important components of a community's aesthetics, identity, economic activity, health, social cohesion, and opportunity. Streetscaping programs and standards typically include changes to the roadway cross section, modifications to traffic management, sidewalk enhancements, landscaping, street furniture (bike racks, benches, garbage cans), and building frontages. Typically, streetscaping standards recognize that roadways often serve diverse functions including through travel, recreation, socializing, and vending which all must be considered and balanced in street design and management. When executed properly, streetscape can have a significant effect on how people perceive and interact with their community. For example, if streetscapes are safe and inviting to pedestrians, people are more likely to walk between destinations which can help reduce vehicle traffic, improve public health, stimulate local economic activity, and attract visitors.

Streetscaping is often implemented as part of urban redevelopment efforts, road diets, and traffic calming projects which may be initiated by local jurisdictions, community groups, or private developers. Implementation may involve published guidelines, standards, or policy reforms supporting streetscaping. Projects may be implemented on a single block, along a street, or for an entire district and can often be integrated as part of other roadway maintenance or construction projects. Some streetscaping can be implemented with pedestrian facility improvements or as part of special programs, such as a parks program to plant trees along a roadway. When evaluating potential streetscape improvements, it may be beneficial to develop goals, strategies, and performance indicators to understand impacts to travel and safety, equity, benefits compared to costs, and adjacent property impacts. As with any public infrastructure project, it is important to not only consider capital costs for implementation, but also on-going costs for maintenance and upkeep.

When paired with an ambitious long-term vision of multimodal improvements as described in this plan, streetscape design standards and guidelines can be helpful in ensuring cohesion over the life cycle of implementation. Balancing flexibility with consistency in such standards and guidelines aids in the resiliency of streetscaping program. The standards should focus more on consistent palettes and level of finishes rather than specifying exact treatments, which will allow flexibility to respond to and incorporate advancements in transportation



including emerging technologies and climate responsiveness. It is also helpful to develop a set of guidelines whose applicability and level of detail is more nuanced than citywide standards, especially for a defined area such as the BID. The nuance both signals a heightened emphasis on the quality of the public realm in the defined area, but can also help guide partners in ways that enable them to assist with implementation or advocate to supplement the City's work and help overcome any capacity or financial constraints.

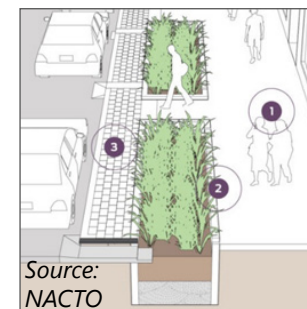
### 6.4. GREEN STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Incorporating green stormwater practices in urban streetscapes can help improve the water quality of downstream lakes and streams while also mitigating flooding concerns. Green stormwater practices should be considered during the early stages of concept development to ensure proper implementation. Survey and geotechnical investigation may be required to properly design green stormwater features.

A summary of green stormwater best practices that could be incorporated in future development within the BID is provided below. Additional guidance for selection and design of green stormwater practices is provided in the NACTO *Urban Street Stormwater Guide*.<sup>29</sup> When determining which green stormwater practices to use, the following criteria should be considered:

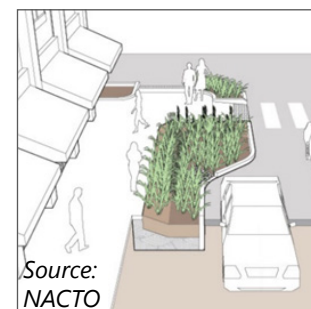
- **Subsurface Soils** – The infiltration rate and presence of expansive soils will dictate whether the feature will need to be lined, under drained, or free draining.
- **Slope of the Street** – Steeper streets typically require special detailing. Green stormwater features should be located in flatter areas when possible.
- **Upstream Run-on Area** – The size and characteristics of run-off (such as the presence of pollutants or sediment) will dictate the size and pre-treatment requirements of the feature.

#### GREEN STORMWATER BEST PRACTICES



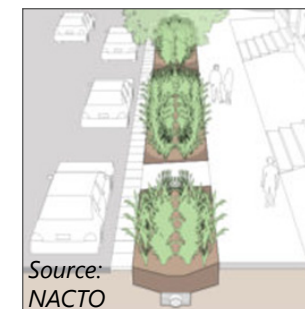
##### BIORETENTION PLANTER

- Can be used along a street, as shown, or at curb extensions, floating planter islands, or medians.
- Requires infiltration.



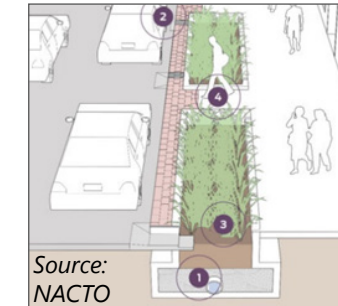
##### HYBRID BIORETENTION PLANTER

- Can be used along a street, as shown, or at curb extensions, floating planter islands, or medians.



##### BIORETENTION SWALE

- Can be used along a street, as shown, or at curb extensions, floating planter islands, or medians.
- Appropriate for neighborhoods, where space allows.



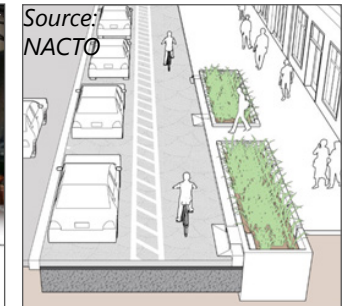
##### BIOFILTRATION PLANTER

- Can be used along a street, as shown, or at curb extensions, floating planter islands, or medians.
- Appropriate for ultra-urban locations where space is highly limited.
- Does not require infiltration.



##### STORMWATER TREE

- Most efficient when coupled with suspended pavement systems that provide tree soil volume. Useful in plazas or other locations with limited vegetation.



##### PERMEABLE PAVEMENT

- Can be used in the roadway, parking lanes, furnishing zones, and sidewalks.
- Special considerations if used in traveled way of non-residential streets.
- Typically requires infiltration.

### 6.5. WASTE MANAGEMENT

In 2021, the Helena City Commission adopted Resolution 20643, which established a goal for the City to reduce solid waste disposal to landfills by 50% by 2040, with an interim target of 35% reduction by 2030.<sup>30</sup> This resolution led to the development of a *Strategic Plan for Waste Reduction*<sup>31</sup> outlining the City's current policies, programs, infrastructure, and management of waste with specific focus placed on diversion of waste through recycling and compost.

When the BID Trustees were approached for input on the Strategic Plan, the Trustees proposed the idea of the BID becoming an independent solid waste district that could contract waste and recycling services on behalf of the entire district. Currently, waste collection within the BID is provided by either the City of Helena Solid Waste Division or Tri County Disposal.

The Solid Waste Division operates the city's Solid Waste Transfer Station and provides both residential and commercial waste collection for the City. Residential waste is collected once weekly while commercial waste can be collected up to 6 times per week depending on the contracted service.







Tri County Disposal provides residential and commercial trash pickup in Broadwater, Lewis and Clark, and Jefferson Counties. Commercial services are offered within a 35-mile radius by roadway from the city limits of Helena. Residential service is not available within the city limits of Helena or East Helena as these residences are served by local providers. Commercial businesses within city limits can choose to have trash collected up to 5 days per week.

### 6.5.1. Ongoing Waste Management Concerns

Since both the City and Tri County offer commercial collection services multiple times per week, trash trucks are often seen driving around the BID to collect waste which can be a nuisance to Downtown users. When businesses have separate collection days for trash, recycling, and/or compost, this adds to the frequency and number of collection trips. During collection, business owners have observed trucks pushing bins around or placing them haphazardly after dumping. This can cause a hazard to the public when placed within pedestrian areas or other travel ways. In general, dumpsters and other waste bins are also seen as unsightly or as eye sores that detract from the beauty of Downtown.

It has been noted that some businesses pay for less frequent waste collection or smaller sized dumpsters which often leads to overflowing receptacles. When their personal receptacles are full, some users dump their waste in other bins which is unfair to the property owners who pay for larger bins or more frequent service. Since most businesses have bins and the Downtown is physically constrained, there is limited space for additional or larger receptacles.

### 6.5.2. Waste Management Strategies

If the BID were to proceed with establishment of a separate waste district, the BID could contract either the City of Helena or Tri County Disposal to collect all waste within the district on a regular schedule. Ideally, the selected provider would also collect recycling and compost to streamline collection. This service would be paid via BID property owner taxes and would allow the BID to have more control over collection services and frequency. Access and use of receptacles would be fair since all property owners would be assessed for the service and bins would be owned by the BID rather than individuals.



Source: The Darango Herald

Different sized bins could be strategically placed within the BID as space allows and as needed to serve nearby businesses and/or residences. To reduce haphazard placement of bins after collection, dumpster enclosures could be considered. A generous number of recycling bins should also be provided to encourage diversion and help reduce waste in support of City goals. To make the bins more appealing visually, a consistent bin

style could be pursued. Bins could be branded or beautified through public art similar to the Dumpster Beautification Project.<sup>32</sup>

## 6.6. ADA STANDARDS

The City of Helena is responsible for maintaining pedestrian accessibility on public rights-of-ways across the city. It has been a priority for the City to improve accessibility for all pedestrians by requiring the installation of sidewalks with new construction and major subdivisions and, when needed, ordering the repair of existing sidewalks. Over the last several years, the City has implemented several programs and developed funding mechanisms to address system needs and ensure facilities meet current ADA design standards and guidelines.

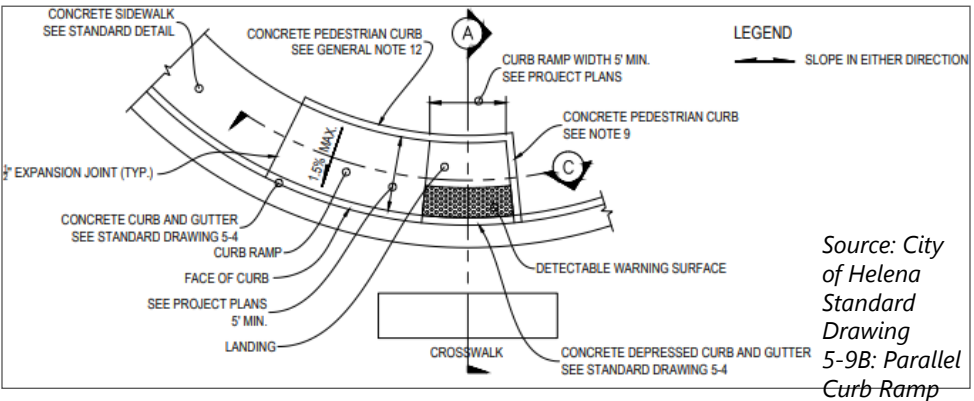
### 6.6.1. City Standards and Regulations

Standards and regulations for construction of accessible pedestrian facilities is discussed in Section 5.2.2. of the *Draft 2022 Helena Engineering and Design Standards* and Title 7 Chapter 4 of the *Helena City Code*.<sup>33</sup>

The standards state that all sidewalks, sidewalk crossings, pedestrian ramps, or other pedestrian facilities in the rights-of-way should be constructed in accordance with the current edition of *Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG)*. All pedestrian ramps must also be compliant with both ADA and PROWAG including installation of PROWAG-compliant detectable warning devices. Standard drawings of sidewalks and ADA curb ramps are provided in Appendix C of the Design Standards (5-5B through 5-10B).

Provision 7-4-3 of the City Code specifies that construction of new sidewalks must be completed under the supervision and to the acceptance of the city engineer or inspector. Furthermore, whenever a sidewalk, curb, or gutter is deteriorated, uneven, or otherwise unsafe for public travel, the city engineer may require the adjacent property owner to repair the damaged sections at the expense of the property owner.

Title II of ADA requires that state and local governments ensure that whenever streets, roadways, or highways are altered to provide curb ramps where street level pedestrian walkways cross curbs. Alterations of streets, roads, or highways include activities such as reconstruction, rehabilitation, resurfacing, widening, and projects of similar scale and effect. Maintenance activities are not considered alternations. It is typically City of Helena practice to complete ramp upgrades along a corridor in the year prior to a planned resurfacing project. Otherwise, curb ramp upgrades are completed concurrent with other qualified reconstruction projects.



Source: City of Helena Standard Drawing 5-9B: Parallel Curb Ramp

### 6.6.2. Past Implementation Efforts

As part of development of the *City of Helena ADA Transition Plan* in 2011, the City completed an inventory of the curb ramps on all streets in the city. The inventory indicates whether there were any existing curb ramps, and whether existing curb ramps met the ADA design standards for slope, lip, ramp width, and landing area. The information in the inventory was used to identify priority routes for funding giving priority to ramps close to government facilities, on streets with higher traffic volumes, on streets located along emergency snow routes, on streets with public transit service, and on streets with pedestrian attractors like schools, parks, and shopping. One of the five priority routes identified was generally described as the Downtown area bounded by Park Avenue, Cruse Avenue, and Neill Avenue.

In 2011, the City completed accessibility improvements to pedestrian mall crossing at the Last Chance Gulch and Broadway intersection. In 2013, the City secured a \$600,000 grant from MDT to repair or replace 48 curb ramps in portions of the Downtown area. Construction on these ramps was initiated by MDT in the fall of 2015. The City also initiated the Volunteer Sidewalk Replacement Program to help property owners add sidewalks where they are missing or replace old and damaged sidewalks. Through the program, the City offers a 0 percent, 10-year loan repaid through the property owner's annual tax bill then consolidates all of the projects into one bid to reduce overall installation costs.

With the exception of future grant funding opportunities, the City typically dedicates approximately \$50,000 per year specifically for curb ramp improvements and sets aside another \$25,000 for curb ramp improvements completed in conjunction with other street improvement projects. These funds are used for projects across the city based on need and priority.



Source: City of Helena, ADA Funding Priorities (2011)



### 6.6.3. Future Sidewalk and ADA Improvements

As discussed previously in **Section 4.1.3**, when adjacent property owners complete repairs on the sidewalks adjacent to their property, owners are free to choose their own contractor. During implementation, new sidewalks are generally constructed to meet minimum ADA requirements and other standards, but can sometimes vary from sidewalks on adjacent properties. To remedy this issue, the City could consider implementing a sidewalk program in the Downtown with the goal of systematically replacing or upgrading sidewalks to a uniform standard and design. This type of program is typically best funded through a Special Improvement District (SID) where property owners pay an additional assessment to fund improvements. To gain a good understanding of which sidewalks need to be repaired or replaced, a comprehensive sidewalk inventory and assessment should be performed either by City staff or a contracted service. After the inventory, a process for upgrading sidewalks, such as block by block or in order of condition, can be determined and executed. The City has previously discussed such ideas and plans to conduct a sidewalk summit with the Commission to work toward addressing this issue.

Note that an ongoing issue in the Downtown regarding sidewalk replacement is the existence of vaults below sidewalks that were historically used for access to underground building space. Some property owners know the location of vaults within their property, while others may be unaware of a vault on their property. City building inspectors have found that some vaults have been retrofitted to contain fire suppression systems for modern day buildings. The existence of vaults adds an extra layer of complexity that must be considered during sidewalk design and construction.

## 6.7. PARKING MANAGEMENT

Parking availability has long been a topic of discussion within Downtown Helena. While there is generally an adequate amount of parking available during a typical day, events and other surges in visitation can reduce the supply. Although the supply is considered adequate based on typical activity, some residents and visitors become frustrated when there is no parking available in front of or directly near their intended Downtown destination. **Figure 5** shown previously notes the locations and fee requirements for existing parking Downtown.

When implementing the long-term multimodal network, some reduction of on-street parking will be necessary. Potential increased use of parklets Downtown may also convert some stalls into non-parking uses. Reductions in on-street parking may be frustrating among business owners and community members who feel there is already a lack of adequate parking. The following sections describe requirements for the provision of parking and some strategies to help manage the limited supply to serve the needs of Downtown users.

### 6.7.1. Parking Standards, Requirements, and Other Guidance

The following sections describe local, state, and federal requirements regarding the provision of adequate parking for all users. Provided parking Downtown consists of both on-street and off-street surface lots or garages as discussed previously in **Section 4.1.2**.



The code requires that accessible parking spaces are provided, located, designed, and signed according to ADA and regulations and accessibility guidelines promulgated by the US Department of Justice. Off-street ADA stalls must be at least 9 feet wide and 20 feet long. Pedestrian pathways must be located through parking areas to provide the shortest feasible connection from the parking area to building entryways, public sidewalks, and transit stops.

Additionally, parking lots with 10 or more parking spaces must provide 3 bicycle spaces within 50 feet of a main building entryway. Parking lots with 50 or more parking spaces must provide additional secure bicycle parking equal to 5 percent of the total number of parking spaces in excess of 10.

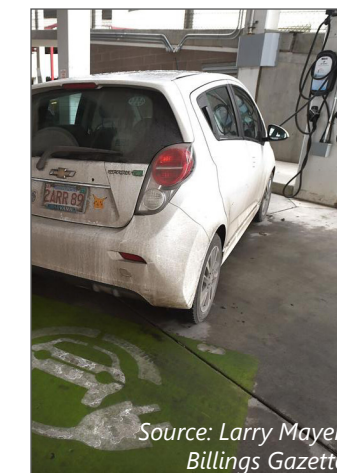


Section R214 of PROWAG states that, "Where on-street parking is provided on the block perimeter and the parking is marked or metered, a minimum number of parking spaces must be accessible and comply with the technical requirements for parking spaces in Chapter R3. For every 25 parking spaces on the block perimeter up to 100 spaces, one parking space must be accessible. For every additional 50 parking spaces on the block perimeter between 101 and 200 spaces, an additional parking space must be accessible. Where more than 200 parking spaces are provided on the block perimeter, 4 percent of the parking spaces must be accessible."

### Off-Street Parking

Off-street parking requirements for the City of Helena are discussed in Title 11 Chapter 22 of the City Code. The requirements were developed with the intent to provide a reasonable amount of parking for development while lessening hazardous conditions on streets and encouraging increased pedestrian and bicycle trips between destinations. The minimum number of off-street parking spaces required by each development varies by land use, with special requirements for Downtown properties which are covered in Title 11 Chapter 9.

The technical design requirements of on-street ADA parking stalls hinge on the width of the sidewalk adjoining the stall. Where the width of the adjacent sidewalk or available right-of-way exceeds 14 feet, an access aisle at least 5 feet wide must be provided at street level the full length of the parking space and it must connect to a pedestrian access route. The access aisle cannot encroach on the vehicular travel lane. An access aisle is not required where the width of the adjacent sidewalk or the available right-of-way is less than or equal to 14 feet. When an access aisle is not provided, the parking spaces should be located at the end of the block face.



### Electric Vehicle Parking

Available data suggests that the City of Helena currently has 18 public electric vehicle charging stations, approximately 55 percent are Level 2 stations and 45 percent are Level 3. Half of the stations are free to the public.<sup>35</sup> The stations are all located at private businesses outside the BID. The City plans to install additional four stations at the Bill Roberts Golf Course. During on-going planning and implementation efforts, the City has encountered challenges with supplying adequate electricity for additional charging stations Downtown, especially in the parking garages.

In terms of accessibility design, ADA Standards do not include specific provisions for electric vehicle charging stations. However, it is advisable to address access to charging stations so that they are usable by people with disabilities. Guidance states that if provided, accessible spaces at electric vehicle charging stations cannot count toward the minimum number of accessible parking spaces required in a parking facility. It is advisable to design an electric vehicle space to be at least 10 to 13 feet wide with 3-foot aisles on either side to provide flexibility and accessibility.

### 6.7.2. Management Strategies

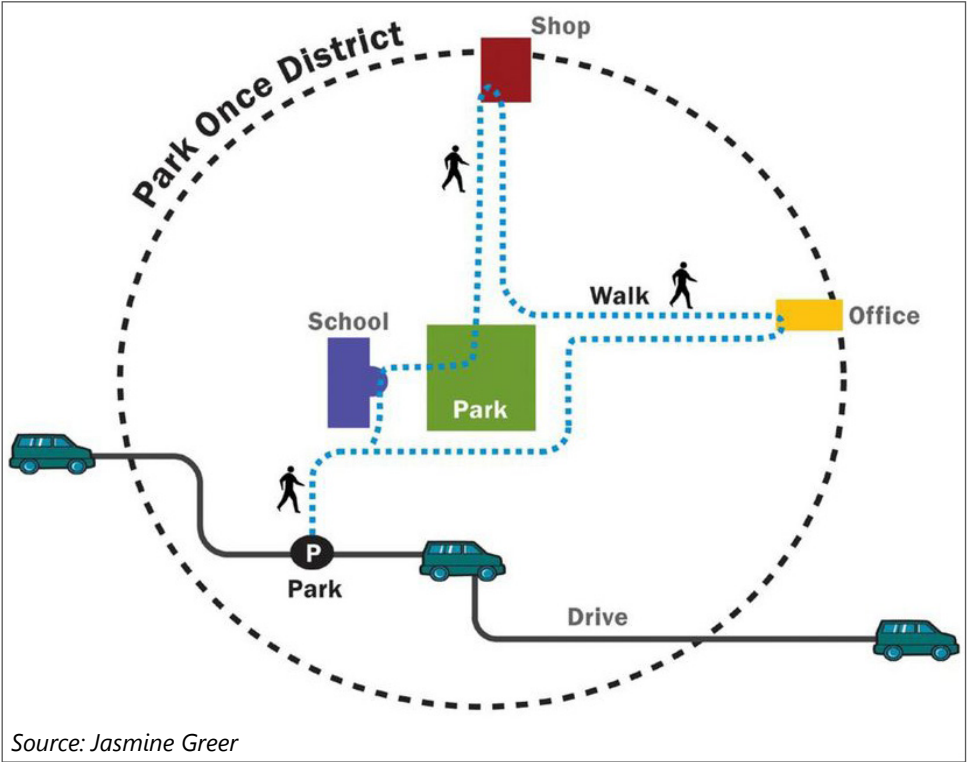
The auto-centric culture and car-dependent built environment in the US have historically contributed to the perception of the American desire for a large, free, and easy to access supply of on-street parking. This desire has kept the demand for on-street parking high in many communities, including Helena. Discussions about re-allocating parking space to bicycling or other purposes can be challenging due to these long standing desires, historic availability of parking, and challenges of winter maintenance. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) *On-Street Motor Vehicle Parking and the Bikeway Selection Process*<sup>36</sup> provides helpful information to guide and inform discussions about the tradeoffs between on-street parking and bicycle facilities. When installing bicycle facilities, removal of on-street parking may be required and reallocating lost parking to adjacent streets, surface lots, or structured parking is sometimes not achievable. Instead, it may be beneficial to implement parking management strategies to more effectively match parking demand to parking availability. Many parking management strategies have been implemented nationwide. The following strategies are considered reasonable to implement within the BID.





**Parking Wayfinding and Information**

A simple way to manage parking in the BID is to create signs, brochures, and other informative materials indicating parking availability, pricing, distances from key destinations, and other pertinent information. The focus of the content should be on promoting “park once, then walk” behaviors. For example, it may be beneficial to compare the distance of the walk from the back of the Costco parking to the back of Costco to the distance from the Great Northern to the pedestrian mall. Putting distances like this into perspective helps reduce misconceptions and may help change parking behaviors. Improved signage indicating the location and availability of parking in surface lots and parking garages could also be beneficial to increase use of these facilities.



Source: Jasmine Greer



**Multimodal Access**

Providing improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities throughout the BID, such as those recommended in the multimodal networks in **Chapter 5**, will help increase the walkability and bikeability of the BID, lessening the need to drive between destinations. This can help distribute traffic across the BID by encouraging visitors to park at a less congested location and walk or bike to their desired location. Similarly, this infrastructure may promote increased transit use by offering an easy way to access several destinations from a singular access point. Building out a comprehensive multimodal network is also expected to encourage visitors to

spend more time Downtown, allowing them to explore more destinations more easily. Better facilities, a more inviting walking space, and improved wayfinding may also help lessen frustration for visitors who have to park further from their destination.

In addition to building out the recommended multimodal network, bike parking should be provided in high use locations to encourage Downtown visitors to make their trips by bicycle rather than a vehicle. Converting more trips to non-motorized uses helps lessen the demand for on-street parking spaces. Bicycles also require less space than vehicles; on average, a bike corral can accommodate up to 10 bicycles in the space of one vehicle parking stall.



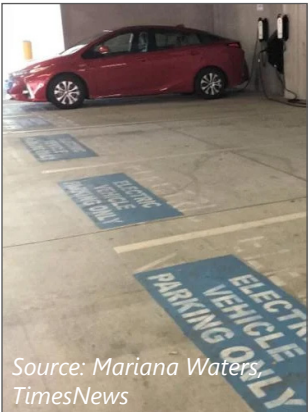
Source: City of Helena

**On-Street Metering and Parking Restrictions**

The City of Helena recently installed new on-street parking meters and overhauled the metering system. In locations where parking has to be removed to accommodate future bicycle facilities, additional changes to the metering system could be implemented. For example, limiting parking time in a single location

can help encourage short-term parking and optimize turnover of spaces for priority users. To ensure that on-street parking is available for ADA users or delivery vehicles, designated ADA and loading/unloading stalls can be installed periodically on Downtown streets using paint and signage. These stalls could be metered or not. The City currently has several on-street ADA and loading stalls within the Downtown. Loading zone permits can be purchased through the City. ADA stalls are subject to the applicable fees of the parking zone.

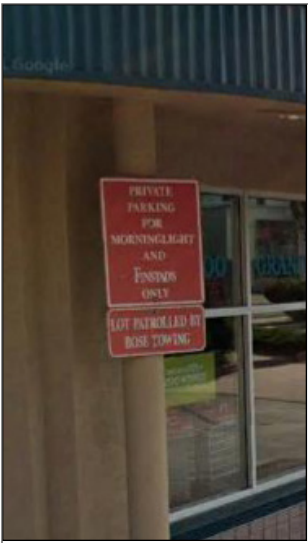
Meter pricing could also be adjusted to reflect market demand. For example, the City could charge less for parking in lots and garages compared to parking on-street to help distribute parking. Other cities implement variable pricing during peak activity hours in high use locations, such as at night in entertainment districts. This strategy is already in use in Helena at many Downtown parking garages where the first hour of parking is free and for pay to park on-street parking where the fees vary based on use and demand.



Source: Mariana Waters TimesNews

**Electric Vehicle Charging Stations**

Providing an increased number of electric vehicle charging stations within parking garages in the BID can help promote use of off-street parking, boost visitation, and encourage environmentally friendly travel practices. Providing charging stations Downtown can help encourage visitors to park and charge their vehicles while they shop, dine, and tour Downtown Helena. The charging stalls can also be a source of income the City or BID which can be used for maintenance and implementation of additional charging stations in the future.



**Shared Parking**

The shared parking management strategy involves encouraging businesses with exclusive parking lots on their property to share with adjacent businesses (possibly for a fee), allow parking outside of business hours, or offer a paid parking option during events. Many of the privately owned parking lots Downtown are reserved for the exclusive use of patrons of the business occupying the lots. These lots are often underutilized, especially outside of business hours. Offering shared parking can help alleviate parking strain Downtown while also providing a potential source of income for property owners. An incentive program offered by the City or BID may help encourage greater buy-in by Downtown businesses and property owners.

**Preferential Parking**

To reduce parking demand, the City could introduce preferential parking for high occupancy vehicles (HOV). By designating preferred parking spots, either on-street or off-street, as HOV only may help encourage greater use of carpools and vanpools and reduce the number of parking spaces needed to accommodate the same number of passengers in single occupancy vehicles. Enforcement of this type of management strategy can be difficult on a daily basis without advanced technologies. However, this type of management strategy may be well suited for parking during events, when humans may be monitoring parking.

**6.8. OWNERSHIP AND MAINTENANCE RESPONSIBILITY**

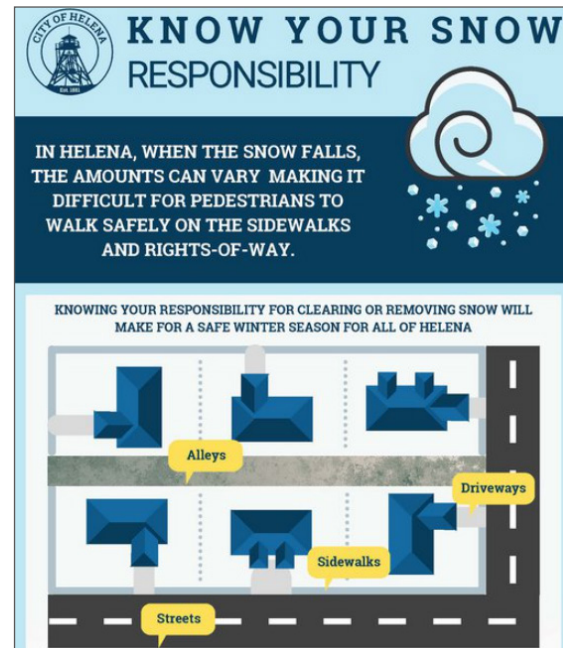
Projects within the BID may be implemented by a variety of different entities including the BID, several different City of Helena departments, MDT, developers, and property owners. Whether it be streets, bicycle facilities, sidewalks, street furniture, parkland, irrigation, or electrical outlets, it is important to have a clear understanding of who will own and maintain the facility after construction, how often maintenance activities are completed, and how maintenance activities will be funded. Oftentimes the implementing agency assumes ownership and maintenance responsibility post construction, however, this is not always the case. For example, a private developer may be required to install a traffic signal at an intersection as a result of anticipated impacts from a development, but the City will assume ownership and responsibility of future signal maintenance after construction. If roles are not clearly defined, maintenance activities are often overlooked and new facilities risk deteriorating to a point beyond repair.

To ensure projects are implemented in the same or similar fashion, it is important to define specific standards for implementing agencies to follow. It is also important for the future owner to be involved in design and oversee implementation to the greatest extent practicable. For example, the City requires that property owners maintain, repair, and replace the sidewalks within



their respective lots and provides specific design standards to help ensure that property owners design their sidewalks in a way that is consistent with adjacent properties' sidewalks. The City also specifies that a City engineering representative should be present to ensure facilities are constructed according to approved designs.

Owners should also develop a consistent approach to maintenance and clearly define how future maintenance activities will be funded. To help ensure the proper maintenance is funded and performed, a maintenance plan is recommended. Developing and executing a maintenance plan will help ensure that all facilities are maintained to a consistent standard. This is beneficial for the end user and helps promote longevity of projects.



Source: City of Helena; In Helena, adjacent property owners are responsible for sidewalk snow removal.

## 6.9. WINTER BIKE FACILITY MAINTENANCE

When the City plows Downtown Streets, the plow trucks typically leave a large berm of snow adjacent to the curb, commonly in the parking lane. It is City policy to remove cleared snow piles from all Downtown streets when there is adequate accumulation. Generally, a single storm does not accumulate enough snow to meet the threshold, so off-site snow removal is typically performed periodically throughout the winter. Special focus is sometimes needed in areas with extra shadowing from adjacent buildings which may prevent snow from melting naturally via sun exposure.

These snow plowing practices are pertinent especially when considering winter maintenance of bicycle facilities. It is desirable to ensure that on-street bicycle facilities are clear of snow to ensure bicyclists can safely travel during the winter. Best practices for snow removal typically include a combination of proactive and reactive deicing in conjunction with scheduled snow removal. One of the best ways to facilitate the removal of snow from bikeways is through proactive and thoughtful roadway design by ensuring there is enough right-of-way to accommodate snow storage.<sup>37</sup>

It is typically recommended that roadways with bike lanes provide enough right-of-way for preferably a 6-foot bike lane and a minimum 5-foot storage space for snow. This allows snow to be piled in the buffer space instead of the bike lane. The buffer may be located between the travel lane and the bike lane, or between the bike lane and the edge of the roadway/sidewalk, depending on the roadway

configuration. Providing a 6-foot bike lane also allows for some encroachment of snow in the bike lane while still maintaining functionality. Where there is not enough space to provide a buffer area, the City could consider restricting on-street parking during snow events to allow snow to be piled in parking lanes, rather than bike lanes. While this isn't an option for all roadways, it could be utilized along priority bicycle routes in the winter.

Another solution could be providing bicycle facilities that are wide enough to accommodate small snow removal vehicles, such as ATVs mounted with snowplows. These types of vehicles are typically used in cities to clear sidewalks but are also useful in areas too constrained for pickup truck-mounted snowplows such as protected cycle tracks or separated shared use paths. However, in many communities, sidewalk snow removal is contracted out, so the city often does not own these specialized vehicles.

Using de-icing materials can also help with winter maintenance to help improve safety for bicyclists. The most effective strategy is to apply a proactive anti-icing approach where the de-icing material is applied approximately two hours before a snow event. Following the snowfall, the roadway is cleared, and additional de-icing material is added as necessary. The proactive approach typically requires less de-icing material and less plowing. A reactive approach, on the other hand, applies de-icing material to the roadway surface after snow or ice has been plowed off the surface. This method helps break the bond between the ice and the roadway but is less effective overall. Various de-icing materials are used across the US including rock salt, salt brine, pre-wetted salt, beet juice, sand, and gravel. In the spring, roadway grit and leftover de-icing materials should be swept and removed from bike lanes.

For most jurisdictions, keeping all bikeways completely clear during or immediately after a heavy snow event is infeasible. It is best practice to clear primary bikeways first, prioritizing bikeways that serve the greatest number of people possible following a heavy storm event. When prioritizing bikeways, there are many factors to consider including bike and vehicle volumes, directness of routes, and connectivity between high-use origins and destinations. For example, primary routes leading from residential areas to schools and business districts should be cleared first.



Source: City of Minneapolis





# DOWNTOWN HELENA

## MULTIMODAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN





# CHAPTER 7: CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Helena City Commission has identified redevelopment of the Downtown as a priority and supports efforts to improve existing infrastructure, revitalize and redevelop Downtown, and promote a unified, inclusive, and connected Downtown environment. Accordingly, the BID and City of Helena have coordinated efforts to identify capital improvement recommendations to support redevelopment opportunities and improve multimodal connections across the Downtown.

Capital improvement projects are one-time projects that are needed to improve the condition, capacity, or functionality of existing infrastructure, or provide a new facility. This chapter provides a summary of recommended capital improvements for implementation in Downtown Helena. These projects were identified through review of past planning documents and studies (see **Section 1.3**), deficiencies and areas of potential identified in previous sections, and through coordination with the City and BID. The recommended improvements are intended to build upon past planning efforts to create a cohesive vision for Downtown Helena.

Together, the recommended projects identified in this chapter make up the Downtown Capital Improvements Plan (DCIP). The DCIP is intended to be a long-range planning document which identifies capital improvement projects and provides preliminary plan for implementation including identification of lead and partner agencies, potential sources of funding, cost estimates, implementation considerations, and an estimated timeframe for completion of the project. **Appendix D** contains the full DCIP with more detailed information about the recommended capital improvement projects presented in this chapter.

Recommended improvements can be developed as stand-alone projects, or, in some cases, combined as larger projects as appropriate. Cost savings and efficiencies may be gained by concurrently implementing multiple improvements within a corridor. If improvements are advanced for implementation, coordination with other entities, consideration of long-term maintenance needs, detailed analysis of impacts, and identification of applicable permits, laws, and regulations may be necessary. Information contained in the *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* may be used to support future project development.







7.1. RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

The following sections outline the improvements recommended for implementation in Downtown Helena over the next several years. The identified projects are sorted into three categories, Downtown Revitalization, Transportation, and Utilities, based on the scope and purpose of the improvements. Additional implementation details such as lead implementation agency, timeframe, cost, and potential sources of funding are also provided.

Lead Agency

Successful implementation of improvements may require cooperation from multiple entities such as the BID, City of Helena, URD, MDT, or stakeholder groups. The primary implementation agency for identified projects will likely be the City of Helena or the BID with support from other agencies. The lead agency listed is the most likely entity to initiate planning, design, and implementation of the project. This may also include being the primary financial sponsor of the project or leading the effort to secure funding from other discretionary sources, but does not commit the agency to any financial obligations. For City led projects, the recommendations from the DCIP will need to be included in the City’s funding prioritization process and included in the city-wide CIP.

Implementation Timeframe

Recommended projects were sorted into short-, mid-, and long-term timeframes as described below. Projects that are already committed for implementation and general tasks that should be completed on an annual basis are also included. Recommended implementation timeframes were selected based on the timeframes listed in previous documents, consideration of urgency, functionality, and community benefit, as well as acknowledgment of potential funding constraints. Some projects may be implemented faster or slower than indicated depending on available funding. A formal scoring and evaluation process was not conducted, and the implementation timeframes, described below, do not reflect a commitment to develop the projects.

- **Committed:** Project that already have a funding source identified and will be implemented in the next year
- **Annual:** Set aside for projects that should be completed on a regular, on-going basis, or as needs arise
- **Short-Term:** High priority projects that may be funded within 1 to 5 years
- **Mid-Term:** Medium priority projects that may not be able to be funded yet, but should be prioritized for future funding within 6 to 10 years
- **Long-Term:** Lower priority projects that should be completed over the next 11 to 20 years as funding becomes available

Total Cost

Planning-level cost estimates were developed for each improvement option. Cost estimates for large-scale improvements include construction, engineering, and a general contingency to account for unknown factors and anticipated project development risk level. Estimates do not include costs for right-of-way as additional design details may be needed. In some cases, a generalized unit cost is applied based on local or national comparisons due to unknown project

details at this phase of project development. Cost ranges are provided in some cases, indicating a range of options or other variables. The estimates are presented in 2022 dollars and can be expected to increase with inflation depending on the anticipated future year of expenditure.

Potential Funding Sources

Capital improvement projects may be eligible for funding through multiple local, state, and federal programs. Additionally, private funds may be available for certain projects. No funding has been identified or dedicated for any recommended improvements. Refer to **Section 7.4** for more information on potential funding opportunities.

7.1.1. Downtown Revitalization Improvements

The Downtown Revitalization improvements category includes projects aimed at beautifying Downtown streets, encouraging redevelopment activities, supporting Downtown businesses and community events, and making the Downtown more attractive and accessible to all users. Nine Downtown Revitalization improvements were identified, as shown in **Table 3**. It is envisioned that these improvements would primarily be lead and implemented by the BID with assistance from the City of Helena.



Table 3: Downtown Revitalization Improvements

ID #	Capital Improvement Project	Description	Lead Agency	Timeframe	Cost	Funding Source(s)
D-01	Cruse Avenue Streetscaping (Park Avenue to Lawrence Street)	Reconfigure and reconstruct Cruse Avenue according to the Downtown Renewal Vision for Cruse Avenue (incorporate streetscape improvements, add bike lanes, and provide sidewalks).	BID	Long-Term	\$2.9M	BID/TIF, City Funds, Private, Grants
D-02	Electric Vehicle Charging Stations	Install new electric vehicle charging stations within the downtown (electrical upgrades may be required).	BID	Mid-Term	\$100,000	BID/TIF, City Funds, Private, Grants
D-03	Gateways and Wayfinding	Invite visitors to explore Downtown with new gateways, banners, and wayfinding.	BID	Mid-Term	\$50,000	BID/TIF, Grants
D-04	Install Free Standing Public Restroom	Locate in a central area for use by shoppers, tourists, residents, bar/restaurant goers, families/children, pedestrians, homeless, and attendees at special events.	BID	Mid-Term	\$240,000	BID/TIF, City Funds, Private
D-05	Install Permanent Stage for Downtown Events	Install a permanent stage in the BID for use during special Downtown Events (Alive at 5, Art Walk, Other Events).	BID	Mid-Term	\$375,000	BID/TIF, Private, Grants
D-06	Last Chance Gulch Street Design (North of Neill Avenue)	Complete streetscape improvements to improve aesthetics, increase pedestrian appeal and usage, and provide an enhanced connection to the Downtown core.	BID	Long-Term	\$350,000 - \$1.2M	BID/TIF, City Funds, State/Federal, Grants
D-07	Last Chance Gulch Street Design (South of Neill Avenue)	Complete streetscape improvements to enhance pedestrian access and appeal, help reinforce a gateway entrance into the Downtown core and create a more uniform appearance and environment on Last Chance Gulch.	BID	Mid-Term	\$50,000 - \$150,000	BID/TIF, City Funds, Grants
D-08	Parking Garage	Construct a new parking garage either by redeveloping an existing surface lot or redeveloping underutilized property elsewhere. Alternatively, rebuild/retrofit an existing garage.	City of Helena	Long-Term	\$7.5M	City Funds, Private
D-09	Street Furniture Installation / Replacement	Annual set aside for installation of new street furniture or replacement of deficient items such as benches, bike racks, waste bins, public art, etc.	BID	Annual	\$5,000	BID/TIF, Grants, Private



### 7.1.2. Transportation Improvements

The Transportation improvements category includes projects relating to travel by vehicle, bicycle, or foot including multimodal facilities, intersection improvements, ADA accommodations, and parking. A total of 19 Transportation improvement projects were identified and would primarily be lead by the City of Helena. **Table 4** summarizes the recommended Transportation improvements.

**Table 4: Transportation Improvements**

ID #	Capital Improvement Project	Description	Lead Agency	Timeframe	Cost	Funding Source(s)
T-01	6th Avenue / Fuller Avenue - Enhanced Pedestrian Crossing	Install curb bulbouts and an RRFB at the 6th Avenue / Fuller Avenue intersection to improve safety and visibility of pedestrians.	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$53,000	City Funds, Grants
T-02	ADA Upgrades	Annual set aside for ADA upgrades on streets within the Downtown including ADA ramps and pedestrian signals.	City of Helena	Annual	\$20,000	BID/TIF, City Funds, TA, SID, Property Owners
T-03	Benton Avenue / Hauser Boulevard - Intersection Improvements	Install traffic signal at intersection and convert Hauser Boulevard between Benton Avenue and Kessler Street to two-way traffic.	City of Helena	Long-Term	\$440,000	City Funds
T-04	Bike Boulevards (Short-term Improvements)	Install additional signing and pavement markings to designate roadways as a bike boulevard as recommended in the short-term multimodal network ( <b>Figure 25</b> ).	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$100,000	BID/TIF, City Funds
T-05	Bike Lanes (Short-term Improvements)	Install additional signing and pavement markings for on-street bike lanes as recommended in the short-term multimodal network ( <b>Figure 25</b> ).	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$32,000	BID/TIF, City Funds
T-06	Bike Lanes (Long-term Improvements)	Install additional signing and pavement markings for on-street bike lanes as recommended in the long-term multimodal network ( <b>Figure 26</b> ).	City of Helena	Long-Term	\$270,000	BID/TIF, City Funds
T-07	Cruse Avenue / Broadway Street - Intersection Improvements	Remove slip lane and provide curb extension/bulbout over the previous extents of the slip lane to improve safety for non-motorists.	City of Helena	Mid-Term	\$34,000	City Funds
T-08	Cruse Avenue / Cutler Street - Intersection Improvements	Reconfigure intersection to reduce vehicle-pedestrian conflicts and improve sight distances.	City of Helena	Long-Term	\$120,000	City Funds
T-09	Downtown Sidewalk Improvements	Annual set aside for installation of new sidewalk where gaps exist, or repair/replacement of deficient sidewalks within the Downtown.	City of Helena	Annual	\$60,000	Property Owners, BID/TIF, City Funds, State/Federal, TA, SID
T-10	Great Northern Town Center Connectivity	Provide better delineation of the existing bike route along Carousel Way using additional signage and sharrows. Complete the connection of the trail to Front Street.	BID	Short-Term	\$20,000	BID/TIF, Private
T-11	Gulch Trail	Install a cycle track/SUP along roadways as identified in the long-term multimodal network ( <b>Figure 26</b> ) to provide a continuous north/south route from the Centennial Trail to Downtown.	City of Helena	Long-Term	\$2.3M	BID/TIF, City Funds, Grants
T-12	Last Chance Gulch / 6th Avenue - Signal Modification	Modify traffic signal to provide a leading pedestrian interval.	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$3,000	BID/TIF, City Funds
T-13	Last Chance Gulch / Lawrence Street - Intersection Improvements	Redesign the intersection of Last Chance Gulch and Lawrence Street including ADA upgrades and crosswalk improvements.	City of Helena	Committed	\$200,000	City Funds
T-14	Last Chance Gulch / Neill Avenue - Intersection Improvements	Remove traffic signal and install single-lane roundabout; close 11th Avenue spur; install stop control at Cruse Avenue/11th Avenue intersection.	City of Helena	Short- to Mid-Term	\$3.2M	BID/TIF, State/Federal, City Funds, Grants
T-15	Last Chance Gulch / Placer Avenue - Intersection Improvements	Install ADA compliant curb ramps, curb bulbouts, and colored crosswalks.	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$110,000	BID/TIF, City Funds, TA
T-16	Neill Avenue - Enhanced Pedestrian Crossings	Install an RRFB at the Neill Avenue / Fuller Avenue intersection to improve safety and visibility of pedestrians. Optionally, install a second RRFB at the Neill Avenue / Front Street intersection.	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$30,000	City Funds, Grants
T-17	Pedestrian Mall (Short-term Improvements)	Remove the restriction of bicycles on the pedestrian mall through city ordinance. Update and install signage throughout the mall that reflects these changes.	BID	Short-Term	\$15,000	BID/TIF, City Funds
T-18	Pedestrian Mall (Mid-term Improvements)	Install streetscaping improvements to beautify the mall and use paint to designate bicycle travel zones (i.e., bike lanes) on the mall.	BID	Mid-Term	\$600,000	BID/TIF, City Funds
T-19	Pedestrian Mall (Long-term Improvements)	Resurface and install streetscaping improvements to better define amenity, pedestrian, and bicycles zones.	BID	Long-Term	\$8.2M	BID/TIF, City Funds, Grants, Private







### 7.1.3. Utilities Improvements

The Utilities improvements category includes projects aimed at addressing capacity or condition concerns for electrical, water, stormwater, or wastewater systems within the BID. A total of 15 Utilities projects were identified and would be the responsibility of the City of Helena to implement. It is recommended that upgrades be performed in conjunction with roadway improvements or future development for cost-saving purposes. The Utilities improvements are summarized in **Table 5**.

**Table 5: Utilities Improvements**

ID #	Capital Improvement Project	Description	Lead Agency	Timeframe	Cost	Funding Source(s)
U-01	Electrical Outlet Inventory	Inventory electrical outlets within the Downtown for location and functionality.	City of Helena	Short-term	\$5,000	City Funds
U-02	Electrical Repairs and Upgrades	Annual set aside for electrical repairs/upgrades as needed.	City of Helena	Annual	\$10,000	BID/TIF, City Funds
U-03	Pedestrian Mall Electrical Repairs	Repair broken electrical outlets on the pedestrian mall.	City of Helena	Committed	\$9,120	City Funds
U-04	Irrigation Utility Inventory	Inventory existing irrigation utilities to help inform future project development decisions.	City of Helena	Short-term	\$7,500	City Funds
U-05	15th Street and 16th Street - Water Main Replacement	Install upsized connections on 15th Street and 16th Street between Front Street and Last Chance Gulch to achieve adequate fire flow capacity.	City of Helena	Long-Term	\$285,000	City Funds, Grants, Private
U-06	Improve Stormwater Retention / Treatment	Perform a study to identify potential areas for micro retention and treatment.	City of Helena	Long-Term	\$15,000	City Funds
U-07	Plumbing Upgrade Project Fund	Annual set aside for plumbing upgrade projects to help property owners address plumbing issues in Downtown buildings as they are discovered.	City of Helena	Annual	\$5,000	BID/TIF, Private
U-08	Replace Aging Sanitary Sewer Infrastructure	Annual set aside to improve aging sanitary sewer infrastructure through pipe replacement and slip lining.	City of Helena	Annual	\$1.4M	City Funds
U-09	Upper Hale Zone and Reeder's Village Water Main Connection	Remove West Main Street and Reeder's Village from their respective pump stations and pressurize using the Hale Storage Tank.	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$1.27M	City Funds
U-10	CIPP Liner - Placer Ave to Neill Ave	Line and restore pipe in severely deteriorated condition.	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$830,000	City Funds
U-11	Front St - Reroute and Upsize	Reroute and upsize poor condition pipe segment to provide additional capacity.	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$2.5M	City Funds
U-12	Inlet Improvements at Neill/Fuller	Increase inlet interception capacity at intersection to reduce ponding and overflow.	City of Helena	Short-Term	\$610,000	City Funds
U-13	Siphon Replacement at 13th St, 14th St, 15th St, 16th St	Replace siphons to increase capacity and reduce ponding.	City of Helena	Long-Term	\$1.2M	City Funds
U-14	West Main Pipe - Phase 1 (Inlet Improvements)	Modifications to increase the capacity and debris screening capability of the inflow to the City system.	City of Helena	Mid-term	\$210,000	City Funds
U-15	West Main Pipe - Phase 2 (Open Channel Enclosure)	Pipe enclosure of Last Chance Gulch to provide flow pathway and reduce flood risk.	City of Helena	Mid-term	\$1.0M	City Funds



### 7.2. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Funding for infrastructure improvements and redevelopment programs can be implemented using a variety of federal, state, local and private funding sources. A narrative description of potential funding sources is provided in the following sections including the source of revenue, eligibility considerations, means of fund distribution, and other relevant information. While other funding sources may be possible, those listed in this memorandum are the most probable sources at this time.

#### 7.2.1. BID Funding Sources

The BID is operated on revenues derived from a special assessment. However, the BID also leverages, or plans to leverage, several other funding sources for implementation of improvements and programs within the BID. The primary funding sources used by the BID are discussed in the following sections.



#### **Business Improvement District Assessment**

The Helena BID is a 501(c)(6) organization created by State Statute through a resolution of the City of Helena. The most recent resolution was passed in January 2020 and is set to be renewed by January 2030. The BID receives funds that are derived from a special assessment on the district's property owners' annual tax bill. The assessment is only applicable to properties within the established BID boundary. Revenues are used to fund the BID programs and services such as summer flowers, holiday lighting, streetscape, graffiti removal, downtown banners, façade improvements, parklets, business development, and marketing.

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, the assessment for private properties will be a flat rate of \$425 plus a \$0.03 fee per square foot of land area and 3% of the property's taxable value. Public properties are only assessed a \$425 flat rate. Vacant properties with no habitable improvements are exempt from the assessment. Under this methodology, the 2023 assessment is projected to be \$310,979. The BID will also receive approximately \$20,000 in additional revenue from DHI to provide management services such as administrative, payroll, facilities, and equipment benefits. The total FY 2023 operating budget is estimated to be \$333,066.



#### **Downtown URD Tax Increment Financing**

Coincident with the establishment of the Downtown URD, a TIF district was also established as an economic redevelopment tool to help the community reinvest tax revenues in the Downtown. TIF can be used for capital projects with public benefit and for improvements that incentivize private development, but it cannot be used for operations and maintenance. Eligible projects include infrastructure projects to support development (streets, utilities, and non-motorized facilities), development activities (acquisition, demolition, and site preparation), and affordable housing projects.



When the URD was established, the tax base was frozen at a base year value. This base year value remains constant until the URD sunsets and is used to fund local government services. Taxes acquired from new development or appreciation (or the tax increment) get reinvested in the district. The City of Helena can spend the revenues from the TIF district directly or they can leverage anticipated TIF revenues to secure bonds for identified improvements. In FY 2022, the TIF district generated \$181,350 in revenue.

The TIF District funds projects within the URD each year through grant opportunities. Applicants may request up to 50% matching funds for projects exceeding \$10,000 or up to 25% match for projects equal to or less than \$10,000. In FY 2023, the TIF Advisory Board seeks to fund projects under the following priority programs:

- **Infrastructure Improvement Program** (water, sewer, stormwater, fiber optics, transportation)
- **Site Redevelopment & Public Space Activation Program** (redevelopment or adaptive reuse of underutilized or underperforming properties)
- **Downtown URD Housing Program** (affordable housing)
- **Façade Improvement Program** (match funding for façade improvements)
- **Marketing/Branding Project Program** (marketing, branding, and wayfinding within the URD)
- **Cruse Avenue Redevelopment Program** (surveying and infrastructure planning for future redevelopment activities)
- **Rodney Street Commercial Center Program** (gateway signage, infrastructural connectivity, and public art improvements)



### **Tourism Business Improvement District**

The Helena City Commission established a Tourism Business Improvement District on April 20, 2009, to promote tourism, conventions, trade shows, and travel to the city. The Helena Tourism Alliance is the administrative organization of the TBID. The district includes all properties within the corporate limits of the City of Helena that provide overnight stays at lodging

facilities. Revenues are generated from an assessment levied against each property's tax bill based on average daily number of occupied rooms. The "per occupied room" rate is determined annually based on the district's proposed work plan and adopted budget. The FY 2023 TBID room assessment is anticipated to generate \$525,668.

The TBID Grant Program was established in 2013 to provide financial assistance to support sports and tournaments, music festivals, outdoor recreation events and a variety of other events. Local organizations and businesses can apply for grant monies to help grow the local tourism economy through increased visitor spending in Helena's lodging establishments. In 2020, the program was revamped to help develop a more year-round tourism base.

### **501(c)(3) Organization**

Section 501(c)(3) is the portion of the US Internal Revenue Code that allows for federal tax exemption of nonprofit organizations, charities, or private operating foundations. These types of organizations are advantageous because they can be tax-exempt and donation based. Donors who make charitable contributions to most types of 501(c)(3) organizations are allowed a federal income tax deduction. The BID is working to establish a 501(c)(3) for the purpose of collecting donations to raise money for specific projects within the BID.

### **7.2.2. Local Funding Sources**



Local governments generate revenue through a variety of funding mechanisms. Typically, several programs related to transportation exist for budgeting purposes and to disperse revenues. These programs are tailored to fulfill specific transportation functions or provide particular services. The following text summarizes programs that are or could be used to finance transportation improvements by the City.

### **General Fund**

The General Fund acts as the main operating fund for the City of Helena. The majority of the General Fund revenues are derived from property taxes and special assessments. The General Fund is used to provide central administrative services including general city administration, personnel management, financing, public works, engineering, and parks and recreation. An indirect allocation formula is used to benefit funds and departments outside the General Fund as described in the following sections.

### **SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS**

Special revenue funds are designed to account for and report the proceeds of specific revenue sources that are restricted or committed to expenditure for a specific purpose other than debt service or capital projects. Revenues are generated from property taxes, state taxes, or fee assessments. The special revenue funds are supported by the General Fund and charged through indirect allocation formulas. The City operates eight special revenue operating funds: City Streets, Civic Center, Facilities Management, Gas Tax, Open Space District Maintenance, Urban Forestry, Storm Water Utility, and Lighting Districts.

### **INTERNAL SERVICE FUNDS**

Internal Service funds are proprietary type funds used to report activity that provide goods or services to other government funds, departments or agencies on a cost reimbursement basis. The City maintains internal services funds for Copiers, Health, Dental, Vision and Fleet services.

### **ENTERPRISE FUNDS**

Enterprise Funds are used to account for operations that are financed separate from other government activities. The intent is that the costs of providing goods or services to the public on a continuing basis is financed or recovered primarily through user charges. The City operates enterprise funds for Buildings, Water, Wastewater, Solid Waste (Residential and Commercial), Landfill Monitoring, Transfer Station, Recycling, Parking, Golf Course, and Capital Transit.

### **DEBT SERVICE FUNDS**

Debt Service Funds are set up to receive dedicated revenues used to make principal and interest payments on City debt. They are used to account for the accumulation of resources for, and the payment of, general obligation and special assessment debt principal, interest, and related costs.

- **General Obligation (GO) Bonds** - The sale of GO bonds can be used to finance a specific set of major highway improvements. A GO bond sale, subject to voter approval, provides the financing initially required for major improvements to the transportation system. When the bond is retired, the obligation of the taxpaying public is also retired. State statutes limiting the level of bonded indebtedness for cities and counties restrict the use of GO bonds
- **Special Improvement Districts** - These districts are areas in which additional fees and/or taxes are collected to fund specific improvements within the area. In general, property owners within the district must petition the local government to create the district. The costs of projects in the SID are distributed across the properties that benefit. State law allows the distribution on the basis of the area of each parcel in the district, the assessed value of each parcel, the number of parcels, the front footage of each parcel bordering a street, or a combination of these.

### **Capital Improvement Fund**

Capital improvement funds account for and report financial resources that are restricted, committed, or assigned to expenditures of capital outlays. Section 7-6-16 of Montana Code Annotated (MCA) notes that a municipality may establish a capital improvement fund for the replacement, improvement, and acquisition of property, facilities, or equipment costs in excess of \$5,000 and that has a life expectancy of 5 years or more.

The city maintains general government, parks improvement, and sidewalk improvement capital funds. Money may be accumulated in these funds during any fiscal year to support annual appropriations and carry-overs to future fiscal periods. The City maintains three tax increment capital financing funds of which assessments are collected and spent based on Commission approval. All fund balances in these funds are reserved to specific approval by the commission.

### **7.2.3. State Funding Sources**

The following is a summary of Montana's state funding sources which can be allocated to local governments and counties for transportation improvements. State funds can be dispersed automatically or on a need basis, depending on the program. The programs listed below are primarily distributed by MDT.

### **Fuel Tax Revenues**

The State of Montana assesses a tax on each gallon of gasoline and clear diesel fuel sold in the state and used for transportation purposes. According to state law, fuel tax funds are distributed to cities and counties based on population, road mileage, and land area.





Effective July 1, 2017, House Bill 473, the Bridge and Road Safety and Accountability Act (BaRSAA) incrementally increases Montana’s fuel tax rate for gasoline and for special fuel. House Bill 473 directs the fuel tax rate increase each biennium until FY 2023. A portion of the revenue generated by the increase is allocated to local governments in addition to the standard fuel tax distributions. BaRSAA fund allocations are calculated based upon the statutory formula and distributed in the same way as the standard fuel tax.

Local governments can use fuel tax revenues for the construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and repair of rural roads or city streets and alleys. Funds may also be used to match federal funds used for the construction of roads and streets that are part of the federal-aid highway system; or road and streets which a local government is responsible to maintain.

TransADE

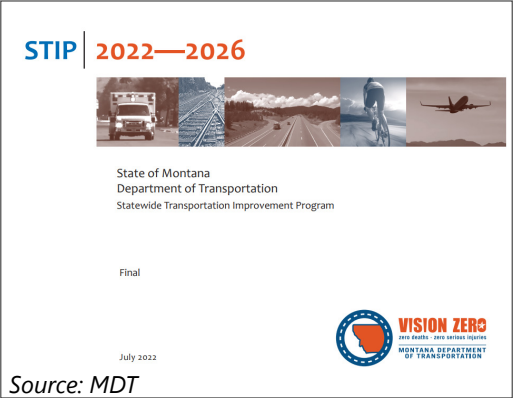
The TransADE grant program provides match or operating assistance to transportation providers that serve the disabled and elderly. The goal of the program is to enhance the access of elderly and persons with disabilities in Montana to health care, shopping, education, employment, public services and recreation; and to assist in the maintenance, development, improvement, and use of specialized transportation systems. Eligible recipients include counties, incorporated cities and towns, tribal governments, urban transportation districts, or non-profit organizations for transportation services for persons 60 years of age or older and persons with disabilities.

State Funds for Transit Subsidies

The 46<sup>th</sup> Montana Legislature amended MCA Section 7-14-102 providing funds to offset up to 50 percent of the expenditures of a municipality or urban transportation district for public transportation. The allocation to operators of transit systems is based on the ratio of its local support for public transportation to the total financial support for all general-purpose transportation systems in the state. Local financial support must be determined by dividing the city’s or district’s expenditure of local revenue for public transportation operations during the fiscal year by the mill value of the city or urban transportation district.

7.2.4. Federal Funding Sources

The following is a summary of major federal transportation funding categories received by the state through Titles 23-49 of the United States Code. Eligibility for federal funding is driven by federal and state mandated highway system designations as shown previously in **Figure 4**. In order to receive funding under the following programs, projects must also be included in the state’s *Surface Transportation Improvement Program*, where relevant.



National Highway Performance Program (NHPP)

NHPP provides funding for the NHS, including the Interstate System and NHS roads and bridges. NHPP funds are federally apportioned to Montana and allocated to Districts by the Montana Transportation Commission. Based on system performance, the funds are allocated to three programs: Interstate Maintenance (IM), National Highway (NH), and NHPP Bridge (NHPB). The Montana Transportation Commission establishes priorities for the use of NHPP funds, and projects are let through a competitive bidding process. Activities eligible for the NHPP funding include construction, reconstruction, resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation of NHS roads and bridges. Operational improvements, safety improvements, and projects to reduce risk of failure of critical infrastructure are also eligible. Lyndale Avenue is the only facility within the BID study area that may qualify for NHPP funding under the NH program.

Surface Transportation Program (STP)

STP is a funding category that may be used to preserve or improve conditions and performance on any federal-aid highway. STP funds are federally apportioned to Montana and allocated through a competitive bidding process by the Montana Transportation Commission to various programs. Programs likely to be applicable within the BID include the following.

- **Surface Transportation Program Urban (STPU)** – Funds used to finance transportation projects on designated urban routes. STPU allocations are based on a per capita distribution. Funds are eligible for rehabilitation, resurfacing, construction, or reconstruction of existing facilities, operational improvements, vehicle-to-infrastructure equipment, bike facilities, pedestrian walkways, carpool projects, and traffic operation projects on the state-designated Urban Highway System.
- **Surface Transportation Program for Other Routes [Off-system] (STPX)** - The funds available under this program are used to finance transportation projects on state-maintained highways (or in other areas) that are not located on a defined highway system.
- **Urban Pavement Preservation Program (UPP)** - The UPP is a sub-allocation of STP that provides funding to urban areas with qualifying Pavement Management Systems. UPP funds provide opportunities for pavement preservation work on urban routes based on system needs identified by the local Pavement Management Systems.
- **Transportation Alternatives Program (TA)** – The TA program is a set-aside from the STP that provides assistance to local governments, tribal entities, transit providers, resource agencies and/or school districts for community improvements. Funds are awarded on a competitive basis for capital improvement projects and pavement preservation projects.
- **Recreational Trails Program (RTP)** – RTP is a set-aside of TA funds. The RTP funds come from the Federal Highway Trust Fund and represent a portion of the motor fuel excise tax collected from nonhighway recreational fuel use. Eligible projects include urban trail development, basic front and backcountry trail maintenance, restoration of areas damaged by trail use, development of trailside facilities, and educational and safety projects related to trails.

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)

HSIP is a funding category that helps states implement a data-driven and strategic approach to improving highway safety on all public roads. The Montana Transportation Commission approves and awards the projects, with a primary focus on locations with crash trends (where feasible countermeasures exist) and prioritizing work according to benefit/cost ratios. However, systemic improvements (such as rumble strip projects, curve signing and wrong-way warnings) are also funded to address safety issues at the network level.

Transit Capital and Operating Assistance Funding

Federal transit funds are provided to eligible recipients through several transit programs. All funded projects must be derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan (a “coordinated plan”). The coordinated plan must be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human service providers and participation from the public. The following programs may be applicable to transit services in Helena.

- **Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311)** - This program enhances the access of people in non-urbanized (<50,000 population) areas by providing public transportation. Eligible recipients of these funds can be state or local government authorities, nonprofit organizations, or operators of public transportation or intercity bus service that receives funds indirectly through a recipient.
- **Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310)** – This program authorizes capital grants to eligible organizations to assist in providing transportation for the elderly and/or persons with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs. Funds are apportioned among the states by a formula which is based on the number of seniors and people with disabilities in each state. MDT is the primary recipient and eligible sub-recipients include private nonprofit organizations, other state and local government authorities, or operators of public transportation.
- **Bus and Bus Facilities (Section 5339)** – This program provides capital funding to replace, rehabilitate and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities including technological changes or innovations to modify low or no emission vehicles or facilities. Funding is provided through formula allocations and competitive grants.





### 7.3. DISCRETIONARY GRANT PROGRAMS

Discretionary grants are grants awarded by federal or state agencies based on merit and eligibility through a competitive application process. Discretionary programs that may be applicable for projects within the BID are described in the following sections.

#### **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)**



Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) was established by Congress in 1974. The Montana Department of Commerce administers CDBG funds on behalf of the State of Montana. Grants are awarded to counties, cities, and towns in four categories: planning, housing, economic development, and public and community facilities.

- **CDBG planning grants** may be used for the preparation of plans, studies, training or research.
- **CDBG housing grants** help local governments fund new construction or rehabilitation of single-family or multi-family housing projects that benefit low- to moderate-income (LMI) residents.
- **The CDBG economic development program** is designed to stimulate economic development activity by assisting Montana's private sector to create or retain jobs for LMI residents by awarding grants to local governments and making fixed-rate financing available to those businesses at low interest rates.
- **CDBG public and community facilities grants** help fund construction or rehabilitation of community infrastructure or a community facility (such as senior centers, food banks, homeless shelters, youth homes, or head start centers) that principally benefit LMI residents.

#### **Montana Tourism Grant Program**

The Tourism Grant Program awards funds annually to projects that strengthen Montana's economy through the development and enhancement of tourism and recreation products that have the potential to increase out-of-area visitation. The grant program is funded by the state's 4% Lodging Facility Use Tax, commonly known as the "Bed Tax", which is collected from guests of hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, guest ranches, resorts, short-term vacation rentals, and campgrounds.

#### **Montana Main Street Program Grants**



MONTANA MAIN STREET

The Montana Main Street Program, established in 2005, is a collaborative effort between the Community Development Division and the Montana Office of Tourism at the Montana Department of Commerce. The Montana Main Street Program offers technical assistance and expertise to member communities and awards competitive grant funding to communities actively working on downtown revitalization, economic development, and historic preservation. Awarded funds can be used for planning or brick-and-mortar projects that support downtown revitalization efforts.

Helena has been a member community since 2013 and achieved top tier member status in 2020 under both the Montana and National Main Street programs. The BID is the program coordinator for Helena. As a top tier Certified Main Street Community, Helena is eligible to apply for annual grant funding from the Montana Main Street Program with no required local match.

#### **Big Sky Trust Fund Grants**



The Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund (BSTF) program is a state-funded program created by the 2005 Montana Legislature and administered by the

Montana Department of Commerce. The overall objective of the BSTF is to aid in the development of good paying jobs for residents and to promote long-term, stable economic growth in Montana. Interest earnings generated from the BSTF are available for financial assistance to local and tribal government entities and economic development organizations by either grant or loan. Earnings are distributed for job creation projects (75%) and economic development planning projects (25%).

#### **Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP)**



The Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) is a statewide program that was established in 1992 to help finance local government infrastructure. Grant funding for the program is derived from investment earnings on coal severance tax funds. Eligible applicants include cities, towns, counties, and tribal governments, county or multi-county water, sewer, or solid waste districts. The Montana Department of Commerce administers the TSEP. Grants are authorized through legislature by a process that ranks projects based on seven statutory priorities and relative financial need. Projects are generally funded in priority order, given the amount of interest earnings anticipated in the biennium. The 67<sup>th</sup> Montana Legislature appropriated \$27.7 million for TSEP for the 2023 biennium.

#### **Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act – Federal Discretionary Grant Programs**



The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was signed into law on November 15, 2021, reauthorizing federal surface transportation programs for the next five years. IIJA also includes discretionary grant program funding to rebuild and reinvest in our railways, public transit infrastructure, and the safety and resilience of the nation's transportation system. Current grant programs under IIJA, administered by the US Department of Transportation (USDOT), include the following.

#### **RURAL SURFACE TRANSPORTATION GRANT PROGRAM (RURAL)**

RURAL grants are awarded to projects that improve and expand the surface transportation infrastructure in rural areas, increase connectivity, improve the safety and reliability of the movement of people and freight, generate regional economic growth, and improve quality of life. The program defines a rural area as an area outside of a Census-designated Urbanized Area, or inside an urbanized area with a population of less than 200,000.

#### **REBUILDING AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE WITH SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY (RAISE) GRANTS**

This competitive grant program (formerly BUILD and TIGER) provides funding for road, rail, transit, and other surface transportation of local and/or regional significance. Selection criteria includes safety, environmental sustainability, quality of life, universal design and accessibility, economic competitiveness and opportunity, state of good repair, partnership, innovation, supply chain efficiency, mobility, and community connectivity. USDOT also encourages applicants to consider how their projects can address climate change, ensure racial equity, and remove barriers to opportunity.

#### **COMMUNITY CHARGING AND FUELING INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS**

IIJA introduced a competitive grant program to strategically deploy publicly accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure and other alternative fueling infrastructure in locations on public roads, schools, parks, and in publicly accessible parking facilities. Priority is given to projects that expand access to electric vehicle charging and alternative fueling infrastructure within rural areas, low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, and communities with a low ratio of private parking spaces, or high ratios of multi-unit dwellings.

#### **RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES PILOT GRANT PROGRAM**

The purpose of the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program is to reconnect communities by removing, retrofitting, or mitigating transportation facilities such as highways and rail lines that create barriers to community connectivity including to mobility, access, or economic development. The program provides technical assistance and grant funding for planning and capital construction to address infrastructure barriers, restore community connectivity, and improve peoples' lives. Eligible projects include high-quality public transportation, infrastructure removal, pedestrian walkways and overpasses, capping and lids, linear parks and trails, roadway redesigns and complete streets conversions, and main street revitalization.

#### **7.3.1. Tax Incentives and Loan Programs**

Tax incentives are outlined in the US tax code which are designed to incentivize or encourage economic activity by reducing tax liabilities for private entities. Such programs may be beneficial in the BID to incentivize redevelopment and revitalization Downtown which could also reduce funding needs from local and other government sources. Some state agencies also offer loan programs that promote economic development by loaning funds at low interest rates. These loan programs may be beneficial to help supplement available funds to implement projects faster. Opportunities applicable to improvements in Downtown Helena are described in the following sections.

#### **Opportunity Zone Program**

Opportunity Zones are economically distressed communities, defined by census tract, nominated by America's governors, and certified by the US Secretary of the Treasury. The Opportunity Zones initiative is an incentive program to spur private and public investment in underserved communities by providing tax benefits to investors. Census tract 30049000800 overlaps much of the Helena BID and is a qualified Opportunity Zone.





### **State of Montana INTERCAP Loan Program**



The Montana INTERCAP loan program was established in 1987 under MCA 17-5-1604 to provide Montana government units with low interest loans. The INTERCAP program is a variable rate loan program, where interest rates are adjusted each year. Eligible projects include new and used equipment and vehicles, real property improvements, cash flow, preliminary engineering costs, and grant writing.

### **New Markets Tax Credit**



The New Market Tax Credit (NMTC) Program incentivizes community development and economic growth

through the use of tax credits that attract private investment to distressed communities. The NMTC Program attracts private capital into low-income communities by permitting investors to receive a federal income tax credit in exchange for making equity investments in specialized financial intermediaries called Community Development Entities (CDEs). In Montana, the Montana Community Development Corporation is a qualified CDE which offers financial and technical assistance for community planning, infrastructure improvements, and economic development. Using the capital from these equity investments, CDEs can make loans and investments to businesses operating in low-income communities on better rates and terms with more flexible features.

### **Montana Business Assistance Connection Revolving Loan Program**



Montana Business Assistance Connection, Inc. (MBAC) operates a revolving loan program to promote economic and community development in Lewis and Clark, Broadwater, and Meagher Counties. Some of the primary goals of the program include: promoting

economic development through establishment, expansion or retention of businesses that create or save jobs and increase private or public investments; encouraging economic growth in blighted areas; and developing infrastructure to encourage community development. All proceeds from the loan must be used for business purposes such as purchasing commercial real estate and fixed assets, debt consolidation, or working capital. The program operates through funding and management contracts with multiple public and private entities. The following MBAC loan programs are potentially applicable to improvements in Downtown Helena:

- State Micro Business Finance Program
- USDA Intermediary Relending Program
- US Economic Development Administration Revolving Loan Fund
- Montana Board of Investments Intermediary Relending Program
- City of Helena Revolving Loan Fund
- Lewis and Clark County Revolving Loan Fund
- MBAC Regional Revolving Loan Fund
- Montana DEQ Alternative Energy Revolving Loan Program (statewide)
- Lewis and Clark County Wastewater Revolving Loan Program
- Montana State Small Business Credit Initiative Revolving Loan Fund

### **7.3.2. Private Funding Sources**

Private financing of infrastructure improvements, in the form of right-of-way donations and cash contributions, has been successful for many years. In recent years, the private sector has recognized that better access and improved facilities can be profitable due to increase in land values and commercial development possibilities. Several forms of private financing for infrastructure improvements used in Montana and other parts of the United States that may be beneficial for improvements Downtown are described in this section.

#### **Cost Sharing**

Developers may be required to construct additional facilities as mitigation of impacts to the existing network.

#### **Private Ownership/Privatization**

This method of financing is accomplished in one of two ways. First, a private enterprise could construct and maintain a transportation facility, and the government would agree to pay for public use of the facility either through leasing agreements or through access fees. Alternatively, a transportation agency could grant either a temporary or long-term transfer of a public property or publicly owned right-of-way to a private business in return for a payment that can be applied toward construction or maintenance of transportation facilities.

#### **Private Donations**

The private donation of money, property, or services to mitigate identified development impacts is the most common type of private transportation funding. Private donations are effective in areas where financial conditions do not permit a local government to implement improvements itself.

#### **User Fees**

User fees are charges for services where the benefits received from such services can be directly and equitably applied to those who receive the benefits. User fees and charges are preferable to general taxes because user charges can provide clear demand signals that assist in determining what services to offer, their quantity and their quality. User fees are often costly to administer so they are only collected if it is cost-effective and administratively feasible to do so.

#### **Business Owners Associations**

A Business Owners Association is a common funding mechanism for downtowns across Montana. Businesses downtown pay a membership fee, which is then invested into projects that improve the Downtown. Examples of such associations include Chambers of Commerce; local, regional, and national professional or trade associations; and small business associations. Funding is generally spent at the discretion of the association. Typically, the funds go towards promotion and marketing, lobbying, event organization and execution, beautification and maintenance.



## CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

**W**ith financial support from the Montana Main Street Grant, the BID and City of Helena have coordinated efforts to identify capital improvement recommendations, promote and support redevelopment and investment opportunities, and provide options to improve and promote safe, efficient multimodal connections across the Downtown. The *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* is a comprehensive planning document intended to complement and build upon past planning efforts completed by the City of Helena and the BID while providing a guide for future implementation efforts in support of City and BID goals.







## 8.1. MONTANA MAIN STREET GRANT COMPLIANCE

In December 2020, the City of Helena submitted an application for a Montana Main Street Grant to develop a Downtown Capital Improvements Plan that would provide a set of projects to address deficiencies and opportunities for improvements in the BID. The application stated that the DCIP would focus on evaluation of solid waste collection and recycling, electrical needs, irrigation needs, streetscape and architectural design standards, multimodal connectivity, and ADA compliance. The *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* and its recommendations are intended to satisfy the scope of the grant application and comply with the terms of the grant contract. In accordance with the grant reporting requirements, the following sections summarize the accomplishments of the project and next steps that the City will pursue upon completion of this project.

### 8.1.1. Project Accomplishments

Completion of the *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* provides the City of Helena and the BID with a long-term vision for revitalizing the Downtown through infrastructure improvements, re-development initiatives, and multimodal accommodations. In conjunction with the identified capital improvement projects, the Multimodal Plan translates the vision into a strategic plan for implementation over the next 20 years. Nearly 40 capital improvements, categorized into Downtown Revitalization, Transportation, and Utility categories, have been identified. These improvement projects synthesize the ideas, projects, and needs identified in several past planning documents into a cohesive and comprehensive vision for the Downtown. Each improvement outlines anticipated implementation agencies, timeframes for implementation, estimated project costs, potential funding sources, and supporting information and resources. Additional guidance for development and implementation of supporting programs, policies, and standards is provided to help promote a unified Downtown environment and assist with implementation of the capital improvements.

A primary result of the *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* is a specific plan for implementation of a multimodal transportation network within the Downtown. Implementation of the network is intended to connect the northern portion of the BID (the Great Northern Town Center) to the Downtown Retail Core and the southern portion of the BID (Fire Tower District) for visitors traveling by foot or bicycle. The network provides logical connections and safe accommodations. Combined with enhanced wayfinding and branding of the “Gulch Trail,” the multimodal network is anticipated to decrease auto-dependency and parking demand while promoting visitation and enhancing the vibrancy of Downtown. The network is presented in two phases, short-term and long-term, to simplify implementation and promote buy-in from the community. The short-term network is intended to be simple to implement without impacting parking or requiring reconstruction while the long-term network consists of more comfortable accommodations but requires some removal of parking and roadway reconstruction.

### 8.1.2. Next Steps

The *Downtown Helena Multimodal and Infrastructure Plan* is a planning document that helps identify potential improvements to be completed as funding becomes available. At this time, no funding or timeframe for construction of the recommended projects has been identified. Potential funding sources are identified for each project. More detailed information on each funding source, including project eligibility, is provided in **Section 7.4**. Funding for implementation of the capital improvement projects may come from a variety of sources including federal, state, local, and private funding sources including discretionary grants and general loan programs. It is envisioned that some projects will be initiated by the BID, while others may be initiated by the City of Helena. This plan is intended to provide justification for the future projects and support for future funding opportunities.

Projects are anticipated to be implemented over the next 20 years, depending on funding availability and community support. Short-term projects can reasonably be expected to occur within the next five years whereas mid-term projects may be implemented over the next 10 years. Some projects are intended to be completed incrementally and on an annual basis as needs arise. After a project is nominated and funding has been identified, it may still take several months to several years to complete applicable feasibility studies, environmental documentation, design, and other project development processes, depending on the scope of the project.





# **DOWNTOWN HELENA**

## **MULTIMODAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN**

- LAST CHANCE GULCH  
300 BLOCK
- ↑ Shopping / Dining
  - ← Jackson Street
  - ↑ Sixth Avenue
  - ↑ Walking Mall
  - ↑ Performance Square
  - ↑ Visitor Information





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