

Memorandum

Studio Week, Process Results

May 20, 2019

Introduction

Beginning on Wednesday, Thursday, April 2 and continuing through Saturday, April 6, 2019, the City of Helena hosted a series of “Storefront Studio” events at 121 Last Chance Gulch, downtown. The daily studio schedule was as follows:

Wednesday, April 2 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm
Thursday, April 3 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Friday, April 4 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Workshops, also conducted at the above address, were held at the following times:

Wednesday, April 2 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Saturday, April 5 Noon - 1:30 pm

The studio was also open to visitors during the April 4 First Friday event, from 5:00 pm to 8:30 pm.

These events were designed to engage residents in multiple ways and including visitors taking part in scheduled group meetings, visiting in response to media outreach, or just passing by. The studio events, as well as the workshops, were advertised in the following ways:

- The City website
- Helena’s Facebook account (including that platform’s “live” video feed)
- Flyers posted in and around the community
- A print ad in the Helena IR

The following outlines both process and summary results of input received during the studio-only times, both workshops, and to-date results of a short questionnaire presented in paper form at the studio and promoted online.

Storefront Studio Input

As previously indicated, the storefront studio events were designed to engage residents in multiple ways in support of Helena’s Growth Policy Update. Engagement activities are broadly categorized below as “informal” and “formal”, though all efforts were configured to provoke thought and allow visitors the means to learn, consider and provide input regardless of level of interest or time available to do so.

Informal Activities

Upon arrival, visitors were typically provided a brief overview of the Update, asked to consider topical issues introduced on 13 wall-mounted displays, and make notes regarding these directly on the display panels. A larger-sized, blank “graffiti wall” panel allowed

visitors to record thoughts and ideas independent of the topical panels if they so desired.¹ In addition, poster-sized prints of City maps were also on display to seed conversation, including Helena's Future Land Use Map, the Zoning Map, the 'Hazards' Map, and Vacant Lots Map.

Summary Findings

In addition to numerous conversations with staff and the consultant team, participants provided a limited number of comments on the topical panels but provided a great many comments on the graffiti wall. Typical comments included remarks covering the following topics and issues:

- More city activity, especially downtown
 - More for kids/teens to do
 - More festivities downtown
 - Christmas lights display
 - Concerts
- Affordable housing within city, including tiny houses and mother-in-law units
- Dense living spaces are desired
- Community gardens wanted throughout the city
- More trails for biking/walking and better access to existing trails
 - Need for a cleaning and maintenance program along trail system
- Support public safety
 - Drug use is a problem
- Equality for bicyclists
 - Don't allow e-bikes on trails
 - Older cyclists need a place to ride also, not always easy without assistance
- Walking mall should be maintained and celebrated
 - Prioritizes walkers and bikers
- Make more effort to protect the city from wildfires
- Make sure walking and biking around is safe for all
 - More bike lanes
 - Provide safe paths to schools
- More open spaces throughout the city and in each neighborhood
- Avoid excessive parking
 - Reduce or eliminate parking minimums
- Invest in sustainable building practices such as LEED
- Highlight historic character of the city

Formal Activities

Visitors were also asked to provide input in more structured ways, specifically by completing a short, 1/2-page questionnaire, and by considering and advising on each of three potential, broadly-described "Growth Strategies" for Helena's future, introduced here:

¹ Images, scans or photographs of all panels, worksheets, sign-in forms and other materials are available from the City's Community Development Department.

1. **Status Quo, but Better** – This strategy would accommodate growth with development continuing to occur on the edge of town and in the unincorporated county. This scenario would also see Helena working more closely with Lewis and Clark County to manage development more effectively, potentially targeting annexation in some areas and revising environmental and subdivision standards to reduce development intensities where resources might be more vulnerable or where fiscal impacts were more pronounced.
2. **Grow, in “Nodes”** - This strategy would also accommodate growth, but generally do so by encouraging development of more urbanized areas (nodes) located in various parts of the city. This would also involve working closely with Lewis and Clark County to create robust planning policies to steer growth into areas where utility and transportation infrastructure already exists. By directing more growth into areas that would blend housing, retail, employment, and open spaces with a more urban flair, conversion of rural land would be slowed.
3. **Shift to the Center** – This strategy envisions Helena going “all-in” on its city center, creating an attractive, vibrant, and irresistible city core to draw development inward and provide an economic focal point for the entire region. Policies would focus less on joint planning with the County and more on enhancing the attraction of the city center for housing, employment, culture, and entertainment. It would direct major transportation investment and infrastructure upgrades to the benefit of the central city, resisting pressure to enhance roadway capacity on arterials leading out of town and focusing, instead, on upgrades to the transportation experience within.

The questionnaire, provided in print form and made available online, asked respondents to consider and indicate their preferred balance among five pairs of policy-related concepts, each presenting relative extremes for their topics. For instance, the questionnaire asked participants to indicate an appropriate balance between locating housing mostly in and near the city center, versus locating housing mostly on the periphery of the city.

Summary Findings

Written responses to the growth strategies displays were fairly limited but may generally be described as favoring growth strategy two, seeking to create neighborhood-scaled, mixed-use nodes. Transcribed comments from these are provided here:

1. Status Quo, but Better
 - *Don't sacrifice Helena's history for new development – maintain sense of place and identity*
 - *Historic Preservation*
 - *Leave farmland for farmers*
 - *100% renewable energy for the city*
2. Grow, in “Nodes”
 - *Expanded public transportation and more covered transit stops*
 - *Retain open spaces and parks*
 - *Mixed use development*
 - *Increase connectivity between nodes through bicycle paths and walkable routes*
 - *Develop regulations that require new development to fund infrastructure and maintenance costs*
 - *Create a “tourism triangle” via trolley cars to connect the capital, the depot area, and downtown*

- *Sixth Ward would be a good node, but needs amenities and traffic plan first to attract business*
3. Shift to the Center
- *Mixed-use - lower level stores, middle level offices, upper levels residences*
 - *Nodes should be able to stand alone and serve residences within walking distances*
 - *Analyze tax revenue per unit area and prioritize high return businesses (not big box stores)*
 - *Retain parks/open space*
 - *Housing options including affordable housing*
 - *Focus on infill*
 - *Limited on-street parking*
 - *Incentives for small businesses especially on the walking mall*

In addition to the comments above, the three scenarios were seen as successful in terms of setting an effective stage for participant efforts at the workshops, and in “framing” some of the key policy considerations the Growth Policy Update will need to address.

Results of the questionnaire are presented in the table below, reflecting 158 participants recorded thus far:

Concept 1 (Tab value = 1)	Mean Score	Concept 2 (Tab value = 5)
Locate housing in and near the city center.	2.22	Locate housing mostly on the periphery of the city.
Locate housing in the city, but scatter it in neighborhood centers, creating identifiable urban "nodes."	1.99	Locate housing mostly on the periphery of the city.
Increase the level of design control to make residential and commercial projects look better.	2.13	Leave project design up to project proponents, limiting the degree to which the City can require design enhancements.
Let annexation happen as it now does - only as property owners may request it.	3.66	Advocate for annexation, using availability of municipal services as a lever.
Invest in road widening and other capacity improvements to ease congestion.	3.96	Invest in road enhancements to improve quality and safety for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians.

As shown, respondents tend to:

- Favor a more wholistic approach to transportation investment, supporting cyclists and pedestrians as well as motor vehicles
- Support a more aggressive approach to annexation, leveraging municipal services in serving growth strategies
- Are split on whether to focus housing in or near downtown versus on the periphery
- Tend to favor the creation of neighborhood centers or nodes to absorb housing demand
- Slightly favor increased design control to guide the appearance of development.

Workshop 1

On Wednesday the 2nd, the first of two public workshops (“Vision Workshop”) was held at the storefront studio venue. Approximately 40 individuals, exclusive of staff and consultants, attended and took part in exercises. A copy of the worksheet used in the group activities and a PDF copy of the slideshow/presentation from the meeting is available from

Helena’s Community Development Department, along with photos and other materials from the event.

Following a presentation outlining the Growth Policy Update’s background, scope and the consultant team’s initial findings, the evening’s group activities were introduced, asking small groups (three to six persons per table) to help develop a topical, long-term vision for Helena, using a table-sized worksheet considering 10 key topics. Each table (of five groups that evening) presented their consensus findings to the larger assembly at the end of the exercise.

For this exercise, each group was given sets of sticky dots for use in indicating, on a scale of one to 10, Helena’s performance as it exists today, and how they hoped to see Helena perform over the long-term. For each of the 10 topics, these scores were then calculated according to relative gap, helping illuminate the level of work, investment or effort the City might need to dedicate to address each topic. Finally, the groups were asked to advise on how much effort they’d associate with each topic, assigning portions of a 10-unit “budget” among the set.

Summary Findings

Mean results from the Workshop 1 exercise are presented in the tables below, with the first table sorting results according to perceived gap, and the second sorted according to the relative weight or “budget” assigned by the groups.

Topic	Gap	Weight
Active Downtown	4.5	1.25
Transportation Network	4.1	1.75
Affordable Housing	3.5	1.25
Housing Mix	3.1	0.75
Capable Workforce	2.5	0.25
City Leadership	2	0.25
Sense of History/ Identity	1.7	0.625
Water Resources	1.4	0.75
Beautiful Public Spaces	1.2	1.25
Open Space Access	1	0.875

Topic	Gap	Weight
Transportation Network	4.1	1.75
Active Downtown	4.5	1.25
Affordable Housing	3.5	1.25
Beautiful Public Spaces	1.2	1.25
Open Space Access	1.0	0.875
Water Resources	1.4	0.75
Housing Mix	3.1	0.75

Sense of History/ Identity	1.7	0.625
Capable Workforce	2.5	0.25
City Leadership	2	0.25

According to workshop results, participants associate the largest gap, or disparities between existing and envisioned conditions with the following topics:

- Active downtown
- The transportation network
- Affordable housing
- The general mix (or available diversity) of the city’s housing supply.

Conversely, participants associate the smallest gap between existing and envisioned conditions with the following topics:

- Open space access
- Beautiful public spaces
- Water resources
- The City’s general sense of history and self-identity.

Group results from the workshop indicated a preference for greater resources to be assigned to help address the following topic areas:

- The transportation network
- Active downtown
- Affordable housing
- Beautiful public spaces

Results indicated that fewer resources be assigned to address the following topic areas, indicating either a lower priority due to low gap, that the issue wasn’t necessarily one associated with energy investment (political or market factors, for instance), or lower priority due to recognition that addressing other, higher-priority issues might also address those listed:

- City leadership
- Capable workforce
- The City’s general sense of history and self-identity.

Workshop 2

On Saturday the 5th, the second public workshop (“Scenario Workshop”) was held at the storefront studio venue. Approximately 30 individuals, exclusive of staff and consultants, attended and took part in exercises. A copy of the worksheet used in the group activities and a PDF copy of the slideshow/presentation from the meeting is available from Helena’s Community Development Department, along with photos and other materials from the event.

This meeting began with a presentation outlining findings from the first workshop, indicating an emerging sense that Helena’s Growth Policy might embrace strategies to encourage the creation of neighborhood centers across the city. Accordingly, several slides and exhibits

were presented showing where these might be located, how they might be scaled and appear, and what type of street sections or profiles would typically be associated with them.

As with the first workshop, attendees were then asked to complete table-sized worksheets as small groups, providing feedback based on group consensus. Worksheets were completed as three-part exercises, including:

1. Reactions to a set of policy paragraphs, comparing existing policy with proposed revisions. Groups were instructed to rate each of these as "Love it", "Hate it", or Don't know/indifferent.
2. Reactions to a set of actions (or programs) proposed to implement the previous policy set, as before, rating each action as love/hate/unsure.
3. Reactions gauging each group's willingness to "pay" for the previous actions, generally asking the groups to circle a "Yes", a "Maybe" or a "No" for each.

Following the exercise, each table (of four groups that afternoon) presented their consensus findings to the larger assembly at the end of the exercise.

Summary Findings

Text and results from the first portion of the exercise are presented in the table below. Numbers in each of the columns shows the number of tables that checked that reply:

Existing Policy	Policy Shift	Like	?	Dislike
Encourage new development of dense and intense land uses that are contiguous or near existing development and infrastructure in order to ensure efficient expenditure of public funds.	Encourage compact, mixed-use development of activity centers and neighborhoods that are contiguous to existing infrastructure.	4		
N/A	Promote development of a variety in type of activity center to enhance neighborhood identity, serve community need, and support a local lifestyle.	4		
Support infill development of additional housing that harmonizes with the character of existing neighborhoods	Support infill development of additional and varied housing that harmonizes with the character of existing neighborhoods and complements activity centers.	4		
Implement the mixed-use areas and urban standards boundary identified on the Future Land Use Map, update the Growth Policy as new issues arise and make the mixed-use areas a priority when developing neighborhood plans	Focus new development into a hierarchy of neighborhood, community, and regional-scaled activity centers that integrate a mix of live, work, play, and learn functions.	4		
Provide cohesive neighborhoods and pedestrian-friendly environments with connected transportation linkages with walkable block lengths or pedestrian corridors for physical connectivity, and a sense of community	Promote small blocks to ensure good connectivity and reduced walking distances between residences and schools, parks, and services.	4		
N/A	Promote the redevelopment of vacated commercial properties with a vertical and/or horizontal mixture of uses.	4		
Promote transportation choices and efficient land use patterns	Promote transportation choices and efficient land use patterns, making cycling and walking a practical transportation alternative.	4		

Plan a logical, long-range arterial system, including interstate access, that promotes a compact, highly interconnected urban land use pattern and can be systematically implemented by right-of-way reservations and advance acquisition procedures.	Plan a logical, long-range arterial system, including interstate access that promotes a compact, highly connected urban land use pattern and can be systematically implemented by ROW reservations.	4		
N/A	Differentiate arterial roadway design treatments to emphasize activity centers as points of focus linked by arterial corridors.	3	1	

As shown above, support for the various proposed policy shifts was close to unanimous among all tables.

Text and results from the second portion of the exercise are presented in the table below, with numbers in each of the columns showing the number of tables that checked that reply. Actions are numbered sequentially, and for purposes of this report, are referenced in the table presenting results from the third phase of the exercise:

Implementation Actions	Like	Unsure	Dislike	Comments
1. Create multiple-use activity center zoning districts and assign to places where infrastructure is available.	4			<i>What does zoning allow?</i>
2. Develop model activity center master plans in collaboration with property owners and the development community, exploring ways to create effective, functional, and attractive mixed-use projects.	3	1		
3. Adopt design standards for attached housing projects like fourplexes, townhouses, and apartments.	3	1		<i>Multi-family especially. Make sure building and infill development isn't so difficult that development goes out of town.</i>
4. Program public improvements in strategic areas to stimulate private investment in the most visible activity center areas.	3	1		<i>Viable?</i>
5. Amend zoning to require development in Activity Centers to provide pedestrian connectors at 300 to 660-foot intervals and vehicular connections at no more than 660-foot intervals.	3	1		<i>ADA standards now 500', more frequent. The right #'s.</i>
6. Craft and adopt form-based design standards that emphasize attractive block frontages and welcoming pedestrian connections.	3	1		<i>Both this and design standards?</i>
7. Evaluate the "complete streets" ordinance on a regular basis and amend as appropriate based on its performance to achieve multi-modal objectives.	3	1		<i>Include street trees. Need to be enforced. Don't allow so many variances.</i>
8. Prepare and update a regional transportation system plan identifying planned roadway corridors throughout the urban service area.	3	1		<i>Disconnect between regional and city, need a master street plan for city. Easements for centennial trail- need cooperation of railroad.</i>
9. Design and improve different sections of arterial roadways differently, manipulating lane widths, landscaping, lighting, and other features to distinguish corridors from activity centers.	4			<i>Healthy community design standards. Need more info.</i>

As shown above, groups were generally in favor of all implementation actions proposed, though some groups indicated a level of uncertainty regarding specific portions of the

actions. Only one group marked that they “liked” all actions. Notes elaborating on concerns or questions regarding the actions are transcribed in the “Comments” column.

Results from the third and final portion of the workshop exercise (willingness to pay) are presented below:

Action	Yes	Probably	Maybe	Probably Not	No
1	3	1			
2	3		1		
3	2	1	1		
4	2	2			
5	2	1			
6	2	1		1	
7	3	1			
8	1	2			1
9		3	1		
Total	18	12	3	1	1

As shown above, groups were generally “willing to pay” or support implementation of most of the proposed implementation actions. Some groups expressed skepticism by marking their answers between “Maybe” and “Yes” due to details that either needed to be clarified or added to the action, as expressed in their comments on the sheet. One group did not answer this part for Action #5.