

Growth Policy Update  
Comments from the 2019 Studio

A number of concept panels were placed around the studio and attendees were encouraged to place comments related to that concept on the board.

The comments have been grouped according to the concept board they were attached to;

[ ] indicates words added to clarify a comment; and

*Italics* indicate participant comments added to an existing participant's comment.

**Concept:**

# 1. Status Quo, but Better!

## *Maintaining direction, powering action*

This option accommodates growth, with development continuing to occur on the **edge of town** and in the **unincorporated county**. In this scenario, however, Helena will work closely with Lewis and Clark County to manage development more effectively, potentially targeting **annexation** in some areas and revising **environmental and subdivision standards** to reduce development intensity where the **water resource** is vulnerable. A collaborative strategy will accommodate existing development trends while tailoring them to be **more sensitive** to long-term environmental impact.

**Comments:**

- No, leave the farmland for farmers *and protect view corridors*
- Don't sacrifice our local history for new development – need to keep our sense of place/identity. It's important to support historic preservation. Character of [other or older ?] character
- Set goal of 100% renewable energy for City of Helena
- Standardize NWE (North Western Energy) street light districts, for standard billing, as communities are annexed.
- Poor planning for streets and sidewalks in new housing developments in Helena; and existing subdivisions; Street trees
- Streets are not wide enough for on street parking on Saddle Drive – medical facilities have not, in my opinion, allowed adequate parking.  
How are # [number] of [parking] spaces calculated?
  1. # of employees/ [property?]
  2. # pts [patients, patrons?] per hour
  3. # hours open/day

Winter space for snow removal! Although streets have been plowed in winter, the streets are difficult to have 2-way traffic, let alone parking, Gold Rush in south hills especially. Try alternate side of the street parking and remove the snow when possible!!

## 2. Grow, in “Nodes!”

### *Anticipating growth, concentrating patterns*

This scenario accommodates growth, but it suggests policies to distribute it in more **urban clusters**. This involves working closely with Lewis and Clark County to create **robust joint planning** policies to direct growth into areas where utility and transportation **infrastructure already exists**. This will alleviate pressure to accommodate increasing levels of **commuting traffic** to and from the city on main arterials, recommending annexation only in areas where there is now a need for services. **Discouraging conversion** of rural land, **Helena and the County** will reconfigure land use policy to encourage **increased intensity** in multiple neighborhood activity **centers**, blending housing, retail, employment, and open spaces with a more **urban flair**.

#### Comments:

- Beautify more plants and flowers!
- Expanded public transportation
- Reuse empty buildings e.g. ShopKo. Affordable housing
- Make walkable – to destinations *and bikeable*
- Mixed use is good - *agree*
- Sixth Ward would be a great “node” area, but it needs amenities and traffic plan so that businesses are willing to come to this area. \* *Seconded*
- Seek transportation funding independent of state/fed'l sources. Need to invest in transportation maintenance.
- Make sure that added infrastructure, like roads, water, and sewer, does not have unsupportable maintenance costs in the future. & *sidewalks*
- Connect Nodes with active transport Increase connectivity/consistency of bike paths. Trailhead→ Town center; Leverage biking tourism
- City-wide sidewalks and streetlights; *streetlights should be dark skies compliant*. Yes! *Agree*
- Set goal of 100% renewable energy for City of Helena
- More covered transit stops
- Initiate plastic recycling city-wide; get rid of plastic straws & bags. *This!*
- Agree with enhancing city center! Make rentals, downtown stores more affordable; How? Improve parking –Better handicap access
- Retain parks/open lands i.e., don't sell parks. Stewardship should be paramount over recreation.

- As the city grows, consider essential services –example fire, police, EMS, these should be treated as critical infrastructure. *Sidewalks*
- Learn from mistakes at the Great Northern. *Agree, but these result from deliberate choices by the developer. Need to anticipate.*
- Neighborhood Nodes naturally divided by major streets and geographic features. Mini-towns with residential, businesses, services, etc.
- Helena has 400+ non-profits they are an important economic contributor. Do the focus group members need to be expanded? Big Sky Institute has monthly meetings with about 30-40 non-profits- they're a resource.
- Seek zoning or subdivision regulations that require new development to truly fund their infrastructure costs e.g. rebuilding valley schools are funded by entire district and they are not paying for the capacity reduction on the public road system.
- Building in the periphery and improve public transportation to downtown; More events in center of town; Mixed use of existing buildings.
- Helena needs programs to alleviate poverty: affordable housing options and transportation access are key. I'd like to see: mall → affordable housing; tiny home communities w/ pathway to ownership; extended times for the bus route – greater reach; more community spaces free & open to public – other than library. *How?*
- CI (City) & CO (County) coordination is excellent goal but CO gov't serves a larger & different body. Continue cooperative but seek CO to designate "Helena Valley" or "City" focus to avoid competing county resources
- Create a tourism triangle, Depot area – Roberts (Street) - Capital - Cathedral- Helena (Avenue) using the trolley car. So much potential in RR depot area. Sixth ward needs your attention to reach their potential

## 3. Shift to the Center!

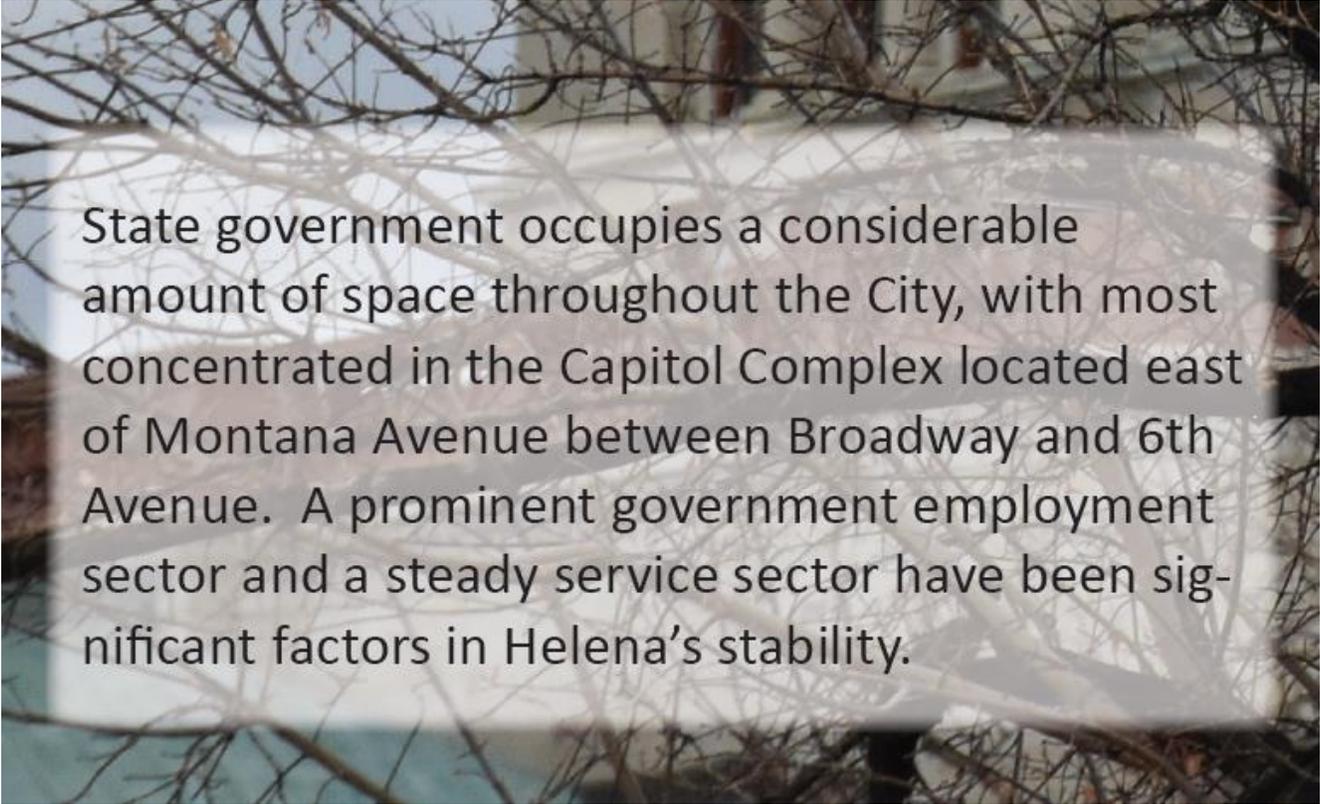
### *Realigning priorities, enlivening downtown*

In this scenario, Helena creates an attractive, vibrant, and **irresistible city core** that draws development inward and provides an economic focal point for the entire region. Policies will focus less on joint planning with the County and more on **enhancing** the attraction of the **city center** for housing, employment, culture, and entertainment. It **directs** major local transportation **investment** and infrastructure upgrades to the **benefit of the central city**, resisting pressure to enhance roadway capacity on arterials leading out of town and focusing, instead, on upgrades to the transportation experience within. The **mixed-use** central core will successfully compete with land on the periphery for development of **new housing**, and **downtown retail** will flourish as a result.

Comments:

- Promote Renewable energy in Helena
- City should not allow anonymous bidders for public spaces!! We care what happens – even [with] small spaces
- Don't just sell off pocket parks to make \$ (money)
- Set goal of 100% renewable energy for City of Helena \*
- Increase livability walkability multimodal options in the central core. Discourage more growth in the valley.
- Adopt traffic calming policies and reduce speed limits over larger area of Helena \*
- Plan for a sustainable mix of retail, services, and housing so nodes can stand alone and serve residents within walking distance.
- Adopt complete street policy
- Hi all my name is Kelly [note from one of the younger visitors to the studio]
- Go for the best; status quo has no vision for a great Helena!
- Create/plant tree-lined streets w (with) various species.
- Thank you for doing this- Keep the public involved in Helena's future
- Connect neighborhoods, especially downtown. Crossing Benton and Park are dangerous- it's wide and there are few crosswalks except at City Co. bldg. It's a straight shot from Mt. Helena down Clark, Lawrence, etc. and yet no connectivity.
- More housing downtown- use existing bldgs. i.e., I.R., Blue Cross
- This is very important, but we can do more for using and neighborhoods as well. A walkable city. well maintained.
- Many of Helena's street trees are ash trees and may be endangered by Emerald Ash Borer. Need to start now to aggressively replace and expand trees, especially in neighborhoods without any.
- Need to identify what the "City Core" is, where does it begin and end, Helena is a tough place to identify where downtown is.
- Close lot across from Lucca's, make it a market or something – no cars!!
- Emphasize pedestrian links between downtown and nearby residential areas, and between walkable "islands" downtown – New pedestrian infrastructure. \* *agree*
- Keep one-way traffic on Main St. It makes it easier to jaywalk- and jaywalking is good for pedestrian circulation. \*
- Reuse empty buildings e.g. Independent Record, Blue Cross.\* Provide grocery downtown,\* retain parks/open space, affordable housing.
- Strong advocate of a vibrant city center. Invest in the core.
- Incentives for more small businesses to open on the walking mall! *Ditto*
- Our cultural assets are a big part of the local economy – visual and performing arts- history, music, dance, theater, library. Let's have public art throughout Helena! Maybe have a downtown cultural district?
- Look at tax revenue per unit of area, for instance \$/acre, and prioritize high return areas i.e., not big box stores!
- Include some limited on-street parking on walking mall
- Redo buildings and facades on E (east) side of Gulch with Trompe l'oeil [a style of painting in which objects are depicted with photographically realistic detail or to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects exist in three dimensions.] to create better look and feel.
- Lower levels stores. Middle offices, Upper residences, condos

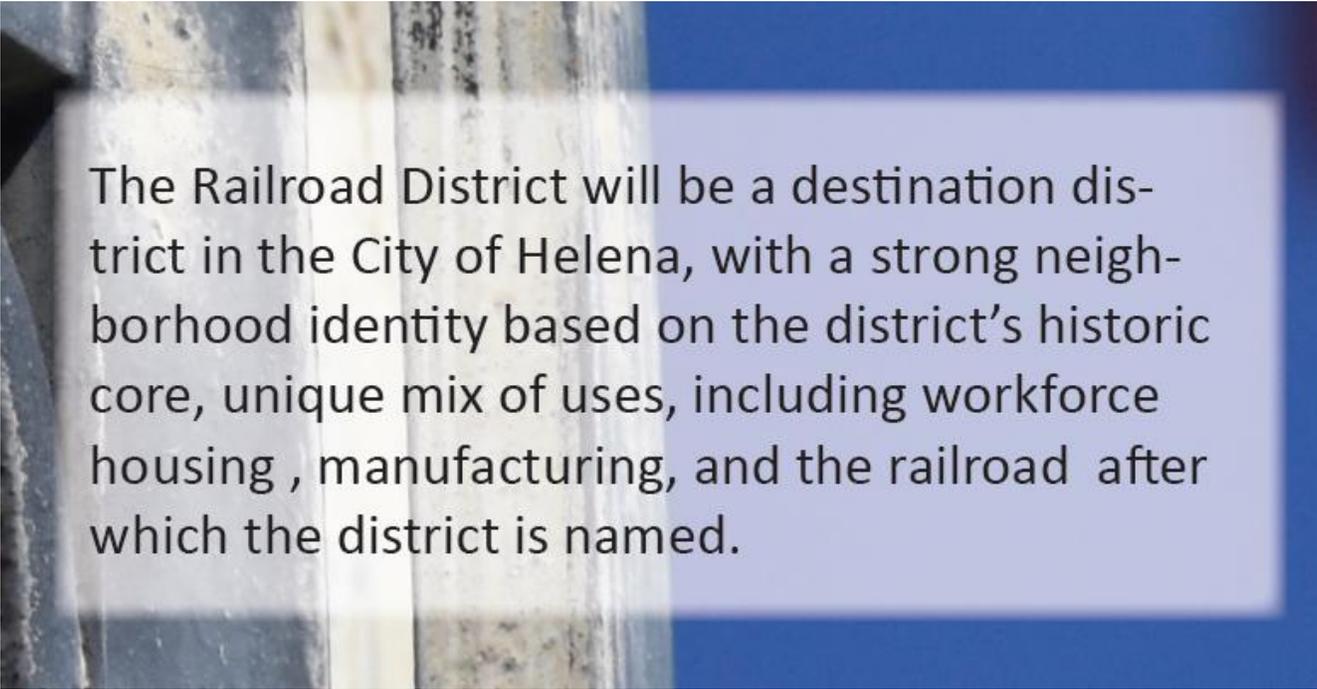
- Walkability and bike-ability need to improve. Invest in 6<sup>th</sup> Ward. Forward thinking City Council, please. Public transit!! Tax rebate for solar. 1 HR (hour) parking inhibits downtown biz [business] & longevity. Helena IR needs to proofread.
- Make some quick hits on walkability - infill gaps in sidewalks that are pervasive in some areas, like E. Broadway.



State government occupies a considerable amount of space throughout the City, with most concentrated in the Capitol Complex located east of Montana Avenue between Broadway and 6th Avenue. A prominent government employment sector and a steady service sector have been significant factors in Helena's stability.

Comments:

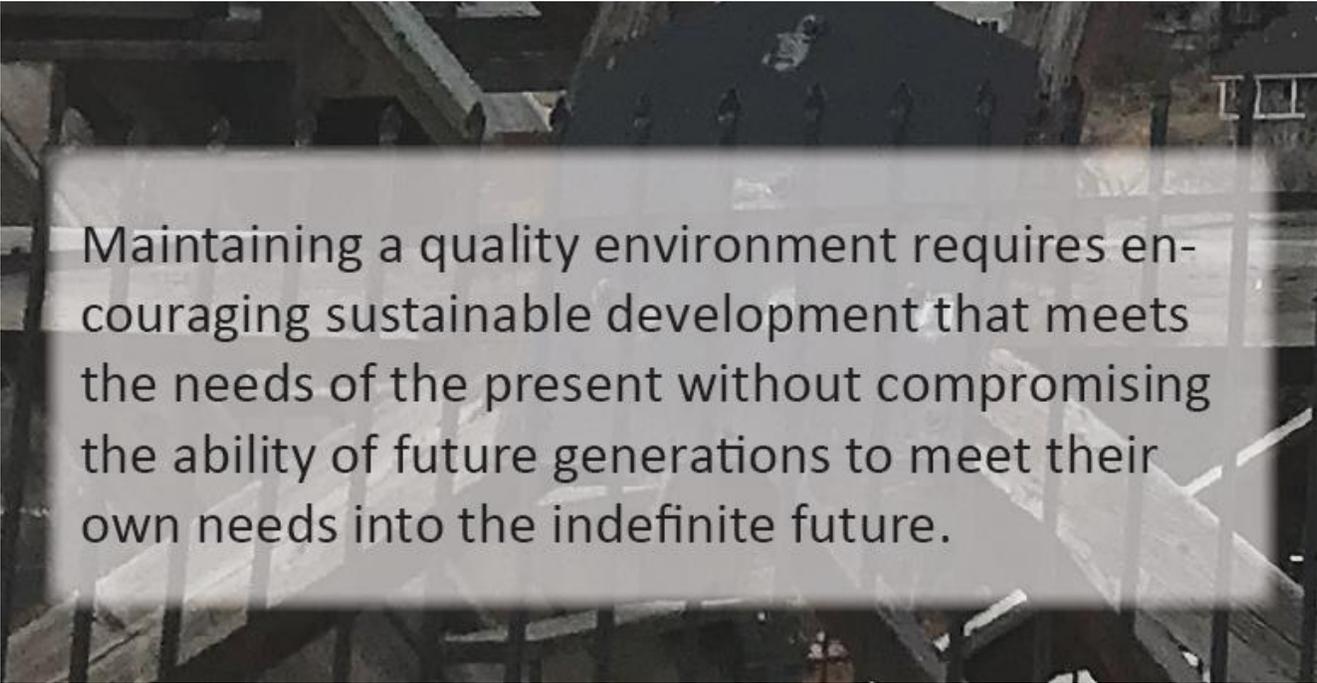
8.2% of Helena's wages are derived from nonprofit orgs (organizations) *which embody Helena's values.*



The Railroad District will be a destination district in the City of Helena, with a strong neighborhood identity based on the district's historic core, unique mix of uses, including workforce housing, manufacturing, and the railroad after which the district is named.

Comments:

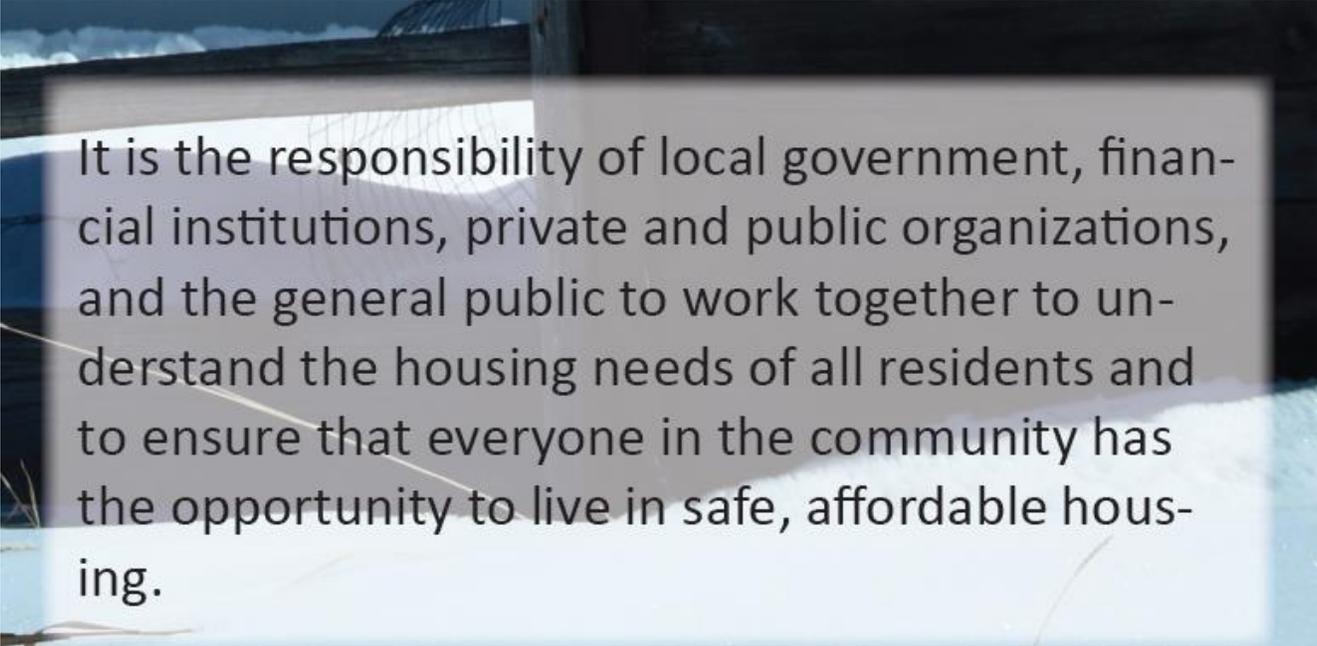
There is so much potential in the 6<sup>th</sup> Ward. The Depot is a focal point. The buildings on RR (Railroad) Ave are the last of Helena's false fronts and they would benefit from facade improvements that are done in accordance with historic standards.



Maintaining a quality environment requires encouraging sustainable development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs into the indefinite future.

Comments:

- Keep the tower and restore it with historic timber
- Restore Fire Tower in keeping with historic federal standards. It's the symbol of our City.
- Contract with John Fiedler, world renowned timber conservator, who worked at Bray on kilns. He has been on the fire tower before the arson.



It is the responsibility of local government, financial institutions, private and public organizations, and the general public to work together to understand the housing needs of all residents and to ensure that everyone in the community has the opportunity to live in safe, affordable housing.

Comments:

- With sidewalks and street lights.
- Limit light pollution.
- I agree that light pollution is a problem! Car lots on Cedar Street and Target/ShopKo areas!

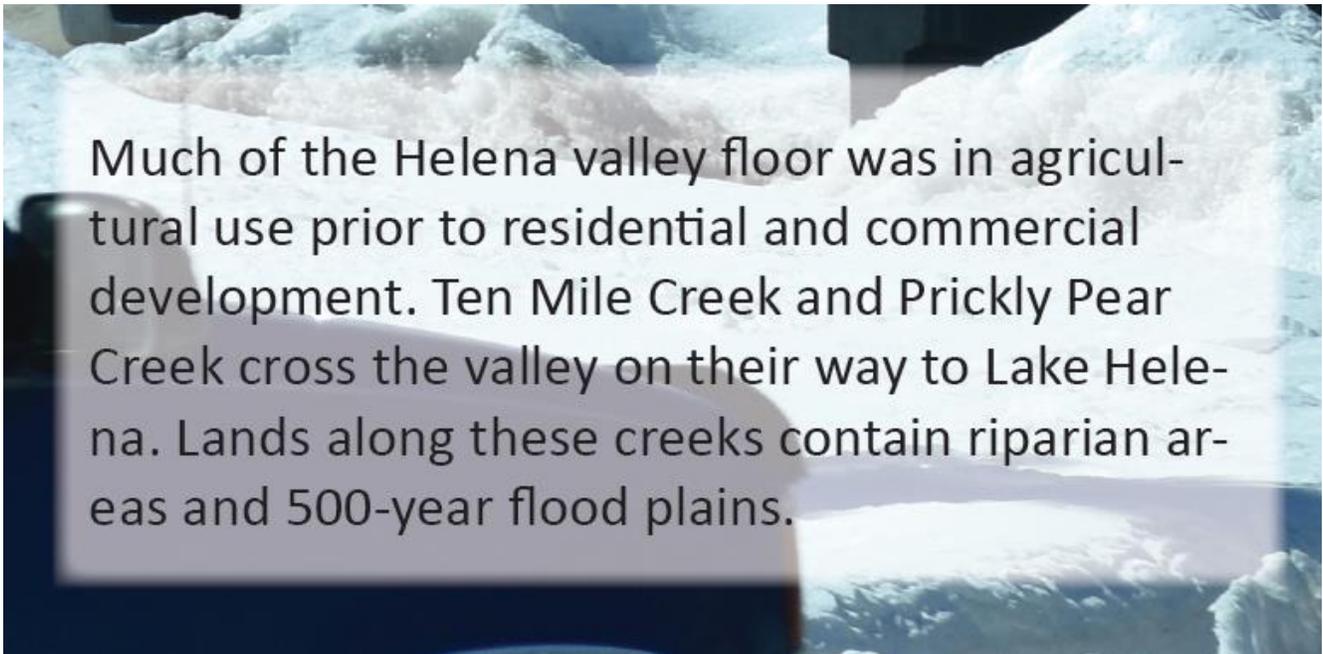


Helena's greatest natural resources include its wooded back drop and open spaces. These areas provide not only an aesthetic value, but also recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat, and include city parks such as Mt. Helena and Mt. Ascension, state and federal lands, and privately held lands—some of which are preserved through conservation easements.

Comments:

- More 'programming' to utilize trails → kids events, nature hikes, etc.
- Don't over develop open space to the south i.e. be cautious about building to many trails.
- This is Helen's greatest cultural and economic resource. Nurture it, preserve it, put resources into it.

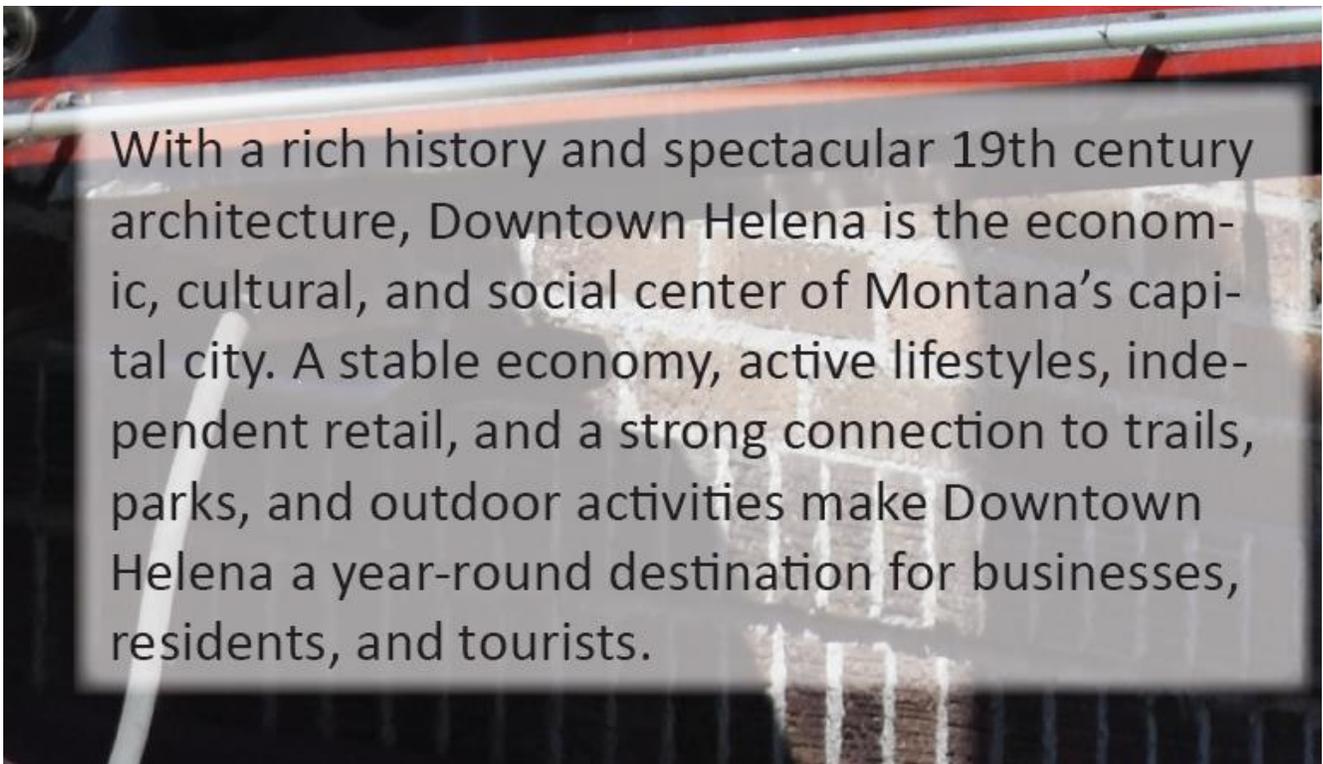
- Stop putting city/bed tax money into promotion Helena as a bike center. Promote Helena as multi-recreational, family& community, not single interest.
- “Don’t it always seem to go, we don’t know what we’ve got til it’s gone.” Don’t over promote our trails/open space they are our greatest asset but not immune to being loved to death.



Much of the Helena valley floor was in agricultural use prior to residential and commercial development. Ten Mile Creek and Prickly Pear Creek cross the valley on their way to Lake Helena. Lands along these creeks contain riparian areas and 500-year flood plains.

Comments:

Smarter, *no*, growth in the Valley, no building in the flood plain!



With a rich history and spectacular 19th century architecture, Downtown Helena is the economic, cultural, and social center of Montana’s capital city. A stable economy, active lifestyles, independent retail, and a strong connection to trails, parks, and outdoor activities make Downtown Helena a year-round destination for businesses, residents, and tourists.

Comments:

- Limit Casinos

- Keep strong and vibrant downtown walkable
- More outdoor patios and eating areas
- Pay attention to Walking Mall!!



The downtown urban renewal district exists to advance Downtown revitalization and the Downtown Helena Master Plan vision by incentivizing private investment and funding public infrastructure that improves the quality and value of downtown properties.

Comment:

Use the funds to improve and maintain the history of downtown.

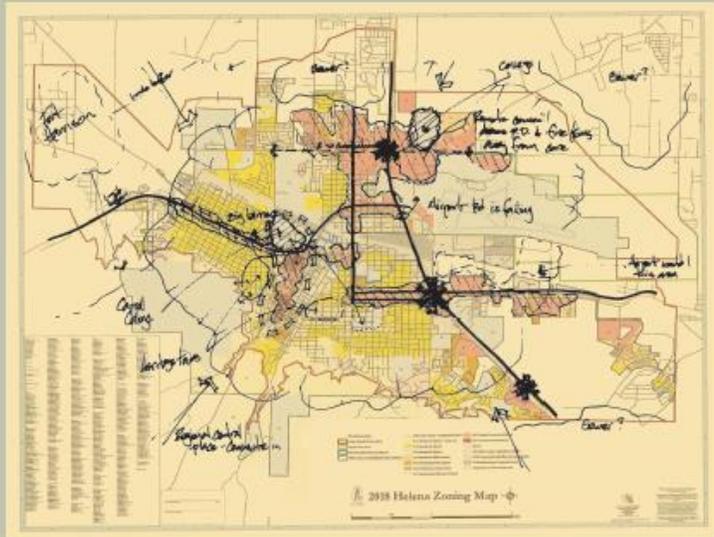
# Sampling of Issues

## *Our early take, an invitation to learn more*

We met with about 50 residents, business owners, boards, commissions and agency representatives during the course of three days of interviews. Here's some of what we found:

- *Housing's too expensive.*
- *Rural land conversion presents challenges.*
- *City/County rules are inconsistent.*
- *Rural wells & septic systems are failing.*
- *County roads are congested.*
- *Downtown retail struggles.*
- *Helena serves more than its own residents.*

*Do you have other ideas? Grab a sticky note and post them on this board!*



### Comments:

- Transit needs improvement
- Walkability of downtown is halted by connection of Front Street to the Woman's Park.
- Downtown is cut in two with Federal Reserve Building \*\*\*\*
- Not bike friendly in town.
- 1 HR (hour) parking makes it hard to do biz downtown can't even get a haircut in that time.
- Traffic circles!!! We have too many 5+ way intersections. Circles!
- HLN (Helena) lacks the attention of the 25-35yr old demographic.