



Helena
FORWARD
History • Opportunity • Legacy

DRAFT LAND USE PLAN

JUNE 2025

Agenda

- About the Project and Planning Process
- Plan Document – A Foundation for Decision Making
- Next Steps

ABOUT THE PROJECT



Helena
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What is a Land Use Plan?

The Land Use Plan...

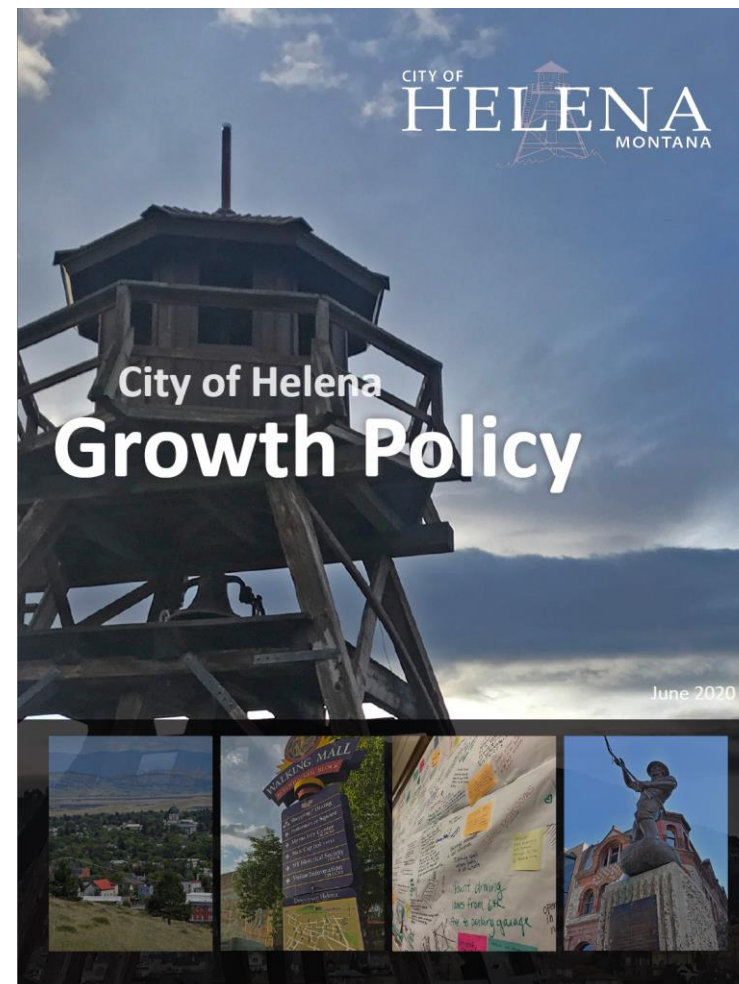
- Identifies community desires, needs, and aspirations
- Assesses the City's existing issues and strengths
- Guides a broad range of topics (policy)
- Is a dynamic document – can be updated and maintained to reflect trends and events
- *The process allows the City to engage the entire community.*

Why is it Important?

- Tell Helena's story and share the City's vision
- Evaluate and inform development proposals
- Foundation for the regulatory framework
- Coordinate local and regional initiatives
- Support the CIP and budgeting
- Identify future studies
- Inform and educate the community

What about our previous plans?

- Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan
- Railroad Urban Renewal District Plan
- Downtown Helena Master Plan
- ADA Transition Plan
- Helena Downtown Urban Renewal Plan
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Growth Policy
- Capital Hill Mall Urban Renewal Plan
- Downtown Renewal Vision for Cruse Avenue
- Helena Open Lands Management Plan Update



Scope of Work

Approximately 18-month process to:

- Establish where we are today
- Define where we want to go
- Establish the roadmap to get there



Scope of Work (cont.)

Approximately 18-month process to:

- Establish where we are today
- Define where we want to go
- **Establish the roadmap to get there**




Public Engagement

 Overall
Participants
Engaged
1,159



 **18**
Total Public Events

15,471
Fliers Sent
(Through Utility Bills)



 **6**
Pop-Ups at Farmers Markets

Fliers, Posters, and Sandwich Boards Distributed at Key Locations



 **Community Workshops**

Working Group Sessions

City Staff Meetings

Community Open House

Public Hearing and Adoption

 Online
Engagement
Participants
440

 **11**
Social Media Posts

 **389**
Community Surveys Taken

 **10,579**
Project Website Interactions (Unique Clicks)

51 map.social Contributors

523 map.social Points Created

587 map.social Likes and Dislikes



DRAFT PLAN OVERVIEW

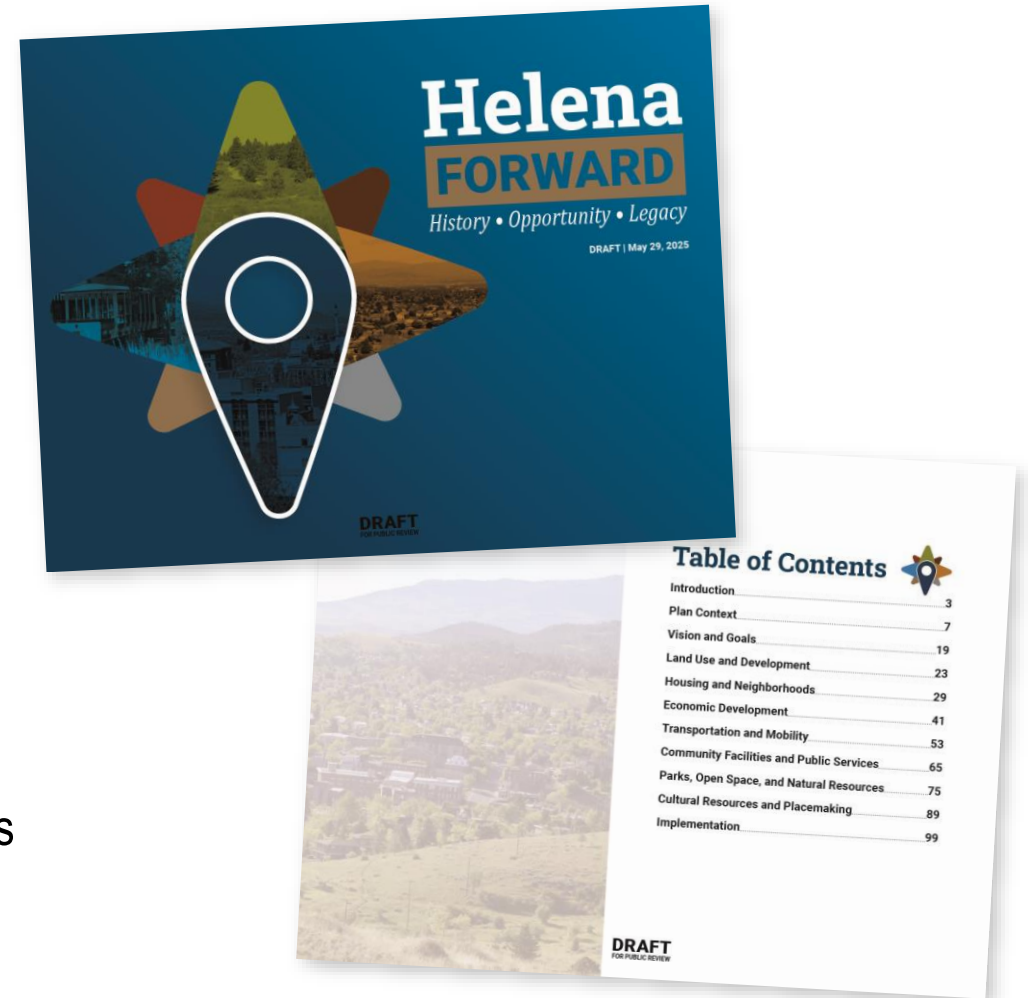


Helena
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Plan Content

- Chapter 1 – Introduction
- Chapter 2 – Plan Context
- Chapter 3 – Vision and Goals
- Chapter 4 – Land Use and Development
- Chapter 5 – Housing and Neighborhoods
- Chapter 6 – Economic Development
- Chapter 7 – Transportation and Mobility
- Chapter 8 – Community Facilities and Public Services
- Chapter 9 – Parks, Open Space, and Natural Resources
- Chapter 10 – Cultural Resources and Placemaking
- Chapter 11 - Implementation



Plan Framework

- Sets the stage for the Plan
 - Introduction to the Plan
 - Community Context
 - Demographic Snapshot
 - Community Outreach
 - Vision and Goals
 - Future Land Use



Vision and Goals

VISION STATEMENT

Helena is a community rooted in history, opportunity, and legacy. It is an exceptional place to live, work, raise a family, start and grow a business, and visit. Over the next 20 years, Helena will continue to capitalize on its distinctive character, welcoming atmosphere, and plentiful access to public lands to be a livable, resilient, and sustainable community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

History – Helena preserves and celebrates its rich history and draws on its past as a source of identity, community pride, and wisdom to attract visitors and investment and to support and guide community resilience and sustainability.

Opportunity – Helena is a community that embraces diversity and possibility where anyone can realize their potential—whether through education, by starting or growing a business, or in its varying land uses and variety and quality of employment options.

Legacy – Helena looks forward to its future while recognizing its debt to the past and its responsibility for generations to come—it is a community dedicated to government transparency and accountability, fiscal responsibility, and protecting the environment.

HELENA STRIVES TO...

Be a welcoming, safe, inclusive, and affordable community, accessible to all;

Preserve and celebrate its history, historic neighborhoods, and heritage;

Ensure that growth is thoughtfully planned and upholds community values while meeting community needs;

Be a connected and walkable community;

Support a healthy, and diverse economy that benefits all;

Be resilient and adaptable to meet the challenges of a changing climate;

Support a vibrant arts, cultural, and civic environment;

Invigorate and nurture a lively, authentic downtown, create and sustain attractive commercial corridors, and support connected and inviting third spaces;

Be a leader in preserving, conserving, and restoring its natural environment and open space while maintaining and enhancing residents' access to exceptional outdoor recreational opportunities;

Provide quality, efficient municipal services; and

Empower citizen involvement and engagement in all community decision-making.

GOALS

Goals are broad and long-range desired outcomes. They are ambitious and will require the culmination of incremental actions to be fully achieved. The goals and objectives are organized by key planning topics.

Housing

- Support residents' access to affordable, quality housing throughout Helena's socially diverse and livable neighborhoods
- Preserve Helena's historic integrity and small-town character throughout existing and new development.
- Ensure Helena's zoning code and regulations provide a great amount of flexibility in housing development, enabling creative solutions and denser housing types.

Economic Development

- Incentivize high-quality commercial and industrial opportunities that support beautifying major corridors and neighborhoods.
- Promote a series of neighborhood nodes that embody the character of the area and encourage local businesses to grow.
- Continue to revitalize Downtown, cementing its status as the central place for entertainment and activities that serve all ages, ability levels, and lifestyles for residents and visitors alike.

Transportation and Mobility

- Promote a transportation network that enables easy access to neighborhoods, community facilities, employment opportunities, and recreation areas.
- Improve infrastructure and encourage alternative modes of transportation such as walking, bicycling, and public transit for traveling while making roadways and intersections safer and more efficient for all user groups.

Public Facilities, Utilities, Infrastructure, and Community Facilities

- Continue to maintain and improve facilities, services, and infrastructure, ensuring they are reliable for current and future residents.
- Leverage the city's role as the state capital and county seat to collaborate with other agencies and jurisdictions and improve public services while addressing regional impacts.
- Promote sustainable technologies and renewable energy through policies and actions as new technologies become available.

Parks, Open Space, and Natural Resources

- Continue to conserve and steward Montana's land, air, and water and serve as a model for sustainability and resilience.
- Support an extensive parks, open space and trails network, and continue to monitor opportunities to increase and secure outdoor recreational access and improve the wayfinding and safety of trails.

Cultural Resources and Placemaking

- Preserve the city's local landmarks and attractions, encouraging a lively and active tourism economy.
- Continue to support the preservation of Helena's historical structures and maintain the city's heritage and identity.
- Promote a strong sense of community and personal connections to continue to be an exceptional place to live at all ages and stages of life with a healthy, work-life balance.
- Maintain and enhance the city's unique character, including its charming downtown and neighborhoods, all set within a stunning and accessible natural environment.

Core Chapters and Elements

- Land Use and Development
- Housing and Neighborhoods
- Economic Development
- Transportation and Mobility
- Community Facilities and Public Services
- Parks, Open Space, and Natural Resources
- Cultural Resources and Placemaking



Land Use and Development

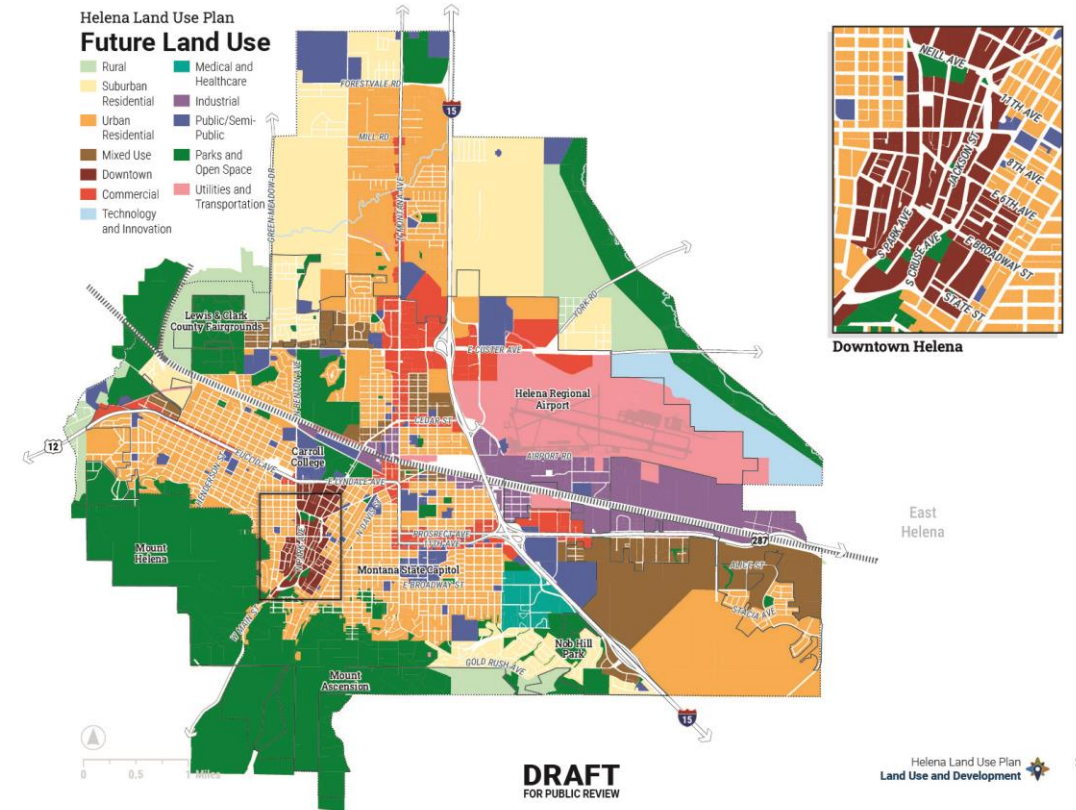


CHAPTER 4

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Land Use and Development chapter establishes the definitions and guidance for land use and promotes strategies to make Helena more sustainable and resilient, preserve its character, enhance its quality of life, accommodate growth, and advance its economy. This chapter is specific enough to guide land-use decisions while also allowing the City to be flexible and creative in individual approaches to new development.

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Transportation and Mobility



CHAPTER 7

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Helena's transportation system creates a balanced, efficient, and well-connected network providing access to goods, services, and community resources, and supports land use development through a variety of modes. The Transportation and Mobility Chapter provides guidance aimed at providing a system that will ensure the community will be effectively served by multi-modal transportation opportunities. The section discusses the Plan's approach to "human-centric transportation," including strategies to support walking, biking, and complete streets.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY GOALS

Promote a transportation network that enables easy access to neighborhoods, community facilities, employment opportunities, and recreation areas.

Improve infrastructure and encourage alternative modes of transportation such as walking, bicycling, and public transit for traveling while making roadways and intersections safer and more efficient for all user groups.

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Transportation and Mobility



Traffic Flow and Congestion

Traffic flow and congestion issues have many detrimental effects on communities and the environment, including economic impacts due to delayed delivery of goods and services, air quality and fuel consumption, and a general disruption of daily routines resulting from longer commute times and unpredictable delays.

The Greater Helena Area Long-Range Transportation Plan, updated in 2014, examined projected roadway volumes and capacity for the year 2035. The plan calculated volume/capacity (v/c) ratios for principal and minor arterials, and major and minor collector routes, identifying multiple routes projected to be very near, at or over capacity in 2035. These routes include Custer Avenue, Prospect Avenue, 11th Avenue, Benton Avenue, Montana Avenue, and Airport Road.

One considerable issue within Helena, resulting in significant traffic delays, is the presence of six railroad crossing locations with no grade separation. At these locations, traffic is required to stop when trains are in route. Four of these crossings are on low volume roads; however, crossings on North Montana Avenue and North Benton Avenue, both major north-south traffic corridors, can cause traffic to back up for several minutes. Both routes are within the Greater Helena Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) boundary; however, North Montana Avenue is the responsibility of MDT, while North Benton Avenue is the responsibility of the City.

Greater Helena Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

In 2020, the Greater Helena Area MPO was federally required to be created as the area's population exceeded 50,000 people. The MPO is comprised of the City of Helena, City of East Helena, Lewis and Clark County, and the Montana Department of Transportation. The purpose of the MPO is to provide greater coordination and cooperation between all agencies for improved transportation planning. While the MPO does not directly provide funding for projects, they receive financial assistance in the form of Metropolitan Planning (PL) funds to carry out the required planning activities and transit funds for transit planning.



The City should continue conducting traffic studies and surveys to determine how residents travel through Helena. In addition, the City should continue analyzing current crash locations and severity to identify problematic intersections and corridors to determine improvement priorities. While the City has complete authority over local streets, it should continue working with regional partners to develop a comprehensive traffic management plan to balance the needs of regional corridors with the safety needs of residents.

Complete Streets

Complete streets are designed and operated to be safe for all types of road users, not just drivers. Pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists of all ages and abilities must be able to safely move along and across a complete street. Complete streets incorporate physical infrastructure, such as raised crossings, protected bike lanes, medians, and similar treatments, to reduce hazards from automobiles and protect and make pedestrians and cyclists more visible. In addition to their safety benefits, Complete Streets often ease congestion, support economic growth, encourage walking and biking, improve air quality, and enhance mobility options for children and elderly residents.

In 2010, Helena adopted Resolution No. 19799 which requires the implementation of Complete Street infrastructure and principles for newly constructed streets and those undergoing reconstruction or extensive maintenance. Perceptions of safety are a primary factor for residents in determining whether to utilize bicycling or walking for trips, especially for trips that include major streets. To successfully implement Complete Streets principles, the City should identify points of potential conflict where existing bicycle or pedestrian routes intersect with high-speed corridors and analyze crash location and severity data to identify street segments and intersections where injury risk to people walking and bicycling is most acute. The City should then prioritize roadway infrastructure projects that improve multi-modal safety.

Complete Streets principles recognize that the City cannot rely on laws or human nature or common sense to adequately protect more vulnerable users of roadways and encourages the use of physical barriers between vehicles and pedestrians and bicyclists. By prioritizing infrastructure projects at locations with observed safety issues and targeting street safety projects based on crash data analysis and risk factors, Helena can improve pedestrian safety outcomes and perceived comfort for active users.



***NOTE:** The City has developed several off-street multi-use path options throughout the community. This option is intended to illustrate a general on-street reconfiguration emphasizing multi-modal transportation and safety. Future road diet recommendations will require case-by-case considerations and alternative design configurations.

Recommendations

- Ensure new developments comply with the City's Engineering and Design Standards for roadway design.
- Continue implementing the Complete Streets Policy and following the Public Right-of-Way Access Guidelines (PROWAG).
- Improve connectivity within the roadway network to meet the demands of future growth.
- Support future and ongoing city roadway development through Capital Improvement Projects to ensure long-term functionality.

- Identify mechanisms to assist the City with funding necessary roadway projects, such as Special Improvement Districts, Street Maintenance Districts, and private funding sources.
- Coordinate with regional and state entities to align roadway expansion and maintenance needs.
- Conduct the planned update to the Greater Helena Area Long-Range Transportation Plan to ensure that current and future transportation network needs are met.
- Identify new projects that will address traffic flow and congestion issues for the projected population increase.

- Coordinate with MDT and BNSF to evaluate options that will alleviate traffic delays due to at-grade railroad crossings including replacing at-grade crossing on Montana Avenue with an overpass.
- Seek grant and loan funding opportunities to help finance modifications to at-grade railroad crossings.
- Evaluate major north-south and east-west routes within Helena to identify concerns for freight traffic.
- Continue incorporating new infrastructure in their streets to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists, and reduce automobile crashes.

Transportation and Mobility



BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

The introduction of safe, interconnected, and accessible bike and pedestrian facilities with the transportation framework of a community encourages greater usage and provides numerous benefits, including reduced traffic congestion, positive environmental impacts, and improvements to physical health. With the adoption of the Complete Streets policy, the City should continue to promote active transportation.

“With the increasing popularity of e-bikes and more people getting around on two wheels, Helena’s street improvements should be designed to enhance pedestrian safety.”

Connectivity Between Residential Areas and Key Destinations

Certain areas of a community are more apt to attract pedestrian and bike traffic, and improving pedestrian and bike traffic connections to these areas will encourage additional non-motorized transportation throughout the City. In Helena, the numerous schools, the Capitol Complex, parks and open space, and the Last Chance Gulch area are all local destinations that would benefit from increased connectivity from residential areas.



There are large areas of older residential development in Helena that have very limited sidewalk networks, likely because they were not required during development of the neighborhoods. In addition to gaps in sidewalk infrastructure, there are large gaps without existing bike infrastructure, which proves challenging for those choosing to travel via bike rather than automobile. Because bikes are most often sharing the road with vehicles, it introduces added safety concerns for bike users. Newer residential areas, and areas yet to be developed, must follow the City of Helena Engineering and Design Standards, which contain requirements for sidewalks, bike and pedestrian paths, and bike lanes.

In 2021, The City of Helena Multimodal Traffic Study examined existing conditions and provided recommendations for connecting the downtown and midtown areas of Helena. Within this study, multiple projects were identified to improve connectivity to key destinations, such as sidewalk improvements along Last Chance Gulch, Lyndale Avenue pedestrian crossings, Helena Avenue bike lanes and pedestrian accommodations, and the Montana Avenue Centennial Trail crossing.

As the population of Helena continues to grow, the lack of connectivity between key destinations and residential neighborhoods will continue to inhibit the appeal of using non-motorized transportation methods to travel throughout the City. This results in increased vehicle traffic, leading to greater traffic congestion, a lack of adequate parking, and unfavorable environmental impacts.

Bikeways

A tiered approach to implementing bikeways throughout Helena’s streets can provide a range for the City to support bike infrastructure. A tiered approach can include bikeway types that are comfortable and easily implementable such as conventional bike lanes to high-investment, high-safety infrastructure like protected bike lanes and grade-separated side paths. Shared-lane bike markings, otherwise known as “sharrows,” were not included due to the safety risk they pose for bicyclists. The following categories provide more details about how these bike lanes should be implemented:

- **Multi-Use Trail/Side Path:** Shared use path located immediately adjacent and parallel to a roadway, typically grade-separated and designed with a buffer between the street and path.
- **Conventional Bike Lane:** Exclusive space on the side of the road for bicyclists designated by pavement markings and signage.
- **Buffered Bike Lane:** Exclusive space for bicyclists with additional buffer space between bicyclists and drivers typically designated by diagonal hatch or solid lines.
- **Protected Bike Lane:** Dedicated space for bicyclists with physical separation from vehicles typically using concrete barriers or bollards.



Multi-Use Trail/Side Path



Conventional Bike Lane



Buffered Bike Lane



Protected Bike Lane

Example images of bikeway types for reference

Transportation and Mobility



Sidewalk Improvements

As identified in the 2014 Long Range Transportation Plan, the southeast portion of Helena, neighborhoods west of Benton Avenue, and the area west of North Montana Avenue and north of the railroad tracks are condensed areas of incomplete sidewalks. In addition to these large areas, the Plan identifies numerous locations throughout Helena that have smaller gaps in sidewalk infrastructure, resulting in an unpredictable walking resource.

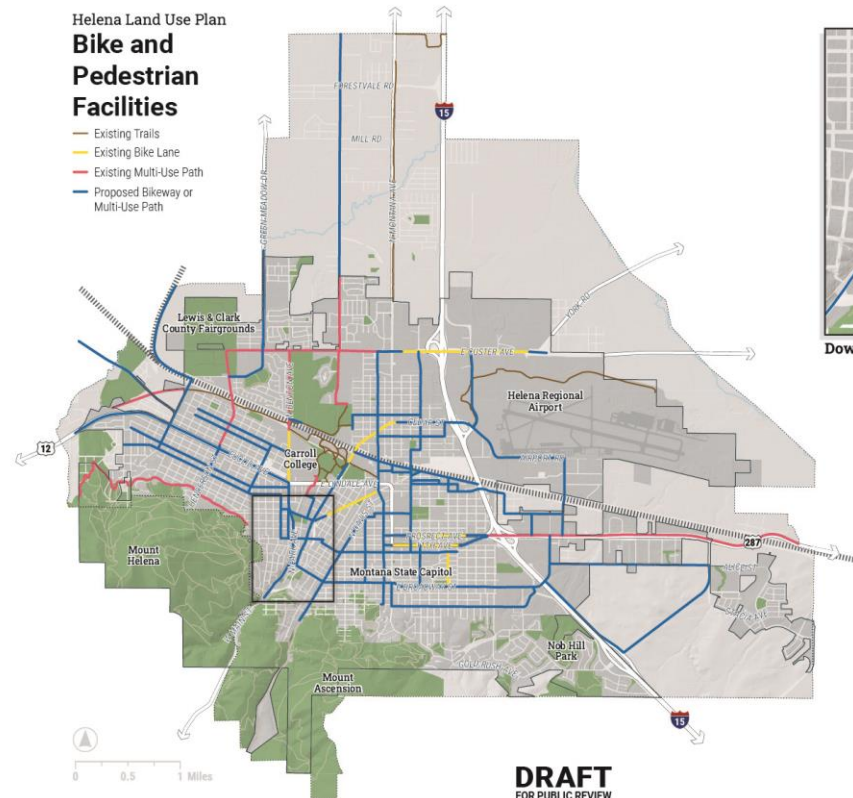
Inadequate or nonexistent ADA accessible facilities also exist throughout Helena, deterring sidewalk usage by pedestrians with disabilities and creating a barrier to independent mobility. The existing ADA accessible transportation facilities are currently inadequate for community members requiring use and will certainly not accommodate the future population demands of Helena.

Addressing gaps in sidewalk and ADA accommodations throughout the transportation network can result in reduced motorized transportation, improved pedestrian safety, and access for all mobility levels.



Recommendations

- Utilize identified priority routes from the Long-Range Transportation Plan to plan pedestrian and bike network improvements throughout Helena.
- Update the Long-Range Transportation Plan to identify areas of connectivity to key community destinations.
- Prioritize completion of the Centennial Trail.
- Plan similar north-south paved shared use trails or routes that will connect with the Centennial Trail and enable users to connect to more parts of the City without riding on roads.
- Provide access to existing residential trail systems through city pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- Adhere to City of Helena Engineering and Design Standards for new and reconstructed roadways.
- Prioritize and implement project recommendations outlined in the Long-Range Transportation Plan.
- Implement a tiered approach to incorporating bikeways throughout Helena's streets that can provide a range of options for the City to support bike infrastructure.
- Continue to upgrade existing facilities to meet ADA requirements.



Parks, Open Space, and Natural Resources



CHAPTER 9

PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Helena is an exceptional place to live, in large part, due to its complementary mix of intact and functioning natural ecosystems and a high-quality built environment. Its natural resources and environment ground the community in place and provide a foundation for its future. Residents and visitors alike cherish these elements and rank the City's parks, natural areas and open space as some of the most desirable and valued features in Helena.

Incorporating practices that protect the natural systems that ensure the City's ability to provide clean drinking water, protect clean air and biodiversity, improve stormwater management, preserve and sustainably manage wetlands and forests, and safeguard topsoil will make Helena more resilient to growth and a changing climate.

PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND NATURAL RESOURCES GOALS

Continue to conserve and steward Montana's land, air, and water and serve as a model for sustainability and resilience.

Support an extensive parks, open space and trails network, and continue to monitor opportunities to increase and secure outdoor recreational access and improve the wayfinding and safety of trails.

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Helena Land Use Plan
Parks, Open Space, and Natural Resources

Parks, Open Space, and Natural Resources



CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

In 2007, City of Helena Commission passed Resolution 19530, recognizing that there is "sufficient scientific evidence to conclude that global climate change is occurring, that humans are contributing to it, and that reduction in greenhouse gases (GHG) is necessary in to avert the negative consequences of a changing climate." Lowering GHG emissions will likely result in numerous additional benefits to the Helena community, including improved water quality, reduced energy costs, and improved waste and air pollution efforts. The passage of this resolution, allowed for the construction of a Climate Change Task-force, and for this task-force to give recommendation on the following categories:

1. Energy Efficiency & Municipal Operations
2. Water Supply, Treatment, and Delivery
3. Transportation, Waste, Recycling, and Public/Private Partnership

Over the years the City has pursued many of these recommendations and moved its GHG goals forward. In 2017, the City Commission adopted Resolution 20347, requiring the preparation of an annual report to document specific activities implemented by the City, track greenhouse gasses, energy usage, and other resources such as water and recommend future sustainability measures for Helena. The City continues to make energy efficiency and sustainability upgrades to buildings, parks, and practices. The information below outlines the upgrades and efficiencies for each calendar year as well as purposed projects for the future. Where applicable, the activity references the corresponding recommendation from the Climate Action Plan.

PARKS, OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, AND RECREATION

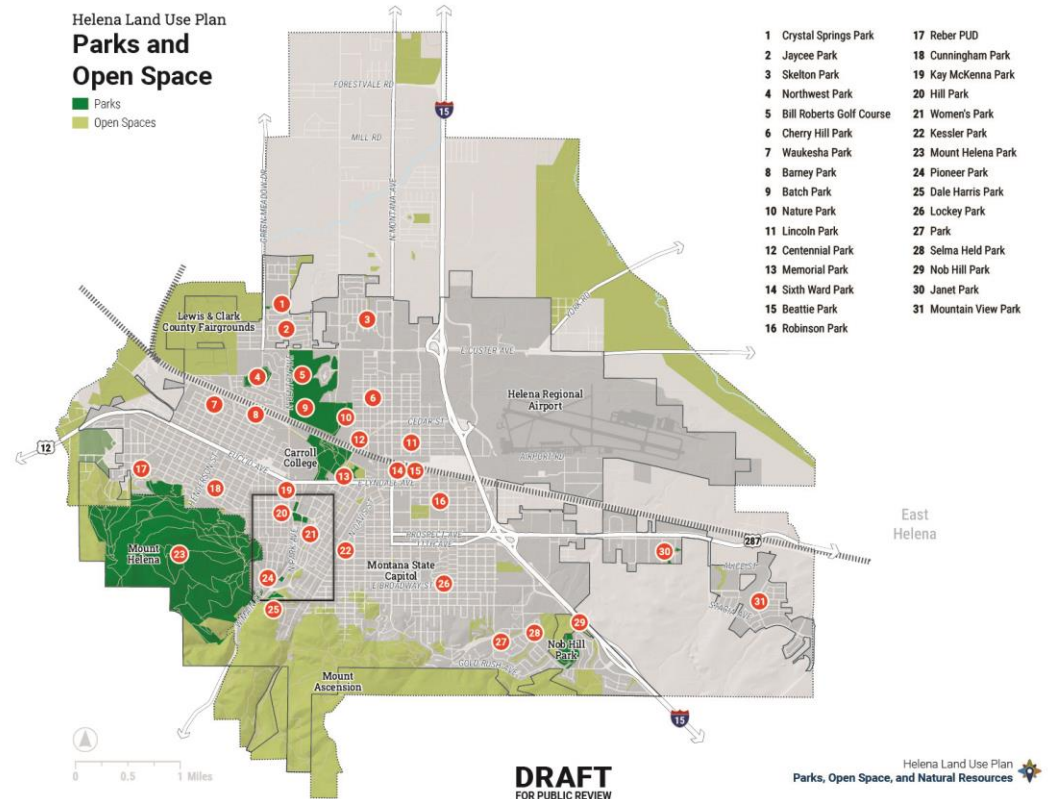
Helena's developed parkland supports the City's high quality of life by providing essential green space for recreation, relaxation, and community engagement. These parks offer residents opportunities to maintain a healthy lifestyle, host organized sports, and gather for civic events, all of which contribute to the City's vibrancy. With over 2,140 acres of parkland and 30 parks, including bike and pedestrian trails, the Parks, Recreation and Open Lands Department is committed to preserving and enhancing these valuable assets.

As Helena continues to grow, strategic investments in accessibility, maintenance, and expansion will ensure that parks and open spaces remain welcoming, equitable, and resilient—safeguarding natural resources while adapting to a changing climate. Through thoughtful planning and partnerships, the City will continue to enrich its parks, trails, and open spaces, making Helena an even more vibrant place to live and visit.

Park Access

Ensuring equitable access to parks is essential to fostering a healthy and well-connected community. While Helena is home to iconic parks like Mount Helena and Centennial Park, some areas—particularly north of Last Chance Gulch between McHugh and Sanders up to Custer Avenue—have limited access to park space. Addressing these gaps will help ensure that all residents have parks and recreational amenities within a short walk of their homes.

Additionally, improving connectivity through new paths along existing rights-of-way and within neighborhoods will make cycling and walking safer, more convenient, and enjoyable for all. Enhancing park quality and usability is equally important, as aging facilities and inadequate ADA accessibility can limit inclusivity. Climate-related challenges, such as drought and wildfire smoke, further impact safe outdoor recreation. By prioritizing strategic park investments and improvements, Helena can create a more accessible and resilient park system that serves the needs of all residents.



Parks, Open Space, and Natural Resources

Trail Connectivity and Improvements

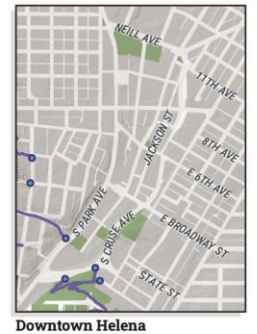
Helena's 75-mile trail network is a regional treasure, seamlessly connecting urban neighborhoods to surrounding wildlands while attracting tourists and outdoor enthusiasts. However, increasing use, outdated or insufficient signage, limited trailhead access, and gaps in connectivity pose challenges to its long-term success. There is significant potential to improve trail interconnectivity within Helena and throughout the region to further solidify the city's reputation as a premier destination for hikers, mountain bikers, and endurance athletes.

By securing access to key trailheads and linking multiple soft-surface trails, the city can further position itself as a hub for mountain biking and trail running events that bring visitors and economic benefits to local businesses. Collaborating with Prickly Pear Land Trust and neighboring jurisdictions will be essential in expanding trail connections between parks, neighborhoods, and adjacent communities. Additionally, ongoing investments in trail maintenance, signage, and facilities will help ensure the system remains safe, accessible, and enjoyable for all.

Recommendations

- Work towards acquiring lots that would be suitable for more inclusive park spaces that are multi-generational.
- Partner with other City departments to identify and plan to address key barriers of access to parks and recreational components.
- Focus short-term strategies toward maintenance of aging or distressed components in the park system.
- Continue to evaluate current offerings for efficiencies, and opportunities to provide more value through programming or facilities.
- Maintain current levels of trail access and look for opportunities to secure and expand access for existing trails as well as for new trail construction.
- Strive for a balance of providing multiple access points with concentrating access in specific areas to reduce public resource and user impacts.
- Improve wayfinding at trailheads and through easily accessible mobile-optimized web-based information to help distribute users more evenly throughout the system, reduce overuse and crowding at high use trailheads and on high use trails, and prevent conflicts between trail users.
- Expand accessible trails within the Helena open lands and trails system where feasible.
- Analyze current trail system to identify opportunities to connect trails to maximize accessibility, and to identify possibilities for designating or creating new trails that are restricted to mountain biking or foot travel to reduce user conflicts.
- Continually look for opportunities to increase trail connectivity, active transportation infrastructure and public transit, if it is available, to make access more inclusive.
- Increase signage, such as on blind corners, and to inform users that the Helena Open Lands system is a multiple use trail system, educating users on trail etiquette, and preventing user conflicts.
- Strengthen partnerships with land management entities including the Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Forest Service, and federal Bureau of Land Management to coordinate trail planning and management initiatives.
- Work with community partners like bike shops, Prickly Pear Land Trust, Chamber of Commerce to help develop safe urban bike routes to connect to trailheads.

“Helena should strengthen its Sustainability Program - additional outreach and education for the community, led by City staff, private and public entities would go a long way in improving trails, urban tree canopy, composting and so much more.”



Implementation



CHAPTER 11 IMPLEMENTATION

Realizing the vision and goals of the Helena Forward Land Use Plan will require leadership, organization, persistent monitoring, and adjustment. The Implementation chapter translates the Land Use Plan's recommendations into tangible actions the City should take to achieve the Land Use Plan's long-term vision.

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Implementation



USING THE PLAN

The **Helena Forward Land Use Plan** should be used as the official policy guide for planning decisions by elected officials, boards, commissions, and staff. The Plan should serve as a primary reference in guiding policy formation, evaluating projects and planning initiatives, reviewing development proposals, and prioritizing public expenditures. Referencing the Land Use Plan will ensure future planning efforts and decisions align with the community's long-term vision and goals. Service providers and partner organizations should also be encouraged to use the Land Use Plan when considering new development, facilities, infrastructure updates, and programming within Helena.

Update Related Plans

Past plans, studies, and reports have influenced planning and development policy in Helena. The **Helena Forward Land Use Plan** has integrated relevant goals and ideas from these documents. Looking ahead, these plans should be updated to correlate with recommendations presented in the Plan.

REVIEWING AND UPDATING THE PLAN

Noting the City's dedication to thoughtful planning, the Land Use Plan should not exist as a static document, but rather the center of a continuous planning process. Following adoption of the Plan, the City will continue to move forward, change, and evolve. As such, the Plan should be updated on a regular basis to respond to these changes, addressing shifts in community aspirations and demographic trends as well as new and unexpected issues as they arise.

Montana statute requires that the planning commission review the Land Use Plan at least every five years and determine whether an update to the Land Use Plan and Future Land Use Map is necessary. Change, of course, follows its own schedule without much consideration for state statute. Given the fast pace of change, a full review should be completed at least every two to three years. Best practice, however, would be an annual review. This process should coincide with the preparation of the City's annual budget and Capital Improvements Program, enabling recommendations and projects from the Plan to be considered as part of upcoming funding commitments for that fiscal year. Establishing a routine for review of the Plan will ensure the document remains relevant to the needs and desires of the City.

Capital Improvements Program

Helena's Capital Improvements Program (CIP) represents its fiscal commitment to initiatives aimed at maintaining and improving the community. As a critical tool for implementing the Land Use Plan, the City should review and update the CIP as needed to reflect Land Use Plan recommendations. Projects or initiatives may include restoring and upgrading existing utilities and infrastructure, and the renovating, expanding, or relocating City facilities.

The annual review of the CIP should ensure that projects align with the vision and goals set out in the Land Use Plan. This review should assess short-term and long-term recommendations that City staff can review, prioritize, and organize cost-estimates and potential funding sources to complete. Some of these projects could be broken down into incremental stages that contribute to the Helena's long-term vision.

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

The following funding sources are available to the City and its partners to help implement the plan. This is a general overview of the potential tools and resources. City staff should research each in more detail and regularly monitor these sources to account for legislative and statutory changes that may affect the applicability or availability of funding as well as proactively seek new funding sources.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

TIF funding is a tool that can be used to incentivize and attract desired development within key areas, including housing. As with commercial developments, TIF can be used for infrastructure, streetscaping, public improvements, land assemblage, and offsetting the cost of development.

Affordable Housing Trust Fund

In 2020, the City established an Affordable Housing Trust Fund to provide gap financing to organizations that serve beneficiaries of low- to moderate-income. The fund was initially created through several investments from the City Commission and will receive \$100,000 each year from the City's General Fund. Since the fund was created, staff have been working with a seven-member advisory board that will provide recommendations to the City Commission, which makes the final decision concerning which projects receive support.

Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME)

This federal block grant program is directed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and administered in Montana by the state Department of Commerce. It provides funds to units of local government and non-profit organizations to expand the supply of affordable housing for Montanans with low- and very low-incomes. HOME supports the state and local governments in implementing strategies to achieve adequate supplies of decent, affordable housing and provides financial and technical assistance to develop model programs for affordable housing.

Housing Trust Fund (HTF)

The Housing Trust Fund Program is an affordable housing program that complements existing federal, state, and local efforts to increase the supply of decent, safe, and sanitary affordable housing for extremely low income (ELI) households, including special needs households, unhoused households, and those at risk of homelessness. Administered by the Montana Department of Commerce and funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the HTF provides grants for the construction, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable rental housing for ELI families. Cities, non-profits, or public housing authorities may apply for HTF funds.

**COMMENTS OR
QUESTIONS?**

NEXT STEPS

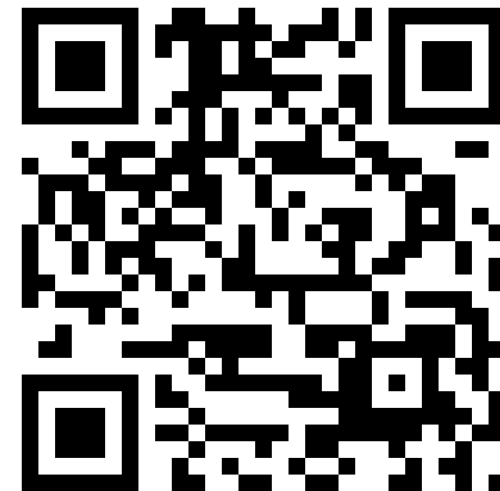


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History • Opportunity • Legacy

Next Steps

- Final Comments
- Revise Draft Land Use Plan
- Community Open House
- Adoption Process



Scan this QR code to view the Draft Plan and submit comments



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History • Opportunity • Legacy



THANK YOU!