



City of
Helena

Downtown Renewal Vision for Cruse Avenue

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Prepared by


Better City

DOWLING
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2020, the City of Helena (the “City”) hired Better City and Dowling Architects to assist the City with the creation of a Downtown Renewal Vision for Cruse Avenue (the “Plan”). This Executive Summary section contains the key findings from each section of the Plan including the history of Cruse Avenue, reviews of prior plans, key stakeholder interviews, land and industry analyses, project assessment including open house feedback and preferred alternatives, policy recommendations, and action steps. **At the time of this draft the final public meeting has yet to be conducted and there may be additional changes to the preferred alternatives and this document to reflect additional feedback from these meetings.**

The scope of work of this Plan includes the Cruse Avenue corridor beginning at the Park Avenue intersection and extending to the Lawrence Street intersection. Excluded from this Plan is the section of Cruse Avenue between Lawrence Street and Neill Avenue due to project dependencies associated with transportation planning at the “mini-malfunction junction” (the intersection of Neill Avenue, Helena Avenue, Last Chance Gulch and Cruse Avenue). It is recommended that a small area plan be conducted to evaluate the potential for substantial redevelopment and re-alignment of infrastructure in this area.

History of Cruse

- Cruse Avenue is a remnant from a master transportation plan developed in the late 1960’s under the Model Cities Program
- This plan involved the construction of a connector from I-15 to Highway 12, aligned at the southern edge of downtown along with an interchange to provide better access and improve commercial viability for downtown

- North/south access to the downtown interchange was to be provided by a new arterial, Cruse Avenue, connecting the downtown to Neill Avenue.
- In anticipation of the new interchange, initial phases of Cruse Avenue were constructed, which included the intersections at Park Avenue, Cutler Street, and 6th Avenue, with the extension to Neill Avenue built a few years later.
- Ultimately, the I-15 to Highway 12 connector did not receive adequate community support and was not pursued, leaving Cruse Avenue as a remnant arterial.

Synthesis of Prior Plans—Key Findings

- In prior plans Helena identified what the City strives to be recognized for along with their guiding values. Any future plans should align with these priorities.
- The draft vision statement is: “Helena celebrates its past, enjoys its present, and plans its future to ensure that its growth is beneficial, its environment is clean, and its economic stability assured while maintaining its outstanding natural setting, quality of life and sense of community.”
- The City’s Master Plan identified issues and goals regarding Downtown connectivity, business access, walkability, bike routes, parking, aesthetics, and vibrancy.
- The City’s Downtown Master Plan reviews the areas qualifications as an Urban Renewal District, along with key issues regarding the street layout of Cruse Avenue.
- A Retail Market Analysis conducted in 2016 found demand for up to 142,900 SF of additional development.
- Downtown districts include Great Northern District (business and entertainment), Last Chance Gulch (retail

core), and Fire Tower District (entertainment, recreation, history, arts, and culture).

- Recommendations include revising downtown development code, promoting redevelopment of underperforming properties, and encouraging downtown housing.
- All streets downtown should be two-lane, and the pedestrian and bike network should be fully connected.
- A concept study for 'Malfunction Junction' provided alternatives for improving the intersection, but for improvements to be implemented a funding package will need to be identified and an environmental process completed.
- There is adequate parking downtown, yet there are opportunities to better manage parking to improve utilization.
- Number of lanes should be reduced to two-lanes, one going each way, and intersections should be improved.
- Develop bike network and address pedestrian crossing barriers.

Key Stakeholder Interviews—Recommendations by Topic

- **Downtown:** Modernize and make vibrant with things to do. Put retail and services near residential. Bring back the creek.
- **Businesses:** City needs commercial tax base; there used to be lots of small retailers, attract those again with a nice downtown (not chains). Shiner's building and others that could go. A challenge is the cost of redevelopment of old buildings.
- **Housing, Affordability:** Housing is important to bring grocery and restaurants, need a comprehensive design. Need variety of affordable housing. Economic impediments are subsidies, developers, and matching

market values people can support. Affordable includes both owning and renting.

- **Walkability, Sidewalks:** Connectivity is biggest problem downtown—it needs to be walkable. Think ahead 50 years and design development to include pedestrian access and bike lanes.
- **Bikes, Trails:** There is support for walkability and bike-ability. Make downtown a spot to walk or bike to. Helena is becoming a hub for biking trails.
- **Parking:** There is plenty of free parking, although it is often mentioned as an issue.
- **Traffic:** There is a preference for two-lane streets.
- **Cruse Ave:** There is wasted potential on Cruse, could provide green space and housing—right now it is a sea of asphalt. South of Broadway there is almost no traffic. It could be the backyard of the downtown. Could it become a modified bike trail? There is opportunity to reduce the width. The City owns a good part of the land, so could be a catalyst for changing it.

Land and Industry Assessment

- Market demand for commercial uses along Cruse Avenue is limited due to the proximity to competing commercial nodes and lot sizes. Land use should be complementary and supportive to the existing downtown uses which would indicate little to no commercial uses.
- Residential product type is in short supply and attainable housing is in high demand. Adding new residential product to the Cruse Avenue corridor will improve the streetscape and aesthetic.
- Attached single-family uses such as townhomes is a suitable product type considering available lot configurations. Townhomes also fit the desired urban scale and will maintain visual sightlines into the

downtown and surrounding neighborhoods along the Cruse Avenue corridor.

- Industry

Project Assessment

Initial Alternatives

- Keep vehicular access but reduce the ROW to add space for bike lanes and pocket or linear parks, new residential offerings, and remove the aged neighborhood center building and relocate tenants to improve circulation between Cruse and Last Chance Gulch;
- Turn Cruse into a linear park focused on bikes and pedestrians and supported by residences with no vehicular access, remove the aged neighborhood center building and relocate tenants to improve circulation between Cruse and Last Chance Gulch;
- Create a hybrid approach of the two alternatives that provides both a linear park along less frequented sections of Cruse and maintains vehicular access along more active areas with active transportation improvements and new residential offerings.

Open House Feedback

- Few supported the concept of a linear park along Cruse Avenue as stakeholders:
 - preferred to maintain vehicular access as a convenient and quick route to access downtown compared to other alternative routes;
 - were concerned of the impact closing Cruse Avenue to vehicular traffic would have on traffic volume in surrounding neighborhoods;
- Removing the aged neighborhood center from its current location to improve circulation between Cruse

and the walking mall and relocating tenants received conditional support so long as:

- A new multi-story building should be constructed on the parking lot of the existing location with tuck-under parking provided along with access to the building from the street-level at Cruse Avenue and the walking mall;
 - Existing tenants would then relocate into the new facility, the old facility would then be demolished, and improvements to accessibility and circulation undertaken between Cruse and the walking mall;
 - Any new facility would provide adequate space for the programming needs of existing tenants; and
 - The project would be funded by the City and other parties to subsidize the development costs and to keep rental rates in-line with current economics;
 - Additional community conversations are needed to determine the future of the existing neighborhood center and plans for a new facility; and
 - Present both options in the next public meeting to 1) keep the neighborhood center as it is or 2) develop a new facility on site.
- The alternative that received the most support was to keep vehicular access, reduce the ROW to add space for bike lanes and pocket or linear parks, and add residential product along the corridor.

Preferred Alternatives

- Keep vehicular access, reduce the ROW to add space for bike lanes and pocket or linear parks, and add residential product along the corridor. Included are two options to leave the neighborhood center as is or relocate to a new facility at their existing location.
- Conduct outreach and recruitment for the development of supportive neighborhood commercial uses as well as adaptive reuse of existing buildings along Cruse; and
- Engineering of planned improvements.

Policy Recommendations

- Discussions with stakeholders highlighted a number of impediments to private sector investment in downtown Helena that could be ameliorated by enhancing incentive policies to include:
 - Strengthening the State HTC;
 - Expanding uses for TIF to include vertical construction costs; and
 - Adopt a State NMTC program.
- The State of Ohio has adopted policies aimed at facilitating investment by twinning state and federal incentives that could be a model for Montana to consider.

Action Plan

- Key next steps include addressing
 - Cruse and Cutler ROW abandonment / private property owner purchase rights;
 - Infrastructure extensions to planned redevelopment sites;
 - Economic structures to accommodate attainable housing, disposition of City property for redevelopment;
 - Further stakeholder discussions regarding replacement of the aged Neighborhood Center;
 - Adjustments to State incentive policies to facilitate private sector investment in the downtown;

HISTORY OF CRUSE AVENUE

The following historical information was taken from the [Final Environmental Report for Project No. M5815\(1\) - Cruse Avenue Sixth Avenue to Neill Avenue](#) conducted in late 1981.

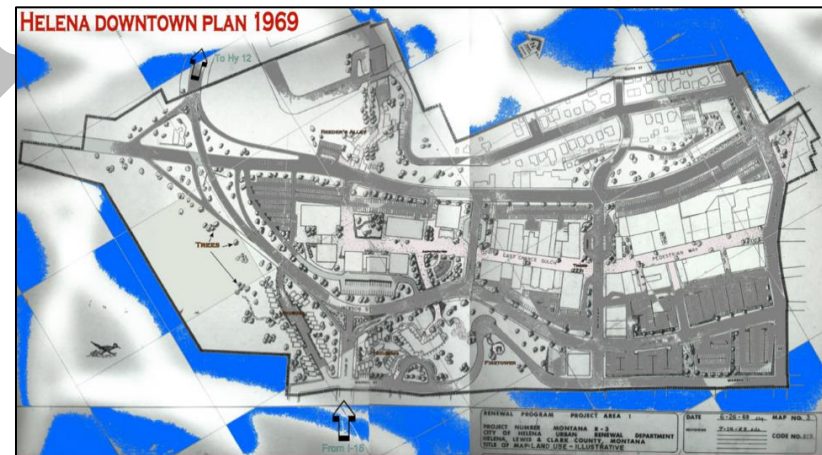
The City of Helena received a grant under the provisions of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 to begin one year of planning as one of 147 Model Cities in the United States. The program began in July 1968 and was followed by four Action Years, the final year terminating in June 1973. Between 1969 and 1981, \$47.0M was spent in the downtown area comprised of \$22.7M and \$24.3M of Federal and private funds, respectively.

In 1969, “public hearings were conducted on the Last Chance Gulch Urban Renewal Plan. Major features of the Traffic Circulation and Public Parking elements of the plan were:

- Relocate Jackson Street to the east and construct a two-way four-lane facility (Cruse Avenue [parts of which used to be named Allen Street]).
- The Urban Renewal Project extended north to 6th Avenue; however it was recommended that the Jackson (Cruse) extension be completed to Neill Avenue.”

Figure 1 is a map of the 1969 Helena Downtown Plan. “The Original Plan created in 1969 included the “ring road” using Cutler as the I-15 entry and the route south of Reeder’s Alley that looped around Mount Helena to Hy 12.” Major differences between the plan and what is currently observed in the built environment include:

1. The highway interchange and overpass of Park Avenue at the southern end of Cruse Avenue connecting through to Highway 12.
2. Cutler Street connecting through to I-15 with alignment to Winnie Avenue. Winnie and Broadway Avenues were to be reconfigured to one-directional road couplets with an interchange at I-15.
3. The access road to the library continues through the block and intersects Cruse Avenue.
4. The Wong Street configuration includes a curb cut along Cruse and no circulating connection to the library access road.
5. The Consistory Shrine Temple Association buildings (erected 1880 Historic Ming Opera House¹) used as a fraternal hall at 15 Jackson Street were to be demolished and replaced with surface parking.
6. Access to Fire Tower Park was to be improved by extending Warren Street in a curvilinear design through the block, connecting into Broadway.



SOURCE: Pamela Attardo, Helena/Lewis & Clark Co. Heritage Preservation Officer

Figure 1—1969 Downtown Plan



SOURCE: helenahistory.org – Sean Logan

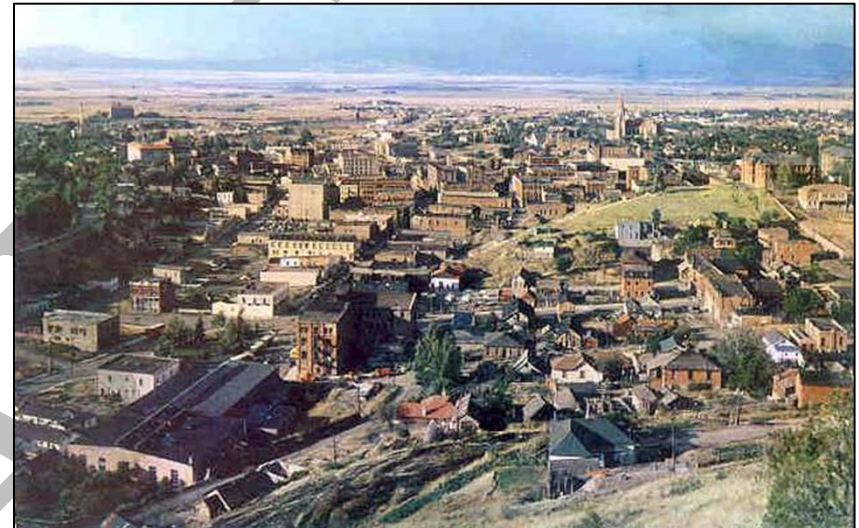
Figure 2—1940s View of Cruse Ave

The following historical summary was provided by Pamela J. Attardo, Helena/Lewis and Clark Co. Heritage Preservation Officer:

“By 1972 things had changed. Negotiations for the Shrine Consistory and old Helena Light and Traction buildings on Jackson Street failed, forcing a re-route of the eastern loop street. Jackson survived as a street and the loop was renamed Cruse.

Historic preservation concerns and regulations prompted reconsideration of certain demolitions, staving off a few and delaying others. The darkly outlined structures—Brewery, Denver Block, Parchen, State Publishing, Independent Record, Colwell, VFW, Sheehan’s, Wheat, Murphy and Walker buildings—were questionable historical survivors, having structural and other liabilities but were kept in the running for retention. Few

were purchased. The plan was simplified by these and other practical reasons, leaving more structure and less roadway in downtown.



SOURCE: helenahistory.org

Figure 3—1950s View of Cruse Ave

Details in the plan were worked out. A historical theme developed. Again using European precedent, artifacts from demolished buildings were to be incorporated into street furniture and other structures. The gulch’s old stream from 1864 was symbolically recreated along a block of the “pedestrian way” and themed statuary commissioned.

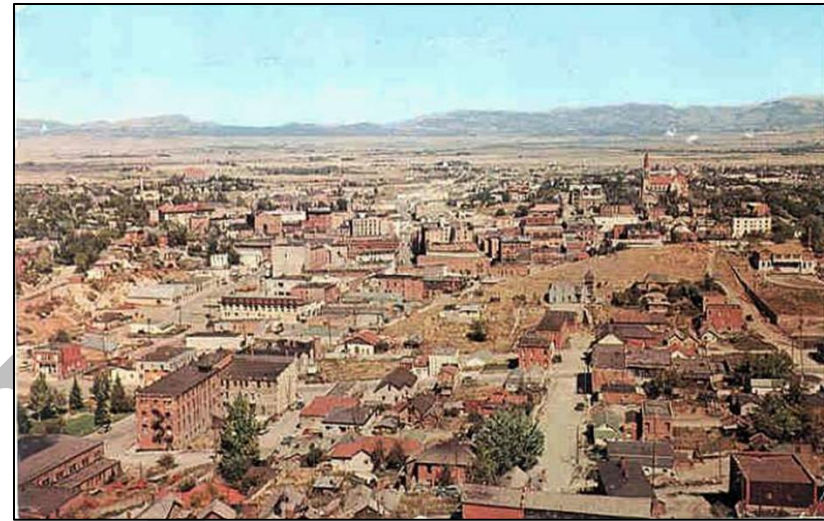
Parks, though reduced in size, remained as important features. Housing structures were reduced. A large apartment complex would be built south of the Bluestone. Displaced residents were parceled out to “scattered housing” constructed by Model Cities in various area locations.

The hotel and convention center project that had started redevelopment downtown, remained as a central component to the scheme. Its placement would remove the historic Wheat Block, a large and memorable old Main Street presence.

Private investment boosted the outlook for success. Notorious “Dorothy’s” and the Dunphy, Loranz, and Goodall Blocks across the street were largely privately developed. New buildings like the Arcade Block, designed to complement their historic neighbors, were successfully financed.

The “Ring Road” idea died. Developers and homeowners along its route objected to traffic it would bring. As a result, downtown would remain inaccessible by direct means and suffer accordingly.”

Subsequent to this plan, the Helena Labor Temple Association and Chamber of Commerce buildings were constructed in 1972 and 1995, respectively. These buildings occupy part of the parking lots east of Cruse Avenue between Broadway and 6th.



SOURCE: helenahistory.org

Figure 4—1950s View of Cruse Ave

“The overall goal for the Last Chance Renewal Project was based on the completion of a continuous access route around the downtown area ...[and] to improve the accessibility to and from the downtown area.”

It would appear that an initial phase of Cruse Avenue was constructed from Park Avenue to 6th Avenue in 1970 with an extension from 6th Avenue to 11th Avenue and Neill Avenue occurring sometime after 1981.

“In 1975, the Helena Urban Transportation Study was adopted by the Helena City Commission. The final priorities for the current projects [identified] Cruse Avenue - 6th Avenue to Eleventh Avenue-priority number 4”. In 1979 an update to this Study was commissioned which raised the Cruse Avenue extension to priority number 1. In 1980, a consultant was hired to conduct the environmental impact study for the extension.



SOURCE: helenahistory.org

Figure 5—1950s View of Cruse Ave

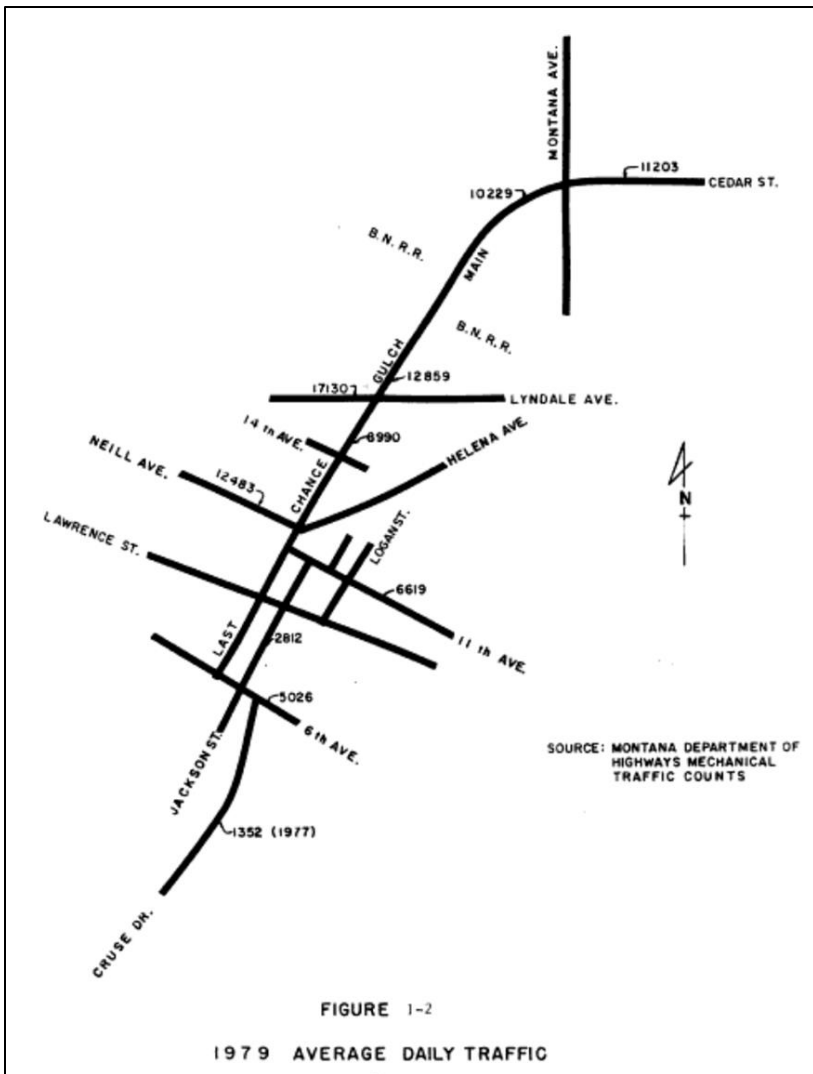


SOURCE: helenahistory.org – Scott Nelson

Figure 6—1960s View of Cruse Ave

“In 1977 an engineering firm was hired to establish a preliminary alignment for Cruse Extension with emphasis on the connection to 11th Avenue and Neill Avenue. Alternate 1 of this report was considered by the City Staff as the best overall solution.” During the process of developing a Final Environment Report over “25 alternate routes and various intersection configurations were reviewed.” Four viable, build alternatives were presented in the draft EIS. The average daily traffic count and street grid from 1979 is shown in Figure 7.

See Appendix A for articles which provide additional historical context for decisions concerning Cruse Avenue.



SOURCE: Montana Dept of Highways Mechanical Traffic Counts

Figure 7—1979 Average Daily Traffic

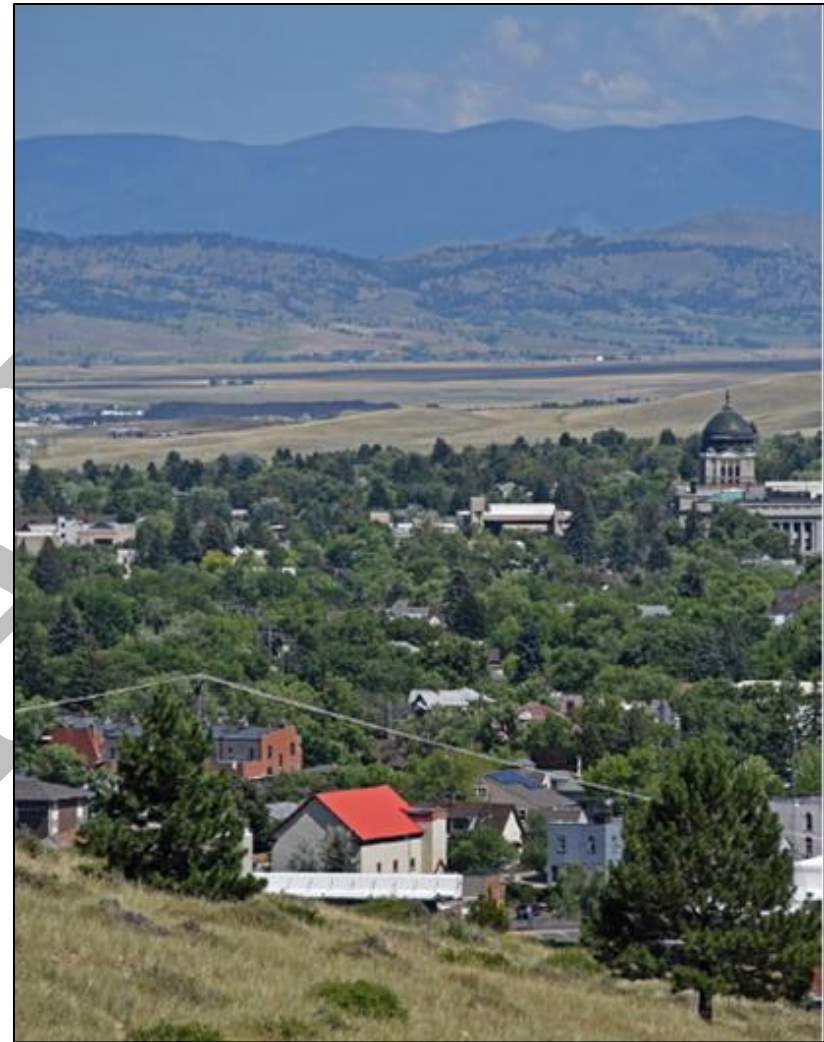
REVIEW OF PRIOR PLANS

The documents listed below were studied and were incorporated into a synthesis of prior plans:

- Helena Downtown Urban Renewal Plan, adopted 29 October 2019
- City of Helena Growth Policy, draft submitted October 2019
- Downtown Helena Master Plan 2016-2036, adopted 17 October 2016
- Appendix A – Existing Conditions Report
- Appendix B – Market Analysis Report
- Appendix C – Public Outreach Summary
- Appendix D – Funding Sources
- Downtown Study Area – Draft Statement of Blight, City of Helena, dated 15 March 2018
- Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan – 2014 Update

The documents listed below were also reviewed for relevant contextual information:

- Montana Economic Development Report 2019
- Montana Economic Report 2019
- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2019-2023 (for Broadwater, Lewis and Clark, and Meagher counties)
- Tri-County Housing Needs Assessment, dated 30 Oct 2018 (for Broadwater, Lewis and Clark, and Meagher counties)
- Helena Climate Change Task Force Action Plan 2009



SOURCE: City of Helena Growth Policy, pg 3-6

Figure 8—City of Helena

Helena’s prior plans were reviewed to determine the City’s vision, values, and goals to provide context for the vitalization of Cruse Avenue. Similarities and priorities from Helena’s prior plans were synthesized into the following key points.

VISION

The City of Helena strives to be recognized for:

- A healthy, vital economy that benefits all,
- Quality municipal services,
- Balanced and beneficial growth,
- A world-class natural setting and recreational opportunities,
- Clean, safe, and sustainable natural resources,
- A vibrant arts cultural and civic environment,
- A vital, active downtown, rich in history, and a source of intense community pride, and
- Citizen involvement and engagement in all matters.

Draft Vision Statement

Helena celebrates its past, enjoys its present, and plans its future to ensure that its growth is beneficial, its environment is clean, and its economic stability assured while maintaining its outstanding natural setting, quality of life and sense of community.

COMMUNITY VALUES

Community: Helena is a safe and secure place to live, work and play, with a stable and friendly environment that encourages citizen involvement.

Leadership: Helena values leadership that respects differing views, models integrity, and implements community goals.

Environment: Helena is an environmentally aware community that preserves, conserves, and appreciates its distinctive open spaces, natural resources, habitats, parks, and outdoor recreation.

Economic Development: Helena encourages economic development that safeguards the environment, while promoting community prosperity.

Diversity: Helena is a community for all people, offering diverse cultural and educational opportunities, with varying land uses and unique neighborhoods.

Accountability: Helena is dedicated to promoting fiscal responsibility, managed growth, responsive community services and an open and fair government.



SOURCE: Helena Downtown Master Plan, pg 3

Figure 9—Fire Tower

GROWTH POLICY GOALS

The draft City of Helena Growth Policy has goals and objectives, which are summarized here to serve as guiding principles for vitalization of Cruse Avenue.

Population and Economy: Helena expects relatively modest growth. The plan proposes a Neighborhood Centers concept as well as to:

- Encourage clustering of allied business types for efficiency and sharing of practices,
- Adopt zoning patterns that allow ample locations near infrastructure and quality housing,
- Sustain the area's scenic, cultural, and recreational attractions, and
- Invest in "green" building and renewable energy.

Land Use, Housing, and the Natural Environment: Focus growth patterns within the city and promote infill and advance the Neighborhood Centers Concept, all of which will:

- Reduce service costs,
- Preserve open space and recreational features,
- Enhance civic activities,
- Support economic growth,
- Reduce vehicular miles traveled,
- Boost housing diversity,
- Accommodate Helena's growing population, and
- Maintain air and water quality, conservation, and hazard reduction while growing.

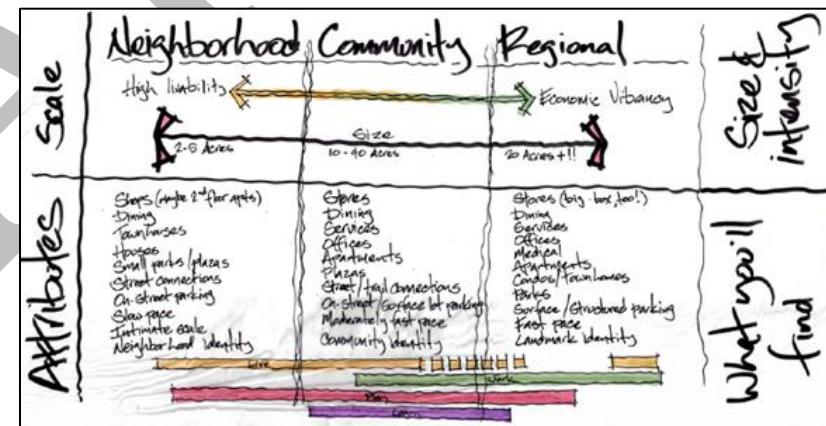
Public Facilities, Services, and Transportation: Seek tight integration of services, supporting compact land use:

- Invest in target maintenance and system upgrades,

- Support parks and open spaces, and
- Arrange the transportation network to optimize land use and connectivity.

Community Culture and Design: Recognize the incredible value inherent in Helena's unique culture and physical character:

- Ensure land use patterns add to local "livability",
- Support a wide range of arts and cultural assets,
- Preserve the historic downtown as the "heart" of Helena,
- Encourage residents to be an active part of the community's culture, and
- Preserve Helena's unique setting, with breathtaking views and access to recreation.



SOURCE: City of Helena Growth Policy, pg 3-10

Figure 10—Neighborhood Centers

This diagram shows how proposed Neighborhood Centers may vary according to desired function and relative size. Some centers may evolve as "Neighborhood", "Community" or "Regional" in scale.

MASTER PLAN

Helena's 2016-2036 Master Plan provides a guide for implementing changes that will attract future growth and development in Downtown. Following are key elements bearing on the Better City project intended to develop a renewal vision for strategic areas in downtown Helena with a focus on Cruse Avenue.

Increasingly, people are choosing quality of life over other factors, including higher salaries. At the same time, technology, and growth of "creative-class" industries, allow people and businesses to locate anywhere. Building a strong and resilient economy starts with creating a great community where people want to live and work. The Master Plan represents a community-based planning effort.

The first step in the process identified issues, barriers, and assets within Downtown. Key issues relevant to the Cruse Avenue project are:

- Connections to the greater community need to be strengthened.
- Business access and visibility is limited by a lack of wayfinding and through traffic.
- Pedestrian and bicycle routes lack continuity and connectivity.
- Parking is inconvenient and confusing.
- Current aesthetic and maintenance levels don't reflect the desired quality.
- Existing land uses don't support a desirable, walkable Downtown.



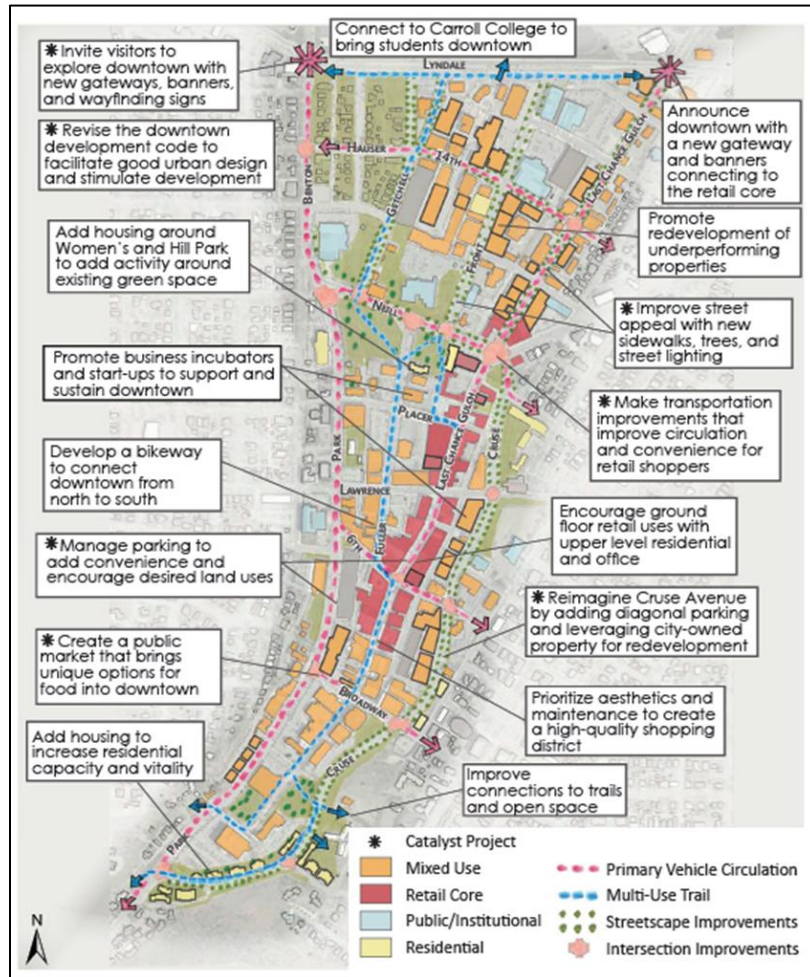
SOURCE: Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan, pg E.7

Figure 11—Walkable

The second step formed the goals and vision for Downtown. Among guiding principles are:

- Downtown is walkable with a concentration of goods and services within easy walking distance. Walking in Downtown must be clean, comfortable, efficient, interesting, and safe.
- Downtown must be a vibrant, year-round destination for business and activity throughout the day and evening hours, including residential housing, arts and entertainment, events and activities.
- Downtown must have convenient access, circulation, parking, and every-day services that allow people to easily visit and stay Downtown.

The third step established and prioritized implementation actions, shown in Figure 12.



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 39

Figure 12—Implementation Action Steps

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

The 2016 Downtown Master Plan study area generally follows the Downtown Helena Business Improvement District (BID) boundary. The Plan Area is approximately one mile long stretching from Lyndale Avenue to the intersection of Park and Cruse Avenues to the south, and between Benton Avenue to the west and Cruse Avenue to the east, encompassing roughly 40 blocks. The Plan Area can generally be characterized as a mix of historic Downtown buildings, mid-century commercial development, and newer office and commercial buildings. Residential use is limited. Topography defines much of Downtown's physical layout, with steep hillsides narrowing to a tightly-constrained gulch at the south end of the Plan Area.

A draft Statement of Blight was tendered 15 March 2018 in response to the recommendation in the 2016-2036 Downtown Neighborhood Plan to demonstrate the area's suitability as an Urban Renewal District. It had been nearly 50 years since the last round of urban renewal projects was initiated in downtown and 15-20 years since most of the projects were completed. Even some of those improvements show signs of wear and tear. Designation as an Urban Renewal District provides the resources needed to rectify the serious deferred maintenance, deterioration, and the blight identified in the report.

The Statement of Blight established the need to undertake revitalization, detailing the blight factors that exist in the downtown study area (see Figure 13). The boundaries were established by considering the geographic extent of the 2016-2036 Downtown Neighborhood Plan, proposed downtown zoning district boundary, and discussion with City staff and stakeholders in the Helena Business Improvement District and Montana Business Assistance Connection.



SOURCE: Statement of Blight Report, pg 4

Figure 13—Downtown Renewal District

For designation as an Urban Renewal District, Montana State statutes require at least three of 15 blight factors; nine of those factors exist in Helena’s downtown. The statement concluded that the study area meets Montana statutory criteria for a blighted area and that rehabilitation and/or redevelopment of the area is necessary in the interest of the public health, safety, and welfare of the residents of the municipality, and without such rehabilitation, blighted conditions in the district are likely to worsen.



SOURCE: Statement of Blight Report, pg 18

Figure 14—Mini-Malfunction Junction

The Statement of Blight addressed Cruse Avenue, which “has a street layout with very long blocks. The on/off ramps where it intersects with Last Chance Gulch no longer make sense from a traffic perspective. The configuration of the Cutler-Cruse intersection is a similar issue.

The Cruse-Broadway intersection is offset by a few yards from Warren Street to the east and a parking lot entrance to west (between Cruse and the walking mall). Long crossing distances and lack of pedestrian striping across Broadway make this is a difficult intersection for pedestrians.



SOURCE: Statement of Blight Report, pg 19

Figure 15—Wide Street

The right-of-way for Cruse Avenue is wider than needed for the road, particularly at the southern intersection with Park Avenue. This area is large enough to accommodate the road as well as development.



SOURCE: Statement of Blight Report, pg 21

Map 1—Right of way at Cruse and Park Includes a Park-like Area

Cruse Avenue has some of the highest accident rates in downtown. The Long-Range Transportation Plan recommends reconfiguring

the intersection of Cruse and Cutler to reduce vehicle-pedestrian conflicts and improve sight distances. The intersection of Cruse and Broadway has crossing distances that are over 100 feet and issues with high speed vehicle turns.

Some parcels along Cruse have less than clear legal standing, with parcels in the middle of the road as shown on Map 2.



SOURCE: Statement of Blight Report, pg 24

Map 2—Parcels in the Middle of the Road

Although most of the study area contains sidewalks, there are gaps along Cruse Ave which disrupt the traditional street network that is conducive to walking. Furthermore, many existing sidewalks are too narrow to allow two people to walk comfortably side-by-side.

Downtown block sizes and shapes are irregular due to topography and historic development surrounding mining areas along Last Chance Creek. Cruse Avenue breaks up the traditional grid pattern and creates several long blocks of more than 700 feet.

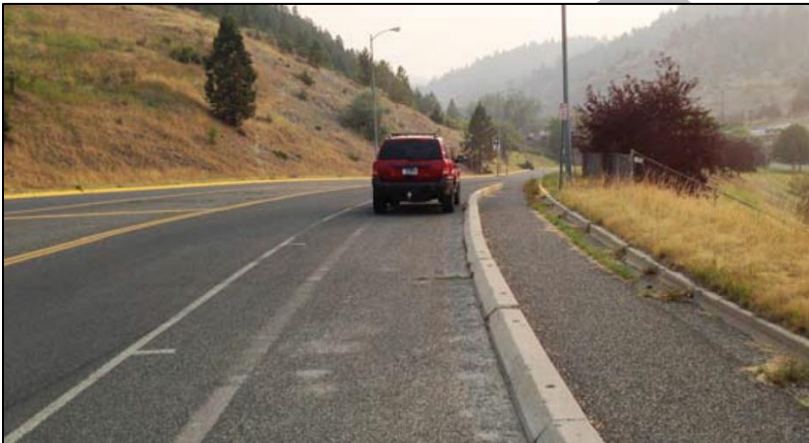
Park Avenue and the walking mall also have several long, uninterrupted blocks due to topography and development. The

Federal Reserve Bank on Neill Avenue disrupts block connectivity to the north due to security requirements.



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 7

Figure 16—Long Blocks on Cruse Avenue



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 9

Figure 17—No Walkway on Cruse Avenue

Retail Market

Helena has an extensive trade area with a large high-income, well-educated population. The 2016 Retail Market Study found that Downtown Helena has an existing demand for up to 142,900 square feet of new retail development which could potentially produce \$46 million in sales by 2020. This new retail demand could be absorbed by existing businesses and/or with the opening of 45 to 60 new grocery stores, limited service eating, apparel and shoes, full services restaurants, general merchandise, and special food services.

Demographic trends suggest empty nesters, baby boomers and millennials want to live near or in downtowns based on convenience of shopping and access to entertainment. Redevelopment opportunities abound in Downtown. There are many properties where the land value exceeds the value of improvements and city-owned surface lots that could be converted to new Downtown buildings with structured parking.

The City of Helena is situated among and near some of Montana's best outdoor activities, including 900 acres of world class mountain biking, hiking, and wildlife viewing just minutes from Downtown. Within a short driving distance flows the Missouri River and several neighboring lakes. Holter Lake and Hauser Reservoir Outdoor Recreation Area has fishing, swimming, camping, water-skiing, and boating.

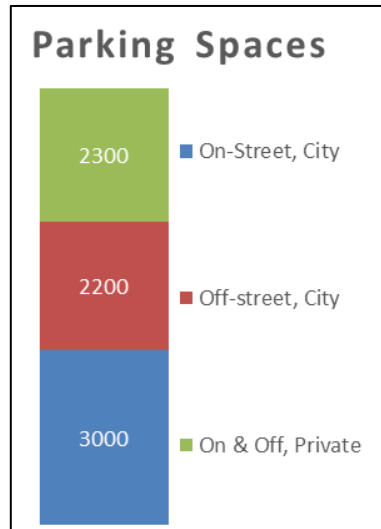
Parking

While downtown charm is often based on walkability, convenient parking is crucial to the success of downtown businesses and the appeal of downtown housing. In Downtown, the off-street parking requirements for businesses can be met when a building/use is within 700 feet of a parking garage or surface

parking lot. 75 percent of permit spaces are being utilized, suggesting there is an adequate supply of parking in Downtown.

Providing adequate ADA accessible parking is a challenge for the local government as well as local businesses due to existing conditions and topography.

Off-street parking requirements in Downtown zoning districts



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan pg. 13-15, Better City

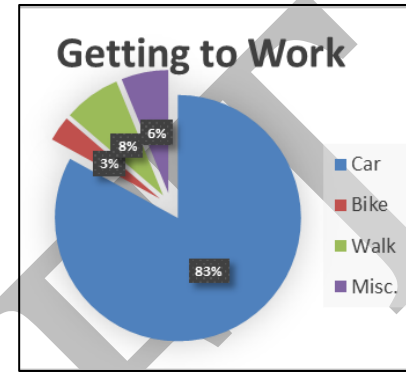
Figure 18—Parking Spaces

Circulation

Cruse Avenue is classified as a major collector on the MDT system—however, wide multi-lane streets that are favorable to cars negatively affect the walkability and scale of Downtown. One-way streets affect the viability of Downtown businesses.

should be re-envisioned. Options include eliminating off-street parking requirements, revising parking requirements to accurately reflect the way parking is actually used Downtown, improving design standards, or a combination of all three. Zoning should facilitate how buildings integrate into the Downtown environment to protect historic resources and create high-quality, human-scale places.

Downtown designated bike facilities are limited to one east-west bike route that bisects Downtown on Lawrence Street. The



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan pg. 13-15, Better City

Figure 19—Getting to Work

Infrastructure

As new development occurs, some gas and electrical lines may need to be updated or improved. Suitable sites for new utility locations are the primary constraint for utility providers. If large facilities are necessary, finding property to house those facilities could prove challenging. For smaller upgrades or expansions, tight spaces in alleys, between buildings, or in streets can also act as constraints.

There are a handful of properties in Downtown served by fiber. Expanding service throughout Downtown is a financial challenge.

The storm drain system both accommodates urban drainage and conveys runoff from the large rural Last Chance Gulch watershed located upstream from the city. As such, there is a backbone network of large diameter pipes through the heart of Downtown, the majority of which is undersized or in poor condition and needs repair or replacement. Replacement of the storm drain poses

The Centennial Trail is an amazing amenity close to Downtown, but connectivity issues remain. One of the lanes could be repurposed for sidewalks, a bike lane, and safe, accessible parks. The area between Cruse and Park intended for an overpass could be made available for housing.

complex construction issues because the existing pipe alignment runs near or under building structures in several locations. Replacement with larger diameter pipe also requires significant installation footprints, which can cause corresponding issues with water, sewer, and dry utility conflicts.

Vision for Each District

Great Northern District: Modern center for business and family entertainment.

The Great Northern District caters to the modern professional who lives and works Downtown. With upper-level housing, coffee shops, fitness centers, family entertainment, and a lively nightlife, the young professional or retiree's desire for an urban lifestyle is satisfied with a wide variety of amenities.

Minimal Setbacks, Walkable Streets, Entertainment/Cinema, Neighborhood Services, Hotel/Conference Center, Health/Fitness Center, Medical Services/Clinic, Schools/Colleges, Business Incubators, Contemporary/Classic, Architecture, Upper-Level Housing, Employment, Class A Office Space, Secure/Structured Parking, Ground Floor Office or Retail.

Last Chance Gulch: Retail core.

The Last Chance Gulch Retail Core invites Helena and its surrounding communities into the Downtown for a unique experience replete with notable, historic architecture, local shops and restaurants, and an active street atmosphere. A place that celebrates the traditional main street while overflowing with character and charm.

Wayfinding and Tourism, Information, Shared-Use Bike Lanes, Convenient, Nearby, Long-term Parking, Short-Term On-Street,

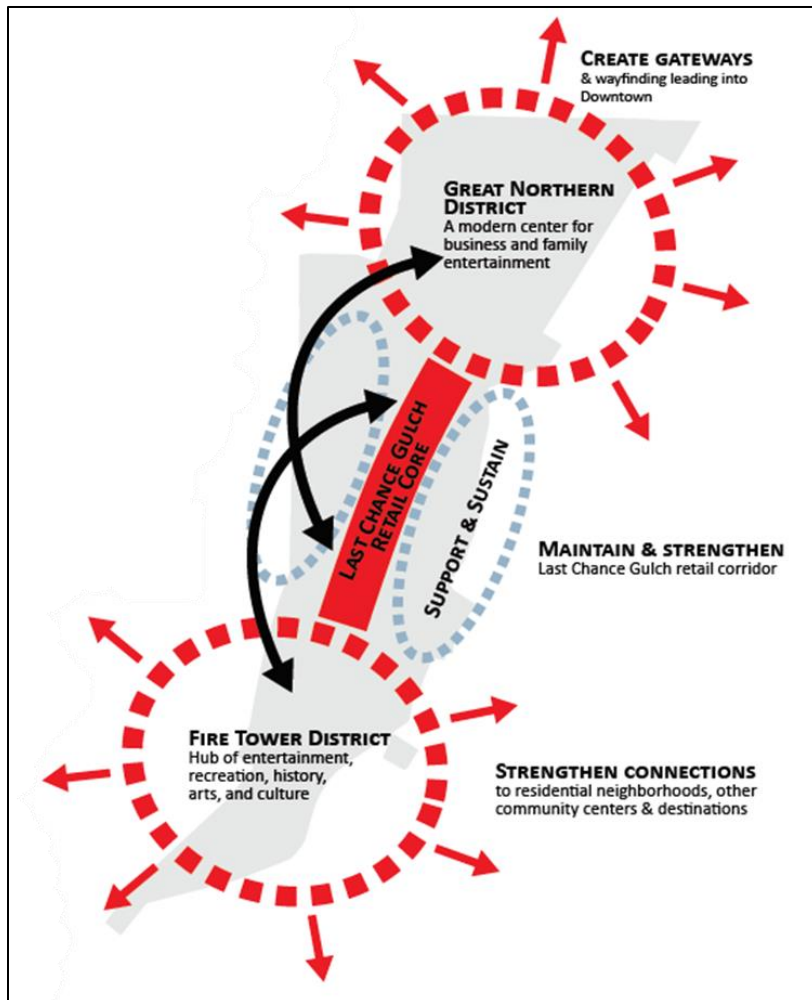
Parallel Parking, Upper-Level Office/Residential, Active Ground Floor Retail, Low-Speed Two-Way Traffic, Street Trees/Furniture, Wide Sidewalks, Well Maintained/High Quality, Well Lit/Pedestrian Scale Lighting, Zero Setbacks, High Ceilings/Large Windows, Continuous Storefronts.

Fire Tower District¹: Hub of entertainment, recreation, history, arts, and culture.

By embracing its eclectic mix of businesses and architectural styles, the Fire Tower District's casual atmosphere welcomes the local and visitor to hang out in a brewery, meet up with friends before hitting the trails, or pick up dinner from a local vendor at the public market. Condos and townhouses that appeal to the millennial or baby boomer bring energy and demand for restaurants, outdoor gathering places, and cultural vibrancy. Desirable amenities might include:

- Public Market
- Employment,
- Eclectic, Active Lifestyle
- Retail
- Architectural Variety
- Art, History, & Performance Arts
- Townhomes, Condos, & Apartments
- Affordable / Workforce Housing
- Outdoor Seating
- Trails & Open Space
- Neighborhood Schools
- Gathering Places
- Restaurants
- Bars / Breweries

¹ Cruse Ave from Sixth Ave to the Cruse Ave intersection with Park Ave



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 31

Figure 20—Downtown Districts

To create a dynamic downtown environment, the following were recommended:

1 – Revise the downtown development code

- Consolidate downtown zoning.
- Eliminate off-street parking requirements.
- Develop design guidelines (a menu of alternative solutions, including incentives).

2 – Promote redevelopment of underperforming properties

- Create a Tax Increment Financing District.
- Encourage ground-floor retail use.

3 – Encourage downtown housing

- Create a full range of housing affordability and options.
- Add housing around Women’s and Hill Parks.
- **Assess the feasibility of converting Cruse Avenue to a local street.**
 - The majority of Cruse Avenue carries less than 2,000 cars per day. Convert its wide right-of-way for parking, trails, sidewalks, and landscaping. Explore opportunities to leverage city-owned property to create mixed-use housing and structured parking.
- **Create Cruse Avenue housing.** Eliminate the landscaped island to make room for condos and townhomes, with trails and open space in a walkable, urban neighborhood. Helena’s prosperity depends on available housing affordable to its residents. Many of Helena’s working population struggle with the affordability and availability of housing.



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 45

Figure 21—De-emphasizing Traffic



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 54

Figure 23—Sidewalk & Crosswalk



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 46

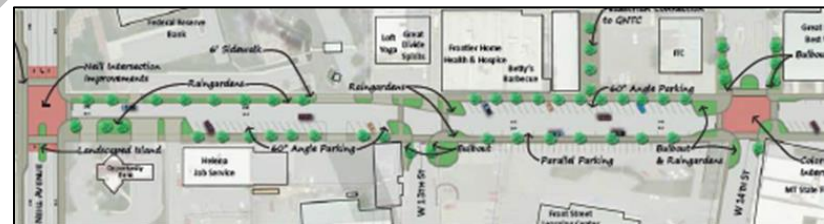
Figure 22—Create Opportunities for Development

Connect Downtown

All streets in Downtown should be two-lanes (one lane in each direction) with appropriate turn lanes at intersections. Current and projected traffic volumes fall well below the typical threshold for multi-lane streets. Intersections should be simplified to reduce crossing distances and right-turn slip lanes should be eliminated for pedestrian comfort and safety.

The pedestrian network should emphasize a finely connected grid that reduces out-of-direction travel and invites people to keep walking.

- Connect to neighborhoods
- Improve crosswalks
- Widen sidewalks
- Add lighting
- Improve street appeal
- Improve Cruse Avenue Streetscape
 - Add sidewalks, street trees, multi-use trail, and street lighting between Park and Broadway. Eliminate slip lanes and islands at Cutler.



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 56

Figure 24—Replace Storm Drain & Water Lines on Front Street



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 57

Figure 25—Proposed Pedestrian Circulation

Develop a Comprehensive Bike Network

- Allow bikes on malls
- Create on-street bike routes
- Add on-street bike lanes
- Develop a north-south bikeway
- Consider different types of users



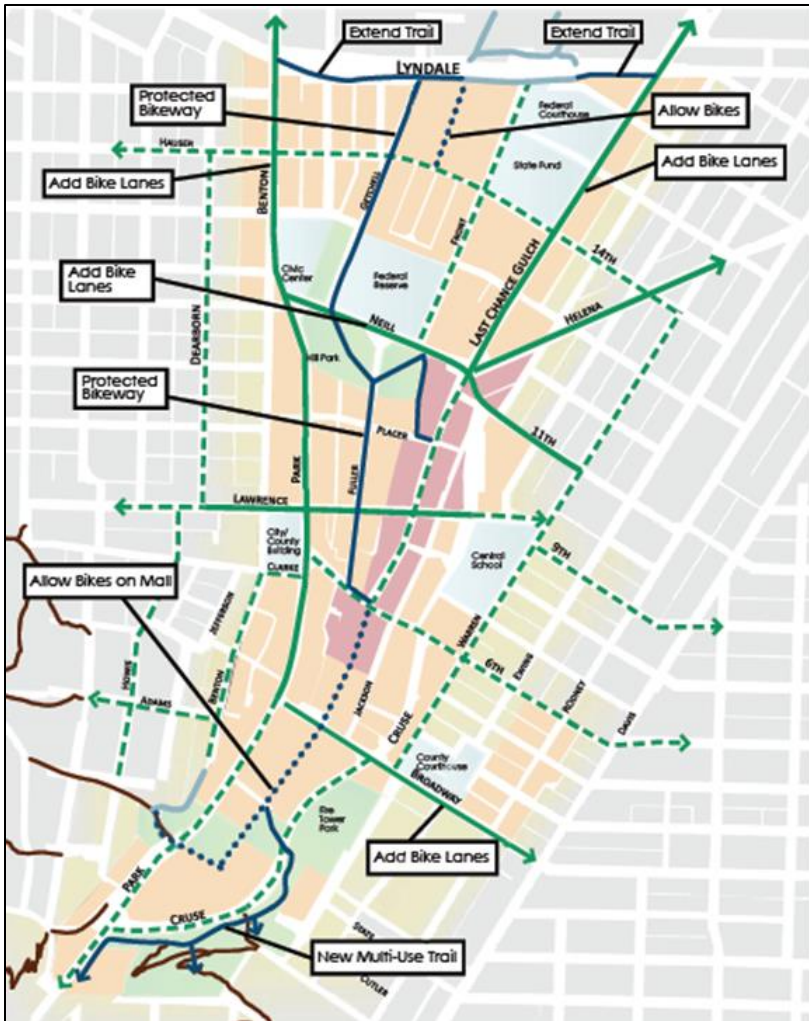
SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 54

Figure 26—Bike Lane



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 58

Figure 27—Alternative Transportation & Recreation Options

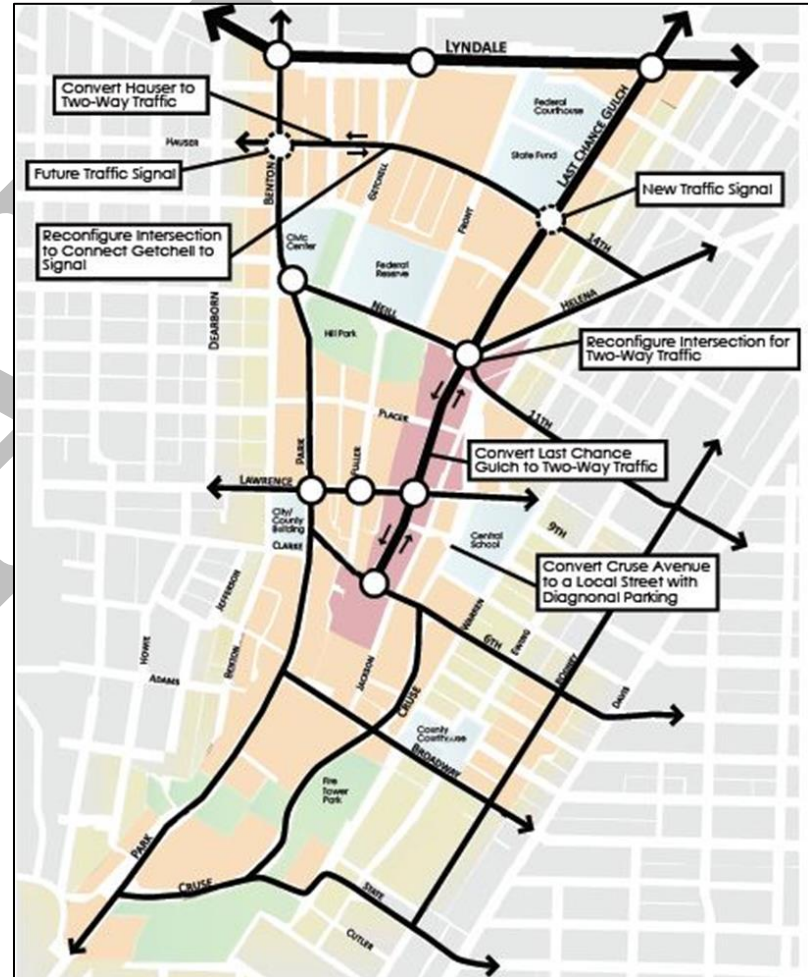


SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 59

Figure 28—Proposed Pedestrian Circulation

Vehicle Circulation

Improve vehicle circulation and access to increase retail viability. Invite visitors to explore Downtown with new gateways, banners, and wayfinding.



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 61

Figure 29—Proposed Vehicle Circulation

Wayfinding should include coordinate guide signs outside the Downtown, as well as bicycle and pedestrian-level signs. Gateway locations could include Benton/Lyndale, LCG/Lyndale, Helena/11th, 6th, and Broadway.

Simplify Malfunction Junction

Study the feasibility of simplifying the five-point intersection of Neill, Last Chance Gulch, Helena, and Cruse (“Malfunction Junction”). This is one of the few intersections in Downtown that experiences poor level-of-service. Reducing the number of streets entering the intersection will improve operations, make the intersection more pedestrian friendly, and allow two-way traffic on Last Chance Gulch to the south. These changes will require meeting with business owners to address changes to Helena Avenue that would affect access.



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, pg 62

Figure 30—Malfunction Junction

The City of Helena commissioned and completed a concept study to evaluate the feasibility and constructability of a modern intersection at the Malfunction Junction intersection. The evaluation included a full operational analysis and preliminary design of intersection alternatives. The primary goals of the effort were to establish a preliminary intersection design for the purposes of assessing right-of-way and infrastructure impacts, and for use in future final design efforts. The alternatives developed met the City’s complete streets objectives to accommodate non-motorized traffic (pedestrian and bicycles). The recommendations contained in the study suggested carrying forward three alternatives for further detailed study in an appropriate environmental review process. The three alternatives were:

- Alternative 1B (single lane roundabout with two lane entry from Neill Rd),
- Alternative 6 (enlarged signalized intersection), and
- A “no-build” alternative.

After the concept study was completed, the City Commission elected to drop the project from additional consideration and allocate available City of Helena funds to the West Main Street reconstruction project. For improvements to be delivered at this intersection in the future, a funding package will need to be identified and an environmental process completed to examine the social, environmental and economic impacts of the project on the community and adjacent businesses (if Federal funds are to be utilized).

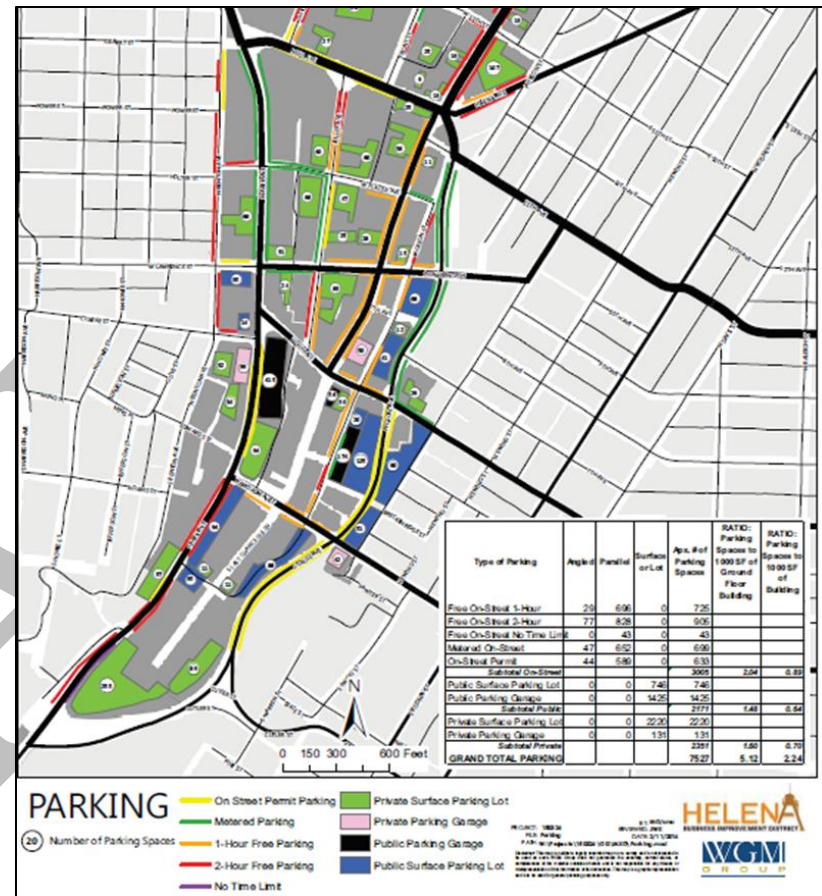
CRUSE AVENUE AREA ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

Points and suggestions from the prior plans, primarily from the Helena Downtown Urban Renewal Plan and the Downtown Helena Master Plan, are compiled by category in this section.

Parking

In the recent past, the City invested in five different parking structures and numerous surface lots to provide an adequate supply of parking for Downtown. While there is enough parking to support current demand, there are opportunities to better manage parking to improve utilization and benefit, some examples of which are:

- Price parking to create high-turnover in desirable and convenient locations.
- Meter all on-street parking within Downtown to manage time limits and pricing.
- Provide free 20-minute “quick stop” parking.
- Reinvest revenue from parking meters in maintenance and beautification.
- Offer first hour free parking in garages and surface lots utilizing pay-as-you leave technology.
- Integrate parking wayfinding signs for pedestrians and vehicles.
- Provide well-lit, well-maintained sidewalk routes to get to and from the parking lots.
- End parking permits for neighborhoods within easy walking distance of Downtown.

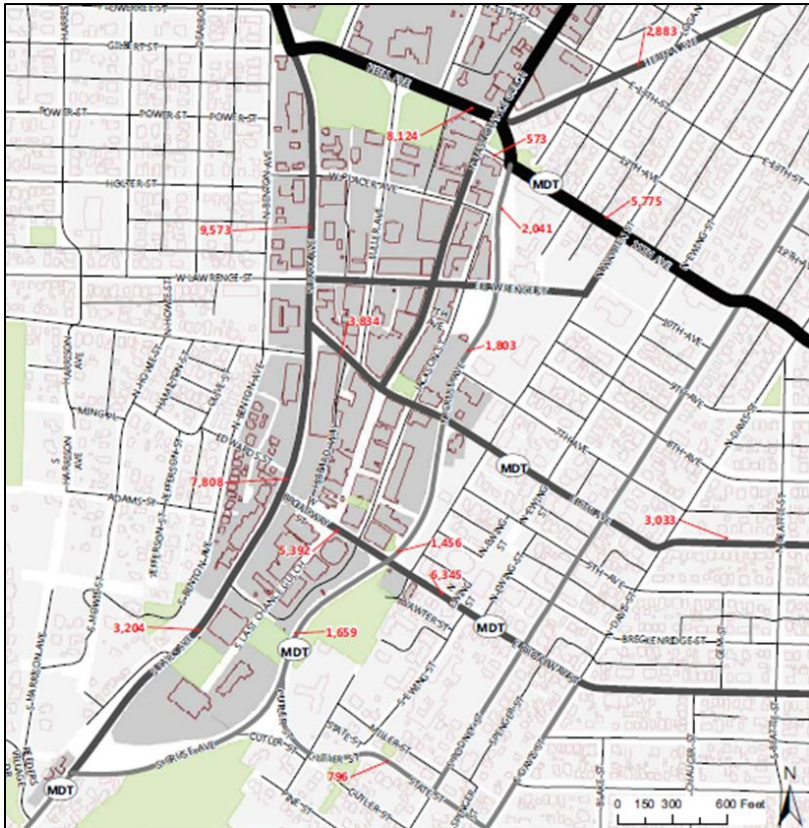


SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix A, pg 21

Figure 31—Parking

Street Network

Past projects placed a high priority on leaving Downtown. The majority of streets have good capacity and level-of-service, making driving Downtown relatively easy. However, wide multi-lane streets affect walkability and one-way streets affect the viability of Downtown businesses.



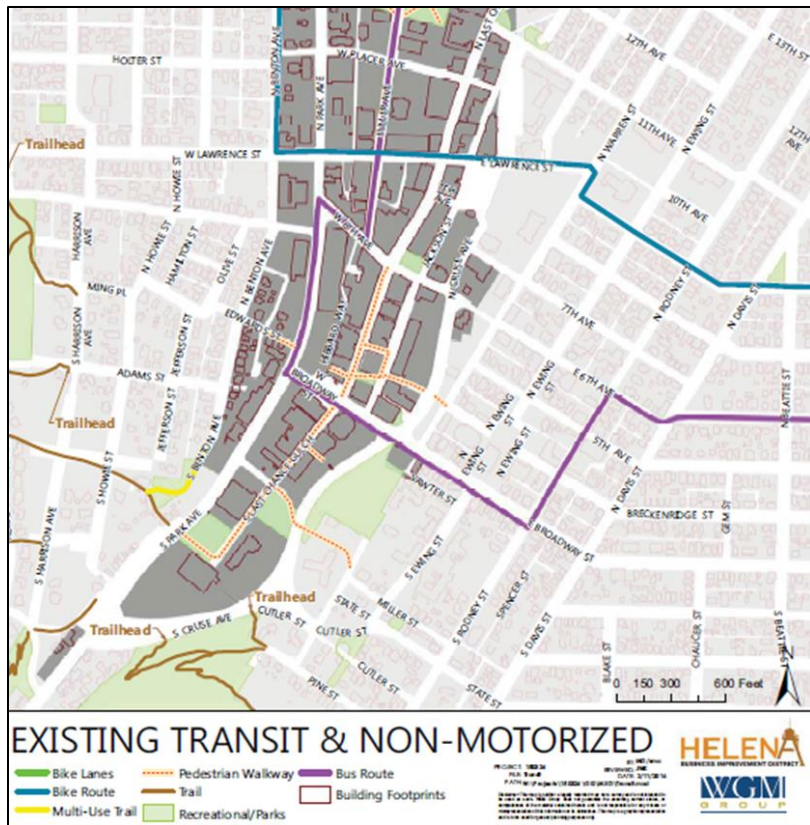
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix A, pg 23

Figure 32—Existing Street Network

- Reduce the number of lanes to two-lanes, with one-lane in each direction.
- Convert one-way streets to promote lower speeds and easier access.
- Simplify intersections to reduce crossing distances and eliminate right-turn slip lanes.
- Fix the five-point intersection of Neill, Last Chance Gulch, Helena, and Cruse.
- Convert Cruse Avenue to a local street. The majority of Cruse Avenue carries less than 2,000 cars per day. Use its wide right-of-way for parking, sidewalks, trails, and landscaping to support new development rather than a high-volume traffic corridor.

Bicycles & Pedestrians

- Address deferred maintenance.
- Address pedestrian crossing barriers with curb bulbouts, refuge medians, and high-contrast crosswalk markings.
- Invite people to keep walking.
 - Add buildings along key corridors to eliminate gaps in the urban form,
 - Orient buildings to the street,
 - Paint, engrave, or inlay sidewalks and streets to show pedestrian routes, and
 - Connect points of interest, public art, and other pedestrian attractions.
- Develop a comprehensive Downtown bike system, including bike routes, bike lanes, multi-use trails, protected bikeways, bike racks, and tuning stations.



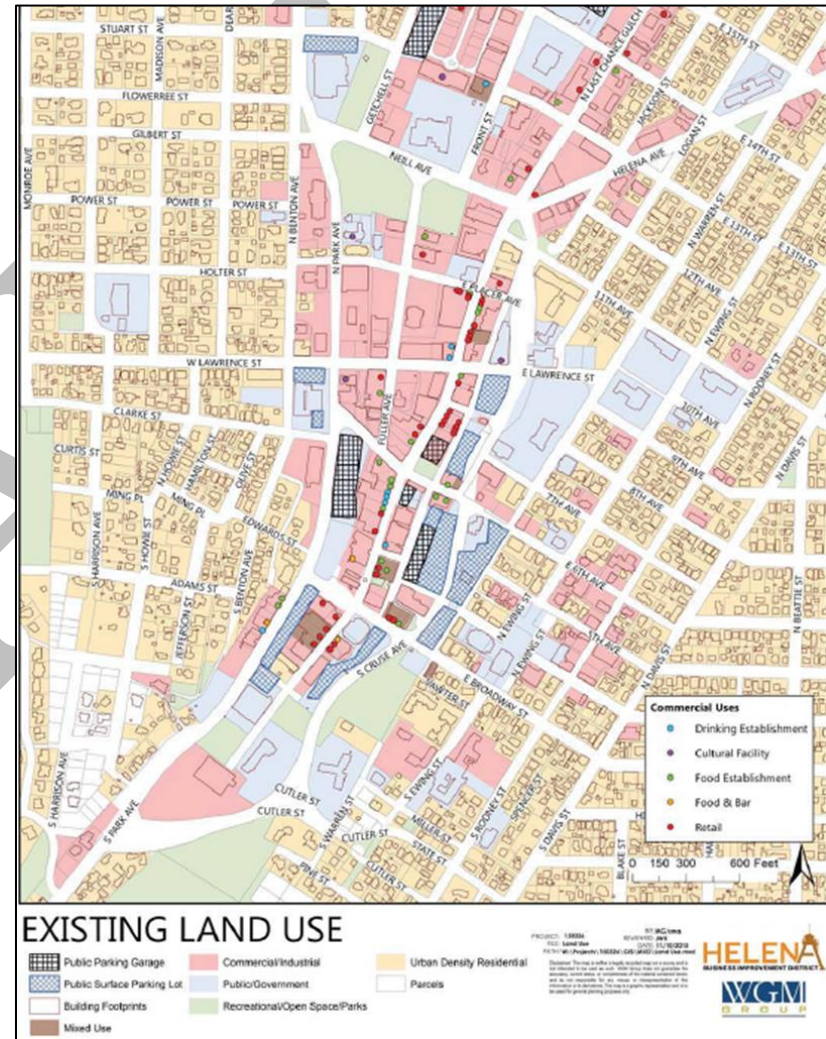
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix A, pg 25

Figure 33—Existing Transit & Non-Motorized

Redevelopment

Redevelopment opportunities abound. Properties where the land value exceeds the value of improvements make up over 31 percent of the Plan Area. Building values of 273 properties (113 acres) exceed the land value, a number of which are city-owned surface parking lots that could be converted to new downtown buildings with structured parking. One redevelopment

opportunity is the Cruse right of way between Cutler and Park Avenue.



SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix A, pg 12

Figure 34—Existing Land Use

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Better City conducted forty-two interviews with a variety of key stakeholders regarding Helena’s downtown, with a focus on Cruse Ave. These interviews provided insights on a variety of local perspectives regarding community issues, goals, and areas of opportunity for improvement.



SOURCE: Wordclouds.com, Better City

Figure 35—Interview Word Cloud

Major themes that were brought up during this week are shown in 35. Quotes from the interviews are provided here, categorized by topic.

DOWNTOWN

“The whole downtown now seems a little uninteresting. A lot of downtown businesses don’t seem interested in modernizing—tiny little offices on the ground floor with old façades. Open offices and other current styles do not seem to get interest. One of the challenges our downtown has faced is that it is not a drive-through downtown. That is a good reason for why downtown is not working well. Back in the day (70s-80s), there were 20-30 restaurants so people would go downtown—if one happened to be full, there were plenty of others to choose from. Now, with fewer restaurants there is no longer the same draw.”

“Helena just can’t seem to figure out where its heart is. What we need is a vibrant downtown—a destination. What would make the central city unique, different, and attractive? Add parks, open spaces, a streetscape to have downtown feel differently. Include residential, parks, retail, commercial, restaurants (for lunch and dinner), breweries, and even street performers. These should all support each other—none would stand alone but they could all rise together. It would be good to be creative and expand the area of thinking beyond just Cruse Avenue.”

“We would like to see a community that is livable, enjoyable, a nice place to live or retire in. We must accept the fact that we need to create activities, shows, and give people reasons to go downtown.”

“We need to develop retail downtown in tandem with residential, so people have a place to walk to services that they want. Currently, if you want some basic necessities, you have to get into your car and drive half a mile elsewhere. Blend mixed-affordable housing with the historic feel of downtown; we are proud of our downtown’s history.”

“Bring back Last Chance Creek! Bring the creek back up out of the ground.”

BUSINESSES

“Every city needs a commercial tax base to survive. Residential taxes are not sufficient.”

“Downtown Helena used to have lots of small grocers, drug stores, and other retailers. It would be great if we would return to what Helena was like with a vibrant downtown. With a more attractive downtown we might be able to draw businesses to the area as well as breweries, wine bars, candy stores, a few little boutiques, restaurants, ice cream stores, and other boutiques, especially to replace ground-floor offices. We have no sustaining middle-of-the-road restaurants between \$10 takeout and \$30 per meal.”

“One would hope that a new level of quality would encourage the rest of the restaurants to update. If existing property owners could be shown that a minor investment could generate \$20/SF rents rather than \$12/SF, they might decide to upgrade the appearance of their facilities.”

“We are not talking about chains—we are looking for natural small businesses. One idea is incubator stores—try it for six months & stay if it works—most downtown landlords are willing to negotiate good entry prices for new stores who want to see if they can make it.”

“If the Shriner’s building went away, there would be a lot of land available and one could access the new building from both sides. There are also other very dilapidated buildings that should go. The State is not really a beneficial anchor tenant for creating a vibrant downtown, but it’s better to have them than not—otherwise buildings would be empty. They lease a lot of space downtown because of the low costs due to businesses having left.”

“Another challenge is the cost to redevelop older properties, which has inhibited renewal. The older downtown buildings are

way below standards. It is less expensive to raze them, but we don’t want to do that. We desire to maintain downtown’s historic perspective character.”

HOUSING, AFFORDABILITY

“Live, work, and play within the city limits. If we had a lot more people living in the area, grocery stores would want to move there, not necessarily big ones, but a bit better than a convenience store; people would like that. What makes a downtown grow? It’s local, really cool restaurants, perhaps like mini-Pike Place—which won’t happen unless we have demand there—so housing is fundamental. But, if we just put in homes but no places to walk to, it will only create congestion. We need a comprehensive design—housing, retail, parks, and so forth. The big problem is to get people to go to areas where have to build higher rather than duplexes. The shortage of housing is being filled by projects outside of downtown. A lot of talk but not much traction due to high costs, particularly for affordable housing—organizer a plan with staged development, partly to test the market before spending all at once.”

“We need a variety of affordable housing. On Cruse, one could aim for a market of people wanting to downsize and move downtown—townhouses at \$250k-\$300k or so. Another group would be young people who struggle to obtain housing in today’s market. We don’t really have many wealthy people, not much high-income demand. But there is an opportunity: folks of middle-income levels might be looking to downsize and move to more convenient areas. We believe that there is demand for smaller homes with amenities within easy walking distance.”

“We would like to see affordable housing to get more people living downtown. We need to look at whole picture. Affordable housing will require walkable amenities like grocery stores.”

“The impediments, having identified the sites, are to obtain subsidies, to find developers we can approve, and match to market values that people can support. So far, the economics just haven’t been there. There have many people talking about housing downtown and there are good lots available, but we just have not been able to get the funding. To build anything right now, it would have to be subsidized. Some developers would consider building more downtown, but they haven’t been able to make the construction costs work—even if the city gave the property away for free. Income-restricted housing rarely gets built without some kind of subsidy—one would hope we could find sufficient blight to justify government assistance. Section 42, for example, allows a developer to do restricted-income and market-rate in the same place. There would be openness to Townhomes on Cruse Avenue, which would be a good alternative due to lot depth constraints.”

“There is pent-up demand, but we need to find subsidies. When one starts adding elevators and covered parking and seeks to be Class A property, one cannot come close to the prices folks are willing to pay. And we don’t have good data on what people are willing to pay. We also need housing that is affordable for the workforce, which also includes low-income-affordable so that people who work at the restaurants and retail stores can afford to live downtown. Probably small apartments with mixed use, but also some larger units. One-bedroom units for \$500-\$600/mo. For teachers, workers, library people. “Affordable” includes both owning and renting.”

WALKABILITY, SIDEWALKS

“The biggest problem of downtown is connectivity. Downtown needs to be focused more on pedestrians, particularly with additional housing and other changes that would draw people downtown. If downtown is going to be developed, people who live

there want it to be walkable. For others, we need to come up with things that will attract them and get them to be willing to walk.”

“The majority of Helena has no sidewalks nor bike lanes. Let’s think ahead 50 years and design for where we should be going. In downtown, we don’t see families using the sidewalks today. The sidewalks are terrible. How can we improve pedestrian access so Cruse Ave. is not a barrier? Currently one is often facing walls and parking lots. There is not much of a neighborhood feel. And we need a lot more trees.”

BIKES, TRAILS

“There is a lot of support for walkability and bike-ability. It is important that this project connect with the people living in the surrounding neighborhoods. Let’s make downtown a spot for people to walk to or ride their bikes to. Everyone would benefit if could integrate biking and tourism plans into community plans. From Cruse Avenue one could see a connection to the waterline trail and to the upper ridges.”

“We have a great system of trails, a really good system of trails for mountain bikes, and we are looking to build trail capacity state-wide, reaching out to large Montana-based donors (companies and institutions). Indeed, Helena seems to be becoming a hub for biking activities, now with a silver rating, and we are trying to get a gold rating. For serious bikers, Helena is viewed as similar to Moab, but we don’t want to end up like Moab.”



SOURCE: Google Earth

Figure 36—South End of Cruse Ave – Satellite Image

PARKING

“The Parking commission has an analysis of every parking place which shows that usage rates are low going even a few blocks outside center city. There are tons of free parking downtown as long as one doesn’t mind walking a block or two compared to Costco or Walmart. However, parking is often mentioned as an issue: if one is developing a condo, for example, most buyers would probably demand covered parking.”

TRAFFIC

“Traffic is not easy to flow through. For example: Last Chance Gulch is one-way. Many enjoy streets that are two-lane. They are

more dynamic. You see buildings differently. One would love not to see more one-way streets.”

CRUSE AVENUE

“Cruse Ave has the opportunity of becoming part of a beautiful loop that exists nowhere else. One’s mind goes to green spaces and trees, places for people to hang out, connectivity to retail spaces. There is a lot of wasted potential throughout Cruse—a dog park, farmer’s market, parks with benches, playgrounds, places to leave cars so we could ride to trails.”

“Cruse also needs to accommodate new housing. There are tons of city lots along Cruse Ave. We would have to find a way to build parking structures to replace existing surface parking. Right now, there’s a breakpoint on Cruse at Broadway. South of there is almost no traffic. If we put in 20-30 homes, that would be great. Moreover, with single-depth town homes, one could get 30-40 homes in. But let’s not go to high-density housing.”

“Cruse Avenue was originally intending as a freeway on-ramp. Now, Cruse is just a place to get through—an unfortunate solution to a problem that never happened. We have a sea of asphalt that was brought with Cruse Avenue. Cruse should not be viewed as the new downtown but could be viewed as the backyard to downtown—to complement Last Chance Gulch, and not replace it. If anything were built at the lower end of Cruse Av, that would become the south end of downtown.”



SOURCE: Dowling Architects

Figure 37—South End of Cruse Ave – Sketch

“We need more green space on Cruse. You’re up there above a beautiful view. We could create a streetscape on Cruse—there is great opportunity there. Cruse Avenue is a whole lot of blacktop. If re-purposed, there could be room for housing fronts, bike paths, pedestrian walkways, and parks. This portion of Cruse Av is a big opportunity for housing, reshaping rights of way, utilizing some of the existing parking lots.”

“What about a connected greenway with bike and pedestrian access? Could Cruse Avenue become a modified bike trail? Throw in some bocce ball and horseshoe pits and a greenway that could provide access to other parks in the area. Still missing are a lot of little pieces of connectivity like stairways and ramps up to Cruse street and a separated pathway. There is a neat opportunity to

reduce the width of Cruse, which would allow a linear park at the base of the fire-tower hill. Cruse is wide enough to be a tree street.”

“To upgrade the Cruse area, there will need to be substantial subsidies for anyone to be willing to develop it. The city owns a good part of the land, so could be a catalyst for changing. In the middle part of Cruse, there is also great potential if we look at it with open minds to revitalize in a way no other city can do. Cruse is a pretty, elevated street.”

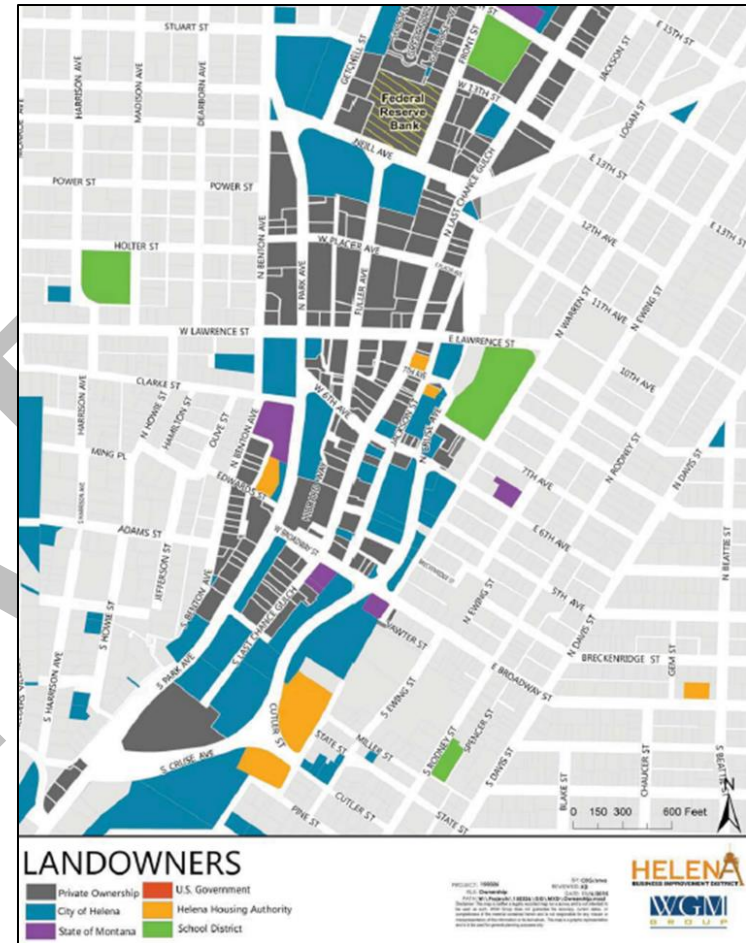
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LAND USE ASSESSMENT

The downtown area parallel to and including Cruse Avenue has considerable unmet potential. A vibrant downtown could encourage existing businesses to upgrade appearances and might attract new investment, with downtown becoming a destination attracting more people to relax, shop, and live there.

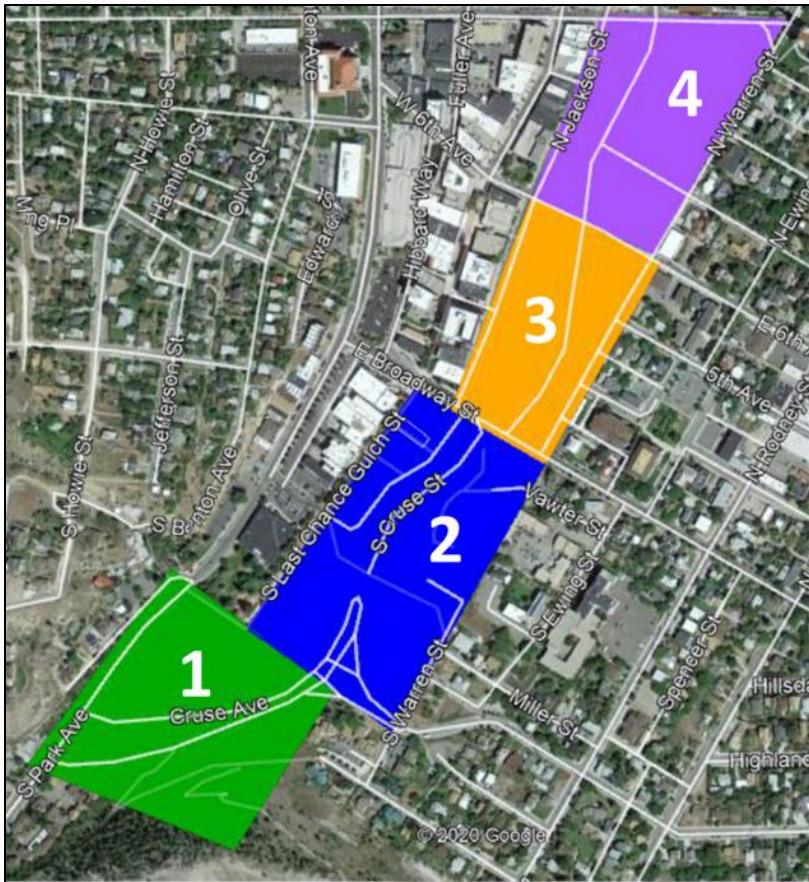
The most prominent concept continually suggested by stakeholders is the need to provide affordable residences downtown. Map 3 shows that much of the land along Cruse is already owned by the city and could be made available to developers as part of a comprehensive plan for the whole downtown area.

Retail amenities, existing and new, could be developed in tandem with construction of residences and green spaces. This need not be done all at once – concepts would be tested in phases. Map 4 shows examples of potential phases of development, possibly starting at the southern end of Cruse.



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, Appendix A, page 11

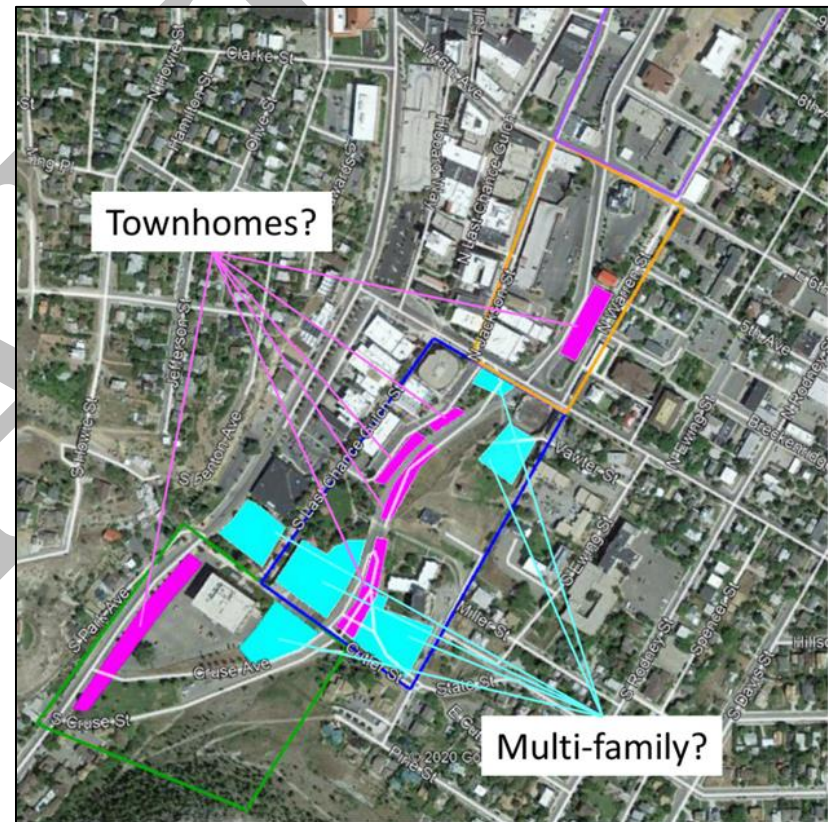
Map 3—Landowners



Map 4—Potential Development Phases

A variety of affordable housing is proposed. One market segment is people who desire to downsize and move downtown. Another segment is young people who struggle to obtain housing today. There is likely to be demand for smaller homes with amenities within easy walking distance. Moreover, townhomes could be a good alternative to traditional housing due to constraints on lot depth. Parking can be provided underneath the residences. At first blush, there are a number of potential sites for townhomes or

multi-family dwellings as shown in Map 5 below. However, topography and the preservation of existing park space eliminates most of these sites for multi-family development. The need for supportive neighborhood commercial favors a small grocery or pharmacy at the intersection of Cruse and Broadway.



Map 5—Potential Housing Sites

The land uses that are most feasible based on existing uses, topography, and lot depth includes townhomes along Cruse, additional apartments by the ME Anderson site, and small neighborhood commercial at Cruse and Broadway.

INDUSTRY CLUSTER ANALYSIS

The *Montana Economic Development Report 2019* from the Governor's Office of Economic Development provides insights on some of the state's key industries, some of which have been provided below for those industries that potentially connect to Helena's downtown.

Small Business & Entrepreneurship: "Generally, Montana's businesses are small, and the state has a larger share of small businesses compared to other states. In fact, 91.2 percent of all businesses in the state are considered small...with fewer than 20 employees. These small businesses provide more jobs and wages compared to other states, indicating Montana has a higher dependence on small business than most other states. By industry, retail trade (6.4 percent of all employment), accommodation and food services (4.8 percent), and construction (4.2 percent) have the greatest number of people working in small businesses."²

Helena can support small local businesses through encouraging them to take advantage of venture capital and entrepreneurial support programs, like Blackstone Launchpads and Early Stage Montana, and keep the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem a priority.

Technology Sector: "According to the Montana Department of Labor, Montana added 153 Information Technology firms in 2017. That year, the tech industry also employed over 15,000 workers and attracted over \$83 million in venture capital investment. This represents a 40-fold increase in venture capital over just a few

years prior...Nearly one quarter of all new hires in the IT sector are coming from outside Montana...[and] recruitment from outside Montana will become an increasingly large component of the hiring strategy."³

Tourism: "In 2017...amongst all ad-exposed travelers who took a trip to Montana, over 90 percent were influenced by Montana ads... In fiscal year 2018, MOTBD's tourism grant program invested \$750,000 into tourism- and recreation-related projects in 27 communities across Montana... Grants supported \$1.8 million of investments into projects aimed at strengthening the visitor experience and allowing Montana's vibrant and charming small towns to tap into the greater tourism economy."

"According to the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana, in 2017, 12.5 million non-residents visited Montana, adding \$3.4 billion to the state's economy, supporting jobs for 53,380 hardworking Montanans, and contributing \$204.5 million to state and local taxes."⁴

The IT as well as tourism and outdoor recreation industry can be directly supported by the development of Cruse Avenue. The development opportunities envisioned in this report make Cruse Avenue more accessible to pedestrians and bikers to create a welcoming atmosphere for people who are enjoying the outdoors. In addition to providing high quality of life for residents, these changes create appeal for visitors and businesses who seek these types of amenity offerings.

Export: "Statistics for 2017...[show] a record \$1.62 billion in goods left the state headed to foreign markets... The top exported products were mineral fuel, inorganic chemicals, pulse crops, and

² *Montana Economic Development Report 2019*, pg 26

³ *Montana Economic Development Report 2019*, pg 30

⁴ *Montana Economic Development Report 2019*, pg 38

industrial machinery. The top countries receiving Montana goods were Canada, South Korea, China, Belgium, and Taiwan.”

“The ExportMontana program at the Montana Department of Commerce continues to focus on developing Montana manufacturing and service industries by providing grants and trade show support to companies ready to enter or expand international markets.”⁵

The City of Helena should do what it can to encourage downtown businesses to have an online presence. This enables them to broaden their customer base, and not be as dependent on the local population.

Remote Work

“Montana has seen a notable rise in remote workers, particularly in IT-related fields. Programmers, graphic designers, customer service, sales, marketing, and other professions are now commonly able to work remotely either part or full time... Remote and freelance workers are an increasingly important component of rural economies. This element of Montana’s employment mix is rapidly growing, and the state is working to enhance the sector in many ways.”¹

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

Lewis and Clark County’s industry clusters (city-level data is unavailable) were analyzed using the shift-share and location quotient methodologies. The following are components of the analysis:

State Share: The portion of job growth that can be attributed to general economic growth throughout the State. It is calculated by multiplying the number of jobs created in each industry by the State’s overall growth rate. For example, a change in the real estate agents may be the result of the State’s overall economic growth (or decline), and not because of local industry or regional trends.

Industry Share: The industry share represents the portion of job growth that is attributable to the industry’s state-wide expansion or contraction. It is calculated by multiplying the number of jobs in the County at the beginning of the period (2014) by the State’s growth rate for a specific industry and taking out the State Share. This share shows expansion or contraction trends for a given industry that cannot be explained by the State Share.

Regional Share: This is the most important component of job growth for the local analysis. It is calculated by subtracting the industry share and the state share from the total number of jobs gained or lost in the selected industry at the local level. This highlights the change in employment that is attributable to the County’s economic conditions. Regional share highlights aspects of the region that may be working with or against the other trends and can reveal the strengths or weaknesses of the area for selected industries.

Total Job Change: The total number of jobs (full-time and part-time) gained or lost in an industry during the period analyzed (2014-2018). This number is based on estimates provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

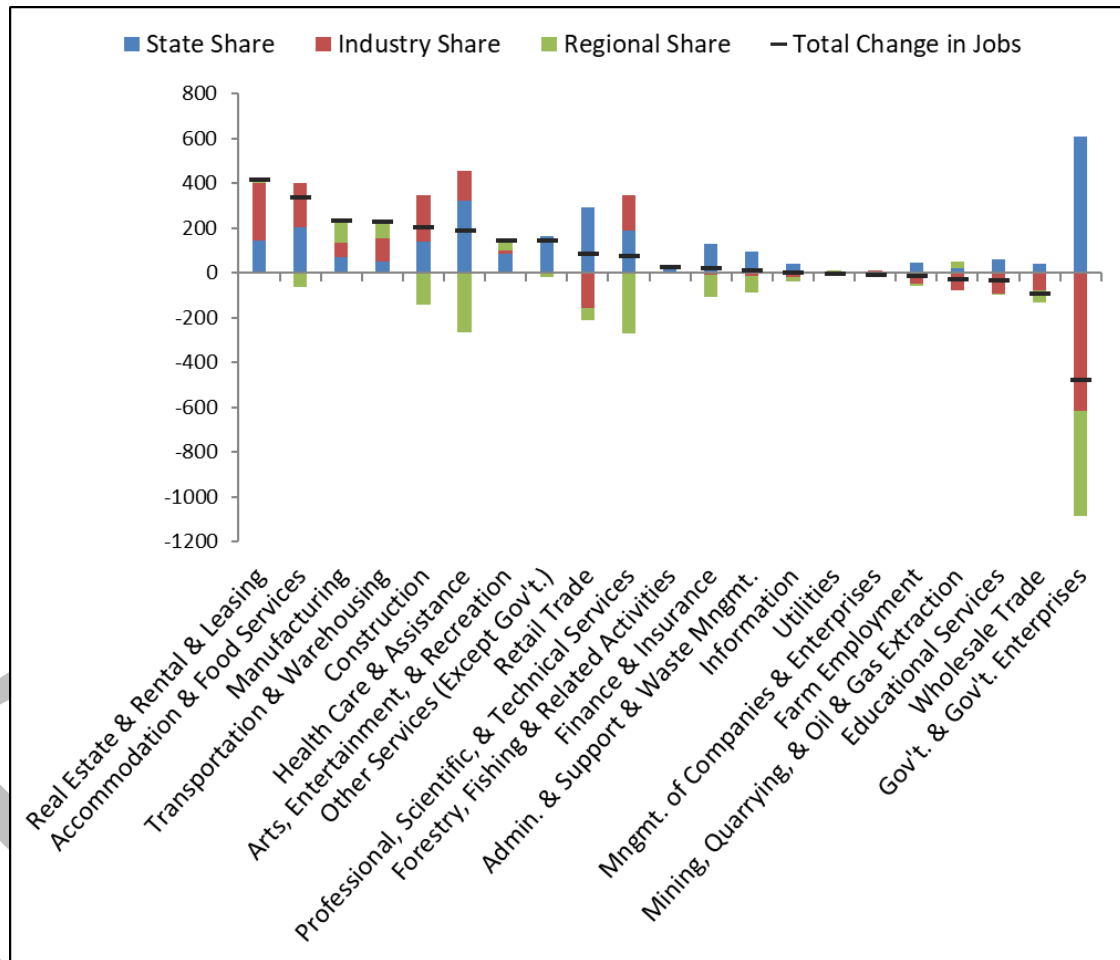
⁵ *Montana Economic Development Report 2019*, pg 42

EMPLOYMENT SHIFT SHARE ANALYSIS

According to BEA estimates, the industries which have experienced the largest amount of employment growth between 2014 and 2018 were “Real Estate & Rental & Leasing” (increase of 415 jobs) and “Accommodation and Food Services” (increase of 336 jobs). Growth in both industries was largely due to industry and state factors.

The next two categories of highest growth were “Manufacturing” (increase of 232 jobs) and “Transportation & Warehousing” (increase of 226 jobs), both of which had growth due to industry, state, and regional factors.

“Government & Government Enterprises” saw significant job losses over the period (decrease of 477 jobs). Other industries with a decline in employment include “Wholesale Trade” (decrease of 95 jobs), “Educational Services” (decrease of 35 jobs), and “Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction” (decrease of 30 jobs). The decline in these industries is a combination of regional and industry factors.



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 38—Lewis & Clark County Shift Share Analysis (2014-2018)

EMPLOYMENT LOCATION QUOTIENT

An employment location quotient (LQ) analysis is a method of quantifying the concentration of an industry cluster in an area when compared to the State averages. This allows the County to see if it has a highly concentrated cluster it can leverage for future economic growth.

The LQ is calculated as shown below:

$$\text{Location Quotient (LQ)} = \frac{\text{Local Proportion}}{\text{State Proportion}}$$

The local and state proportions are calculated as follows:

$$\text{Local Proportion} = \frac{\text{Employees in the County in Industry X}}{\text{Total \# of Employees in the County}}$$

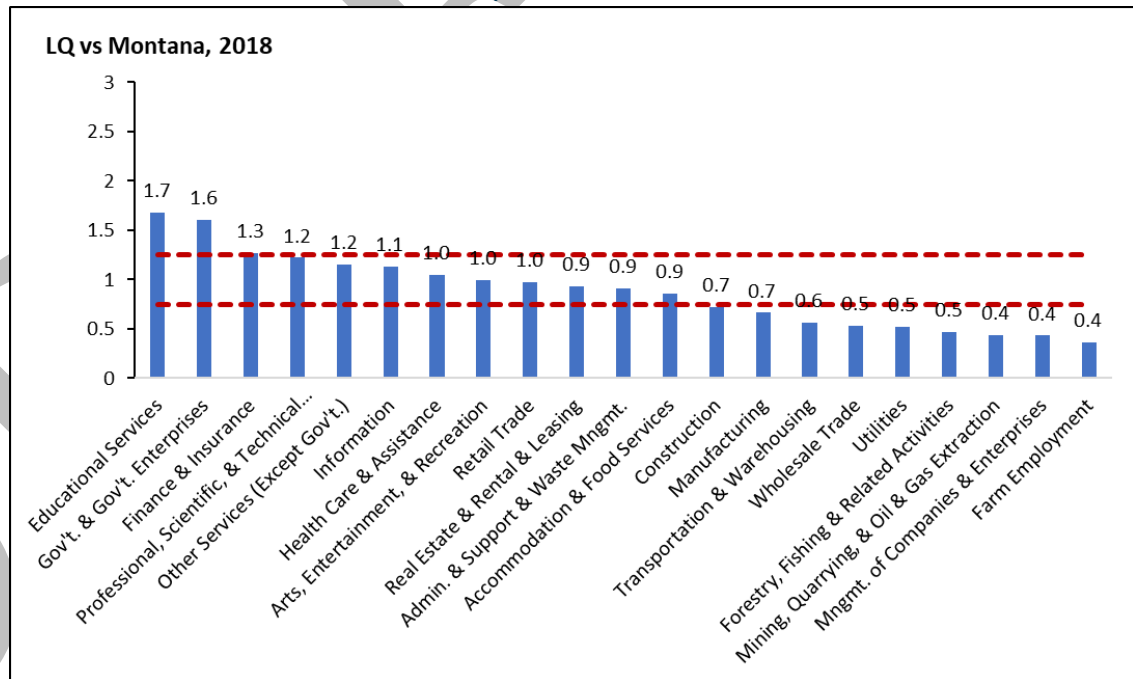
$$\text{State Proportion} = \frac{\text{Employees in the State in Industry X}}{\text{Total \# of Employees in the State}}$$

For example, there were approximately 1,049 employees in the “Education Services” industry in Lewis & Clark County in 2018. This cohort represents 2.2 percent of the County’s total 48,707 employees estimate in the same year. For the State, the share of the “Education Services” industry to total State employment was a mere 1.3 percent. Dividing the former number by the latter equals 1.7. This means that the “Education Services” industry is just over

one and a half times as concentrated in Lewis & Clark County than it is in the State as a whole. An LQ of 1.0 indicates that the local concentration is in parity with the State.

Industries with LQ values greater than 1.25 are typically beneficial to the local economy because they become export-oriented, providing a good or service from the County that goes to customers outside of it. These industries not only provide jobs locally but also have a multiplier effect, creating jobs in other industries that are dependent on the concentrated industries. An LQ value that is below 0.75, on the other hand, is an industry that has very low concentration and is typically unable to serve local demand, resulting in a “leakage” of goods and services outside of the County.

Lewis & Clark Location Quotient Analysis



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 39—Lewis & Clark Location Quotient Vs. Montana, 2018

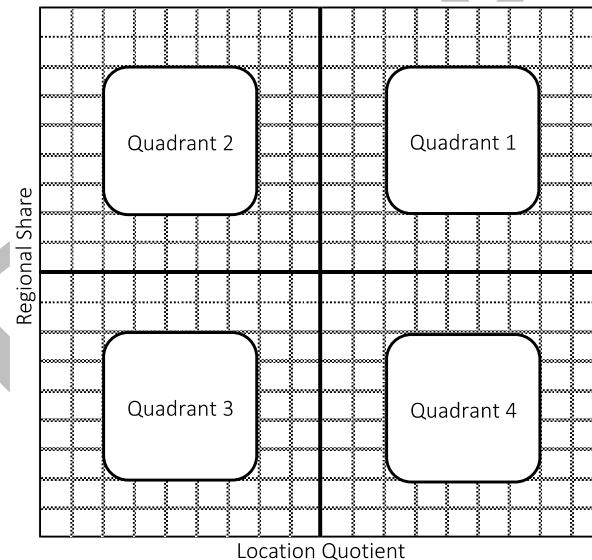
The industries with the greatest concentration are “Educational Services,” and “Government & Government Enterprises.” These represent significant industry sectors to the County and should be viewed as the County’s economic base.

The industries which fall below the 0.75 threshold may have a regional disadvantage that needs to be mitigated. It may also represent industries that have room to grow and which could likely be supported by the local economy. Industries that fall far below the threshold often represent the low-hanging fruit in terms of reducing economic leakage. These industries should be targeted first.

INDUSTRY CLUSTER MATRIX

Shift Share, location quotient, and wealth creation measures can be combined into a simple matrix that provides a more comprehensive view of the County’s economy. The method used in this report plots industries in a two-by-two matrix using normalized LQ estimates on the x-axis and the regional shift on the y-axis. The graph also adds a bubble size to represent total payroll, a proxy for the industry’s wealth generation for the County.

The graph can be interpreted according to where the point is placed in comparison to the origin as well as the relative size of the point. The



interpretation for each quadrant is listed below:

Quadrant One: Industries in this quadrant are concentrated in the region and are growing due to regional advantages. Large industries in this quadrant distinguish the regional economy as they increase workforce demand. Small industries in this quadrant are possibly emerging exporters that should be developed.

Quadrant Two: Industries in this quadrant are growing over time but are still less concentrated than the State average. Depending on the industry, it may settle at the State average or continue to grow and move into Quadrant One.

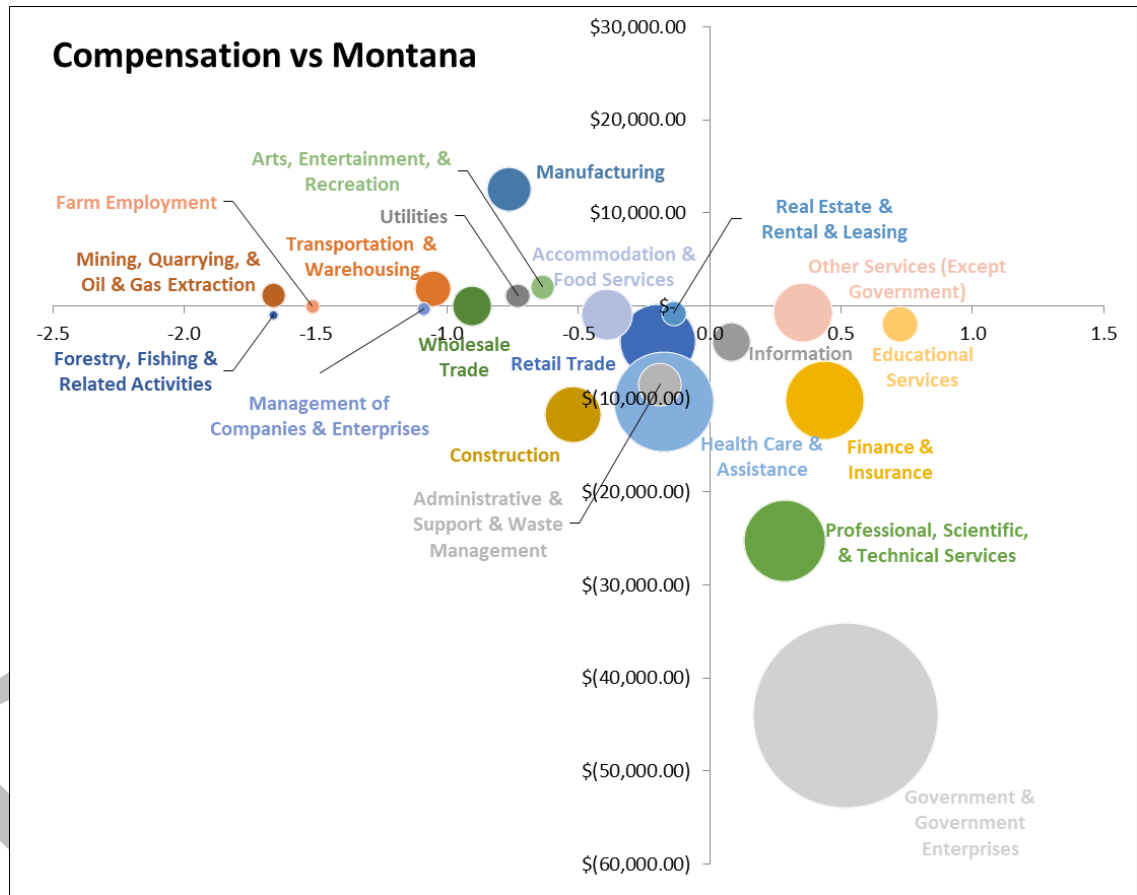
Quadrant Three: Industries in this region are less concentrated than State average and are losing ground relative to State growth. Such industries may face competitive disadvantages due to area factors.

Quadrant Four: Industries in this quadrant are declining but are still more concentrated than the State average. If a large industry is in this quadrant, the region is often losing its export base. The region should plan and invest accordingly.

The size of an industry (according to its relative wealth generation, as represented by the size of the bubble) is key to identify short-term economic impacts. Growth or contraction in industries with high payrolls will have a large impact on the local economy. Small industries will take time to have a significant impact. Smaller industries are usually dependent on the growth or contraction of the larger ones, so a trailing effect is common in this analysis.

Most of the bubbles are clustered near the regional share (horizontal) line, signifying a lack of major expansion or retraction of these industries between 2014 and 2018. The main industry that had growth in compensation during the period is “Manufacturing.”

“Government & Government Enterprises” saw the largest drop in compensation during the period, and considering the size of this industry’s payroll this contraction could lead to a more significant decline in the total economy as the multiplier effect ripples throughout the economy and into other industries.



SOURCE: BEA, Better City

Figure 40—Industry Cluster Analysis, 2014-2018

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PROJECT ASSESSMENT

As a result of stakeholder interviews and data gathering, the project team developed preliminary options aligned with the goals and objectives of the community as well as market realities. The following is a synthesis of input from key stakeholders, much of which is in their own words:

PRELIMINARY OPTIONS

1. Keep vehicular access but reduce the ROW, the avenue would be appropriately sized for traffic and would also add space for bike lanes, pocket parks, linear parks supported by some new residential product.
2. A more extensive change would be to have Cruse be a linear park, focused on bikes and pedestrians, supported by residences.
 - “What if we turned the whole street into a walking mall, cutting the street out entirely? Or at least part of it. We have this meandering street that could have green space, lots of trees, housing, small businesses. Do we even need Cruse to be a street?”
 - “Small cafes to create a neighborhood feel with patios...this would be something really unique.”
 - “A mixture of park, residences, and new amenities: Big Dipper, walk through the walking mall, occasionally into Fire Tower Coffee, sometimes to the farmers market. Something really good and affordable.”
 - “We have a great trail system just to the south of our redevelopment area. Could knit our urban landscape to our rural, mountain trail landscape. And this is affordable and doable.”
 - “1½-mile long urban park if we create a loop, connecting to pedestrian mall. Gives people a reason

to be in downtown core. People could have a really nice half-hour walk through downtown.”

- “A bike-pedestrian greenway the length of Cruse avenue.”
- “Divide the plan into digestible chunks—an overall plan with, say, four planning areas.”
- “Maybe two phases—a loose concept for each phase, test it, then fine tune each block.”
- “This might really change the dynamic of who might move to Helena.”

OPEN HOUSE FEEDBACK

Synthesis of comments – Public Meetings – Cruse Avenue

Options – Linear Park vs. Narrowed Street

“I believe the option that just narrows the street is much more palatable than the options that close it or part of it. Any time you make it harder to get around downtown - more people will avoid the area rather than deal with it.”

Two overall options were opened for discussion: 1) narrowing Cruse or 2) closing portions of Cruse to create a linear park. “These are both terrific proposals. It would be great to draw more people downtown.” However, overwhelming consensus was expressed that narrowing Cruse seems like a more reasonable option rather than closing it off for a linear park. For example: Cruse Avenue is a really nice way to get around. Closing it would push traffic into adjacent areas that are not set up to handle large amounts of additional traffic. In other words, “Although Cruse was originally created by mistake, we’ve gotten used to it being there and we like the convenience.”

There was general agreement that there is a lot of excess space along Cruse and redesigning it would be great, but folks are not

excited about shutting off Cruse – particularly north of Broadway. To most it seemed that narrowing Cruse is more palatable than closing it or parts of it, although they agreed that a narrowed street should be able to handle the current traffic.

Comments included the following: Closing Cruse might be perceived as a psychological and physical barrier. The overall goal is to bring people downtown. One idea is to have fingers of access points from adjacent neighborhoods. The street intersections are not currently pedestrian-friendly. Another key reason for narrowing Cruse is to find locations to place additional housing downtown. We need to improve access to adjacent parks, particularly Dale Harris and Fire Tower. Another issue is working through the utility connections and emergency vehicle access.

New Affordable Housing

Typical of comments was this: “I’m quite pleased to see that residential opportunities are being provided. Fits with my philosophy that we should live downtown. We should keep it affordable.”

This is one of the primary drivers for the design project. Many are pleased to see that residential opportunities are being provided for more people to live downtown. Let’s make sure the new housing is attractive, nice, and not just an ugly row of boxes. Moreover, we should keep it affordable. One added, “My parents would have bought a unit in a nanosecond to be able to walk to the library or go to lunch at RMDC.”

Affordable housing was of high interest, with general acclamation for the proposal showing several potential locations along a narrowed Cruse Avenue. The attendees were informed that government subsidies could be sought to assure that much of the housing would be affordable for residents yet profitable to developers.

Driving development of affordable housing would be market demand. Some observed that a townhome concept would be less expensive than single-family detached and could be done attractively. It was mentioned that, to maintain affordability of the new housing, the city would consider property remaining with the city so people could only sell the house, which would keep the selling price more affordable. Moreover, it was stated that executing the project in phases “would be a perfect opportunity to test this out along Cruse.”

There are important questions to be resolved. How many new housing units are we talking about? How does the housing get built? Can the land remain with the city? Would revenue from selling the right-of-way go towards funding some of the project?

Neighborhood Center

“The Neighborhood Center is important for Helena’s seniors, Head Start students, and our entire community. Please don’t forget that, and if it comes to the building being demolished, please remember that we have seniors, 60-plus staff members, classrooms for Head Start, and a preschool in this building. It will be difficult to find a replacement.” Another noted, “I do want to say is that this design looks very nice. I support it if we can find a good place to relocate the neighborhood center. Deciding that needs to be part of the process.”

The neighborhood center generated much discussion. Most urged that it has a critical role in supporting the various programs that use the neighborhood center, and that it is a key feature downtown and is heavily utilized. The Neighborhood Center is important for Helena’s seniors, Head Start students, and our entire community Programs located at the Neighborhood Center include Head Start, Rocky Senior Center, Meals on Wheels,

Housing, Rocky Mountain Preschool Center, and Homebuyer Education.

Some thought we should simply consider leaving the neighborhood center alone – where it is. But it was then noted that the current configuration does not adequately meet the needs of the center’s constituents. For example, the kitchen also provides food for seniors, meals on wheels, and for Head Start. To also support the other programs currently there, another location that is easily accessible needs to be found and funded. It was also mentioned that the building itself is not adequate for current needs, requiring multiple facilities and that, due to the building’s age, renovation or relocation will have to be done at some point.

Perhaps re-constructing across the parking lot would be optimal. Discussion led to the conclusion that relocation or re-construction of the neighborhood center is needed and should be considered as part of the project to reconfigure Cruse Avenue.

Parking

“This proposal looks very nifty,” said one, “but it seems to have a pretty big impact on parking spaces, appearing to dramatically reduce on-street parking.” There was a lot of discussion about parking, particularly regarding the need to consider possible impacts on on-street parking and on parking for any new housing. Several expressed concern about losing any parking or the need to recapture any lost parking for employees, visitors downtown, school visitors. The perception is that that there is not enough parking downtown and view that as a critical issue. Option 1, narrowing the street, would significantly add parking on both sides of Cruse at the south end. A detailed analysis of parking will be done as we move forward, particularly related to parking for the additional housing units.

It was stated that this could be mitigated perhaps by providing parking under the residence, either at or below street level. It was also mentioned that parking is an income source to defray cost of maintaining on-street and covered parking downtown and the effect on those revenues should be considered. Some thought that, even at a high cost, “We should layer the parking rather than have it spread out. We should reduce our footprint.”

Key questions were raised: Do we know how many parking spaces will be lost – if any? Will the new housing units contain their own parking capacity? Mike Dowling, project architect responded that, “In the solution with the street included but narrowed, we will actually be adding parking on both sides.”

Impact on businesses

Several questions were asked regarding what effect there might be on the downtown business community. The response from the project team is that the goal is to be synergistic with businesses while considering parking. Bringing in more housetops would provide more customers for downtown businesses as well as places for some downtown workers to live. The intent is also to provide supportive services such as grocery or pharmacy.

Other

Among proposed amenities, several said that the amphitheater idea is great. It was urged that the project should incorporate saving the 7th Ave Gym into whichever plan is adopted.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES – PLACEHOLDER PENDING PUBLIC MEETING FEEDBACK

Based on research and interviews with stakeholders, a comprehensive design for housing, pedestrian and bike paths, parks, and street improvements along the Cruse Avenue corridor have been developed.



SOURCE: Dowling Architects

Figure 41—Cruse Ave between Park and Broadway- Current View

Cruse Avenue from Park to Broadway - Option A

In Option A, Cruse Avenue is narrowed to add park strips, bike paths, pedestrian walkways, townhomes, parallel parking, pedestrian crossings, improved access to Fire Tower Park, amphitheatres, and additional housing at the ME Anderson Apartments. Cutler Avenue is also reduced in width with added sidewalks and improved pedestrian safety at the intersection and crosswalk. In this example the Neighborhood Center remains in its current location.



SOURCE: Dowling Architects

Figure 42—Cruse Ave from Park to Broadway— Option A

Cruse Avenue from Park to Broadway - Option B

In Option B, the Neighborhood Center is relocated on-site (new red building) and the existing facility demolished to make way for enhanced green space and connectivity between Cruse Avenue and the walking mall. This option will require additional community conversations among stakeholders regarding the new facility.



SOURCE: Dowling Architects

Figure 43—Cruse Avenue from Park to Broadway – Option B

Cruse Avenue from Broadway to Lawrence

Figure 42 presents the vision for Cruse Avenue between Broadway and Lawrence with streetscape improvements, pedestrian and bike paths, traffic calming measures such as bulb-outs at intersections and pedestrian crossings, dedicated pedestrian path from Cruse Avenue to Jackson Street, public plaza at 7th Avenue with downtown overlook, new neighborhood commercial developed on the City parking lot on the northwest corner of Cruse and Lawrence, new development at the IR site, and townhomes added to the corridor to create a sense of neighborhood at an appropriate urban scale. Parking for the townhomes would be provided by tuck-under garages accessed from Warren Street and Lot 4.



SOURCE: Dowling Architects

Figure 44—Cruse Ave from Broadway to Lawrence

Figure 43 shows the proposed improvements in Option A for the entire project area, with the Neighborhood Center remaining where it now is.



SOURCE: Dowling Architects

Figure 45—Cruse Ave from Park to Lawrence – Option A

Figure 44 shows the proposed improvements in Option B for the entire project area, with the Neighborhood Center being relocated on-site.



SOURCE: Dowling Architects

Figure 46— Cruse Ave from Park to Lawrence – Option B



SOURCE: Dowling Architects

Figure 47—Envisioned Street View of Cruse Ave

Parking Observation

An analysis of parking was conducted on June 18, 2020. The total number of parking spaces in the parking lots and along the streets which would be impacted by the envisioned redevelopment were calculated. The total net change is a decrease of 9 parking spaces.

The observed parking utilization (not including Lot 4) showed that there were 205 spaces available, and, as when observed on June 18, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.* there were 49 cars parked in these parking stalls, representing only 20 percent utilization of available parking.

**Lot 4 has more than 41 spaces. In order to calculate a net gain or loss, only the total number of spaces to be displaced (due to new townhouses in the lot) were counted.

Street Parking	Current Spaces	Spaces in New Plan	Difference	Cars Parked*
Lawrence to 6th	49	50	1	22
6th to Broadway	62	51	-11	12
Broadway to Park	58	136	78	9
Street Total	169	237	68	43
Parking Lots	Current Spaces	Spaces in New Plan	Difference	Cars Parked*
Lot 6	36	0	-36	6
Lot 4**	41	0	-41	0
Parking Lot Total	77	0	-77	6
Grand Total	246	237	-9	49

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

State Historic Tax Credits

The Federal government has several incentives that have been established to facilitate investment in historic buildings as well as distressed census tracts. “The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program, commonly known as the Federal Historic Tax Credit program, provides a 20 percent federal tax credit to property owners who undertake a substantial rehabilitation of a historic building in a commercial or other income producing use, while maintaining its historic character... State Historic Preservation Offices are the first point of contact for information and guidance for property owners interested in the program, and the National Park Service works closely with them in the administration of the program.”⁶

There have been recent changes made to the historic tax credit program and how the tax credits can be claimed. According to the accounting firm Novogradac, one of the foremost experts in tax credits: “The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (P.L. 115-97) was signed on Dec. 22, 2017 and the new tax legislation went into effect Jan. 1, 2018. There are some key amendments to the HTC program. The new rules are applicable for qualified rehabilitation expenditures (QREs) paid or incurred after Dec. 31, 2017, subject to certain transition rules. Under the new law, the 20 percent tax credit for certified historic structures is retained and modified, requiring the 20 percent HTC to be claimed “ratably” over the five-year period beginning in the taxable year in which the building is placed in service... Previously, qualified rehabilitation expenditures with respect to any qualified rehabilitated building

were taken into account for the taxable year in which such building is placed in service... Most state tax credit programs mirror the national program, although often with different percentages. A building owner generates credits by completing a certified rehabilitation on a qualified rehabilitation building.”⁷

“The State of Montana’s income tax credit is equal to 25 percent of the amount an owner claims under the Federal program. Those wishing to claim the state credit must first be certified for credits under the Federal program.”⁸ Essentially, the State’s program provides for only 5 percent (25 percent of 20 percent = 5 percent) of a projects’ Qualified Rehabilitation Expenditures. Compare that to the State of Ohio, where the historic preservation tax credit is 25 percent of QRE’s – even higher than the Federal program. Although many stakeholders expressed the desire to save and preserve historic structures, the amount of incentive that is available through the State does not make a material impact on the ability of the development community to undertake these community-supported projects. The State should evaluate increasing its rate of participation in historic preservation.

State New Markets Tax Credits

Another Federal program, called the New Markets Tax Credits Program, “attracts private capital into low-income communities by permitting individual and corporate investors to receive a tax credit against their federal income tax in exchange for making equity investments in specialized financial intermediaries called Community Development Entities (CDEs). The credit totals 39 percent of the original investment amount and is claimed over a period of seven years.” CDEs, in turn, use the proceeds of these

⁶ <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/htc2017.htm>

⁷ <https://www.novoco.com/resource-centers/historic-tax-credits/htc-basics/about-historic-tax-credit>

⁸ <https://mhs.mt.gov/Portals/11/shpo/docs/Incentives.pdf>

QEI to make Qualified Low-Income Community Investments (QLICIs), such as business loans, in Low-Income Communities.”⁹ Loans can be provided to real estate projects, including combined with those utilizing historic tax credits. Although extremely complicated, these tools can be used to materially impact the capital stack for developments.

The State should evaluate adopting a State New Markets Tax Credit program. Although the market will be thin in terms of tax credit investors, with two regional banks and three national banks comprising the investor community in Montana, there is still a market. The State should evaluate adopting a State New Markets Tax Credit designed to function in parallel with the Federal tax credit. One possibility is to provide for a \$2,564,103 tax credit allocation cap for each project, 39 percent of which would equate to \$1.0M of tax credits. Assuming a syndication rate of 65 percent, a project could receive \$650k in QLICI funding. This could be another valuable tool for CDE’s in the State of Montana to facilitate investments in distressed areas, patterned after Ohio’s program.

Tax Increment Financing

The State provides municipalities with the ability to establish an Urban Renewal Area (after meeting certain statutory criteria) and allow tax increment to be used to fund public infrastructure and façade improvements. However, according to stakeholder interviews, many projects lack economic viability not because of the costs of infrastructure and façade improvements but because of the cost of land, demolition, and vertical construction costs. The State should consider expanding the available use of tax increment to include these costs.

⁹<https://www.cdfifund.gov/Documents/2017%20Introduction%20to%20NMTIC%20Program%20Presentation%20For%20Release.pdf>

PRO-FORMA EVALUATION

Assume for purposes of illustration a \$25M rehabilitation project where there is little cost associated with public infrastructure or façade improvements. The hurdle rate for investors is a 10 percent cash-on-cash return, meaning that if the project doesn’t generate 10 percent on the equity invested, the investment will not occur. The project will produce \$1.0M in net operating income, a measure of cash flow before debt service is paid. Assuming traditional financing, which typically requires a 35 percent equity contribution, the project would generate a negative return as show in Table 1. The debt service is too high to produce positive cash flows.

Sources	Amount	% of Total
Commercial Debt	16,250,000	65%
Equity	8,750,000	35%
Total	25,000,000	100%
Net Operating Income	1,000,000	
Debt Service	(1,197,471)	
Cash Flow Before Taxes	(197,471)	
Cash-on-Cash Return	-2.3%	

SOURCE: Better City

Table 1—Pro-Forma without Incentives

Assume the same project, now with the Federal HTC and NMTC programs. The amount of equity required is reduced to \$6.06M but the return is still 0 percent. Although the debt service has been reduced, it must be reduced further, and the amount of equity required to fund the project must also be reduced to meet the investor hurdle rate. Although the project is utilizing the

Federal HTC and NMTC programs, the costs of meeting historic preservation standards and tax credit financial and legal structuring consume a lot of the economic benefit of these programs.

Sources	Perm	% OF TOTAL
QLICI Loan A	11,008,000	44.0%
QLICI Loan B	4,992,000	20.0%
Equity	6,063,584	24.3%
Federal HTC	2,936,416	11.7%
Total Sources	25,000,000	100.0%
Net Operating Income	1,000,000	
Debt Service	(1,000,000)	
Cash Flow Before Taxes	-	
Cash-on-Cash	0%	

SOURCE: Better City

Table 2—Pro-Forma with Federal Incentives

If we layer in TIF, State HTC's, and State NMTC's, the equity requirement gets reduced to \$1.8M and the cash-on-cash return rises to 13.5 percent.

Sources	Amount	% Of Total
QLICI Loan A		
Bank Debt	9,496,000	38.0%
Bank Debt (TIF)	1,512,000	6.0%
QLICI Loan A	11,008,000	44.0%
QLICI Loan B		
Federal	4,992,000	20.0%
State	650,000	2.6%
QLICI Loan B	5,642,000	22.6%
Equity	1,848,587	7.4%
HTC Federal	2,936,416	11.7%
HTC State	3,564,997	14.3%
Total Sources	25,000,000	100.0%
Net Operating Income	1,000,000	
Debt Service	(750,000)	
Cash Flow Before Taxes	250,000	
Cash-on-Cash	13.5%	

SOURCE: Better City

Table 3—Pro-Forma with Federal & State Incentives, & TIF

Although creating a capital stack with these programs is plagued with complexity, it can make projects that otherwise would not be feasible attractive to the investor and developer community. Investment in downtown Helena and other distressed areas of the City and State can be greatly facilitated by aligning policy to address economic shortfalls that have been impediments to development.

ACTION PLAN – TO BE FURTHER DEFINED WITH STAFF AFTER NEXT PUBLIC MEETING

- Consider a development model where the proposed townhomes could be a mix of market and attainable housing using a land trust model;
- Establish CC&R's or deed restrictions on the City property to be used for residential or commercial redevelopment to ensure suitable architectural and design standards will be met;
- Conduct outreach to performing arts groups to determine the demand and utilization of amphitheater space;
- Post-COVID-19, have a parking study conducted to determine the usage of lots along Cruse Avenue;
- Work with the School District and development community to adaptively reuse the 7th Avenue Gym to accommodate a productive and contributing use;
- Work with the adjacent property owners regarding the abandonment of rights of way along Cruse and Cutler to facilitate plan implementation and redevelopment;
- Consider infrastructure improvements to extend utilities to the planned redevelopment locations, making them shovel-ready;
- Conduct outreach and recruitment and engage the real estate development community to attract a small neighborhood grocer or pharmacy at the northeast corner of the intersection of Lawrence and Cruse;
- Conduct a Small Area Plan for mini-malfunction junction driven by redevelopment opportunities in Class A office and multi-family. Redevelopment could reconfigure the existing blocks and create alignment with the grid system. This may provide a solution to the circulation issues.
- Advocate with State legislators for more impactful redevelopment and historic preservation incentives to facilitate enhancements to HTC's, TIF, and adoption of a State NMTC program.
- Explore developing and funding a new neighborhood center facility on-site that will replace the existing, aged facility. Stakeholder conversations should be continued to discuss programming needs, design, and financing.
- Engage an engineering firm to design street and utility improvements, allocate funding for construction.
- Determine ongoing maintenance costs for planned improvements

APPENDIX A – HISTORICAL ARTICLES

BYPASS ALTERNATIVES UNVEILED – 1 DEC 1977

The Independent-Record, By Angus White

A Helena citizens group presented a list of alternatives to the proposed south bypass during a meeting Wednesday with the Areawide Planning Organization.

The group, representing a cross section of Helena neighborhoods, was formed Nov. 14 to more clearly voice community support or opposition to certain projects that will affect their neighborhoods. The group decided its first project is to tackle the south bypass issue.

Group members agreed to poll their neighborhoods, seeking alternatives to a south bypass. Results of that poll were presented Wednesday to APO director Denis Vogt and planner Lisa Anderson.

Highlights of the opinions voiced by residents on the upper west side are:

- No bypass.
- If the bypass is needed, place it south of Mt. Helena and not close to any residential neighborhood.
- Use existing east-west streets to channel traffic.
- No road should connect the central business district by spanning Park or Cruse Avenues.
- Complete the development of Euclid and Lyndale avenues to the Burlington Northern depot and along the railroad tracks to Interstate 15.
- Develop a bypass to the north over open land one-half mile from any existing neighborhood. Plan to build north-south roads into the downtown and Capitol areas.

Residents polled on the upper east side of Helena came up with these and other alternatives:

- Establish a bus system to serve the downtown area including the new federal building and also the State Capitol complex.
- Provide new access roads to connect new southeast growth areas with the downtown area. These roads should not be an east-west bypass and should not disrupt existing neighborhoods.

Residents polled in the Prospect Heights area came up with these ideas:

- Before a subdivision is approved, consideration should be given to its impact on existing neighborhoods by requiring an environmental impact statement.
- A collector street connecting the proposed Frontage Road along Interstate 15 should be tied in with present Highway 12.
- Put a green arrow for a left turn from Montana Avenue heading north on the 11th Avenue heading west.
- All future construction of state-owned buildings should take place east of Interstate 15. This would ease congestion which exists in the Capitol area.

Residents in the northeast area of the Sixth Ward were presented with a survey.

Of the residents polled, 30 percent favored a south bypass while 20 percent opposed it.

A moratorium of proposed subdivisions (east and west) until the transportation problem is settled was favored by 36 percent of those polled while 14 percent opposed it.

In addition to Wednesday night's proposed alternatives, members of the APO staff presented 10 alternatives derived from suggestions from the Helena Citizens Council (HCC) transportation subcommittee, members of the HCC and members of the neighborhood group.

They are:

- Build a new road one-half mile south of the areas where housing presently exists.

- Bring the proposed Frontage Road into the Prospect Avenue intersection by swinging it around the Colonial Inn from Bull Run.
- Stagger working hours for federal building and Capitol complex employees to alleviate traffic congestion on Last Chance Gulch and in the Capitol area.
- Decentralize state government.
- Make Broadway and Winnie one-way streets.
- Put traffic controls, stop signs, barricades, and time signal devices on affected streets.
- Initiate alternative transportation: bus systems, off-street bikeways, carpooling or trolleys.
- Design and plat a grid street system on the undeveloped land that development proposals would have to conform to.
- Control growth.
- Build a roadway which would run from the downtown area via State Street, from Cruse Avenue to Diehl Drive with a jog around Sugarloaf Mountain.

The APO staff is working toward a December deadline set by the City Commission to come up with a new study updating the city's transportation plan and to resolve the south bypass issue.

The APO and neighborhood group alternatives will be presented Dec. 7 to the HCC transportation subcommittee, which will in turn present the alternatives to the City Planning Board Dec. 20.

And if progress goes smoothly, Bogt said, the APO will take the City Planning Board's recommendations on alternatives to the Jan. 9 City Commission meeting.

CITY MAY BE TIED TO SOUTH BYPASS – 29 NOV 1977

The Independent-Record, By Ellen Burks

The City of Helena may have made a commitment to a major east-west arterial to qualify for urban renewal funds back in 1967.

And if the commitment is clear, and the arterial is not built, the city may be open to a potential suit by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

This information was presented to City Commission Monday night by areawide planning staff member Lisa Anderson as part of the update on the transportation study. She did her research after neighborhood groups questioned if a commitment to the bypass had already been made.

But City Manager Al Thelen and City Attorney C.W. Leaphart Jr. say they have serious doubts about whether such a commitment exists.

In her memorandum Anderson says, "Essentially, the commitment to a roadway and bridge over Park Avenue appears to have been made by the City in order to ensure adequate access to the downtown and thus, to qualify for funding of the downtown Urban Renewal Project by (HUD)." The city received some \$16 million in federal urban renewal money, according to a former director.

City attorney Leaphart said today, "I really don't know what commitments we have (to the bypass). I don't think we have any - or at least not as much as she (Anderson) wants to make it appear."

Commissioners, taken surprise by the memo, decided promptly to table the study until they receive a full staff report and written legal opinion.

They were clearly shocked by the information and placed in an uncomfortable position. The commission has attempted to convince the public that they are searching for alternatives to the south bypass, and Commissioner Jim Nybo has repeatedly assured groups that no commitment to any one plan has been made.

He compared the report to "dousing a fire with gasoline." About 70 residents concerned about the bypass were present at the meeting to hear about the progress on transportation plans. Mayor Kathleen Ramey sternly instructed them that the memo would not be discussed at the meeting.

Commissioner Russel Ritter expressed his irritation with the new surprises that keep arising in the transportation plan. “Every time we turn around something sneaks out of a corner – and I’m tired of it, personally.” Loud applause greeted his remark.

In her presentation, Anderson noted that as recently as 1975, the Environmental Impact Statement for the Federal Office Building and the Court House referred to transportation plans.

“...Long-range plans (projected 1985) contemplate an overpass where Jackson Street (Cruse Avenue) and Park Avenue intersect south of the proposed site. This overpass may eventually link Jackson Street (Cruse Avenue) and Le Grande Boulevard to the west, providing good east-west access. Broadway provides east-west access at the present time but only up to Park Avenue where it ends.”

She pulled additional statement from the 1967 planning proposals and reports for Urban Renewal in the downtown area.

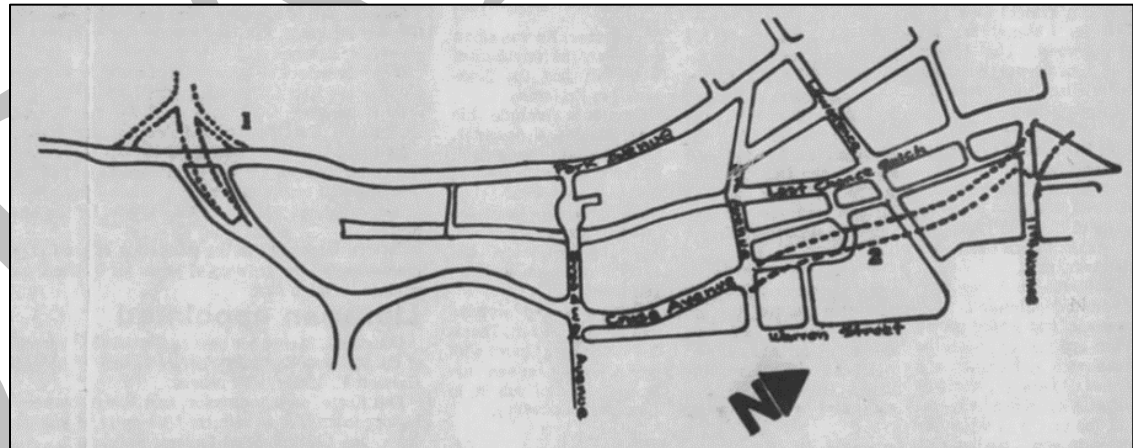
“It has long been recognized that the existing traffic system creates a ‘dead end’ situation for the project area, and local objectives were established to

eliminate the problem. The Urban Renewal Plan accomplishes this purpose by permitting the establishment of a new east-west arterial.”

City Manager Al Thelen says that some commitment was made to the federal government that employees would be able to get in and out, and that there might be an overpass. “But the idea that we have an obligation to build a south bypass is as phony as a seven-dollar bill.”

City Attorney Leaphart says he told Anderson that if there is violation of the HUD agreement on urban renewal, “we may be subject to some kind of litigation.” But he assumes that HUD would have mentioned the problem when the urban renewal project was completed this year.

“I think they’ve been pretty satisfied with us. This is just an engineering thing. As long as you accomplish what you’re trying to do and have ingress and egress, you can change the design or scheme. Cruse and Park are the boundaries of the plan and if we have good traffic flow, then we have accomplished what is necessary.”



SOURCE: The Independent-Record, 29 Nov 1977¹⁰

Figure 48—Historic Development Sites in Helen

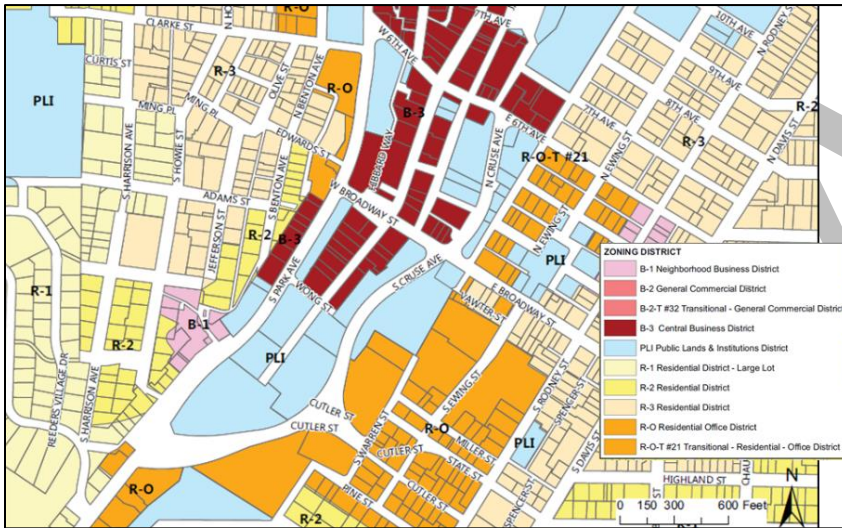
Helena. It indicates the proposed overpass at Park that would provide access to the downtown area (note 1, at left) and the proposed extension of Cruse Avenue into Last Chance Gulch (note 2).

¹⁰ This map is similar to one included in a pamphlet for developers in 1973 that showed available development sites in downtown

APPENDIX B – ADDITIONAL MAPS

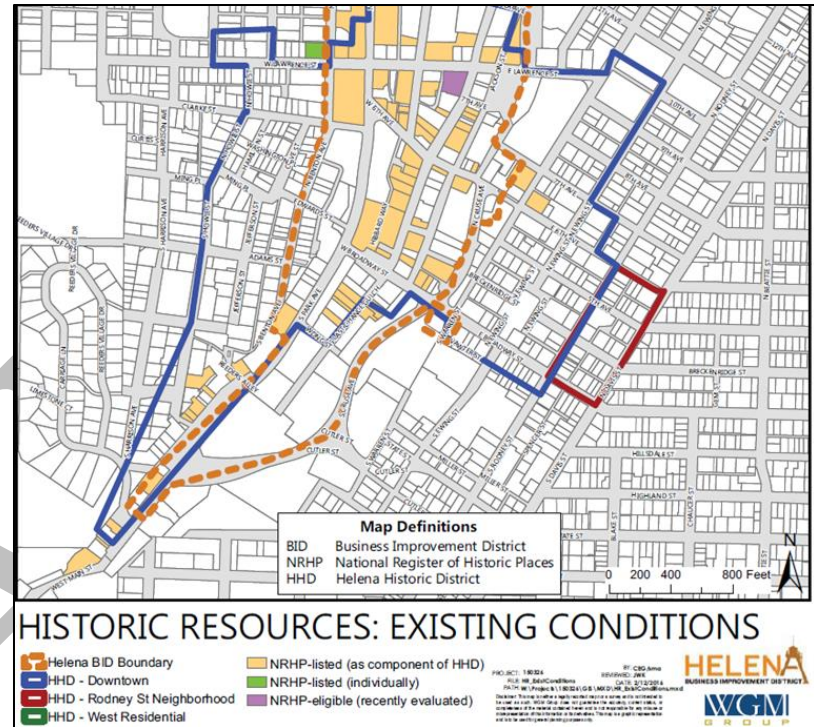
Additional Cruse Avenue Area Maps

1. Zoning & Land Utilization
2. Historic Resources
3. Landowners
4. Building Heights
5. Year built
6. Infrastructure
7. Block Structure



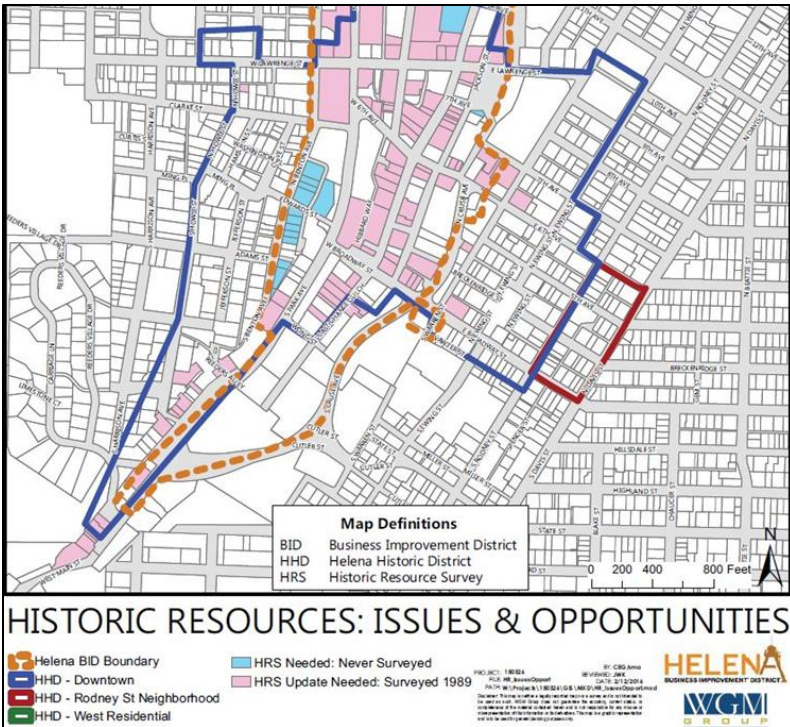
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix A, pg 7

Map 6—Cruse Avenue Area Zoning & Land Utilization



SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix A, pg 17

Map 7—Historic Resources Existing Conditions



SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix A, pg 19

Map 8—Historic Resources Issues & Opportunities



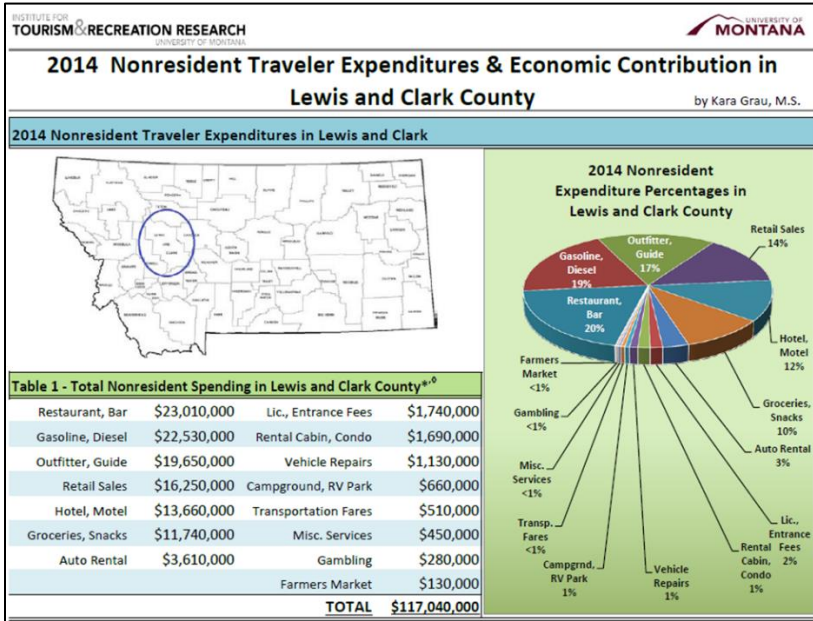
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix B, pg 1

Map 9—2016 Retail Market Study Area

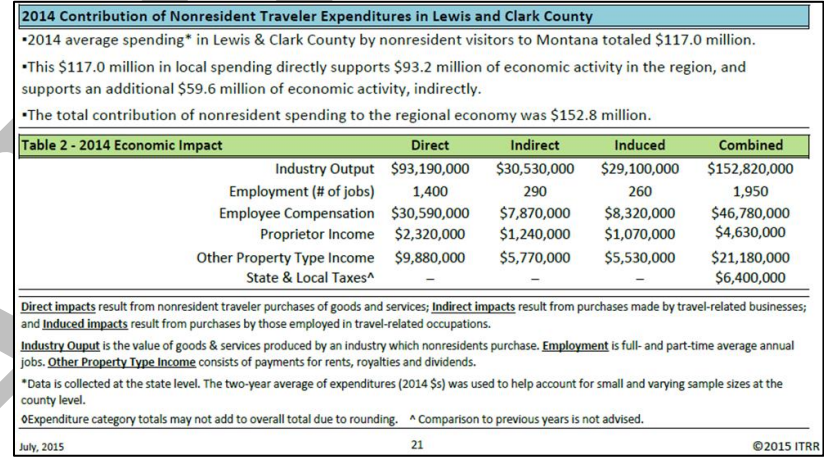
As noted earlier, the Downtown Helena study area can presently support an additional 142,900 SF of retail and restaurant development, producing up to \$46 million in sales.

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APPENDIX C – TRAVELER EXPENDITURES



SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix B, pg 6
 Figure 49—Nonresident Traveler Expenditures & Economic Contribution



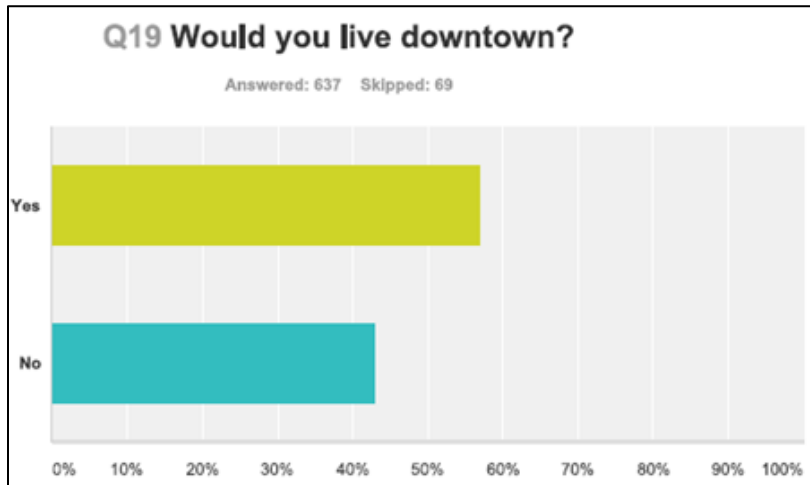
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix B, pg 6
 Figure 50—Economic Impact

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APPENDIX D – PUBLIC OUTREACH SURVEY

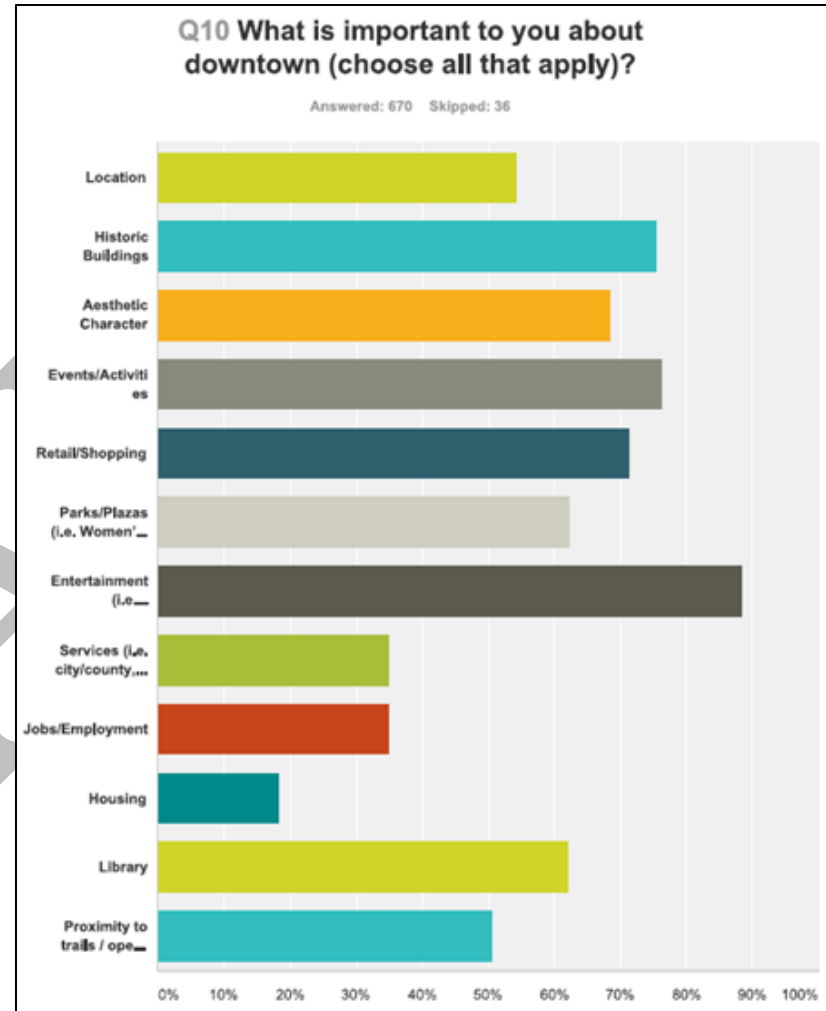
A majority of Helena’s population desires to preserve the historic character of the downtown area while adding more landscaping, trees, and parks. There seems to be a general impression that more parking is needed, but that might be mitigated by increasing walkability and bike lanes, which are also desired.

A third of residents would like to see more housing downtown and more than half would live there if conditions were improved. New development is welcomed, not only for improved shopping and entertainment, but also to improve business health.



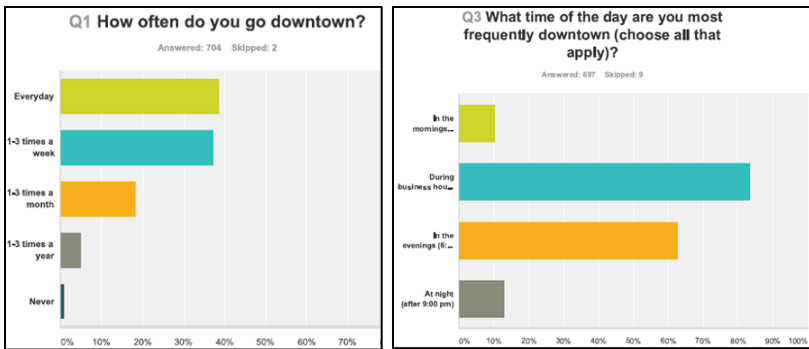
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix C, pg 62

Figure 51—Live Downtown



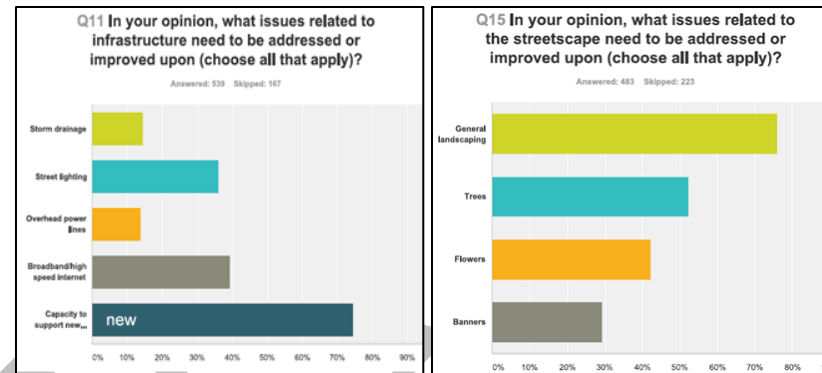
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix C, pg 22

Figure 52—Important Downtown Elements



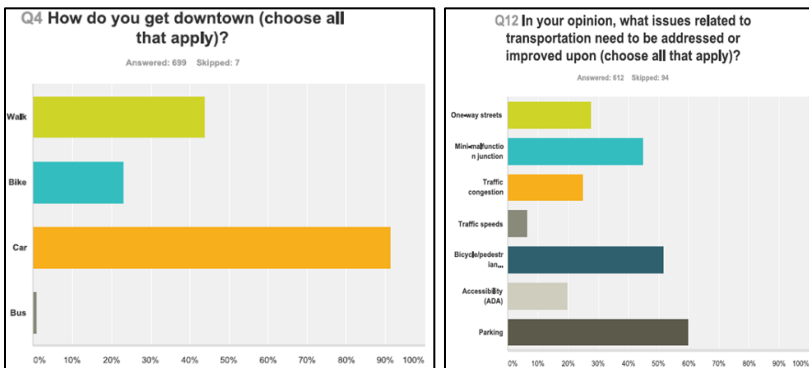
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix C, pgs 8 & 10

Figure 53—Frequency & Time of Downtown Visits



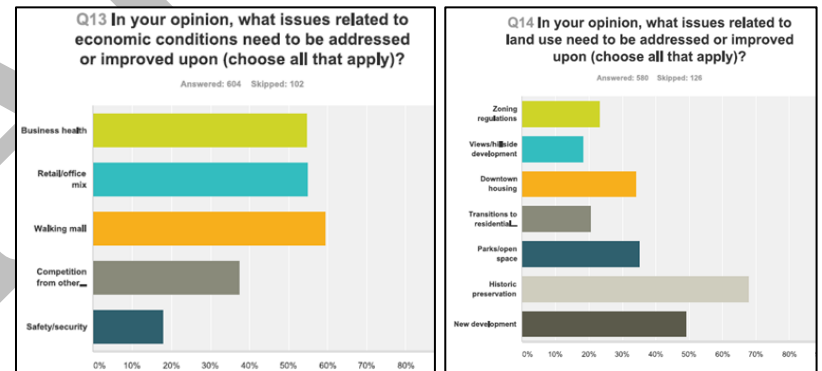
SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix C, pgs 25 & 40

Figure 55—Infrastructure & Streetscapes Downtown



SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix C, pgs 12 & 25

Figure 54—Travel & Transportation Downtown



SOURCE: Downtown Neighborhood Plan, Appendix C, pgs 33 & 37

Figure 56—Economic Conditions & Land Use Downtown

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APPENDIX E – TRANSPORTATION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations Relative to Cruse Avenue from the Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan—2014 Update

Project ID	Location	Problem	Recommendation	Estimated Cost	Other Project References
MSN-27	6th Ave – Cruse Ave to Montana Ave	Roadway surfacing deterioration and increasing traffic volumes.	Reconstruct 6th Ave, between Cruse Ave and Montana Ave, to City complete streets standards. This portion of 6th Ave has been identified by the City for reconstruction (per Fall 2014 citywide inventory).	\$2,299,000	PED-25; SPOT-7; BL-31
MSN-28	11th Ave – Cruse Ave to Montana Ave	Roadway surfacing deterioration and increasing traffic volumes.	Reconstruct Carter Dr, between Prospect Ave and Billings Ave, to City complete streets standards. This portion of Carter Dr has been identified by the City for reconstruction (per Fall 2014 citywide inventory).	\$968,000	BL-9
TSM-22	Intersection of Neill Ave, Helena Ave, Cruse Ave, & Last Chance Gulch	Traffic congestion; lack of suitable non-motorized infrastructure; business parking and access concerns.	The City had a concept study completed to evaluate a modern intersection at the Neill Ave/Helena Ave/Cruse Ave/Last Chance Gulch intersection. The study included a full operational analysis and preliminary design of intersection alternatives. The alternatives developed met the City's complete streets objectives to accommodate non-motorized traffic. The recommendations included three alternatives for further detailed study and an environmental review process. Alternative 1B (single lane roundabout with two lane entry from Neill Rd), Alternative 6 (enlarged signalized intersection), and a "no-build" alternative. The City Commission elected to drop the project from additional consideration and allocate available City funds to the West Main St reconstruction project. For improvements to be delivered at this intersection in the future, a funding package will need to be identified and an environmental process completed (if Federal funds are to be utilized).	\$4,719,000	MSN-3; BBL-2; CT-2

Project ID	Location	Problem	Recommendation – Continued	Estimated Cost	Other Project References
TSM-31	Cutler & Cruse Ave	Vehicle-pedestrian conflicts; sight distance concerns; vehicle speeds.	Reconfigure intersection to reduce vehicle-pedestrian conflicts and improve sight distances. Additional engineering study is needed to identify possible mitigation measures to improve safety at this intersection.	\$93,170	
PED-22	Southwest corner of Cruse Ave & Broadway St	Existing crossing is over 100' in length and allows for high speed turning of vehicles.	Install "pork-chop" style refuge to separate crossing into two stages.	\$9,000-\$16,000	
PED-23	West leg of Cruse Ave & Broadway St	Existing crossing is over 110' in length and allows for high speed turning of vehicles.	Add bulbout due to high traffic on Broadway; bulbouts should not block potential for bike lanes. The southbound slip lane from Broadway to Cruse Ave should be removed with this project.	\$1,200	
BL-12	Cruse Ave from Broadway to Neill Ave	This road is one of only two downtown roads that go north-south. (0.49 mi.).	Beginning at Broadway headed north, convert angled parking to back-in angled parking. Mark all spaces as 'compact cars only' to prevent encroachment into the bike lane. The following cross-section is proposed: 8' parallel parking, 6' bike lane, 11.5' travel lanes, 6' bike lane, 15' reverse angled parking lane. North of Broadway the road is currently a 3-lane section, 58' wide, with parking. Proposed section would include: 8' parking lanes, 5' bike lanes, 11' travel lanes, and a center turn lane/striped median. From 6th Ave north to Neill Ave, the center turn lanes could be removed as there is not significant volume (less than 2,000 ADT). Buffered bike lanes could be accommodated with 8' parking lanes, 2' parking buffers, 5' bike lanes, 2' travel lane buffers and two 12' travel lanes.	\$5,000-\$52,000	

Project ID	Location	Problem	Recommendation – Continued	Estimated Cost	Other Project References
BL-33	Park Ave from Oro Fino turnoff to Cruse Ave	Park Ave is the gateway to many popular trails in the south hills, but has no dedicated bicycle facilities. Formalized bicycle accommodation would make this journey easier and encourage riding to trailheads. (0.5 mi.).	Install bike lanes. From Reeder's Village Dr to Cruse Ave there are two options: Option 1: Remove center turn lane and provide wide bike lanes. Width is 55' curb-to-curb. Recommend 8' parking lanes and 6.5' bike lanes. Option 2: Climbing bike lane only to include 8' parking lanes, 5' climbing bike lane, center turn lane and 12' travel lanes (with the downhill travel lane containing sharrows). South of Reeder's Village Dr recommend bike lane in uphill direction only. Shared lane markings in downhill direction	\$6,000 - \$25,000	
SHR-1	Park Ave Bike Sharrows from Cruse Ave to Broadway	Street configuration is not compatible with bike lanes (0.32 mi.).	Option 1: Place sharrows in center of travel lane with frequent 150-200' spacing. There is high turnover parking on this route, so bike lanes may not be the most desirable. Option 2: Provide uphill bike lane and downhill shared lane, 5' bike lane behind reverse angled parking (no bike lanes should be behind front-in angled parking), 8' parallel parking, and two 12.5' travel lanes. Option 3: 10' travel lanes, 8' parking lane, and two 5' bike lanes.	\$3,000-\$34,000	
SPOT-26	Southwest corner of Cruse Ave & Broadway	Pedestrian crossing is wide, and the existing slip lane allows for high speed turning by vehicles.	Remove slip lane and provide curb extension over the previous extents of the slip lane.	\$10,000-\$15,000	

SOURCE: Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan—2014 Update

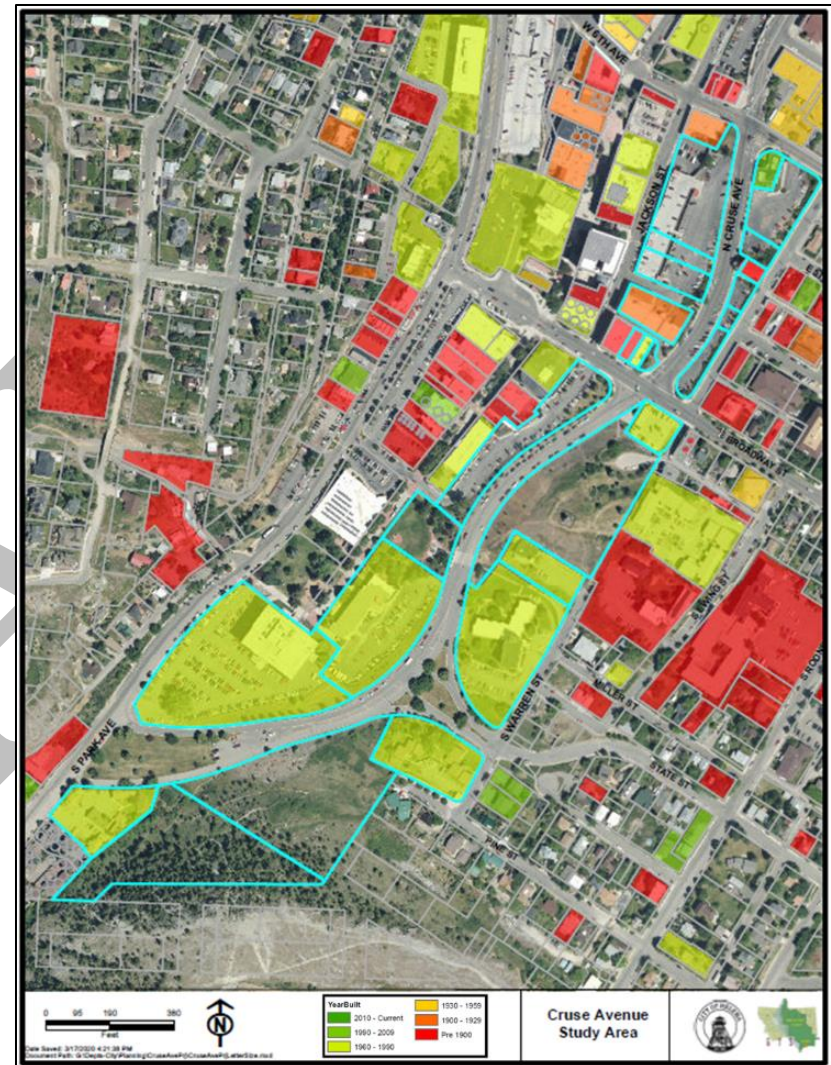
Table 4—Cruse Avenue Transportation Recommendations

APPENDIX F – OTHER MAPS



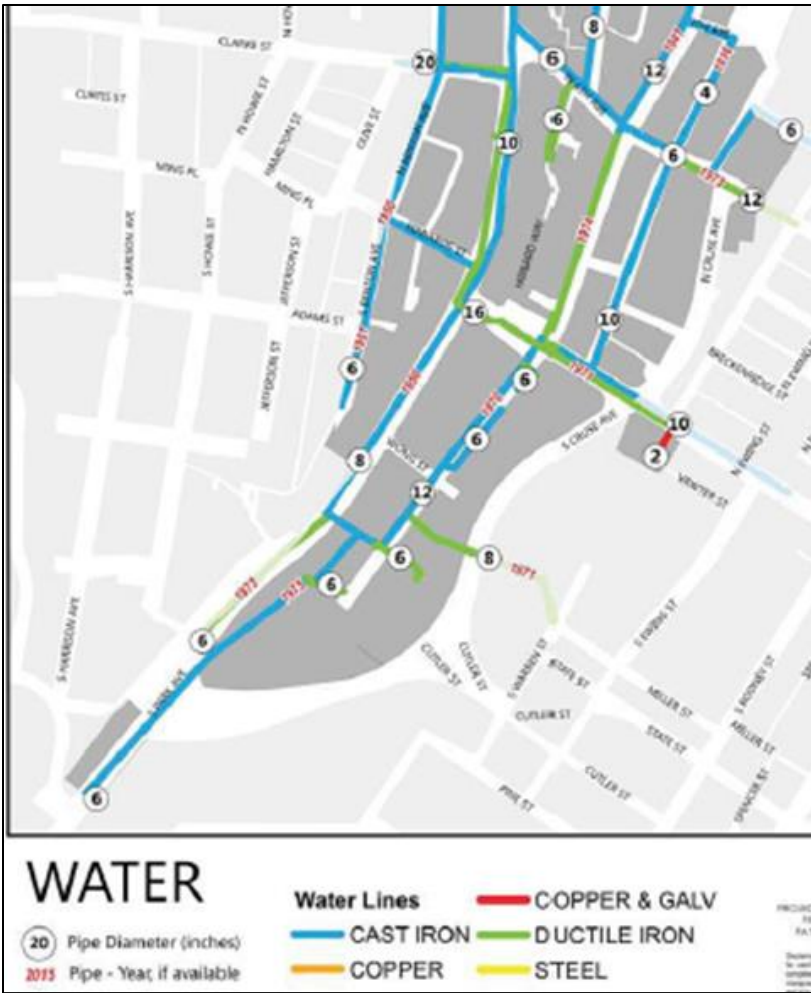
SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, Appendix A, page 13

Map 10—Building Heights



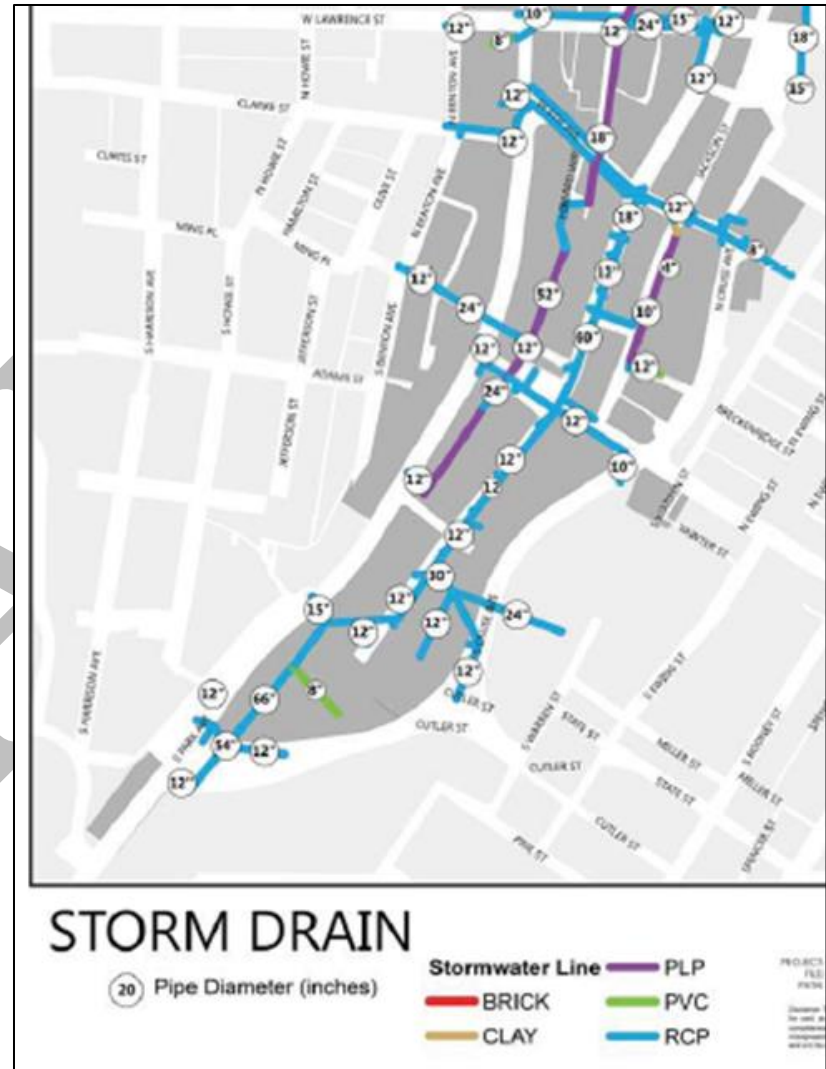
SOURCE: CruseAvePrj3172020.pdf

Map 11—Year Built



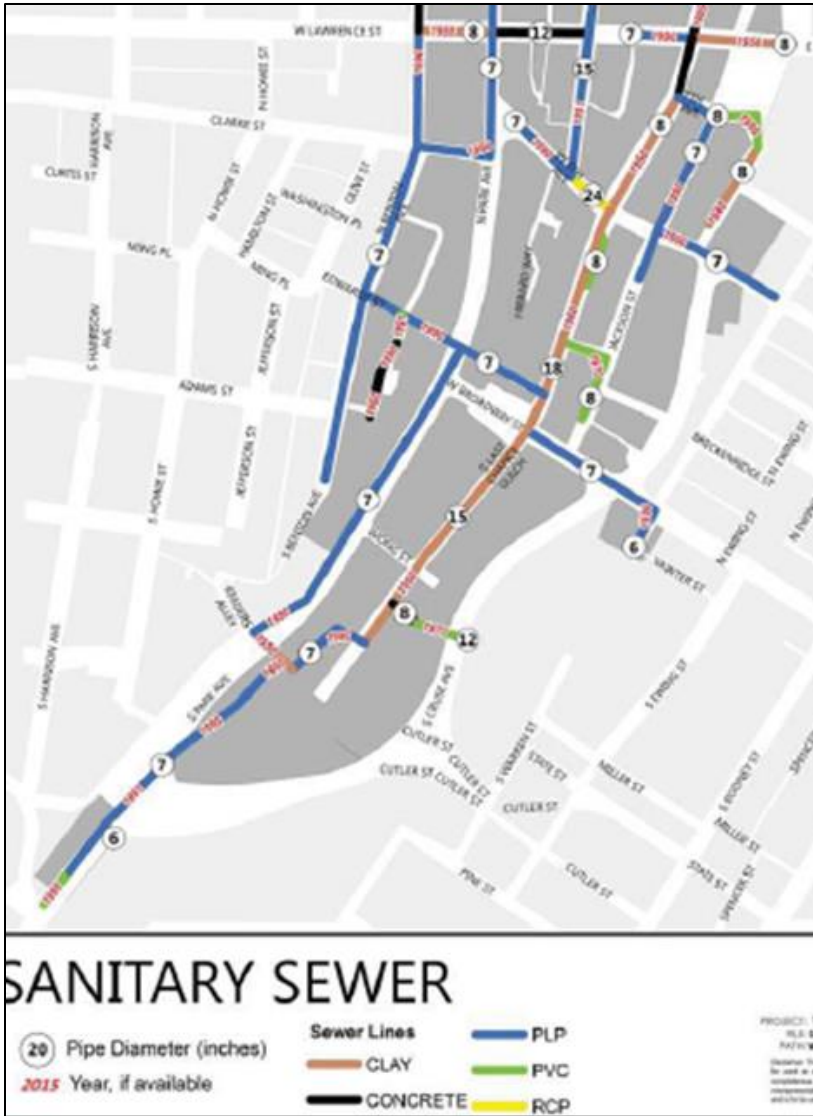
SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, Appendix A, page 29

Map 12—Water Infrastructure



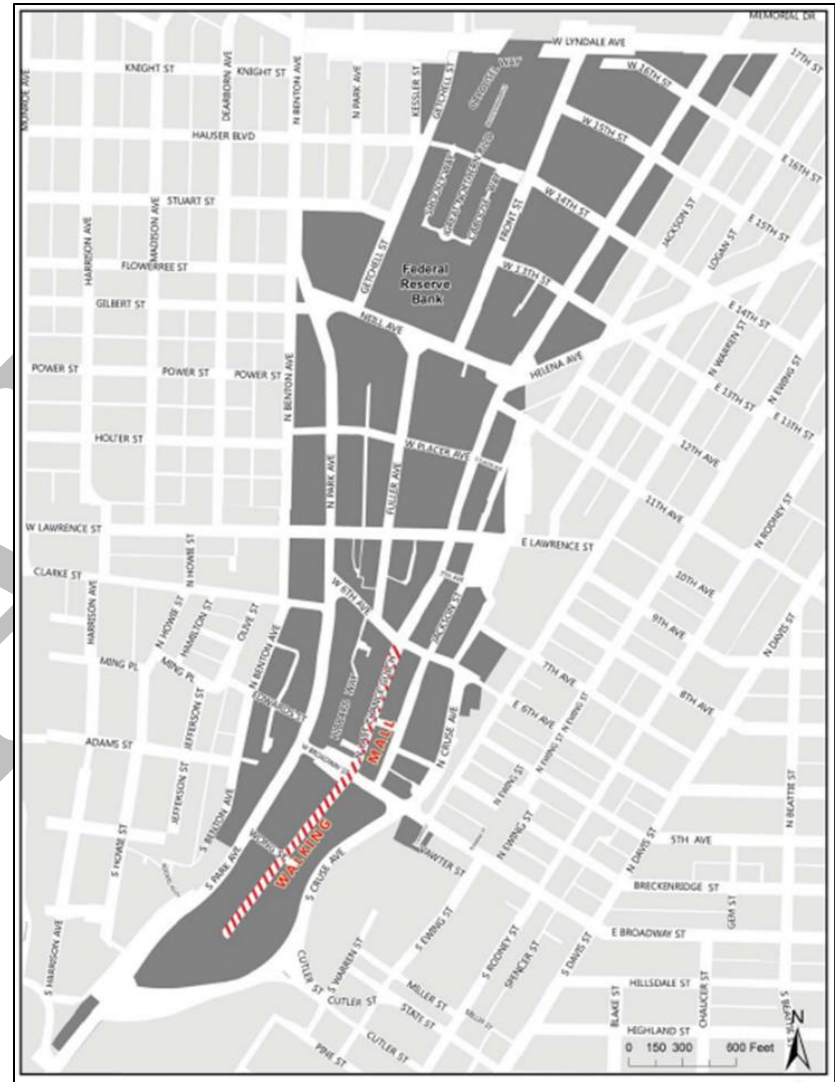
SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, Appendix A, page 33

Map 13—Storm Drain Infrastructure



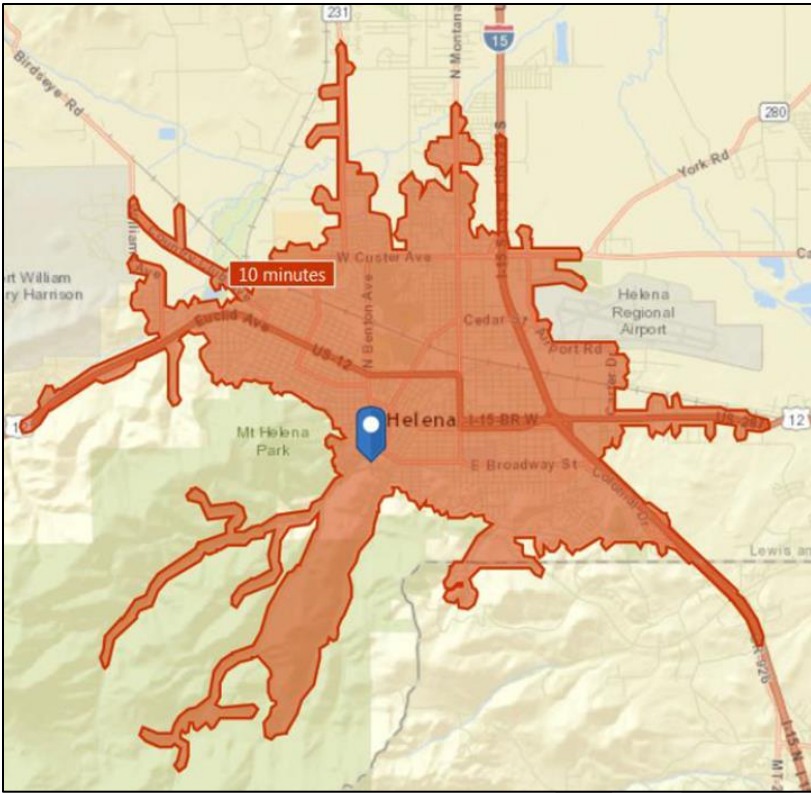
SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, page 31

Map 14—Sanitary Sewer Infrastructure



SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, page 7

Map 15—Block Structure



Downtown Helena is within a 10-minute drive for almost all residents of Helena’s micropolitan area.

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SOURCE: Downtown Helena Master Plan, Appendix B, p.33

Map 16—Drivetime

¹ https://magicvalley.com/news/local/helena-history-for-sale-old-ming-opera-house-hits-market/article_42e318c2-5243-5e49-a8db-498a9694ecc8.html