

August 31, 2016

Sharon Haugen
Helena Community Development Department
City of Helena
316 N Park Avenue
Helena, MT 59623

RE: Downtown Helena Master Plan – Proposed Amendments

Dear Sharon:

We are proposing the following amendments to the Downtown Helena Master Plan based on review and feedback from City staff and other agencies. We understand that the City is already working on many of the recommendations contained in the Plan, which reflects the strong interest and momentum we saw during our public outreach. This is a great place to be as we work through the final adoption process!

The Master Plan is intended to be a guideline for policy and funding decisions by the City Commission and other related organizations. As stated on p. 28, the Master Plan:

- provides a tool for guiding Downtown economic growth;
- reaffirms Downtown's role in the community;
- guides decision-making for public improvements, private investments, and changes to existing regulations;
- anticipates foreseeable development opportunities; and,
- provides a clear path for leadership to successfully implement the Plan.

The following amendments are proposed for clarification:

1. P. 17, Related Plans and Projects

Add: "2014 Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan Update"

Add: "2013 Helena Greening of Last Change Gulch Report"

2. P. 43, Develop design guidelines

Add: "Design guidelines should provide a statement of intent and act as a guide for the key elements necessary to facilitate the desired future conditions, such as sidewalk widths, on-street parking, streetscape amenities, key focal points, and necessary utility infrastructure."

3. P. 45, Encourage Downtown Housing

Replace:

"Encourage workforce and affordable housing. A full range of housing choices is important for Downtown Helena and affordability. Seek partnership that provide

senior housing, market-rate workforce housing, and subsidized affordable housing in the Downtown.”

With language adopted by the Planning Board 6/21/16:

“Create a full range of housing affordability and options. A full range of housing choices is important for Downtown Helena. Providing affordable housing options is critical for attracting a community work force. Seek partnerships to provide senior, low to moderate income, workforce and market rate housing Downtown. Work with existing property owners and partners to retain and maintain current affordable housing units. Encourage different housing types such as apartments, condominiums, brownstone/row houses and townhouses, in both rental and ownership models.”

4. P. 53, Require underground utilities

Replace: “Require underground utilities. Overhead power and communication lines have a significant effect on Downtown aesthetics. Require all new or replacement utilities to be installed underground.” With “Underground utilities. Section 5.6 of the City of Helena Engineering and Design Standards requires all new utilities to be placed underground wherever feasible. Explore funding mechanisms to assist relocation of existing utilities underground when utility upgrades or other street improves are being made.”

5. P. 57, Proposed Pedestrian Circulation

Replace: “Eliminate Right-Turn Slip Lane” with: “Re-Evaluate Need for Right-Turn Slip Lane”

Replace: “Eliminate Slip Lanes and Islands” with: “Re-Evaluate Need for Slip Lanes and Islands”

6. P. 59, Proposed Bicycle Circulation

Replace: “Convert to 3 Lanes with Bike Lanes” with: “Add Bike Lanes”

7. P. 61, Proposed Vehicle Circulation:

Delete: “*” symbol at 14th/Great Northern

Combine circles for Neill/Helena/11th/Cruse intersections

Delete: “Eliminate Signal at 11th/Cruse”

8. P. 65, Implementation, Add:

“As an amendment to the 2011 City of Helena Growth Policy, the Downtown Helena Master Plan provides additional detail relative to public improvements, private investments, and changes to existing regulations in the Downtown area that ensure public health and safety, protect the environment, maintain a high quality of life, promote a sustainable economy, and support a livable community.

The Master Plan does not constitute a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Rather, the Master Plan serves as a guide for decision-making by the Helena City Commission to consider future projects to be included in city budgets or other programs. Ultimately, plan recommendations will need to be further evaluated, designed, and approved by the City Commission, Montana Department of Transportation, or other partnering agencies.”

9. P. 66, Implementation Strategy

Delete: "Helena Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Committee (NMTAC)" under Partner Agencies

Add: "Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC)" under Partner Agencies

Delete: "Helena Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Committee (NMTAC)" under Funding Sources

Add: "Montana Main Street Program (MMSP)" and "Big Sky Trust Fund (BSTF)" under Funding Sources

10. P. 66, Implementation Strategy,

Add: "Dynamic – not Static!

The Downtown Helena Master Plan is designed to be a dynamic document. While the broad goals and objectives remain the same, implementation steps may change depending on market forces and timing of opportunities. The Plan should be updated every five years, similar to the Growth Policy, which allows projected timelines for plan actions and strategies to be reconsidered and adjusted as the Plan evolves."

11. P. 67, 1.3 Create a high quality downtown experience

Add: Montana Main Street Program "MMSP" as Potential Funding Source for façade improvement program.

12. P. 69, 2.3 Encourage Downtown Housing

2.3.e. Add: TCC and MDT as Partner Agencies

2.3.f. Replace: "Make underutilized right-of-way available for housing" with "Evaluate policy for making underutilized right-of-way available for housing". Change Lead Agency to "CD".

13. P. 71, 4.1 Manage Parking

Change timeline for 4.1.e. "Eliminate residential parking permits and time limits" from Short-Term to Mid-Term.

Change 4.1.b. to "Offer first hour free parking in garage with pay as you leave technology."

Change 4.1.d to "Phase out street permit parking."

Change 4.1.e to "Revisit residential parking permits and time limits."

Add 4.1.g "Evaluate and offer first hour free in surface lots with pay as you leave technology" to be completed Mid Term.

14. P. 71, 4.3 Water and Sanitary Sewer

4.3.a. Replace: "Update modeling to reflect fire flow requirements for future development scenarios" with "Evaluate water system model to confirm capacity to support future development scenarios"

4.3.b. Change: "Prioritize replacement of older segments of pipe per current programs"

15. P. 72, 4.5 Gas, Electric, and Communications

Change 4.5.b to “Explore funding mechanisms to assist relocation of existing utilities underground when utility upgrades or other street improvements are being made.”

16. P. 73-74, 5. Connect Downtown, Add footnote:

“Recommended actions generally follow the 2014 Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). In some cases, the Downtown Master Plan reflects a greater focus on connectivity and circulation that promotes downtown economic development. Where the Downtown Master Plan differs from the LRTP, additional study should be undertaken to determine feasibility and balance downtown benefits with regional transportation needs.”

17. P. 74, 5.4 Improve vehicle circulation and access

Change 5.4.d to “Add signal at 14th and Last Chance Gulch”
Add 5.4.e: “Study feasibility of converting Hauser to two-way traffic and adding a new signal at Benton” as a Long Term action.

Sincerely,
WGM Group, Inc.



Jeremy Keene, P.E., LEED AP
Principal Engineer

JK:av

Encl.

cc: Tracy Reich
Ellie Ray
Ryan Leland
David Knopke