



October 31, 2019

To: Mayor Collins and Helena City Commission

From: The Helena Citizens Council

**Subject: Consideration of the Low-Cost Low-Impact Beattie Street Trailhead Option
Recommended**

At the October 23, 2019 HCC meeting, the HCC considered the following motion:

“The HCC recommends the consideration of the low cost, low impact Beattie Street alternative trailhead as a viable option for the project.”

Background

At our August meeting, HCC District 2 representative, Meg Bishop, requested time on the September agenda to discuss the Beattie Street Trailhead. At the September meeting, members of the public were present and expressed different and competing feedback on the presentation, including personal comments not germane to the discussion. At that meeting, the HCC voted 8-5 in favor of continuing the discussion to the October meeting and to invite City staff to join us for the meeting, in order to be better informed. Following the September meeting, staff from the Parks, Recreation and Open Lands Department were invited to attend the October HCC meeting. The City Manager responded that staff would not attend the October HCC meeting and pointed to other opportunities to be informed about the City’s current design.

The HCC Executive Committee, concerned about the nature of the September discussion, established a framework for the October discussion, including handing out and discussing the HCC adopted meeting etiquette and voting protocols, with emphasis on the importance of speaking to the motion. To be sure that the City’s proposed design was understood by the HCC representatives, the link to the City’s website posting was provided (twice) to the HCC members in advance of the meeting and copies were handed out at the meeting. A handout describing the District 2 option was emailed to HCC members in advance of the meeting and was also handed out at the meeting. (These two handouts are attached to this memo.)

The meeting framework established by the Executive Committee was as follows: 1) Motion made and seconded. 2) Those speaking in favor, both HCC and members of the public, had 15 minutes to present and ask questions. 3) Those present, both HCC and public, speaking against the motion then had 15 minutes to present and ask questions. 5) Following those presentations

and discussions, a half hour was set aside for the HCC representatives to discuss the motion among themselves. 6) Following HCC discussion, the question was called.

Discussion The following summary of comments (in no particular order), represent the pro and con statements presented at the meeting by those in attendance; and are based on the meeting record only. The two documents attached to this memo provide additional information.

- For the Motion
 - The proposed option would be less costly, and have less impact on the neighborhood and land. Saved funds can be used to address trailhead improvements in other neighborhoods, including those on Mt. Ascension rather than focus limited public resources on one location. There is no need for a vaulted toilet and saved funds could be used elsewhere.
 - It would provide about the same number of parking spaces in the City's current proposal, current available parking is adequate, the impact on City park property is reduced, and it would be ADA compliant.
 - The preferred City approach, including new and expanded parking with about 50 parking spaces and a vaulted toilet, was made before public meetings were held; the proposed option was not given consideration.
 - Public environmental review documents state that there were no impacts from the City's proposal. Suggested impacts not considered include disturbance to vegetative cover, impacts to local wildlife, bird habitat and potential for noxious weed growth.
 - The proposed option would maintain the historic character of the neighborhood.
 - The City's adopted Growth Policy addresses management of the City's open space; and other City documents such as the 2004 and 2010 open land documents support maintaining open space at the urban interface. Open space near a city is rare and should be maintained.

- Against the Motion
 - Current parking is inadequate, a toilet is needed, space is needed for emergency vehicles and easier use by City snow plows, and should be fully ADA compliant.
 - The City's process was correct. There have been many opportunities for public input, the majority of comments at public meetings was in favor of the City's design. Due process has been performed; and the City has responded.
 - It may be premature to get ahead of the City's decision – there may be further design proposals
 - In-depth studies are needed to support the proposed alternative to back up the proposal.

- The proposed option would result in vehicles, in excess of available spaces, being parked on adjacent neighborhood streets.
- It is too late, the decision has already been made by the City Commission.
- The proposed option would not eliminate headlight glare from getting into adjacent houses.
- Restrooms are needed for all users.

Other Comments

- If the decision is delayed to the next HCC meeting, and the motion approved, it would be too late for City consideration

Recommendation

Following comments in favor and opposed to the motion, and following HCC discussion, the question was called.

The motion passed - nine (9) in favor, four (4) not in favor, and two (2) abstentions.

A LOW IMPACT, ECONOMICAL ALTERNATIVE FOR BEATTIE STREET TRAILHEAD FINDING WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS

Meg Bishop, HCC – District 2

The City of Helena is currently proposing a major parking facility at the Beattie Street trailhead (>1ac footprint) that will have a number of significant environmental, social, and fiscal impacts. Many residents in the community feel the scale and scope of the proposed project is; 1) excessive relative to the City's expressed needs; 2) is not in keeping with the character and integrity of the neighborhood, and; 3) does not justify the high cost given the City's limited budget.

Lower impact, more economical alternatives are possible by enhancing the current parking area and would not only address all "needs" expressed by the City but would provide a number of additional benefits listed below. This approach would not only enhance current access at Beattie, but the cost savings could facilitate the improvement of multiple access points along Mt. Ascension to benefit all stakeholders.

We are asking the HCC to support a low-impact, lower-cost alternative that takes advantage of the existing parking availability while exploring enhancement opportunities with adjacent landowners. At least one landowner is willing to negotiate a land trade with the City to accommodate additional parking or a picnic area with trees. The low-impact design in Exhibit A is provided as a simple example, although with a bit of creativity and a land exchange with the SW landowner, several design options are possible. A side-by-side comparison with the City's high-impact design is provided in **Exhibit A**.

ADVANTAGES OF EXPLORING A LOW-IMPACT, LOW-COST ALTERNATIVE

➤ **Cost Savings:**

- A low-impact alternative will reduce costs at a time when the City is struggling to balance the budget while addressing other pressing needs surrounding infrastructure improvement, etc. The proposed project is a significant investment of taxpayer dollars, especially given the lack of evidence for its need and the City's recent decision to increase property assessments;
- The City has budgeted \$200,000 for their proposed project (>1ac). A more realistic estimate of the project cost will likely be closer to \$500,000 or more (according to those familiar with this kind of project development). The scale and scope of the project involves construction on a site with steep slopes and shallow depths to bedrock, extensive cut/fill, and costly considerations for remediation and stormwater management. The project also includes plans for curb/gutters, re-grading the approach on Beattie Street, and minimal traffic calming efforts. **There is no evidence to justify this level of extravagance;**
- If access along Mt. Ascension is desired, the savings reaped by implementing a low-impact option on Beattie could be used to enhance facilities at not just one access point, but a number of access points in the area, thereby promoting a more dispersed access for all users, especially those with mobility issues. Data indicates that there are currently more folks accessing trails along Davis Street in totality. It is logical to consider enhancing facilities where the terrain lends itself to more options;
- **Prioritization of a costly permanent vaulted toilet:** There are a number of City parks and trail access points, not located in a neighborhood setting, that would currently benefit much more from the availability of a permanent vaulted toilet. Many of these sites accommodate a much larger concentration of use (tennis, soccer, etc.) and are still being serviced by temporary facilities if at all. Implementing a low-cost, low-impact design would allow the City to consider higher-priority placement options for a permanent vaulted toilet that would provide the greatest public benefit.

➤ **Accommodating parking demands safely and comfortably:**

- The existing parking capacity is the same as what the City is currently proposing (~18 spaces). Working with the current site, it is possible to optimize the parking and picnicking capacity by negotiating a land trade with a willing adjacent landowner (who was contacted and prefers this option). This will accomplish access goals while significantly reducing costs and impacts;
- The City expressed a “Need” of accommodating parking without obstructing Beattie Street. This Need has never been clearly understood since Beattie Street would never be extended and would remain a dead-end (similar to other open space access points in the south hills). Therefore, a design surrounding and enhancing the current parking space is reasonable, especially considering the adjacent landowner’s interest in a land trade;
- There are occasional demands for increased parking capacity. It is reasonable to consider on-street parking when necessary, especially if cost savings can enhance other access points for Mt. Ascension. This option is the norm for access to open space in many other cities and is preferable in neighborhoods settings, while complying with Helena city code;
- Emergency services and snowplows access will be accommodated as it is currently being accommodated on the multiple other dead-end streets in the area;
- A low-impact design will comply with ALL statutory requirements, including the ADA.

➤ **Property Values:**

- Discussions with realty specialists in Helena indicate that property values adjacent to a major parking facility that includes amenities like a vaulted toilet, picnicking, and event functions will likely reduce current property values by 10-20%. When the decision was made to approve the City’s high-impact design, local residents were unaware of the project or its potential impacts. These potentially significant reductions in property values could be alleviated by exploring low-impact design options;
- A low-impact alternative design would maintain the character and integrity of the existing neighborhood, enhance the current parking facility, and allow for greater dispersed access along the urban interface at other locations.

➤ **Traffic-Related Issues along Beattie Street and the Need for Traffic-Calming:**

- A low-impact design alternative would prevent an anticipated significant increase in traffic along Beattie Street, already struggling with higher traffic volumes and speeds, contributing to a number of concerns. The Beattie Street neighborhood could continue its current efforts to implement traffic-calming actions without the additional pressure of a major parking facility at the trailhead:
 - Clinton Park is a neighborhood park used by many families with children and is particularly vulnerable to safety concerns. Traffic calming is essential to maintaining the safety and peaceful quality of a neighborhood. In response to local concerns, the City’s initial high-impact design included bulb-outs around the park as a traffic-calming strategy. However, the revised design removed the bulb-outs and replaced them with pedestrian walkways that will be minimally effective (**See Exhibit B below**). These revisions appear to be a cost-saving strategy for the City;
 - Current traffic does not observe laws surrounding unregulated intersections. Most drivers consider Beattie Street a through-street and a 25mph speed limit does not slow traffic enough to allow for compliance with these rules. Most drivers do not currently stop for pedestrians;
 - Winter conditions often present unsafe road conditions due to steeper slopes and irregular road slants. On-street parking along the length of Beattie exacerbates the issue. And since most traffic considers Beattie Street a through-street, slower traffic prompts unsafe passing.

➤ **Enhancing Dispersed Access and Facilities for ‘slow users’ and Wheel-chairs:**

- A lower-impact option would allow the City to use money saved to enhance additional trail access points to Mt. Ascension and other desirable destinations. Improving and enhancing dispersed trail access points would; 1) enhance the overall quality of life in Helena by benefiting a much larger portion of the community; 2) increase walkability and connectivity, and; 3) would go much further in attracting members of the community with special needs that extend beyond biking, hiking, or running;
- Davis Gulch access points to Mt. Ascension trails currently support higher numbers of visitors and offer more reasonable and feasible development options for all users at a much lower cost to the City. In addition, there are opportunities to plan trails affording the greatest access potential for wheelchairs and other users with special needs.

➤ **Remaining True to the Original BLM Land Patent (1981) and the Quality of Open Lands Through a Dispersed Access Approach:**

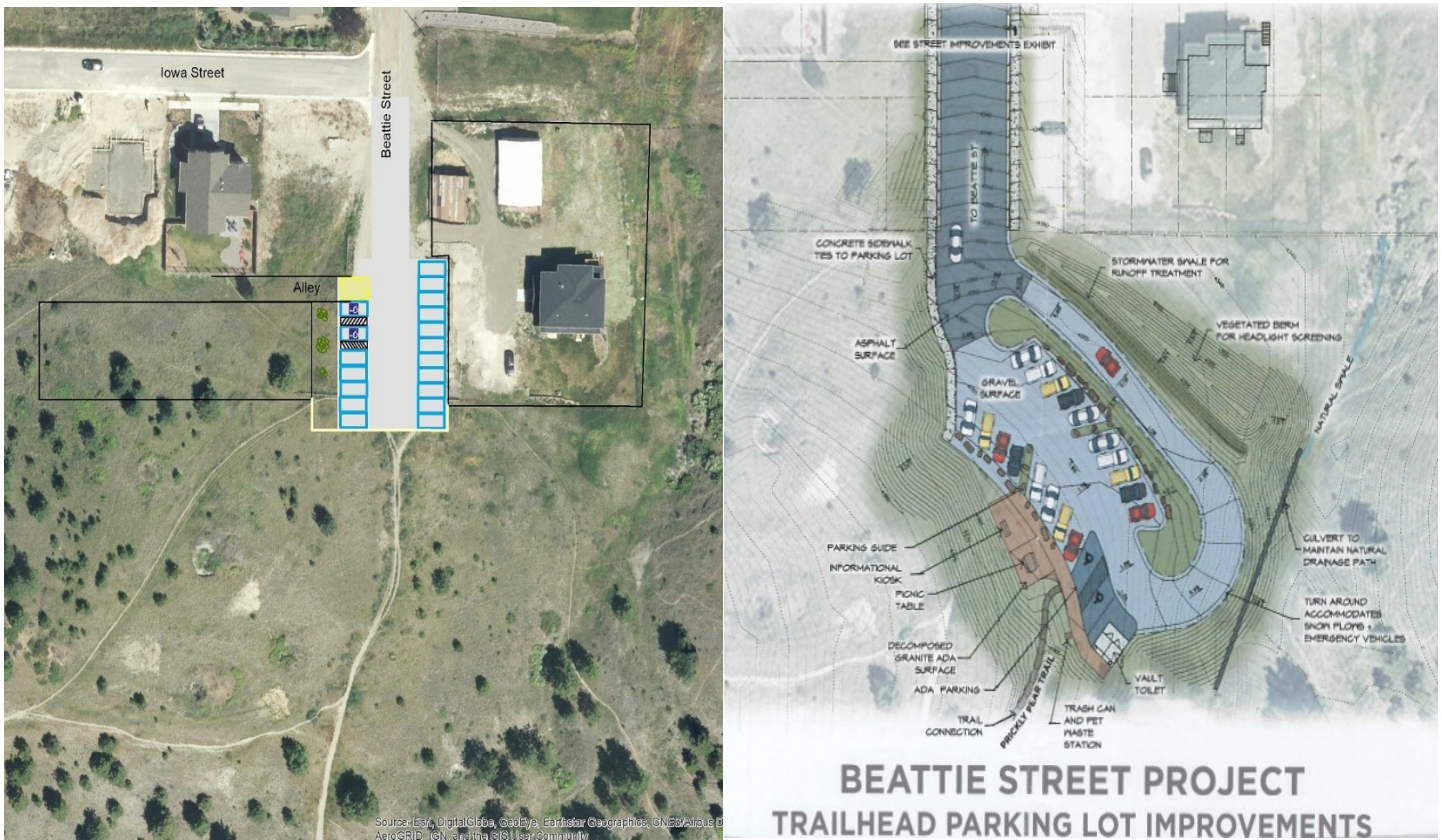
- A low-impact parking alternative would remain true to the original intent of the BLM land patent transfer to the City of Helena under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP) in 1981. In their application to the BLM, the City stated that the land would be “largely preserved in its natural state with a few added picnic facilities and would serve as a sledding area for children;”
- In the late 1990’s, local residents spearheaded an effort to protect Mt. Ascension from a proposal to subdivide 160 acres by Timberline developers. At the time, the City Commission denied the development “for reasons ranging from traffic issues to the effects on wildlife.” Creating a major parking facility/event center there now is counterintuitive to this effort. A low-impact alternative would preserve the integrity of the original land patent and the natural landscape;
- **Existing ‘Decision’ Documents:** A low-impact alternative will also be in keeping with the City’s existing ‘decision’ documents that designate Beattie as a ‘minor’ neighborhood trailhead, for which no development is desired or intended:
 - **South Hills Trails Plan Draft 2003** (“Final 2015” version available only on the PPLT site - not a formal decision document). There is no mention of developing Beattie Street trailhead;
 - **Helena Open Lands Management Plan 2004** (no update found). It clearly states in “Neighborhood Access Points,” that NO parking is desired in these areas. They will include only an informational sign, access gate, and dog waste mitts. On page 7-16 it characterizes that Beattie Street is a MINOR trailhead;
 - **Helena Comprehensive Park Plan 2010.** There is no recommendation to expand Beattie Street Trailhead or develop a parking lot.

➤ **Remaining True to CCB’s Climate Change and Resiliency Recommendations (supported by HCC):**

- A lower impact alternative along with improvements at other access points would encourage dispersed use and promote local walkable/bikeable access, reducing the carbon footprint of accessing open space.
- A lower impact alternative would minimize disturbance to the native vegetative cover and impacts to local wildlife, especially the potential loss of bird habitat (specifically prime breeding habitat for local Mountain Bluebirds). Research indicates that there has been an almost 30% reduction in bird populations across the US and Canada since 1970 (*Science*, 4 Oct 2019). Maintaining native habitat locally is critical to stemming the continued rapid loss of bird populations.
- The City’s proposed project will likely impact an area >1 acre including cut/fill areas. A low-impact alternative would reduce the project footprint, thereby reducing the potential for noxious weed invasion and soil loss through stormwater runoff.

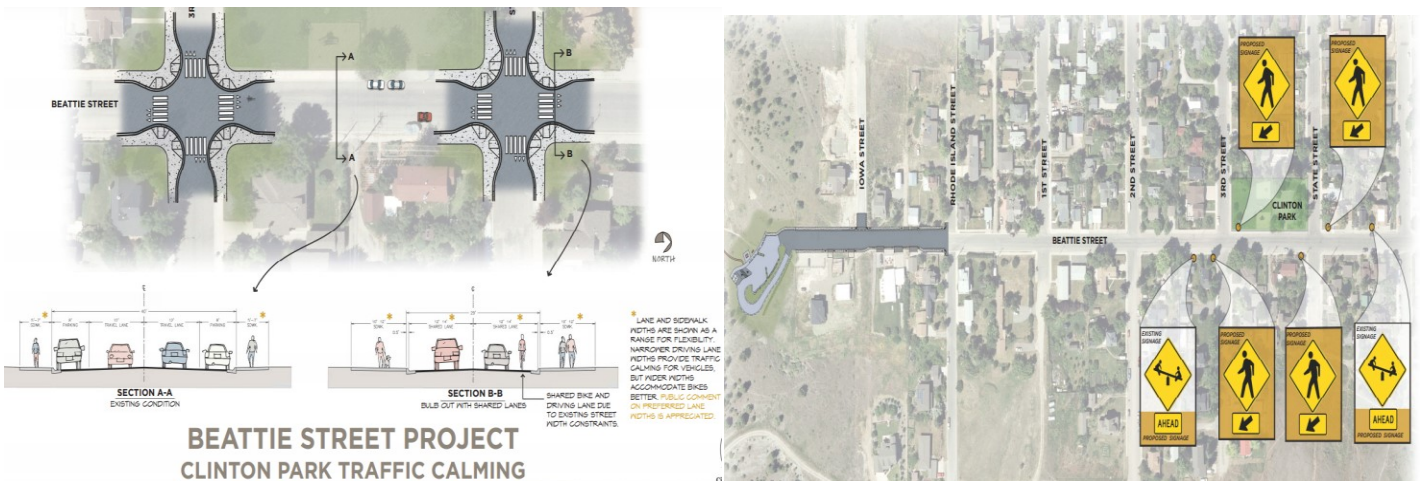
APPENDIX A

A comparison of one EXAMPLE of a low-impact design (left) that is possible and the City's proposed design (right) – not to scale.



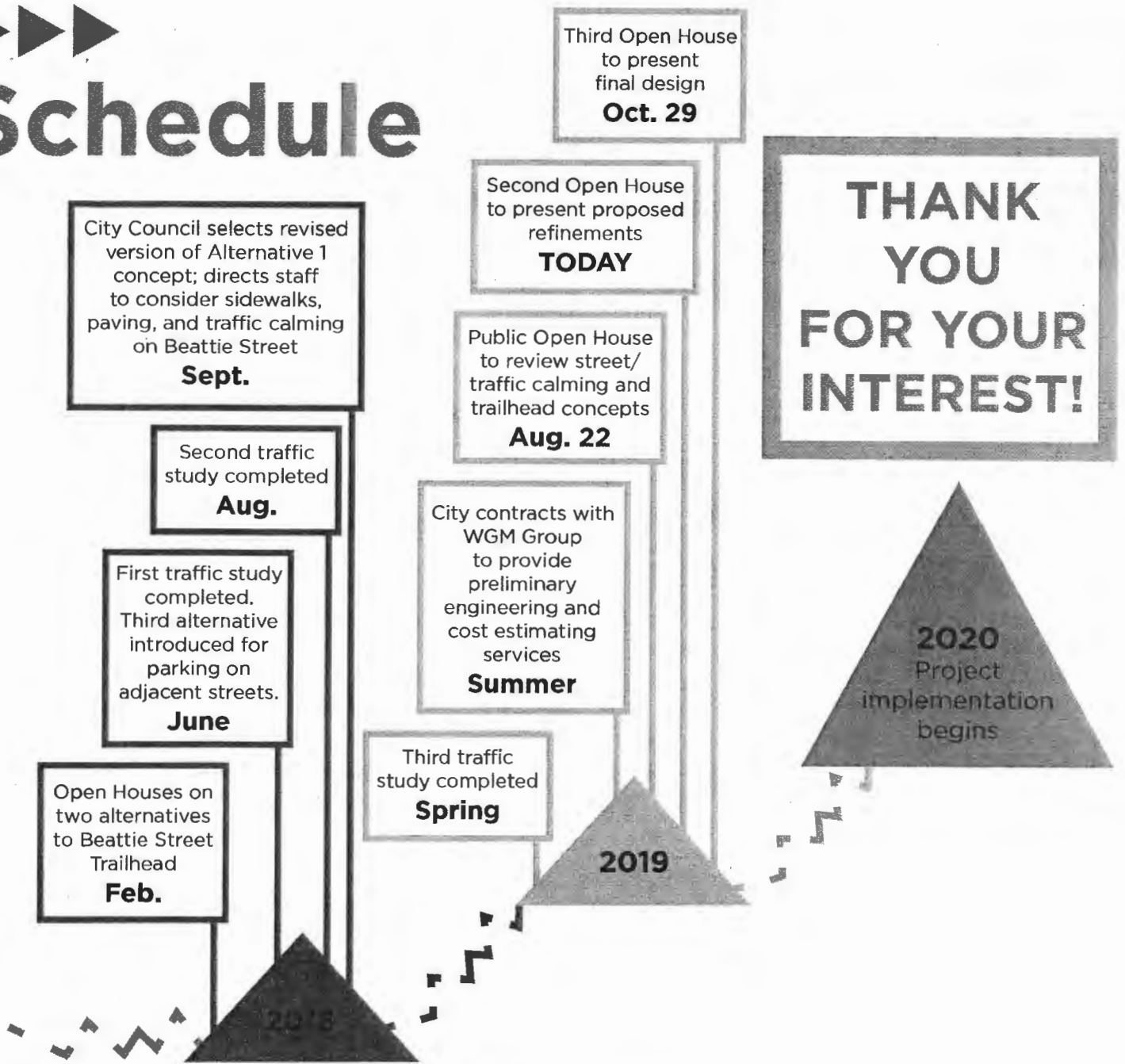
APPENDIX B

A comparison of the City's initial traffic-calming design with bulb-outs at both ends of Clinton Park (left) and the recent revision using only signage and pedestrian walkways (right) to reduce overall costs.





Schedule



How YOU can be involved:

Attend any or all of three public meetings to be held in 2019:

Aug. 22: Open House #1 at Jefferson Elementary School, 4:30-7:00 pm

Sept. 30: Open House #2 at City/County Building, 5:30-7:00 pm

~~Oct. 29: Open House #3 at Lewis and Clark Public Library, 4:30-6:30 pm~~

Nov. 6 Bryant Elementary 1520 Livingston Ave. 6:00pm - 7:30 pm

Submit your comments to:

Anne Cossitt, WGM Senior Planner
1111 E. Broadway St. Missoula, MT 59802
acossitt@wmggroup.com

Or by phone:

City Parks and Recreation at 406-447-8463

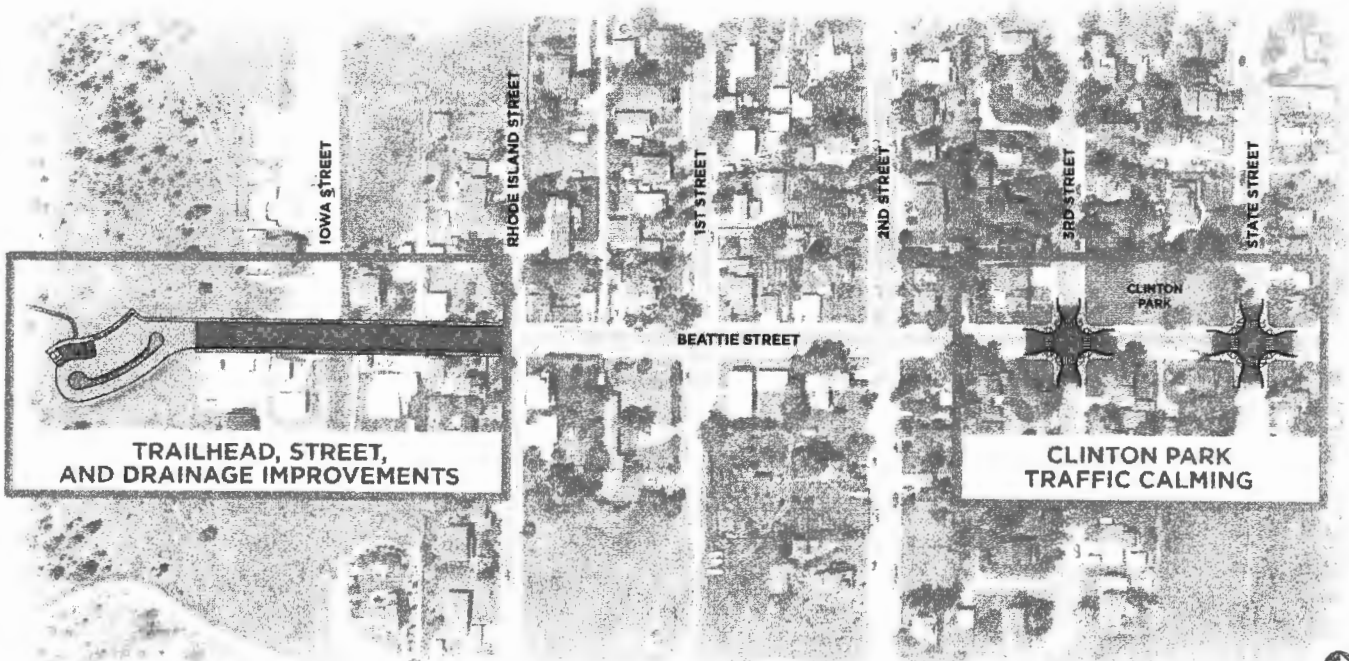


BEATTIE STREET TRAILHEAD PROJECT UPDATE - SEPT. 2019



Introduction

Helena is known regionally and nationally for its comprehensive trail system abutting the Continental Divide, and accessible from various points in city limits. The Beattie Street Trailhead is the starting point for miles of diversified trails and destinations, including Mt. Ascension. The Beattie Street Trailhead is the primary access to the South Hills east of Davis Gulch. Its popularity has become evident over the past few years with increasing numbers of cars at the trailhead. The City of Helena has been working to address needs and associated impacts of increased usage. In September 2018, the City Commission approved one of three alternative preliminary designs for parking and directed City Parks and Recreation to examine other improvements to Beattie Street. WGM Group, Inc. was contracted to provide design for Beattie Street paving and traffic calming measures, final design on the approved parking alternative, and cost estimates for construction. Design work will be completed by winter 2019/2020, and construction will begin in 2020.



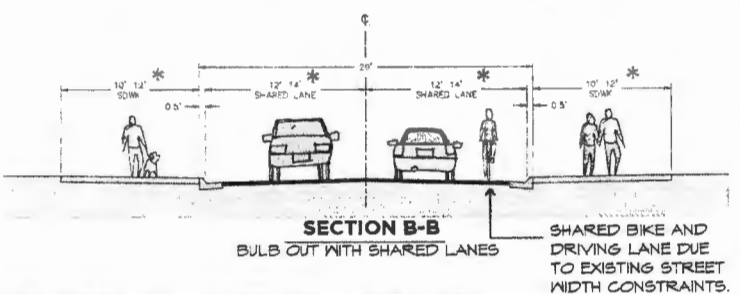
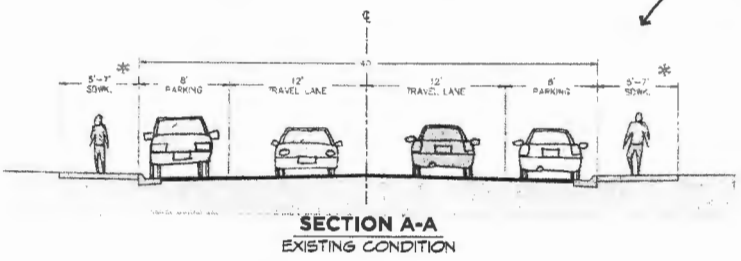
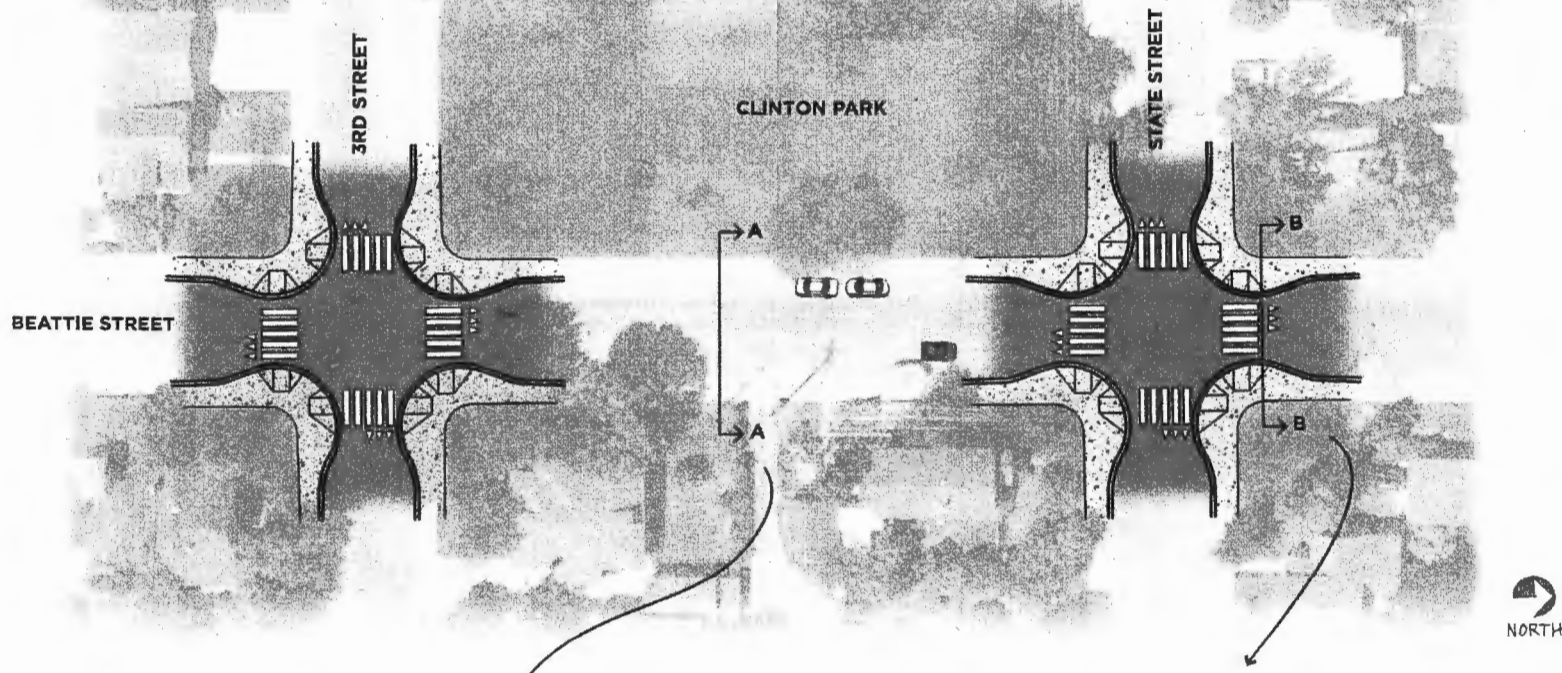
BEATTIE STREET PROJECT OVERALL VIEW



BEATTIE STREET PROJECT REVISED TRAFFIC CALMING CONCEPT

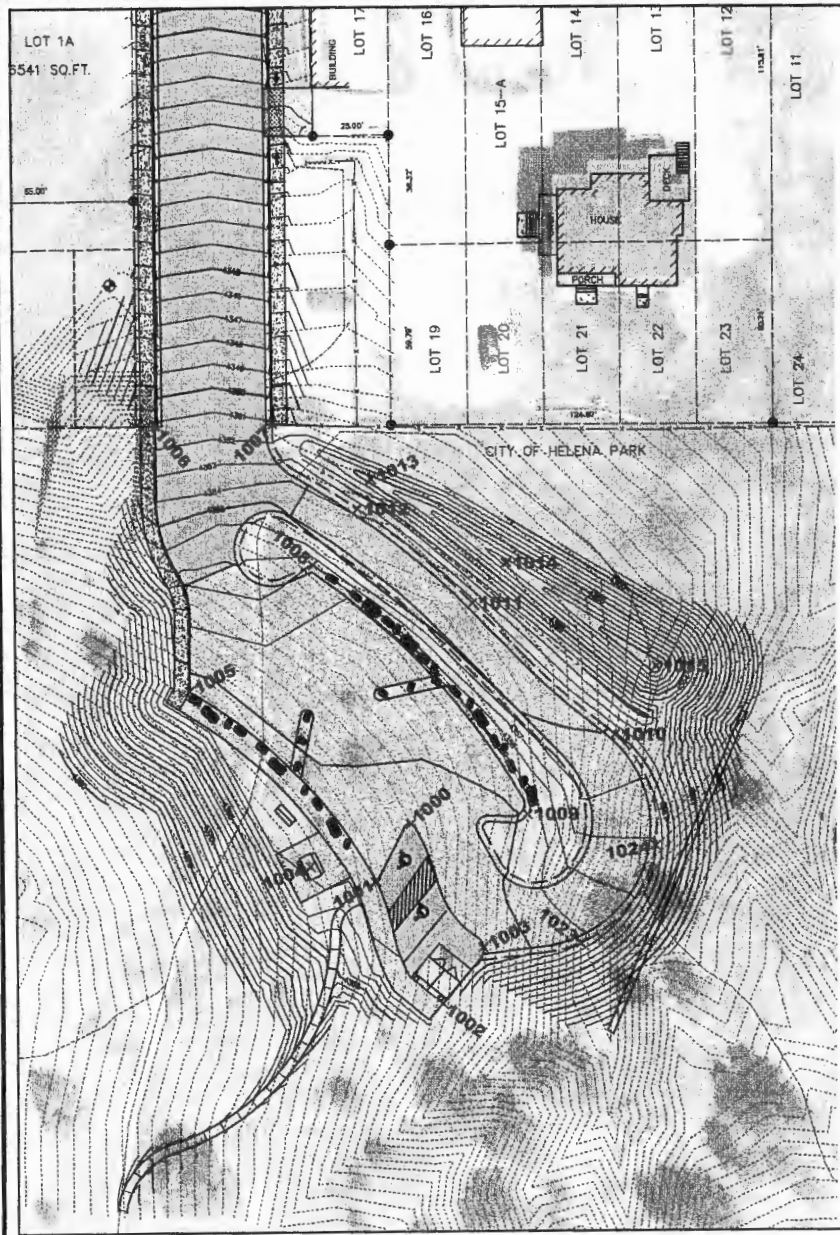


City of Helena
SEPTEMBER 30, 2019
PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE



* LANE AND SIDEWALK WIDTHS ARE SHOWN AS A RANGE FOR FLEXIBILITY. NARROWER DRIVING LANE WIDTHS PROVIDE TRAFFIC CALMING FOR VEHICLES, BUT WIDER WIDTHS ACCOMMODATE BIKES BETTER. PUBLIC COMMENT ON PREFERRED LANE WIDTHS IS APPRECIATED

BEATTIE STREET PROJECT CLINTON PARK TRAFFIC CALMING



WGM GROUP
 www.wgmgroup.com
**PRELIMINARY
 NOT FOR
 CONSTRUCTION**
 PLOTTED: 9/27/19
 SAVED: 9/27/19

POINT LIST

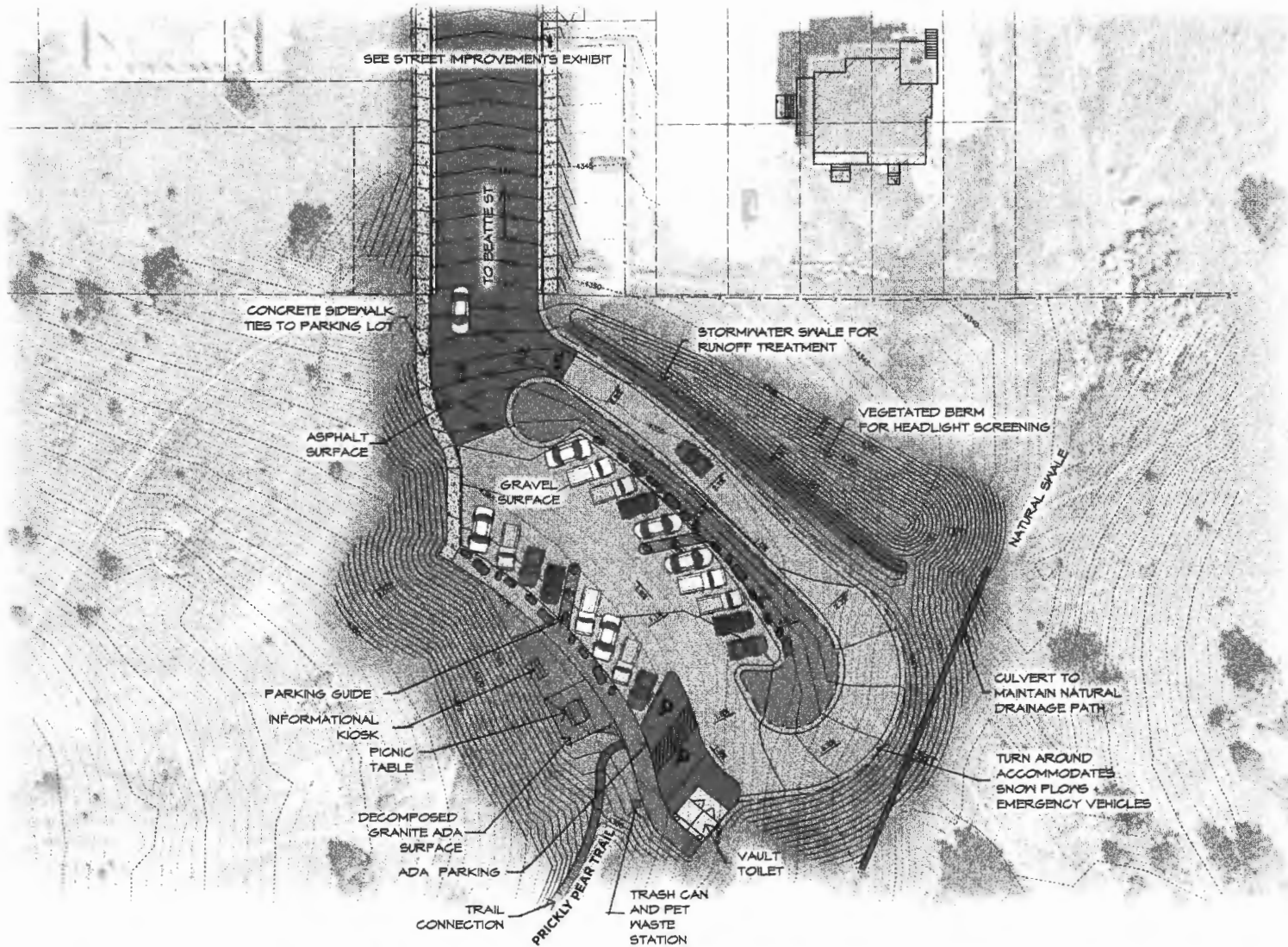
POINT NUMBER	NORTHING	EASTING	DESCRIPTION	FLAGGING COLOR
1000	128338.89	180048.21	EDGE OF ADA	BLUE
1001	128319.64	180037.12	EDGE OF ADA	BLUE
1002	128278.97	180058.65	EDGE OF ADA	PINK AND BLUE
1003	128297.66	180071.99	EDGE OF ADA	BLUE
1004	128324.81	180015.26	CENTER OF PICNIC TABLE	BLUE
1005	128383.38	179975.46	EDGE OF PARKING	PINK
1006	128471.24	179964.77	TOP BACK OF CURB	PINK
1007	128471.59	180003.77	TOP BACK OF CURB	PINK
1008	128424.61	180016.81	EDGE OF PARKING	PINK
1009	128341.94	180086.95	EDGE OF PARKING	PINK
1010	128368.31	180115.74	EDGE OF GRAVEL	PINK
1011	128411.73	180069.24	EDGE OF GRAVEL	PINK
1012	128443.30	180032.00	EDGE OF GRAVEL	PINK
1013	128453.09	180036.46	TOP OF BERM	GREEN
1014	128425.10	180080.45	TOP OF BERM	GREEN
1015	128390.83	180129.36	TOP OF BERM	GREEN
1023	128298.96	180103.96	EDGE OF GRAVEL	PINK
1024	128331.24	180128.90	EDGE OF GRAVEL	PINK

TRAILHEAD STAKING PLAN
 PUBLIC MEETING SEPTEMBER 30, 2019
 BEATTIE STREET PROJECT
 HELENA, MONTANA

REVISIONS:
 NO. DESCRIPTION DATE

PROJECT: 18-08-21
 LAYOUT: STK
 SURVEYED:
 DESIGN: EPA
 DRAWN: PH
 APPROVED: EPA
 DATE:
 SEPTEMBER 2019

SHEET 1 OF 1



BEATTIE STREET PROJECT

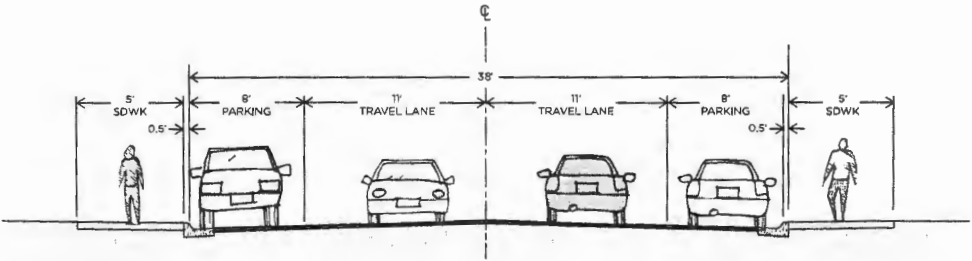
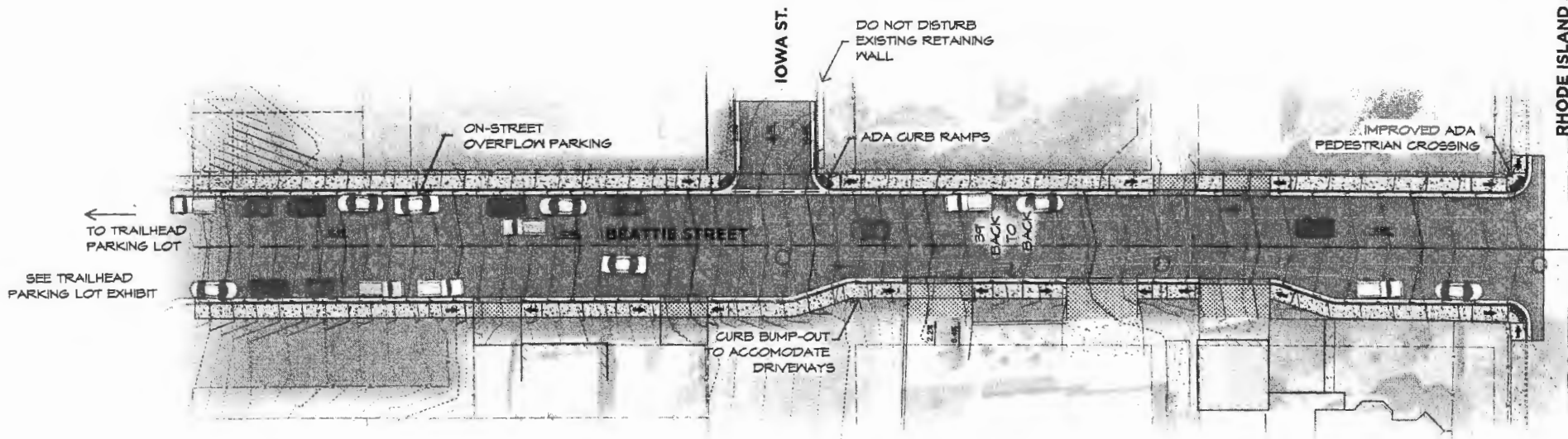
TRAILHEAD PARKING LOT IMPROVEMENTS



City of Helena

SEPTEMBER 30, 2019
PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE





BEATTIE STREET PROJECT STREET IMPROVEMENTS



SEPTEMBER 30, 2019
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