CITY OF HELENA

CALL FOR ARTISTS & DESIGNERS

CITY OF HELENA SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATE DESIGN

1. INVITATION

The City of Helena invites artists, graphic designers, illustrators, and creative teams to submit original design concepts for a proposed City of Helena Specialty License Plate.

The specialty license plate is intended to celebrate Helena's distinctive identity, history, landscape, and community while generating ongoing financial support for affordable housing initiatives within the City of Helena.

The selected design will be submitted as part of the City's application to the Montana Department of Justice, Motor Vehicle Division (MVD), for approval and production as an official Montana sponsored specialty license plate.

The City is seeking a design that is distinctive, attractive, immediately identifiable with Helena, and legible at the scale and viewing distance of a vehicle license plate.

2. COMPENSATION

In recognition of the time, creativity, and effort involved, the selected artist or design team will be eligible to receive an honorarium of $500 for the winning design. Finalists who are not selected will not receive compensation.

The selected artist or design team will work collaboratively with the City to refine and finalize the winning design, incorporate reasonable revisions requested by the City, and provide final production-ready artwork that meets the requirements for submission to the Montana Motor Vehicle Division. The winning artist or design team will be publicly announced and celebrated, and their work and creative contributions may be highlighted through the City's website, social media platforms, and local news outlets.

3. PURPOSE OF THE SPECIALITY LICENSE PLATE PROGRAM

The proposed Helena specialty license plate will provide Montanans with an opportunity to demonstrate their connection to and support for Helena while helping address one of the community's most significant needs.

Sponsor donations generated and received through the specialty license plate program will support the Helena Affordable Housing Trust Fund (HAHTF) and affordable housing programs and initiatives in Helena, including efforts to create, preserve, rehabilitate, or otherwise support housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income residents. Funds will be administered in accordance with City-adopted HAHTF policies and guidelines and will not be authorized to be spent in any other manner unless approved by the City Commission through the appropriate process.

The artwork will function as an attractive license plate, and as a recognizable representation of Helena that residents and supporters will be proud to display.

4. DESIGN THEME

Helena — Guardian of the Gulch

Artists are encouraged to develop a design that reflects the character, landscape, history, architecture, and identity of Helena.

The overall concept or theme of the specialty plate is:

"Guardian of the Gulch"

Design concepts should communicate a strong sense of place and should be readily recognizable as representing Helena. The phrase "Guardian of the Gulch" must be included in the plate design.

Artists are asked to draw inspiration from features associated with Helena, with some components being ***preferred*** elements, including:

- Mount Helena;
- the historic Helena Fire Tower;
- Helena's skyline;
- the Montana State Capitol;
- the Cathedral of St. Helena;
- the official City of Helena logo or other City-approved identifying mark.
- Helena's historic architecture and neighborhoods;
- The outline of Montana;
- Helena's outdoor environment, history, arts, or community character; and
- Other imagery that the artist believes uniquely represents Helena.

Artists are **asked to incorporate as many of the elements listed above as possible or practical.** The City is particularly interested in designs that are visually strong without becoming overly detailed or cluttered and remaining visually simple enough to satisfy Montana Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) readability requirements

The most successful design will likely use recognizable elements to create a clear and memorable image.

5. DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

A license plate is viewed differently than a poster, mural, or conventional illustration. Designs should remain effective when viewed:

- at a distance;
- while a vehicle is moving;
- under varying lighting and weather conditions; and
- with the required license plate number and registration decals placed over the artwork.

Artists should therefore emphasize:

Simplicity. Avoid excessive detail or visual clutter.

Legibility. Required lettering and plate numbers must remain clearly visible.

Strong Contrast. Background imagery should not interfere with the registration number.

Recognizable Imagery. Major design elements should remain identifiable when reproduced at approximately 12 inches by 6 inches.

Reproducibility. The design should be suitable for production using the manufacturing processes required by the Montana Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) and Montana Correctional Enterprises.

Timelessness. The City hopes to select a design that can represent Helena for many years.

6. MONTANA LICENSE PLATE REQUIREMENTS

The final artwork must comply with all current requirements of the Montana Department of Justice, Motor Vehicle Division, and Montana Correctional Enterprises.

Current MVD design criteria include designated areas for the State name, license plate sequence, and registration tab. Among the current requirements:

- "MONTANA" must occupy a prescribed **1-inch by 6-inch** area centered between the upper mounting holes;
- a designated central area must remain available for the six-character plate sequence, generally represented during design development as **AAA000** and occupy an area of **8 ½-inches by 2 ½-inches**;
- space must be maintained for the registration tab in the upper-right portion of the plate; and
- artwork must ultimately be provided in an acceptable layered digital format.

The applicable MTMVD Specialty Plate template is attached to this document for reference.

Artists should concentrate their creative work within the areas available for specialty plate artwork and should not alter required State elements.

The final selected design will be subject to review and approval by the City of Helena, Montana Motor Vehicle Division, Montana Correctional Enterprises, and other reviewing agencies as required.

If State production requirements change during the approval process, the selected artist may be asked to make reasonable adjustments to the artwork.

7. ORIGINAL ARTWORK

All submitted artwork must be the original work of the submitting artist or team.

Applicants must identify any third-party images, fonts, trademarks, photographs, logos, or other intellectual property incorporated into a submission.

The selected artist must grant the City all permissions in writing that are necessary to reproduce, modify, submit, manufacture, advertise, and use the selected license plate design.

Artists should not use copyrighted, trademarked, AI-generated, stock, or other third-party imagery unless its use is clearly disclosed and the artist can demonstrate that the City will have sufficient rights to use the material for the specialty license plate program.

The City of Helena is not ultimately responsible for the use of nonoriginal work or design and will require the artists chosen to hold harmless and indemnify it for any claims for nonoriginal work submitted by artists.

8. SCOPE OF WORK AND DELIVERABLES

The selected artist or design team will work with City staff to develop the selected concept into final production-ready artwork.

The selected artist will generally be expected to:

1. Refine the selected design based on comments from the City;
2. Incorporate required Montana specialty license plate elements;
3. Make reasonable modifications necessary to meet MVD or manufacturing requirements;
4. Prepare a final full-color license plate design;
5. Provide high-resolution reproduction files suitable for print, web, and promotional use; and
6. Cooperate with City staff during the State review and approval process.

Final file formats may include Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, PDF, PNG, JPEG, or other export formats requested by the City.

9. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Applicants should submit the following:

Incomplete submissions will be deemed unqualified.

a. Submission Form

Submission form must be fully completed, contain artist's signature.

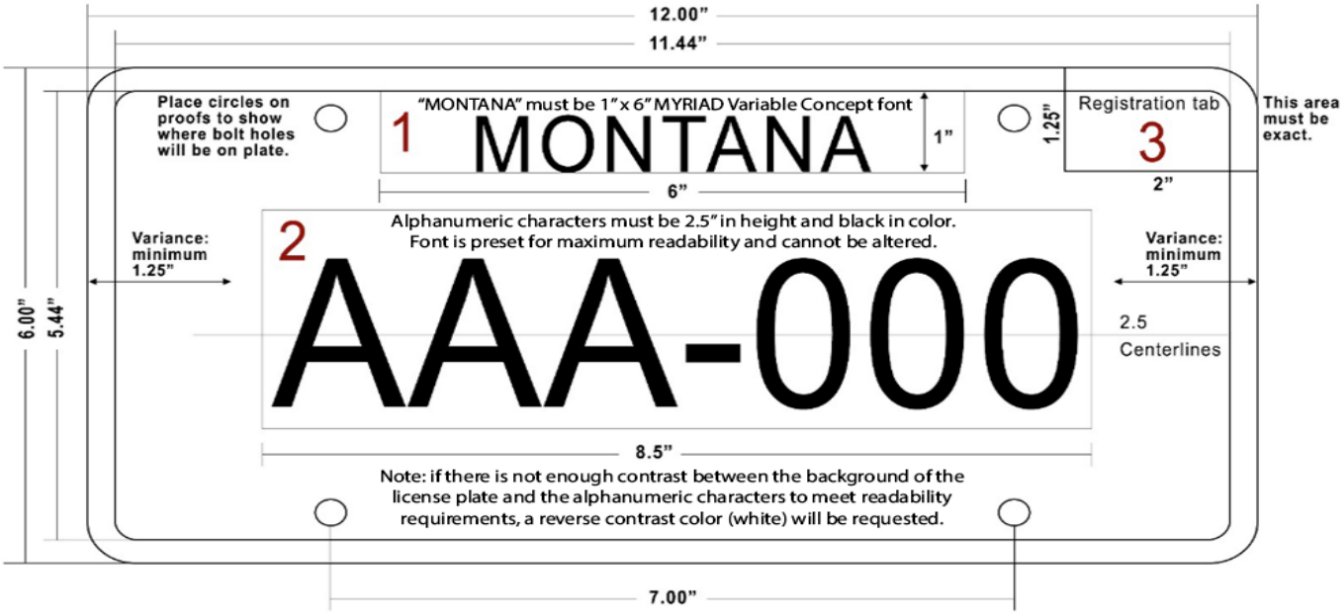
b. Design Description

A brief description, generally no more than one page, explaining:

- the concept behind the design;
- the Helena imagery or symbolism incorporated into the artwork;
- the proposed color palette; and
- how the design reflects the identity of Helena.

c. Proposed License Plate Design

- A color representation of the proposed plate using the template provided by the City.



- Submissions may range from a detailed colored concept to completed digital artwork. Artists are not required to provide final production-ready artwork during the initial submission phase

Proposals may be withdrawn either personally or by written request at any time prior to the due date stated for receiving proposals. No proposal may be withdrawn or modified after the due date and time, unless and until the award of the agreement is delayed for a period exceeding ninety (90) days.

10. SELECTION CRITERIA

Submissions will be reviewed based on considerations including:

Connection to Helena
How effectively the design communicates Helena's unique character and sense of place.

Overall Artistic Quality
Strength, originality, composition, and visual appeal of the design.

License Plate Legibility
Ability of the design to remain clear and recognizable while accommodating the required plate number, State identification, registration tabs, and other mandatory elements.

Simplicity and Reproducibility
Suitability for production as a license plate and effectiveness at actual license plate size.

Public Appeal
Potential for the design to appeal to Helena residents, former residents, visitors, and other Montanans who may choose to purchase the plate.

Adaptability
Ability of the artist and artwork to accommodate modifications that may be required by the City, MVD, Montana Correctional Enterprises, or other reviewing agencies.

The City reserves the right to select a design, request modifications to a submitted design, select finalists for additional review, or decline to make an award if the submissions do not meet the objectives of the project.

The City of Helena will ultimately be the owner of the final design.

11. SELECTION PROCESS

Following the submission deadline, City staff and the Helena Public Arts Committee will review and evaluate eligible submissions. A recommended design will be forwarded to the City Commission for official selection.

The City may select a group of finalists (up to 5) and may provide an opportunity for community input before a final design is selected.

Following selection, the City will work with the selected artist to refine the artwork and prepare the final design for submission to the Montana Motor Vehicle Division.

Selection by the City does **not constitute final approval of the license plate**. The final design remains subject to all State review and approval requirements.

12. ANTICIPATED SCHEDULE

Call for Artists Issued: October 23, 2026

Deadline for Questions: November 2, 2026

Responses to Questions Posted: November 6, 2026

Submission Deadline: December 14,2026 9am MST

Review of Submissions: December 16, 2026

Finalist/Public Review, if applicable: December 2026 – Jan 2027

Artist Selection: City Commission Meeting in January 2027

Final Design Development: through February 26, 2027

Submission to Montana MVD: by March 1, 2027

The City reserves the right to modify this schedule as necessary.

13. HOW TO SUBMIT

Submissions must be received no later than:

9:00am Mountain Time on December 14, 2026

Electronic submissions are preferred and should be sent to:

Bridget Johnston, Community Facilities Manager
bjohnston@helenamt.gov

Subject Line: **Helena Specialty License Plate – Artist Submission**

Submissions may also be delivered to:

City of Helena
Community Facilities Department
Attn: Bridget Johnston
316 North Park Avenue, Room 241
Helena, MT 59623

14. QUESTIONS

Questions regarding this Call for Artists should be directed to:

Chris Brink, Director
City of Helena Community Development Department
316 North Park Avenue, Room 445
Helena, MT 59623
cbrink@helenamt.gov
406-447-8445

Questions received by the deadline identified above may be compiled and answered publicly so that all potential applicants receive the same information.

15. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The City of Helena reserves the right to reject any or all submissions, waive minor irregularities, request additional information, negotiate modifications with the selected artist, or cancel or modify this Call for Artists when determined to be in the City's best interest.

Submission of a proposal does not guarantee selection or compensation.

The specialty license plate program and final artwork will be considered the property of the City of Helena and will remain subject to approval by the City of Helena and the Montana Department of Justice, Motor Vehicle Division, as applicable

CITY OF HELENA SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATE DESIGN

SUBMISSION FORM

Name _____

Email_____

Phone Number_____

Artwork Title_____

Address_____

_____

_____

_____

SIGNATURE NEEDED

I have submitted all information required by this RFP entitled CITY OF HELENA SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATE DESIGN for the City of Helena and the Helena Public Art Committee. Artwork must be original and may not be work that has been sold or reproduced in any way. Designs may not include any breach of intellectual property, trademarks, brands, images of illegal activity and may not involve attaching any object to the box. I understand that all proposals become the property of the City of Helena and may be subject to release to the public pursuant to Mont. Const. art. II, § 9 and Mont. Code Ann. § 2-6-1001 *et. seq.*

My guardian or parent has signed for me if l am not 18 years of age.

_____ _____

Signature *Date*

_____

Printed Name

CITY OF HELENA SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATE DESIGN

ARTWORK DESCRIPTION

Do not include any artist identification information on this page.

Artwork Title:

_____

Concept behind the design:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Helena imagery or symbolism incorporated into the artwork:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Proposed color palette:

_____
_____
_____
_____

How the design reflects the identity of Helena:

_____
_____
_____
_____

CITY OF HELENA SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATE DESIGN

TEMPLATE

Do not include any artist identification information on this page.
Artist must use provided template or provide their own template of the exact same dimension.

Artwork Title: _____

