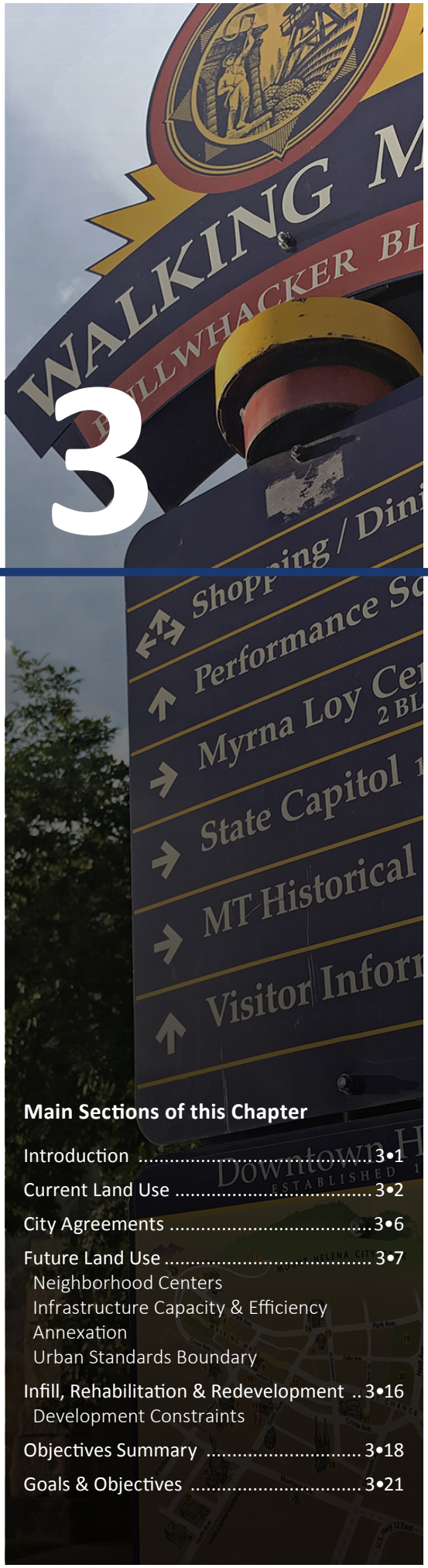
Land Use 3



Introduction

This land use chapter is provided as a guide, describing where development should occur, where land should be conserved, and how the City should manage the mix of housing, retail, institutional, and industrial uses, shaped by zoning regulations, development standards, and City transportation and infrastructure policy. This chapter, perhaps more than others, establishes a very visible manifestation of the Growth Policy, with land use designations providing levels of expectation for what can be done.

Helena is not an island. Its land use objectives are closely tied to those of Lewis and Clark County, Jefferson County and, to a lesser extent, Broadwater County. The City's land use development patterns are also related to regional transportation objectives implemented by the Montana Department of Transportation, and educational objectives implemented by the Helena School District – both independent of direct City jurisdiction.

This chapter summarizes existing characteristics of land uses in Helena and the surrounding area, followed by a summary of the key goals and objectives adopted to achieve Helena's long-term vision. The intent is to present a high-level overview of dominant land uses in place and development trends. On the basis of this overview, more specific and detailed planning

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efforts may be undertaken that might include functional plans such as transportation planning documents or neighborhood plans.

Current Land Use

Identifying existing land uses helps anticipate, evaluate, and prepare for future growth and land use patterns as the community changes over time. Included in this document as Figure 3.05, an Existing Land Use Map has been developed to give a snap-shot look at current conditions. It is not intended to be lot-specific, but to provide a broad view of Helena and the surrounding area. This map defines land uses according to the following categories:

- Agricultural/Low Density – Tracts of land over five acres that include agriculture, wooded areas, single unit residential, mixed uses, etc.; this category may also include vacant land and non-residential uses on tracts over five acres;
- Rural Density – Tracts generally between one and five acres located outside of the City limits; typically, uses on these properties are single-unit residential, but may also include vacant or undeveloped land, mixed uses, accessory uses, and other uses;
- Urban Density – Includes most residential uses within the City and residential uses in the County on lots generally less than one acre; may also include accessory uses and home occupations;
- Commercial/Industrial – Lands predominantly where people work, including retail, office, restaurants, entertainment, manufacturing, freight terminals, contractor yards, industrial parks, and other similar uses;
- Public/Government – Land in government or quasi-government use, including educational and public service activities such as the Capitol complex, schools, hospitals, churches and cemeteries.
- Recreational, Open Space, Parks – Lands in use as developed or undeveloped parks, large areas maintained in natural vegetation, or recreational areas such as golf courses and ball fields.

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The Helena Valley has historically been used for agricultural production. Some property near the city that could be annexed and served by City services is currently in agricultural use.

Annexation and development of these properties for uses other than agricultural production would reduce the amount of agricultural land in the Helena area, but not annexing those lands would not ensure ongoing agricultural use. Low-density residential development located outside the City often uses more agricultural land per dwelling unit than higher density development within the City.

Table 3.01 – *Ten-Year Summary of Subdivision Activity*

Subdivision Location Map #	Year of Final Plat	Subdivision platted	No. of lots	Acreage *(approx.)*	Zoning
1	2009	Antelope Trace Phase I of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	50 lots	7.7	R-4
2	2009	Shopko Minor Sub. Amended	5	10	B-2
3	2011	Antelope Trace Phase 2 of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	14 lots	2.2	R-4
4	2011	Craftsman Village Phase I of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	58 lots 3 multi-unit lots	11.2 11.8	R-4
5	2011	Craftsman Village Phase II of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	16 lots	2.2	R-4
6	2011	Big Sky Estates	9 multi-unit lots	2.2	R-4
7	2012	Commercial Phase I of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	3 lots and 2 tracts	87 acres	B-2
8	2013	Antelope Trace Phase III of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	25 lots	3	R-4
9	2015	Burnham Ranch Phase I	14 and 1 utility lot	14.4	B-2
10	2016	Amended Shopko Minor Sub.	2 lots and 1 stormwater lot	2.6	B-2
11	2016	Green Meadow Subdivision	3 multi-unit	19.3	R-3
12	2017	Amend Broadwater Second Addition	2 lots	.28	R-2
13	2017	Uplands Phase I of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	24 lots	5.3	R-U
14	2017	Craftsman Village Phase 3 of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	26 lots	2.2	R-4
15	2018	Craftsman Village Phase 4 of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	21 lots	2.9	R-4
16	2018	Craftsman Village Phase 5 of Crossroads at Mountain View Meadows Subdivision	5 lots	.43	R-4
17	2019	Intermountain	12 lots	39.2	R-2/PLI
TOTAL			**292 lots**	**223.7 acres**	

Source: City of Helena subdivision records

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Although annexing agricultural lands into the City may reduce the amount of land in agricultural production in the short term, the higher density city development could reduce the pressure to convert additional agricultural lands farther from the City. Promoting infill development and annexation of lands near the City can encourage higher density development, thereby reducing the pressure to develop agricultural lands with lower density uses.

Residential Development Patterns

The Agricultural/Low Density, Rural Density, and Urban Density categories incorporate various residential uses in the Helena area. As

population growth continues, residential development flourishes in all of these categories. Most vacant residential property within the City has been developed in recent years, fueling an increase in annexations and development outside City boundaries to satisfy demand. Although agriculture is still the predominant land use in the Helena Valley (extending beyond the Growth Policy Study Area),[1] large areas of agricultural lands have been converted to residential uses over the past several years.

Residential development has most recently occurred on Helena's southeast and north sides, with a mixture of single-family homes, multi-family apartments, condominiums, and townhouses. Helena's West End contains developed properties interspersed with vacant lots. This area has grown more slowly but is expected to increase due to the recent Westside Annexation.

Commercial/Industrial Development Patterns

The commercial/industrial land use category incorporates a wide variety of land uses including retail, entertainment, health care, office, manufacturing, gravel extraction, freight terminals, contractor's yards, industrial parks and other similar uses that have differing intensity of impact. These uses may exist separately or in mixed-use areas such as Downtown. Most of the land uses in this category are associated with areas where people are employed.

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Retail – one of the largest commercial categories – continues to flourish throughout Helena. Large retailers and shopping centers have been established near North Montana Avenue, Custer Avenue, and Washington Street. They have been attracted to this area by large tracts of vacant land within the City and the I-15/Custer Avenue interchange access.

Redevelopment and expansion of retail uses are also occurring all over the City, particularly along major streets. Most established commercial areas remain strong and are expected to continue if the economy remains stable. The site that used to hold Capitol Hill Mall is anticipated to become a mixed-use development in the near future.

The most noteworthy mixed-use area is Downtown Helena, which features a variety of offices, banks, restaurants, art galleries, retail stores, and residences. Portions of this area are located in the Helena Historic District, which also includes a walking mall. The downtown area has expanded significantly northward from its origins at South Last Chance Gulch, and now reach Lyndale Avenue with the Great Northern Town Center. The northern section of downtown has experienced considerable development in the last several years.

Two smaller commercial clusters that were part of the original historic commercial area exist near downtown Helena. One is Reeder's Alley, located south of the downtown commercial core; the other is the commercial development along Rodney Street between 6th Avenue and Broadway.

1 *The Growth Policy Study Area is depicted on the Future Land Use Map.*

Another mixed-use area is located near the historic train depot, where a number of historic buildings are utilized for commercial, light industrial and residential uses. The historic core of industrial activity around the depot continues to evolve as scattered industrial uses continue in the area located south of the railroad tracks between Montana Avenue and I-15. In 2016, the city established the Railroad Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District, which aims to revitalize the area by creating jobs and encouraging investment in targeted neighborhoods.[2]

Over time, industrial uses have diminished along both sides of Montana Avenue from Lyndale Avenue north to North Last Chance Gulch/Cedar Avenue, generally replaced with commercial uses. Small industrial uses continue to be concentrated in the triangular area located west of Montana Avenue between Lyndale and Last Chance Gulch, and the linear area located north of North Last Chance Gulch to north of Maple Street between Montana and Dodge Avenues.

The area generally located east of Montana Avenue between Cedar Street and north of Marshall Lane continues to contain a mixture of small industrial operations.

The service sector – which includes professional offices, financial institutions and other services – has experienced significant growth in recent years. The area surrounding the hospital has been developed with numerous medical offices and other related uses. The banking industry has also expanded within Helena, including several new buildings dispersed throughout the City.

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In recent decades, industrial uses have been concentrated in the area located along Highway 12 east of I-15, and north to the airport. The Industrial Park, established in the 1970s, is located in this area. The airport property has become a location for some industrial development, with Boeing a prominent example. The industrial businesses located east of I-15 seem to be larger than those located west of the Interstate. Table 3.01 provides a listing of subdivision activity over the past ten years.

Public/Government Development Patterns

The Public/Government category encompasses large areas of land in and near Helena used by various levels of government. Fort Harrison and the Veterans Hospital, located west of Helena, represent the largest single area within this category, in addition to the Helena Regional Airport property. Both Fort Harrison and the Airport area have experienced significant facility expansions within the last decade. A copy of the Military Affected Area map developed under the Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) is included in this chapter as Figure 3.09.

State government also occupies a considerable amount of space throughout the City, with most concentrated in the Capitol Complex located east of Montana Avenue between Broadway and 6th Avenue. In addition, a number of government offices are clustered in the vicinity

2 *See the Railroad Urban Renewal District Plan for more information.*

Figure 3.01 – *Land uses offering proximity to scenic views, open spaces and recreational opportunities – without undermining their functional or aesthetic values – is key to Helena's future. (Image: SCJ Alliance, Inc.)*

of the Montana Department of Transportation, the airport, and downtown.

This category also includes the University of Montana-Helena, Carroll College, and St. Peter's Hospital, which have enlarged their facilities in the last 10 years.

Recreational, Open Space & Parks Development Patterns

The Recreational, Open Space, and Parks land-use category incorporates a wide variety of federal and state open-space lands, City parks and recreational lands such as ball fields and golf courses. Larger open-space lands tend to be located in the southern portion of the City. Parks are located throughout the City, primarily in residential neighborhoods, although several are located downtown. Parkland and open-space lands have been added to the City park and open-space system in the last several years through bond purchase, subdivision dedication, private donations, and the Whyte property acquired with federal money. Significant improvements have occurred in many parks, expanding the network of trails for hiking and mountain biking. Additional information about Helena's open space and parks system may be found in Chapter 5: Public Facilities & Services, or in the City's Parks & Recreation Master Plan.

City Agreements

The City of Helena has entered into a variety of inter-local agreements with the State of Montana and the federal government. Inter-local agreements with Lewis and Clark County relate to joint administrative and advisory boards and cooperative programs such as planning, transportation, public health and safety, historic preservation, and technology. Some of these agreements have resulted in joint planning efforts for transportation, watershed and fire protection, and towards

identifying infrastructure requirements to avoid urban sprawl and preserve the surrounding rural character.

Noting the inter-relationship of the City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County for extending infrastructure for development, the two governing bodies adopted a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2009 recognizing the value of sustainable land development and its necessity in efficiently providing services and infrastructure such as water and wastewater treatment, parks, transportation networks, and emergency services in the Helena Valley.

Per the MOU, the cumulative impacts of urban-density development served by septic systems, together with community and individual septic system failures, contribute significant amounts of nutrients that affect the quality of ground and surface water. The MOU also notes:

- Strong potential for future population increase;
- That urban density development with City services or County community-wide services is the most efficient use of land and provides services most effectively and at the lowest cost;
- The need for development "pay its own way."

In the MOU, the two agencies agreed to:

- Cooperatively develop a plan for sustainable land development in the City of Helena and southern Lewis and Clark County;
- Continue outreach efforts that educate the community about water quality issues;
- Continue to partner to retrofit neighborhood systems;
- Work together to establish and adopt joint development standards and comprehensive zoning for the Urban Standards Boundary (USB), helping achieve an efficient and smooth transition for properties being annexed into the City and to promote environmental and land-use compatibility with the City and other properties within the USB.

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In addition to continuing its joint planning effort with Lewis and Clark County for the USB, it will also be important to include the City of East Helena and Jefferson County.

Future Land Use

Helena's future land use strategy, comprised of this document's goals and objectives, including the Future Land Use Map (Figure 3.06), helps direct a wide range of considerations. It directs where transportation corridors should run. It hints at where new schools should be located and where existing ones may experience enrollment changes. It identifies historic districts and aids in their vitality and prosperity. It shows where

infrastructure should be upgraded or extended to support expected shifts in demand. It provides clues on how subdivision and annexation of land should be managed, ensuring orderly and fiscally sensitive development and growth. And it provides dimension to the levels of development intensity that may occur in the next 20 years, allowing the City to invest strategically in public safety services to ensure target population growth can be kept safe in cases of emergency.

The Future Land Use Map acknowledges existing development patterns, despite some with environmental, service, or other constraints. The map also reflects the community interest in preserving natural resource values, avoiding environmental degradation, preserving public investments in infrastructure, and providing for efficient, cost-effective expansion of the community.

The intent and purpose of each of the City of Helena Future Land Use categories follows:

- **Commercial** – Lands where the predominant use is the transaction of goods or services such as retail, office, restaurants, entertainment, etc.; such areas are usually near arterials or have good access to major streets. These properties are expected to have limited single-unit residential uses, but may include high-density residential uses and residences associated with a commercial use.
- **Industrial** – Generally, land in this category has access to utilities and major transportation networks such as highways, railways and the airport; may have heavy-truck traffic and may be less desirable for other uses. Heavy industrial areas include uses that may emit fumes or constant and loud noise, and may include businesses that involve hazardous conditions. Typically, these areas would not be compatible with residential uses. Light industrial/manufacturing includes manufacturing products from previously prepared materials such as assembly of computers and electronics; storage, sales, and distribution of such products; packaging of premade goods, etc., but excludes basic industrial processing. Light industrial uses could be compatible with residential, commercial, and other land uses.
- **Medical** – Predominant uses in this category include health care/medical, nursing homes, assisted living facilities and medical offices; medical areas might also include other commercial, office, educational and residential uses.
- **Mixed Use** – Places where people can work, live, and play and learn. These areas include a variety of complementary and integrated uses such as, but not limited to, all forms of residential; office; light industrial/manufacturing; retail, entertainment or public uses. Development is usually in a denser comprehensive pattern to achieve a unified, functional, efficient, and aesthetically

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appealing physical setting, and provides opportunities for connectivity, public transportation, and walkability. Mixed-use areas do not use the traditional segregation of uses.

- **Open Space** – These lands include parks and recreational areas such as golf courses and ball fields; large undeveloped areas maintained in natural vegetation; stream corridors and significant wetland areas (may include regional stormwater detention ponds), and cemeteries. Some open-space areas may be incorporated into other land use categories.
- **Public** – Land that is in government or quasi-government use; some public uses may be incorporated into other land use categories.
- **Rural** – This category includes agricultural uses, with residential uses composed mainly of a single dwelling unit on tracts over five acres; may include non-residential uses on large tracts of land over five acres; and may include areas with significant development constraints, such as steep slopes, flood plain, high ground water, large wetlands, forested areas, etc.
- **Suburban** – Includes low-density residential uses (generally one dwelling unit on one to five acres); commercial uses that serve such nearby areas; areas located farther from Helena than the urban category; areas that may provide a transition between urbanized, denser development and rural areas; areas that may have some development constraints such as flood plain location, high ground water or close proximity to water bodies, limited access to transportation network, etc.. Suburban areas may include industrial uses.
- **Urban** – This category includes predominantly moderate- to high-density residential uses, and may include public uses such as schools, churches, and open lands such as parks and occasional commercial uses that serve the immediate area or are relatively small and low-intensity. Within the County, this category includes areas closer to the City; areas with few development constraints; areas that may be currently developed or could be redeveloped at higher densities; and may include a variety of uses including commercial and light industrial.

Future land use classification boundaries should be interpreted in a broad, flexible manner, but in context with currently existing land uses and development. Therefore, the boundaries shown on the Future Land Use Map are not absolute but may vary slightly according to the situation. The Future Land Use Map is intended to invite efficient use of land and facilities and encourage property owners to increase development intensity where appropriate.

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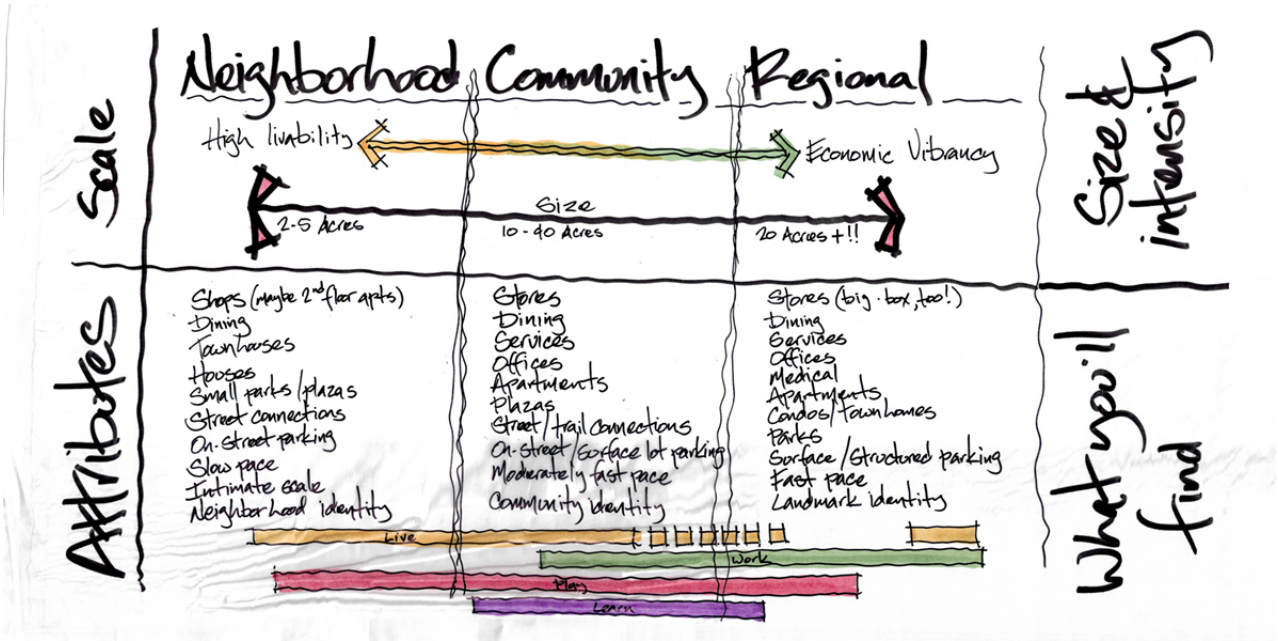

Figure 3.02 – *This diagram, developed and referenced during the HDP update process, shows how proposed Neighborhood Centers may vary according to desired function and relative size, including typical use and activity patterns. Corresponding with the above, some centers may evolve much as those categorized as "Neighborhood", "Community" or "Regional" in scale. (Image: SCJ Alliance, Inc.)*

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Neighborhood Centers

A primary focus of this plan – and this chapter – is to direct investment and reinvestment to "optimize" Helena's centers. This concept directs a mix of housing, retail, office, institutional and open spaces into concentrated clusters in designated areas. When developed, these centers will create natural activity areas that draw residents together, support an active retail and civic scene, and enhance neighborhood identity and vitality.

A key element in Helena's future is its sense of place. This plan harnesses that by enabling more intense, mixed and diverse development in several neighborhoods, concentrating this new development in strategic locations to "enhance community identity, provide housing options, and encourage concentration of activity in identity-rich districts.

As illustrated in Figure 3.02, Helena Neighborhood Centers are envisioned to differ by scale, attributes and experience, planned and designed to fit within the neighborhoods in which they are located. Some may be quite large, becoming centers of regional prominence, with large-scale shopping, institutional uses or open spaces. Others will be smaller, developing at either a community or neighborhood scale, with a mix of housing, retail, office, open space or medical uses, serving a more localized population and integrating seamlessly with surrounding neighborhoods. Some will be new, built in areas with little existing development. Others

Table 3.02 – *Potential Helena Neighborhood Centers*

Center	Description
West End	This center lies at Helena's western gateway, bordered on the west by vast areas of open space and accessed by Highway 12 and the Centennial Trail. Mostly developed in lower-density, rural style land uses, this new center could exemplify Helena's open space assets and easy, non-motorized access to downtown and the community's other neighborhoods. Most of this area is located in the County and includes residential, recreational, some commercial/ light manufacturing uses, the Archie Bray Foundation, Fort Harrison Military Installation including the Veterans Administration plus vacant and under-utilized land. Annexation and more intense commercial and compatible light industrial/manufacturing uses could be encouraged between Euclid and Country Club Avenue, Joslyn Street and Spring Meadow Lake. Residential development north of County Club Avenue could provide a more walkable community, particularly with the recreational uses in the area (Spring Meadow State Park and the Green Meadow Country Club golf course) while protecting sensitive areas such as the Ten Mile Creek corridor and large wetlands. Development that supports and affirms the Fort's importance to Helena is encouraged. Entryways to the West End should include design features that are sensitive to the first impression of those entering the City and promote the appearance of this area.
Downtown Great Northern Rodney Street *	This area is the cultural center of the City, which includes a mixture of the historic downtown with more recent development and redevelopment. Uses are predominantly commercial/office and educational (Carroll College) with some residential uses. Continued mixed-uses in this area will include more residential uses, particularly in and adjacent to the Great Northern Town Center and more intense and higher-density uses closer to Last Chance Gulch and Lyndale Avenue. Increasing development intensity may influence adjacent areas too, provided there is good connectivity into these adjoining areas for autos, bike riders and pedestrians. Included in this conceptual grouping is the Rodney Street area. It's one of Helena's older neighborhoods, with a system of old shops, storefronts, lodging, and housing bordering on the downtown and adjacent to an established turn-of-the-century residential district. Rodney Street has an identity distinct from downtown, with a "bootstrap" feel that may translate into interesting and creative development opportunities.
McHugh	McHugh is one of Helena's newer neighborhoods, and it has begun to incorporate a mix of higher-intensity housing and professional offices. But the area has not yet developed a unified identity or network of effectively connected land uses.
Custer Central	With the closure of a prominent big-box tenant, this development pattern revealed its vulnerabilities to changes in market demands and regional economics. Remaining uses, largely dependent on Montana Avenue and Interstate 15 traffic, still prosper, but the future of retail promises changes in the way stores like these must operate. In addition, vacant land north east of Shopko may provide an opportunity for residential uses.
Mid Town *	Also known as the "Railroad District" or "6th Ward," this area contains a mixture of residential, educational, commercial, and industrial uses. Revitalization of the area is envisioned to preserve the historic character of the district, and appropriate redevelopment and infill that continues the mix of a higher concentration of uses, particularly along Montana Avenue. New approaches to managing the new community center's transportation system – long seen as a curse to a cohesive neighborhood – present opportunities for healing, identity creation, and reinvestment. The Railroad District plan was adopted to guide investment in this tax increment financing (TIF) district, and a Neighborhood Center here can take advantage of that opportunity to create an enduring and successful place, rooted in the community's heritage and the area's reputation as a place for younger homeowners.
Capitol Hill Mall *	Things are changing here with the mall already demolished. The replacement development concept calls for a mix of housing, retail and office, and will likely have a ripple effect on the surrounding commercial and residential properties. It may also influence the future of the Prospect/11th Avenue couplet, potentially arguing for pedestrian-friendly revisions to each arterial to maximize the attractiveness and viability of this evolving center.
Medical Center	This area is generally located north of 11th Avenue southward to Saddle Drive between California Street and Colonial Drive. Predominant uses in the area include health care/medical such as St. Peter's Hospital; Shodair Children's Hospital; various nursing homes, assisted living facilities and medical offices; and other commercial, office, educational, and residential uses. Expansion and further development that includes increased walkability with pedestrian and trail connections within this health care district should be promoted. Land currently in the County could be annexed with development to urban densities consistent with the mixed uses already in the area. Undeveloped land within the City should continue to be developed with a mixture of healthcare, high- to moderate-density residential and commercial uses to promote a walkable area.
Saddle	Freeway interchanges bring with them development opportunity, and this center presents a chance to shape development to create a notable and unique Helena entry. If done well, projects here can both attract Interstate travelers and mix in well with the neighborhoods and hillsides that surround it.
East End	Conceived as a "new urbanist" neighborhood, there is more to come – particularly if the connection to I-15 becomes a reality. It feels remote now, but that might be different in the year 2040.

** = Neighborhood Center with neighborhood plan in-place or already begun.*

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will adapt to and influence existing neighborhoods, fitting new projects within the context of existing streets, buildings and community patterns. In all cases, the evolution of neighborhood centers will need to be guided by design standards that ensure growth is fully complementary with existing patterns and community expectations.

Overall, development in these centers will be in a denser pattern than what surrounds it to achieve a unified, functional, efficient, and aesthetically appealing physical setting, providing opportunities for easy connections, public transportation, and walkability.

The concept of mixed-use development is an important growth management strategy for Helena. If properly planned and developed, Neighborhood Centers will enjoy higher densities, a mix of activities, more transportation options, and convenient shopping and services. When combined with improved multi-modal transportation opportunities, Neighborhood Centers can reduce reliance on automobile travel and the need for costly street improvements while benefiting air quality, slowing sprawl, and providing a greater variety of housing types. Neighborhood Centers located at the west, north and east areas of town may also enhance the experience of entering the city.

Table 3.02 lists and describes areas in Helena identified as potential Neighborhood Centers. Those centers with local plans in-place or that are under development at the time of this document's adoption are noted with an asterisk, and are and are shown on the Neighborhood Centers map. Neighborhood Centers are ultimately determined by the community through a public process.

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Infrastructure Capacity & Efficiency

Additional demands will be made on existing infrastructure as the population of the Helena area increases. As other chapters in this Growth Policy note, current levels of service are generally adequate, but anticipated growth could strain City services. Promoting development of dense and more intense land uses both in the City and in close proximity to existing city services would better utilize City infrastructure and could encourage shared use of facilities such as lift stations and stormwater ponds.

Growth that occurs outside of the City often results in people traveling to the City for employment, shopping, entertainment, education, and other services, which affect city infrastructure capacity. Inter-governmental coordination and continuing to update infrastructure plans, such as the Greater Helena Area Transportation Plan, City of Helena Wastewater Treatment Plan, and Water Master Plan, will help communication and provide guidance to manage changing conditions and their impacts.

Annexation

The City of Helena and the surrounding Helena Valley are facing considerable growth and development pressure. Since 2000, the City of Helena has grown to the north and east with the annexation of approximately 266.64 acres or .41 square miles, as advised by the City's 2001 Annexation Plan. Objectives and actions contained in this plan support an update to the 2001 plan, helping direct future annexations in accord with long-term City and regional objectives. A history of annexations to the City of Helena is shown on the Historic City Limits map, included in this chapter as Figure 3.07.

Urban Standards Boundary

In the 2009 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the City and the County agreed to continue to work together on the development and promulgation of the Urban Standards Boundary (USB) as well as joint infrastructure standards. The USB identifies properties that may be suitable for future connection to City systems and would be able to be annexed to the City. It recognizes that utilizing joint development standards would be beneficial to address the most efficient delivery of local services. The joint standards address the coordination of water, wastewater, storm water, and transportation within the Urban Standards Boundary. Although the MOU at some points uses the term Urban Growth Area (UGA), the term is synonymous with USB in the Helena Growth Policy.

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The USB also could function as an urban services area, with delivery of City services such as fire, police, solid waste, and street maintenance done more efficiently and at lower cost in compact neighborhoods close to the existing City. The USB would require new development to be built according to City standards or in such a manner that the basic infrastructure could be connected to City services at the appropriate time. The establishment of an urban standards area would guide development in certain locations and in a manner that reduces costs to existing and future ratepayers for all City services, not just infrastructure.

The following section describes conditions in various portions of the Helena USB.

West End

Over the past several years, the unincorporated neighborhoods of Helena's West End have been a focus for annexation efforts. The West End is located adjacent to the City and is partially developed with residences, commercial uses along Highway 12 West, and public and private parklands in the vicinity of Spring Meadow Lake. It includes two County Special Zoning Districts.

Individual West End properties had suffered from aging or failing septic systems; elevated levels of nitrates in well-water test samples; lack of

storm drainage; poorly constructed streets, and limited opportunities for pedestrian access. Failing septic systems and wells with high nitrates had led to individual annexation requests, and a proposal to create a water and sewer district and board was presented to voters in 2009, but was rejected.

Recognizing considerable potential for urban development if provided with City infrastructure, Helena conducted a study to evaluate the infrastructure needs of the unincorporated west side, and has since been working to facilitate efficient installation and upgrades in the area.

Northwest Side

The area north of the City generally located between Green Meadow Drive and Interstate 15 south of Sierra Road contains a small number of agricultural lands and is primarily relatively high-density residential with commercial uses located primarily near Montanan Avenue and Custer Avenue. A large portion of the area located in the County is within several County Special Zoning District including Districts #2, 5-A, and 32. Development adjacent to Sanders Street, north and south of Custer Avenue, has increased significantly, and several annexations have occurred in this area in recent years.

Traffic congestion continues to increase in the area although additional street connections have been constructed with new subdivisions. Additional east-west transportation linkages will need to be developed in the future, as identified in the Helena Area Transportation Plan or in future neighborhood-specific plans.

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Northeast Side

The County area northeast of the City generally located between Interstate 15 and Prickly Pear Creek south of Munger Road contains agricultural lands and low-density residential development with some higher-density residential development located near Munger Road within County Special Zoning Districts #35 and 41. Commercial uses are located primarily near Custer Avenue and Washington Street.

Traffic continues to increase in the area due in large part to new commercial uses within the city and continued residential development in the County farther away from the City. A new interchange at Custer Avenue/I-15 interchange began service in 2011, but provided little improvement due to the lack of road capacity west of Montana Avenue.

Considerable growth has occurred in the Helena Valley, with some at what may be considered urban densities and served by community water and wastewater systems. But some individual wastewater systems have started to fail, and connecting to City sewer is the least costly option over the long-term. Required lift stations to serve some of these areas would be expensive, but might also foster the northward growth of the City. Impacts to the Prickly Pear and Ten Mile Creek watersheds should be mitigated when developing this area.

East Side

This area is located east of Saddle Drive, extending across I-15, and bounded by Custer Avenue/Canyon Ferry Road on the north and the Jefferson County line on the south.

The area south of the Helena Airport and north of Highway 12 has high value for commercial/light manufacturing and industrial uses because of access to rail, highway, and air transportation. The area has City infrastructure, including water supply lines, wastewater collection lines, a street network, and a stormwater collection system.

Annexation and development around Highway 12 have resulted in a patchwork pattern for City limits. This area has potential for annexation because of its probable commercial and industrial development. The area south of Highway 12 is largely undeveloped with significant tracts of land in undivided ownership. Future transportation linkages and water and sewer infrastructure will need to be installed to serve this area when it is developed.

The southeastern portion of this area is in the process of being developed as the Mountain View Meadows planned community, and will abut the city limits of East Helena. It will be important to have intergovernmental coordination to accomplish an integrated system for infrastructure and service delivery.

Figure 3.03 – *Economic and land-use objectives in this plan support infill and revitalization efforts, creating growth while minimizing the community's physical "footprint." (Image: SCJ Alliance, Inc.)*

South Side

The area located outside the southern City boundary contains some single-family residential uses. Several recent open-space acquisitions have occurred in this area. Fire protection is a concern within the wildland-urban area, particularly during drought years.

In 1989, the City extended its extra-territorial zoning authority in the portion of this area located in Lewis and Clark County. Though very few properties are included, the existing Open Space Residential (OSR) zoning district specifies development requirements related to roads, stormwater drainage, weed management, and fire protection with the use of a development permit. OSR zoning would ideally be replaced by joint adoption of City and County development standards.

Infill, Rehabilitation & Redevelopment

Infill development is the development of vacant land within or adjacent to the City and near existing infrastructure. Infill can occur in residential or non-residential areas and can provide opportunities for mixed-use development to reduce the need for automobiles, encourage walking, and to save energy. Areas potentially available for infill may not been developed because they may be located in topographically challenging areas, may have undersized or non-existent infrastructure, or may include small lots with multiple property ownerships. Opportunities for infill development are shown on the Vacant Lot Map, included in this chapter as Figure 3.08.

Rehabilitation of existing structures to accommodate a higher density or intensity of use is another method of better utilizing existing resources; conserving land, energy and infrastructure; and minimizing the potential for sprawl. Encouraging rehabilitation of existing building stock is often the preferred option for historic preservation to retain a neighborhood's history and identity. Rehabilitation also can promote maintenance of under-utilized or declining properties and encourages neighborhood stability and viability.

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Often redevelopment happens after a structure has deteriorated or become damaged to the point of needing demolition. Redevelopment may also occur when an area has been identified as blighted and where a redevelopment plan has been established. This option includes a public involvement process so that the activity can be carefully evaluated. Redevelopment can occur where the property location can support more intense development, such as areas where street improvements can accommodate increased traffic.

These options have their place in a community's economic development program and the neighborhood planning process, and are key to this Growth Policy's recommendations for Neighborhood Centers scattered throughout the city. These techniques could provide a number of new housing units and mixed-use development. They also can strengthen a neighborhood's viability and stability.

Recent changes to the Zoning Ordinance allow more units per lot and smaller minimum lot size requirements. Allowing residential uses by right in commercial areas also encourages mixed-use and should encourage

infill, rehabilitation, and redevelopment. In future review of regulations, allowing taller residential and commercial developments and mixing compatible uses could increase housing and commercial opportunities while using services and infrastructure more efficiently.

As the Helena area continues to grow, impacts from development located farther from the City are becoming more evident, including traffic congestion, reduced water quality, increased cost of providing and maintaining services and loss of agricultural lands. Providing residential and commercial options within Helena through infill development, rehabilitation, and redevelopment could help reduce some impacts of expected growth in the area, and are supported by this plan.

Development Constraints

The Helena area contains a variety of development constraints that do not always prohibit development but may require mitigation. The following is a summary of these constraints – in some cases, explained in greater detail or mapped in the Natural Resources or Subdivision chapters.

Topography & the Wildland-Urban Interface

Steeper slopes and the wildland-urban interface tend to be located along the southern and southwestern boundaries of the City. The City's southern edge often contains steeper slopes as it extends into the adjacent forested mountains to the south and west, increasing the danger from wildfire. Burning embers from wildfires may travel considerable distances under normal conditions, and wildfires may even generate their own winds.

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Due to the potential for higher winds in the event of a wildfire due to drought and beetle-killed trees, the entire City has been designated a Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), and all new roofs must have a minimum of Class 3 fire-retardant materials.

The WUI also contains platted lots that remain undeveloped because of steep slopes and lack of infrastructure. The steeper slopes can also create development challenges to address the potential for subsidence and erosion, changes to stormwater drainage patterns, and the need for effective revegetation.

Earthquakes & Related Liquefaction

The Helena area has several earthquake faults and has experienced earthquakes, with the most notable events in 1935 measuring 6.0 and 6.3 on the Richter scale. As a result, all construction is required to comply with seismic design category D (formerly seismic Zone 3) building construction standards. The City also has established a hazard mitigation plan containing a strong public education component to address a variety of hazardous events.

Floodplains & Wetlands

Floodplains and wetlands are located along Ten Mile and Prickly Pear Creeks to the north and east. While development may be permitted in the floodplains, additional development measures may be required for subdivisions and building permits. The City has also adopted a Floodplain Ordinance.

Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife habitat is often located along creek corridors (in addition to floodplains and wetlands), although deer and other wildlife can be found in all areas of the city and surrounding area. Subdivision review criteria, included in Chapter 10, include evaluating development effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Airport Noise

Helena's Airport Noise Influence Overlay includes part of the north-central and northeastern portions of the City and extends east of the Helena Airport into the County. The City's Zoning Ordinance identifies prohibited uses in the overlay district, including:

- *Hospitals;*
- *Convalescent homes and related health-care facilities;*
- *Elderly, multi-family rental housing;*
- *Schools;*
- *Libraries;*
- *Theaters and other indoor or outdoor performing arts facilities.*

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For more on the scope of airport noise in Helena, see the noise influence area map in the Natural Resources chapter. Similarly, a copy of the JLUS Military Affected Area map is included in this chapter as Figure 3.09.

Figure 3.04 – *Downtown and elsewhere, making Helena friendly to all modes of travel is an important consideration. (Image: SCJ Alliance, Inc.)*

Objectives Summary

This plan's goal and objectives framework reflects the complexity and scope of land use policy in Helena, detailing a direction that promotes development patterns that are fiscally and environmentally sustainable, providing a mix of land uses that support a balanced economy and an outstanding quality of life. More compact development is a consistent theme, seeking ways to shorten travel distances, enhance civic character, reduce service costs, and, importantly, accommodate Helena's growing population without relying on expanding the urban pattern into the surrounding countryside.

Some expansion is a realistic expectation, however. Objectives recommend that property located within the Urban Standards Boundary (USB) – particularly areas contiguous to existing development – should be given priority for annexations and extensions of water and wastewater services. Objectives also discourage annexation for undeveloped land until all public facilities are either adequate or appropriately planned and funded to serve development without diminishing service levels elsewhere. For already developed areas, objectives suggest improvement of some public facilities, such as streets, could be deferred to facilitate extension of municipal water and sewer services to areas in need – contingent on owners' willingness to waive the right to protest annexation or formation of special improvement districts. In this chapter and elsewhere, the need for collaboration with East Helena, Jefferson County, and Lewis and Clark County is noted as essential, particularly regarding development along the city's outskirts.

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The Neighborhood Centers concept is seen as a highly visible approach to achieving a more compact means of growth, but other objectives that encourage infill development, rehabilitation of historic structures, and allowance for additional housing units in residential districts are also key. This is consistent with more efficient use of infrastructure, less reliance on the private auto for daily transportation and, as long as the community is involved in the planning and design process, increased compatibility between new development, redevelopment and the surrounding context. More complexity in land use requires more depth of design sensitivity, ensuring new projects are compatible with existing context and fully implement the direction of this growth policy.

An important principle in Helena's Growth Policy concerns arranging the transportation network to take full advantage of and facilitate land use complexity. This dictates a high degree of "connectivity," where blocks are shorter, street intersections more frequent, and street design accommodates shared use by multiple modes. The City's Complete Streets Policy[3] provides some guidance on this, and subdivision objectives further inform how the City may attain increased connectivity in new development. In addition, a more highly connected transportation

3 *City of Helena Resolution 19799.*

network provides better support for incremental land use change – making the urban context more adaptable to shifting expectations and needs over time.

Helena's institutional fabric adds to local "livability." The location, scale, and access to schools, houses of worship, parks and open spaces, environmentally sensitive areas, medical facilities and other institutional or conservation uses can make a difference in how neighborhoods function and endure. In particular, school location and quality influence neighborhood feel, stability, and overall value. If done well, schools stimulate increased pedestrian activity in neighborhoods, add to neighborhood identity, and complement the surrounding transportation and infrastructure context. New development can learn from what has succeeded in the past, providing easy multi-modal access to these institutional and conservation spaces and ensuring that new neighborhoods enrich and are enriched by this interdependent relationship.

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Land Use Goals & Objectives

Goals

[G.01] Promote and sustain Helena's economic vitality, supporting existing businesses and attracting a diverse range of economic sectors that provide employment opportunities.

Discussion: In seeking long-term prosperity, Helena residents understand the need to build economic diversity – capitalizing on access to neighboring areas as well as developing a strong business base within City limits. This plan supports strategies that build and sustain a diverse, balanced economic base, retain existing quality of life assets, and help keep Helena prosperous.

[G.02] Support provision of housing that is safe, available, accessible, and affordable for all Helena residents.

Discussion: Helena's ongoing success depends on the ability of residents to afford safe, comfortable and convenient housing. This goal provides the foundation for a wide range of objectives supporting housing provision, guiding decisions regarding housing diversity, land use patterns, facilities provision, transportation, funding mechanisms and supporting services.

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[G.04] Provide and support Helena's parks and recreational opportunities on-pace with growth.

Discussion: Helena residents cherish current open space access, and parks and recreational services, and wish to retain the same or higher levels of service as the community grows. This goal directs the City to consider open space, parks and recreational needs in all related plans and actions, including land use decisions, regulatory requirements and budgeting.

[G.06] Protect and enhance the quality of Helena's natural environment, conserving resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Discussion: A hallmark of Helena is its mountainside setting, including forested hillside backdrop and open-space lands. In concert with other plan goals and policies directing growth, this goal supports the preservation of scenic and open space areas, urging creative employment of tools such as land trusts, rights-purchasing or exchanges, or other appropriate strategies.

[G.09] Sustain the historic downtown as the "heart" of Helena, bringing the community together and enhancing its commercial, service and civic vitality.

Discussion: In preparing this plan, residents made it clear that the historic city center should still be considered the 'heart' of Helena. Maintaining a vibrant city center will require supporting its numerous and necessary functions, including a strong commercial base, community services, public space availability and access, parking and diverse housing options. This plan provides objectives and actions that help foster an environment in which the downtown can thrive, in turn aiding the attractiveness, efficiency and value of the entire community.

[G.10] Plan for and establish types and quantities of land uses in Helena supporting community needs, neighborhood centers, aesthetics and the City's long-term sustainability.

Discussion: Cities exercise considerable influence over land use, in turn influencing the type and character of development, patterns of growth, and the short and long-term financial impact of growth on the local economy. Consequently, this plan supports the allocation of land use types, supporting features and facilities sufficient to achieve overall plan objectives.

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[G.11] Coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions and agencies, including East Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Jefferson County, and Broadwater County on issues that have regional impacts.

Discussion: In the past, Helena was a more centralized, independent place. Today, the City's fortunes and that of its residents depends on a set of dynamic, inter-dependent relationships between East Helena, Lewis and Clark, Jefferson and Broadwater Counties, and other agencies and forces that shape the region. Over the course of this plan's life cycle, it is expected that inter-agency collaboration will become even more important. Accordingly, this plan's goal and objectives framework supports actions building the economic health and resilience of the region as a whole, especially as it relates strategically to the unique qualities Helena residents enjoy.

Objectives

[O.12] Promote and maintain development of a diverse housing stock, helping to:

- Minimize depletion of natural resources;
- Reduce land consumption and demands on the physical environment;
- Provide housing options for all residents;
- Optimize infrastructure use;
- Prepare Helena to meet emerging needs.

[O.13] Maintain a regulatory environment that minimizes barriers for the creation of new or upgrades to existing housing, while protecting residents' health, safety, and welfare.

[O.14] Support the development of housing located in proximity to necessary services and quality of life assets, including generalized physical, technological, social and economic infrastructure.

[O.24] Give priority for future extension of services and annexations to property located within Helena's Urban Standards Boundary (USB) area.

[O.25] Avoid annexation of undeveloped land until all public facilities are adequate to serve the new development, or an infrastructure plan is in place to assure that such facilities will be provided when needed.

[O.29] Promote energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy in new and existing development, minimizing impacts on natural resources and the environment through measures including, as appropriate:
- Development standards;
- Land use regulations;
- Public/private partnerships;
- Public education;
- Tax or other monetary incentives.

[O.33] Foster open-space connectivity in and around Helena, helping link parks, open spaces and water bodies, and providing opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle trails.

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[O.34] Coordinate parks system planning with land use and transportation planning, recognizing the public health and recreational value of features that support walking and cycling.

[O.40] With Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), plan a logical, long-range arterial system for Helena, including interstate access that promotes compact, highly- connected land use patterns and that may be systematically implemented through right-of- way reservations.

[O.41] Coordinate transportation investment with efficient land use patterns, making cycling and walking a practical transportation alternative.

[O.42] Promote transportation facilities and land use patterns that support resource efficiency and reduce the output of greenhouse gasses.

[O.45] With local and regional jurisdictions, identify key transportation corridors and work to differentiate arterial roadway design, emphasizing neighborhood centers as points of community importance and focus.

[O.51] Protect and sustain irreplaceable natural features such as wetlands, stream corridors, and similar high-value areas that provide wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, improved water quality and safety values such as flood control.

[O.53] Preserve habitat areas identified by the Endangered Species Act or as important to wildlife identified by the State of Montana as species of conservation concern.

[O.54] Minimize conflicts between wildlife and human development, especially in areas abutting wildlife habitat.

[O.55] Minimize environmental degradation in areas with challenging physical and environmental characteristics, such as steep slopes, watercourses, drainage ways and wetlands.

[O.69] Work to preserve or mitigate potential loss of historic, cultural or aesthetically-significant features, boosting overall economic vitality, tourism and local quality of life, including:
- Landscapes and open space areas;
- Skylines, sightlines and viewsheds on the City's south border;
- Buildings, districts or objects of historic significance.

[O.70] Encourage the preservation and rehabilitation of buildings in the downtown.

[O.73] Coordinate historic and pre-historic preservation issues with land-use planning and decision-making.

[O.76] Support land use patterns that:
- Promote compatible, well-designed development;
- Foster the long-term fiscal health of the community;
- Maintain and enhance resident quality of life;
- Implement related master plans and/or facility plans.

[O.77] Apply or revise zoning designations with careful consideration of factors including:
- Future land use mapping;
- Compatibility with surrounding land uses;
- Infrastructure and service plans;
- Development of vacant and under-utilized buildings;
- Existing and future traffic patterns;
- Goals and objectives of the growth policy, related master plan and/or facility plans.

[O.78] Encourage infill development on vacant and under-utilized land within the city, directing growth to areas currently served by, or in close proximity to, existing infrastructure and that harmonizes with the character of existing neighborhoods.

[O.79] Encourage development within the Urban Standards Boundary (USB) to use City standards and guidelines to facilitate future annexation.

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[O.80] Promote development of varied and compatible types of mixed-use neighborhood centers in Helena, serving to enhance neighborhood identity, address community need, and support more compact land use patterns.

[O.81] Identify and encourage the growth of mixed-use neighborhood centers where appropriate and may be served by existing infrastructure.

[O.82] Encourage development patterns and proposals that promote efficient use of City infrastructure and resources.

[O.83] Encourage development patterns that provide suitably-scaled, daily needs services within walking distance of residential areas, allowing a measure of independence for those who cannot or choose not to drive.

[O.84] Promote small block development patterns, promoting connectivity and reduced multi-modal travel distances between residences and schools, parks, and services.

[O.85] Reduce functional and visual impacts of entry corridors and commercial development on abutting residential neighborhoods, considering buffering uses, design standards and other methods.

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[O.86] Promote the redevelopment of vacant or under-utilized properties with a mix of uses, supporting local and citywide objectives.

[O.87] With the school district, prioritize location of schools in areas with: • Access to arterial and collector streets; • Ample sidewalks and pedestrian access; • Proximity to residential areas being served; • Proximity to designated neighborhood centers; • Cost-effective access to necessary utilities and services.

[O.88] In making annexation decisions consider the following factors:
• Master plans for water, sewer, transportation, parks, schools and emergency services;
• Provision of necessary rights-of-way and easements;
• Studies that evaluate environmental and public service factors;
• Timing that supports orderly development and/or coordinated extension of public services;
• Ability to leverage existing facilities, minimizing expansion or duplication of facilities;
• The Urban Standards Boundary (USB);
• Growth Policy goals and objectives.

[O.91] Work with Lewis and Clark County and East Helena to create joint development standards that:
- Provide a more consistent regulatory system for in-city and surrounding areas;
- Guide annexation decisions;
- Require new development connect to public services whenever practical or provide for future connections if not immediately practical.

[O.92] Coordinate land use development issues with East Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Jefferson County, Broadwater County and other adjacent jurisdictions as beneficial to the long-term quality of life of Helena and its region.

[O.99] Promote the concentration of specialized industries within the city where specialized infrastructure, information, and labor advantages may promote economic development and desirable growth.

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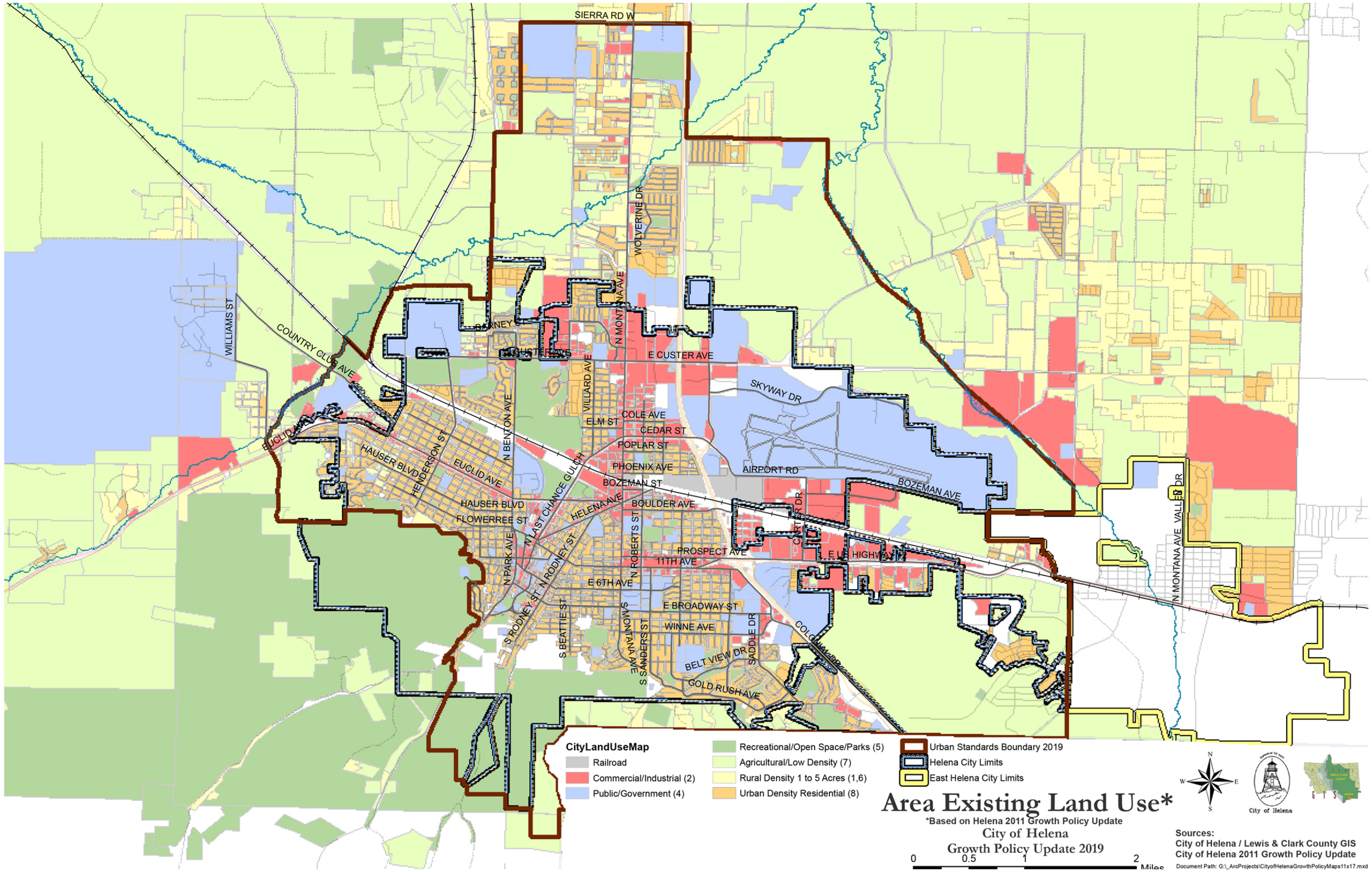

Figure 3.05 – *Existing Land Use map (Image: City of Helena)*

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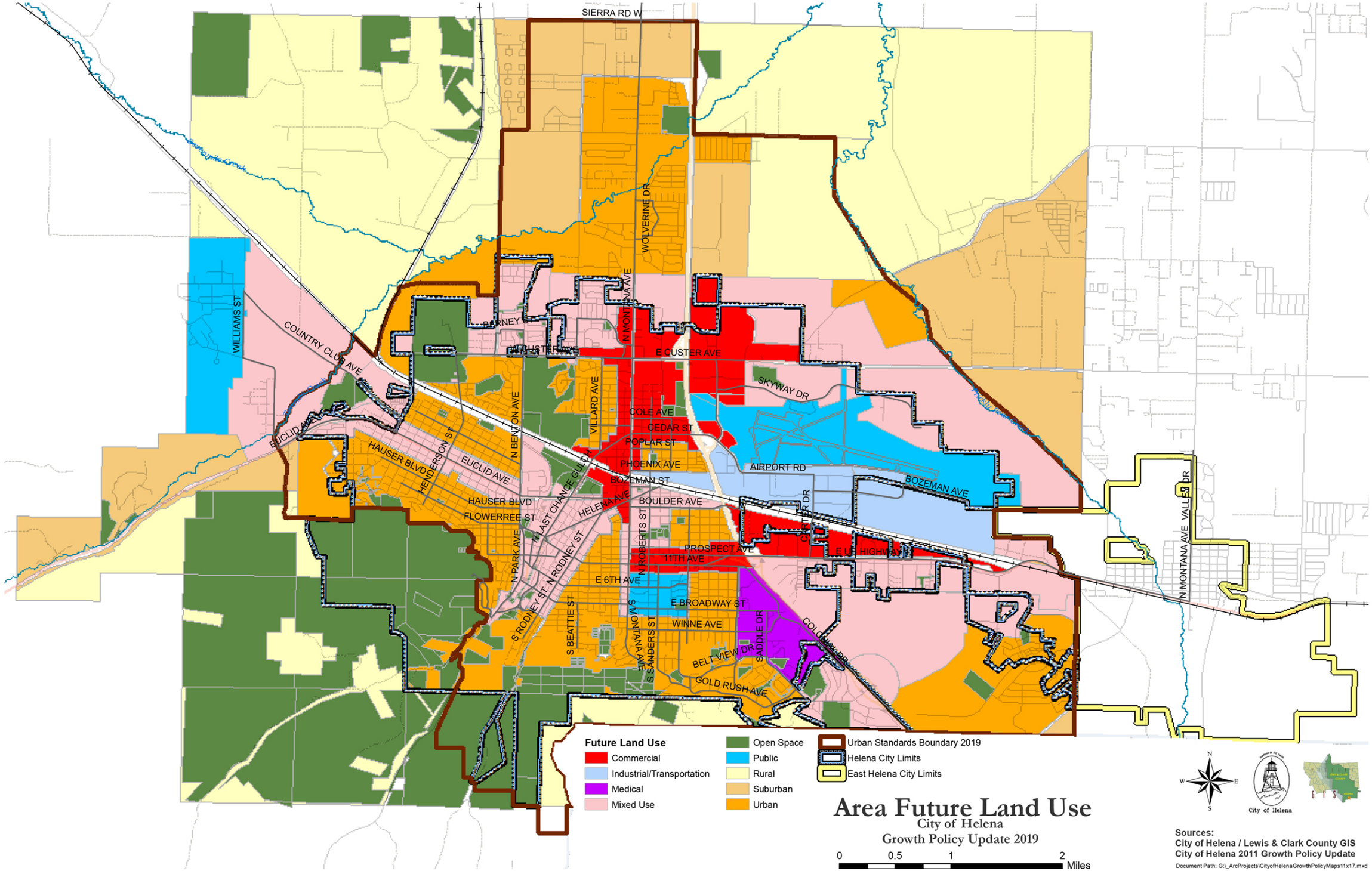

Figure 3.06 – *Future Land Use map (Image: City of Helena)*

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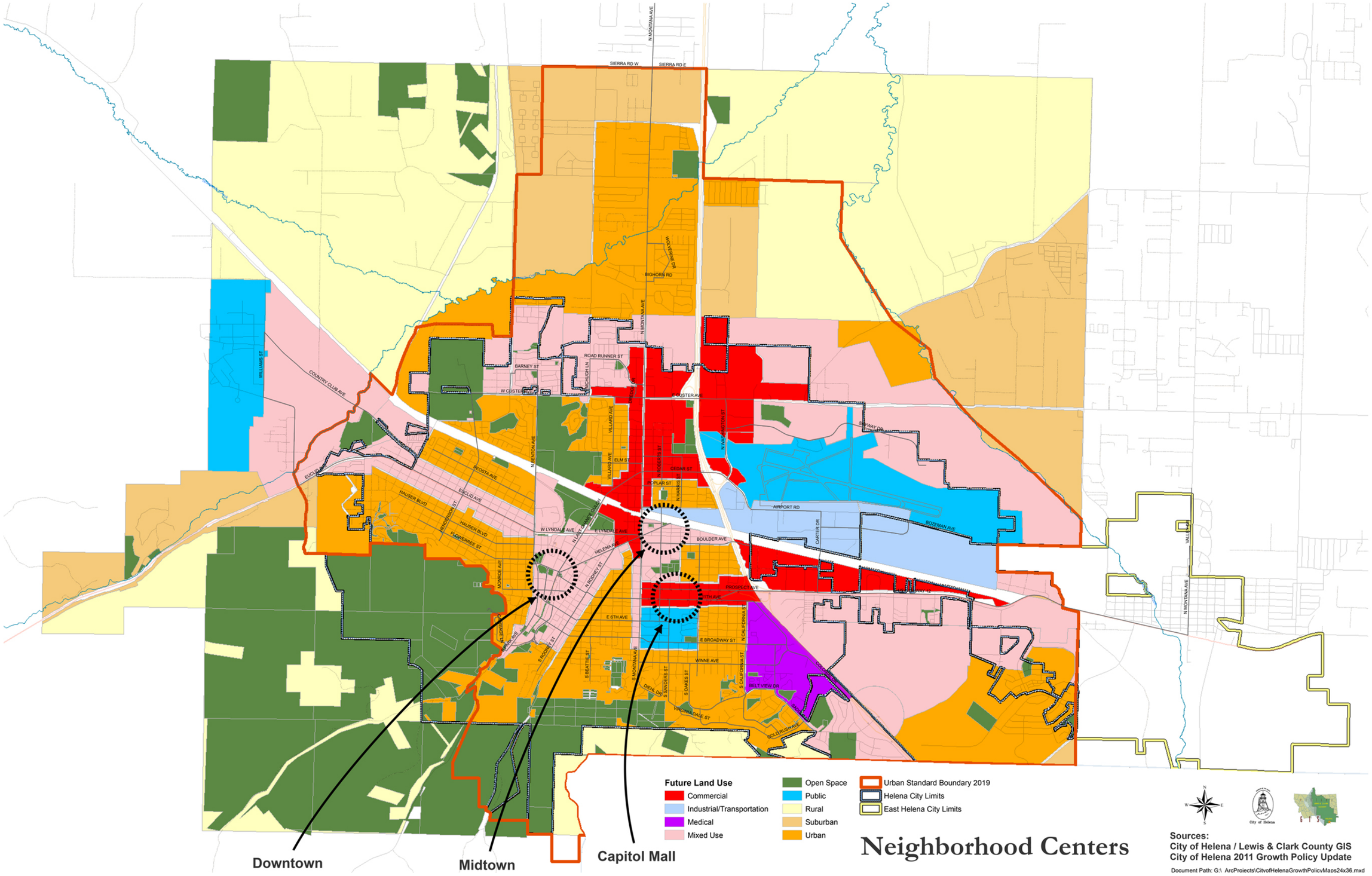

Figure 3.07 – *Neighborhood Centers map. Note that only those centers with completed or in-process neighborhood plans are shown. See Table 3.02 for details on other potential centers. (Image: City of Helena)*

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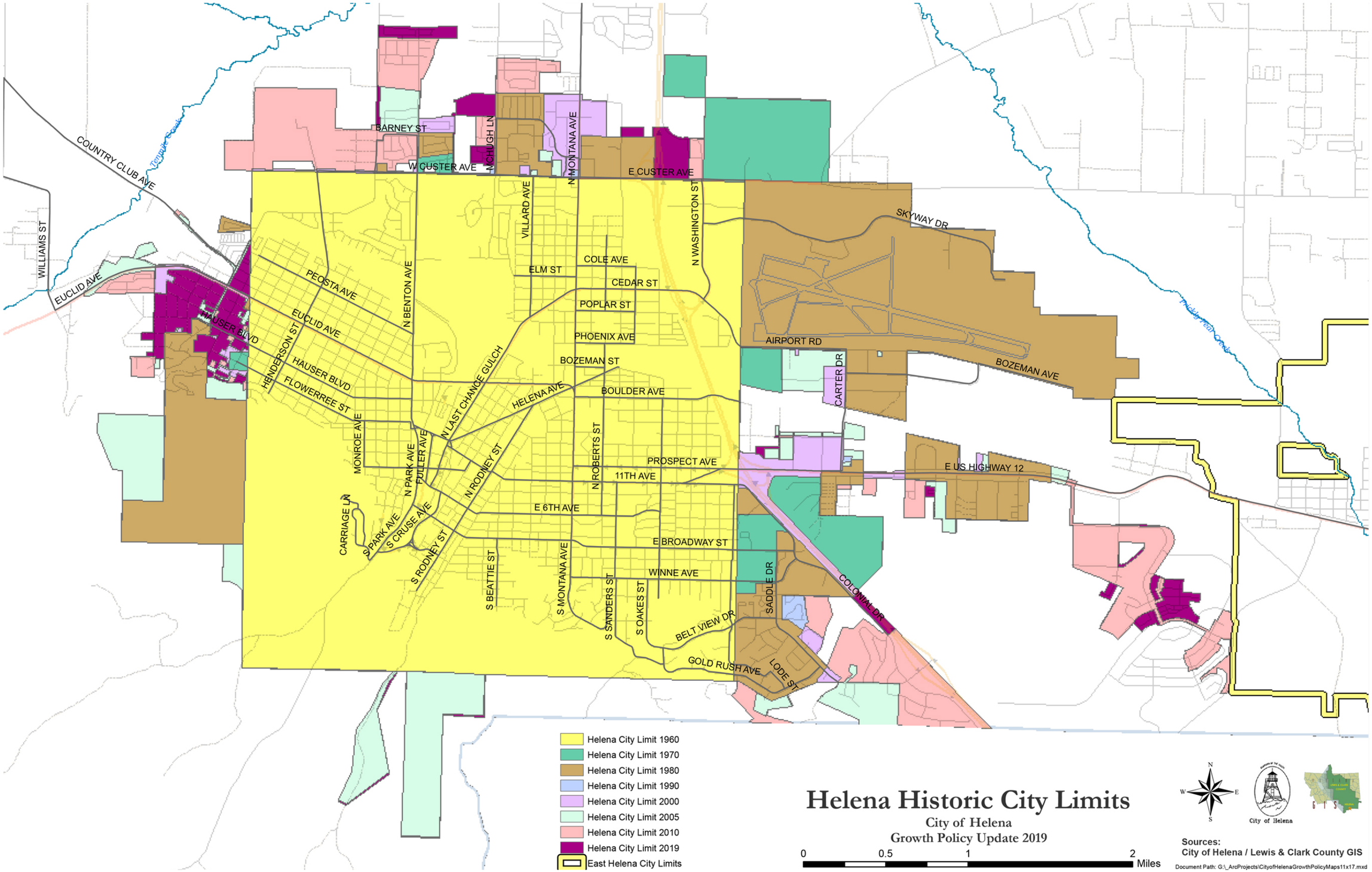

Figure 3.08 – *Historic City Limits Map (Image: City of Helena)*

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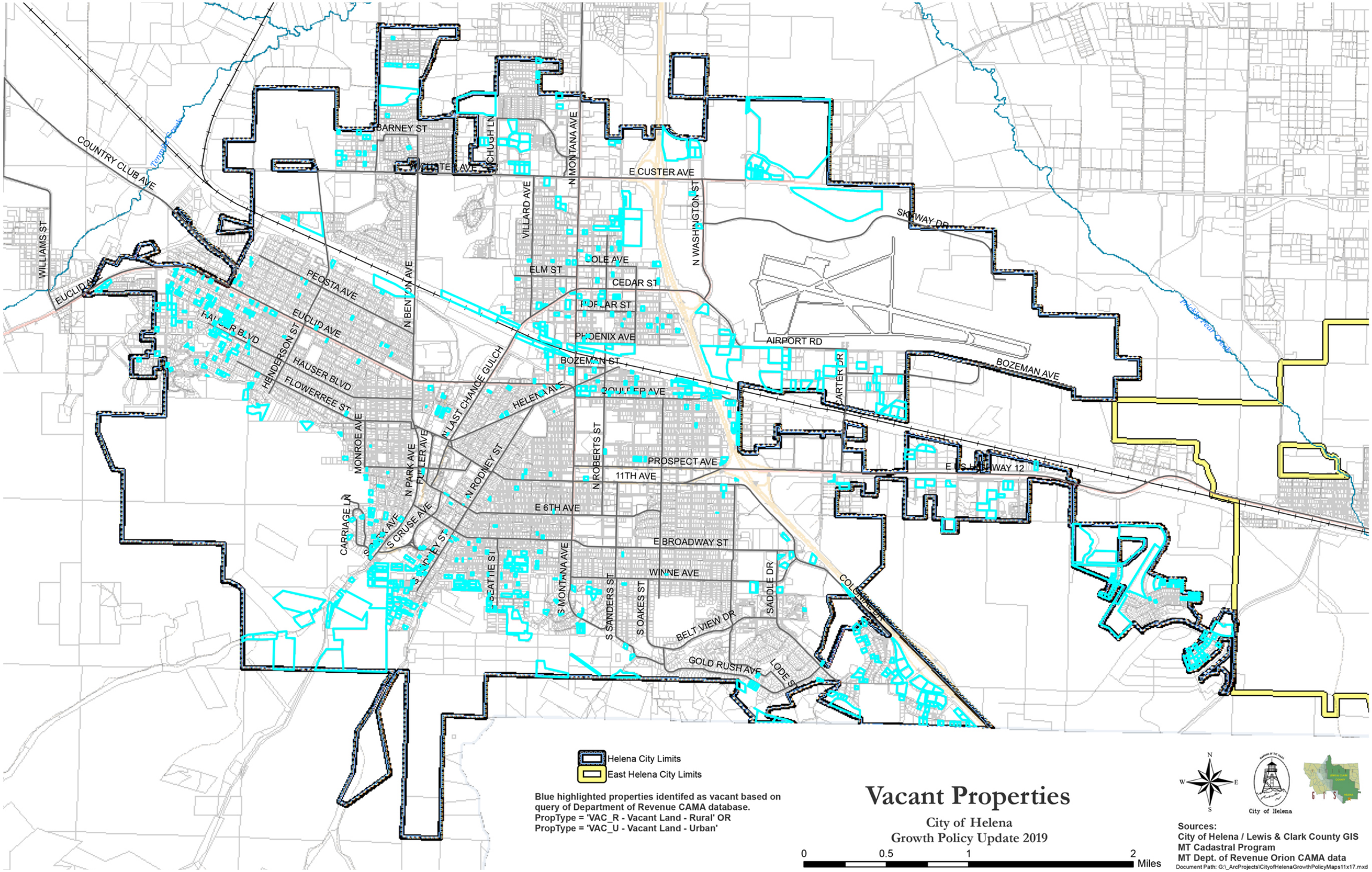

Figure 3.09 – *Vacant Properties Map (Image: City of Helena)*

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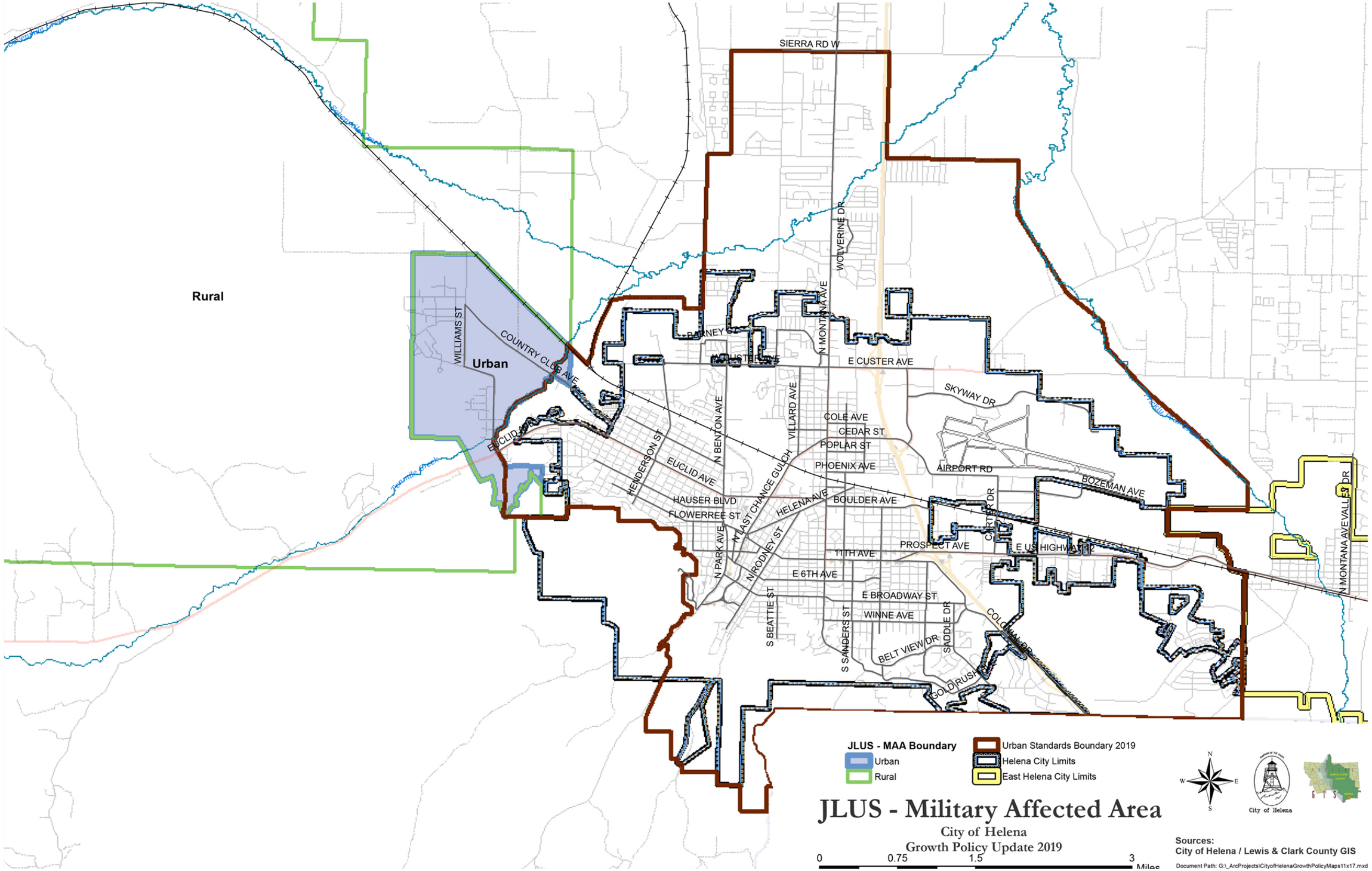

Figure 3.10 – *JLUS Military Affected Area map (Image: City of Helena)*

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