

Population & Economy

2

Introduction

The City of Helena serves as the population and economic center of west-central Montana. It is also an employment and commercial center for households located near but outside City boundaries. Just as these nearby areas have major effects on day-to-day operations inside Helena, the City also affects the surrounding area, including the entire Helena valley and Jefferson County (see *Helena Micropolitan Area* below).

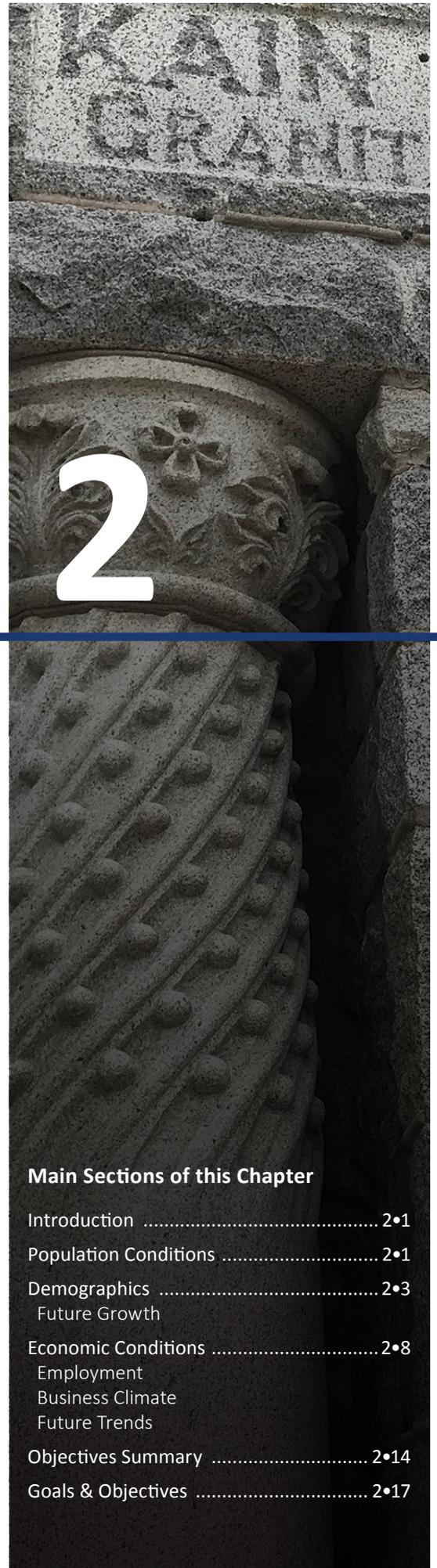
This chapter addresses population and economic conditions affecting Helena now and into the future. Such conditions strongly influence the community’s livability, economic opportunities, operating conditions and environment.

Population Conditions

Population projections are prepared for a number of reasons related to planning, including services like water and wastewater services, transportation needs, park facilities, recreation programming, school facilities and a variety of social programs. Though population projections are inexact, they provide baseline numbers

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to anticipate needs and frame budget discussions. This plan projects trends to the year 2040, derived from sources including the 2010 U.S. Census, the 2013-2017 American Community Survey (ACS) Five-Year Estimates, and the Montana Census and Economic Information Center.

Historically, Helena and Lewis and Clark County have enjoyed a steady growth rate, with unincorporated areas outpacing in-city growth between 1960 and 2010. As described below, this trend has reversed in recent years. See Table 2.01 for comparative counts and percentage growth patterns for the City of Helena and related state and jurisdictional areas.

State & County Trends

The U.S. Bureau of Census estimates indicate that Montana's population increased 30.9% from 786,690 in 1980 to an estimated 1,029,862 in 2017, whereas Lewis and Clark County's population increased 54%, from 43,039 to an estimated 66,290, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Those estimates also indicate that the unincorporated areas of the County grew by 92%, while the incorporated areas of Helena and East Helena grew by 27% and 38%, respectively, over the same time-frame. The population growth for the unincorporated area of Lewis and Clark County was greater than the growth of the City of Helena each decade from 1960-2010. However, from 2010 to 2017, the unincorporated county growth slowed significantly, while the City of Helena grew faster than unincorporated Lewis and Clark County for the first time since 1960.

Helena Micropolitan Area

The Helena micropolitan area includes persons living within the City of Helena, the Town of East Helena, unincorporated areas of southern Lewis and Clark County (Helena Valley), northern Jefferson County, and the northern area of Broadwater County west of the Missouri River. These areas are very closely related with the social, employment, commercial, and public services located in Helena. Many persons living outside Helena make daily trips to into the City for work, shopping, services, and recreation.

Residents of outlying, unincorporated areas contribute to Helena's culture and economy, but they also are major users of public services, adding to the cost of public services and increased environmental effects within the City.

The Helena micropolitan area had approximately 77,915 people in 2017, for an estimated population increase of 7.0% from the year 2010. In comparison, during the period between 2010-2017, the City of Helena's population increased by 7.6%, from 28,190 residents to 30,345, and Lewis and Clark County's population increased by 4.6%, from 63,395 to 66,290 people.

Table 2.01 – Population, Growth Patterns

Year	State of Montana	Montana Growth	Lewis & Clark County	County Growth	City of Helena	Helena Growth	City of East Helena	East Helena Growth	Unincorporated County	Unincorporated Growth
1890	142,924	–	19,145	–	13,834	–	–	–	5,311	–
1900	243,329	70.3%	19,171	0.1%	10,770	-22.1%	–	–	8,401	58.2%
1910	3760,53	54.5%	21,853	14.0%	12,515	16.2%	–	–	9,338	11.2%
1920	548,889	46.0%	18,660	-14.6%	12,037	-3.8%	–	–	6,623	-29.1%
1930	537,606	-2.1%	18,224	-2.3%	11,803	-1.9%	1,039	–	5,382	-18.7%
1940	559,456	4.1%	22,131	21.4%	15,056	27.6%	1,143	10.0%	5,932	10.2%
1950	591,024	5.6%	24,540	10.9%	17,845	18.5%	1,216	6.4%	5,479	-7.6%
1960	674,767	14.2%	28,006	14.1%	20,227	13.3%	1,490	22.5%	6,289	14.8%
1970	694,409	2.9%	33,281	18.8%	22,730	12.4%	1,651	10.8%	8,900	41.5%
1980	786,690	13.3%	43,039	29.3%	23,938	5.3%	1,647	-0.2%	17,454	96.1%
1990	799,065	1.6%	47,495	10.4%	24,609	2.8%	1,538	-6.6%	21,348	22.3%
2000	902,195	12.9%	55,716	17.3%	25,780	4.8%	1,642	6.8%	28,294	32.5%
2010	989,415	9.7%	63,395	13.8%	28,190	9.3%	1,984	20.8%	33,221	17.4%
2017	1,029,862	4.1%	66,290	4.6%	30,345	7.6%	2,265	14.2%	33,680	1.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder

Demographics

This section discusses selected characteristics for residents of the City of Helena. The tables below compare demographic characteristics of persons living within the City of Helena with characteristics of Lewis and Clark County residents, and, where relevant, with characteristics of Montana residents and characteristics seen at a national level.

Household & Family Size

In 2017, both the average household size and the average family size were lower in the city than in the county. The average household size for Lewis and Clark County was 2.34 people and the average family size was 2.90 members, whereas the City of Helena’s average household was 2.11 people and the average family size was 2.75. Family households accounted for 53.3% of the households within the City of Helena, and 62.5% of households in the county. Owner-occupied households have a larger average household size than renter-occupied households in both the city and the county (see Table 2.02).

Table 2.02 – Household Data, Helena, Lewis & Clark County

Population, Age, Household Data	Helena	Lewis & Clark County
Family Households	53.3%	62.5%
Non-family Households	46.7%	37.5%
Total Households	100.0%	100.0%
Average Household Size	2.11	2.34
Average Family Size	2.75	2.9

Source: American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates (2013-2017)

Age

The population of Helena and Lewis and Clark County is aging, as is all of Montana. As seen in Table 2.04, the 2010 median age in Helena was 40.3, rising to 40.8 median age in 2017. This, compared to 40.9 and 41.1 years old in Lewis and Clark County and 39.8 and 39.8 years old in Montana over the same time-frame. The national median age rose from 37.2 to 37.8 years old between 2010 and 2017. These statistics indicate that the Helena and Lewis and Clark County populations are older than national averages, but median increases are quite similar.

Additional demographic statistics are presented in Table 2.03 and Table 2.04. The number of Helena’s population under 18 years of age is the same as the number 65 years and older, at 18.3%. Helena has a greater percentage of residents who are 65 years old and older than Lewis and Clark County. Demographic analyses foresee an increased number of older residents living in the greater Helena area, particularly within the City, presumably because of convenience and access to services.

The aging of the Helena area population warrants particular attention when addressing future needs. An aging population presents challenges for health care, transportation, and social interaction. For example, employees who may have been working with the same business for many years will be retiring soon, taking with them extensive institutional history and experience. Others will want to or need to remain in the workforce, and many live alone. Over 12% of all households within Helena are occupied by a person 65 or older living alone. It will be important to help

Table 2.03 – Select Age Data, Helena, Lewis & Clark County

	Helena	Lewis & Clark County
Male Population	14,989	49.40%
Female Population	15,356	50.60%
Population under 18 years	5,540	18.30%
Population 18 to 64 years	19,254	63.50%
Population 65 years and over	5,551	18.30%
Median Age	40.8	41.1

Source: American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates (2013-2017)

Table 2.04 – Demographic Data, Helena & Comparison Areas

	Helena	Lewis & Clark County	Montana	United States
2017 Total Population	30,345	66,290	1,029,862	321,004,407
2010 Total Population	28,190	63,395	989,415	308,745,538
Population Change 2010-2017	2,155	2,895	40,447	12,258,869
Population Growth 2010-2017	7.6%	4.6%	4.1%	4.0%
Median Age 2010	40.3	40.9	39.8	37.2
Median Age 2017	40.8	41.1	39.8	37.8
Age Distribution				
Population under 18 years	18.3%	21.6%	22.0%	22.9%
Population 18 to 64 years	63.5%	61.7%	60.9%	62.2%
Population age 65 +	18.3%	16.6%	17.1%	14.9%
Sex				
Male	49.4%	49.6%	50.3%	49.2%
Female	50.6%	50.4%	49.7%	50.8%
Race				
White	93.2%	93.8%	89.0%	73.0%
Black or African American	0.6%	0.3%	0.4%	12.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native	2.1%	2.0%	6.5%	0.8%
Asian	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	5.4%
Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Some other race	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%	4.8%
Two or more races	2.8%	2.7%	2.8%	3.1%
Hispanic or Latino	3.8%	3.1%	3.6%	17.6%
Not Hispanic or Latino	96.2%	96.9%	96.4%	82.4%
Household Data				
Average Household Size	2.11	2.34	2.38	2.63
Average Family Size	2.75	2.9	2.97	3.24

Source: American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates (2013-2017)

these senior citizens maintain important societal bonds and to discourage discriminatory activities.

Table 2.04 also compares socioeconomic conditions in Helena with conditions elsewhere in Lewis and Clark County, the state, and the nation in 2017.

Education

As the national and state economies become more technically oriented, higher education levels are an advantage. Education levels for City residents and other residents of Lewis and Clark County are higher than state and national norms. According to Table 2.05, 95.1% of Helena

Table 2.05 – Demographic Data, Helena & Comparison Areas

	Helena	Lewis & Clark County	Montana	United States
Population	30,345	66,290	1,029,862	321,004,407
Education Level, 25 Years and Older				
Less than 9th grade	1.70%	1.40%	2.10%	5.40%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	3.10%	3.40%	5.00%	7.20%
High school graduate	20.70%	24.80%	29.30%	27.30%
Some college, no degree	21.50%	24.70%	24.20%	20.80%
Associate degree	8.50%	8.30%	8.80%	8.30%
Bachelor’s degree	27.20%	24.10%	20.60%	19.10%
Graduate or professional degree	17.20%	13.40%	10.10%	11.80%
High school graduate or higher	95.1%	95.2%	93.0%	87.3%
Bachelor's degree or higher	44.4%	37.5%	30.7%	30.9%
Median Household Income	\$53,892	\$60,789	\$50,801	\$57,652
Unemployment Rate	3.20%	3.20%	4.80%	6.60%
Population Below Poverty Line	15.60%	11.40%	14.40%	14.60%
Persons with Disability	13.70%	13.80%	13.60%	12.70%

Source: American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates (2013-2017)

residents have graduated from high school and 52.9% have attained a college level degree, making the City of Helena’s education levels among the highest in Montana.

According to a January 2018 report by the Independent Record news site in Helena, the graduation rates in Helena are generally consistent with statewide averages. While Montana has seen graduation rates at the state level between 82.2% and 86% over the past decade, Helena’s Capital High School reported a graduation rate of 87.2% in 2017 and Helena High School reported a rate of 84.5%. Helena graduation rates are comparable to other large high schools in Montana and the national graduation rate of 84.6%.

Income

Helena’s median household income is lower than that of Lewis and Clark County (see Table 2.05). The household income data group includes families as well as non-families (two or more unrelated persons living in the same dwelling unit). Non-family households tend to have lower incomes than family households. Helena city has a higher percentage of non-family households than does Lewis and Clark County.

The median household income level in Helena is lower than that the national median income, but Lewis and Clark County has a higher median income than the national number. Lower salaries within the city could present a disadvantage in maintaining residency of Helena’s citizens and/or attracting new residents to the Helena area.

Poverty

Approximately 15.6% of Helena residents had incomes below the poverty level in 2017, which is greater than the 11.4% of residents at the county level who are under the poverty line. As the regional population grows, its low-income population also is expected to grow.

Persons with Disabilities

In 2017, 13.7% of Helena and 13.8% of Lewis and Clark County populations had a disability. This disability rate was about equal to state and national figures.

Race & Ethnicity

Cultural and social diversity are essential elements of a healthy, pluralistic community. Table 2.04 shows that the Helena area has a fairly limited racial and ethnic diversity. Race and ethnic characteristics for Helena and non-City residents of Lewis and Clark County are similar. White persons are estimated to make up about 93.2% of the Helena population and 93.8% of the population at the county level. This means 6.8% of city and 6.3% of Lewis and Clark County populations are non-white or identify with two or more races. These numbers fall well below national levels, where non-white populations account for 27.0% of the entire population.

The American Indian and Alaska Native group is Helena's second largest racial group, representing 2.1% of Helena residents and 2.0% of residents of Lewis and Clark County. This group is estimated to compose the greatest share of Montana's non-white population, accounting for 6.5% of all Montana residents. The Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, other race, and two or more race groups composed just 4.5% of Montana's population.

Nationally, persons of Hispanic or Latino origin are the fastest growing ethnic group. In 2017, 17.6% of the national population was Hispanic or Latino, compared to 3.8% of Helena residents and 3.1% of residents of Lewis and Clark County areas.

Future Growth

The City of Helena's future growth rate can be affected by natural change (births and deaths), in-migration and out-migration, and annexation of developed properties.

Growth rates can be analyzed in different numerical formats, including percentage rates that may be computed annually, by decade and in 20-year increments. US census data provides this information for Helena, East Helena, Lewis and Clark County. Percentages can be useful for a small time-frame to show an annual change, or to gain a perspective on a longer time period and can help identify a logical projection for the estimated future rate of population growth.

In recent years, Helena has experienced a steady population increase. The city has grown at an average rate of just over 1% per year from 2010-2017. As indicated below, population forecasts predict continuing population growth in the Helena area.

Population projections are made for each county in Montana by the Montana Census and Economic Information Center.¹ Lewis and Clark County's population is projected to grow from 66,290 people in 2017 to 72,056 people in 2040 based on projections at the county level. While official projections are not made for the City of Helena itself, a population share projection can be used to project the population of Helena in 2040. Assuming that the ratio of city population to county population (45.8%) remains the same in 2040 as it was in 2017, the population of the City of Helena is projected to increase from 30,345 in 2017 to 32,989 by 2040.

External factors such as variations in the national and local economy, changes in federal and state environmental legislation, and local incentive programs can also influence population growth. After review of historic population growth and recent trends, this updated Growth Policy will plan for a projected population of 32,989 people residing in the City of Helena by 2040.

Economic Conditions

Helena enjoys a relatively strong economy even in times of national economic struggles.² Helena's unemployment rate has historically remained significantly below the unemployment rate at both the state and the national level, even during the recession of 2007-2009. In addition to a relatively low unemployment rate, Helena's economy benefits from high quality and diverse employment opportunities.

A prominent government employment sector and a steady service sector have been significant factors in this stability. The city's core attractions include the educational system, the airport, safe neighborhoods, cultural amenities, quality of life, open lands and recreational diversity. The City continues to work with local economic development agencies to promote economic growth, showcasing Helena's natural setting, access to outdoor recreation and quality-of-life advantages in attracting new industries.

Many commuters from the surrounding areas come into the city for employment, shopping, and various services. The strong relationship between the city and the surrounding community influences Helena's economic conditions and establishes a large trade area, including Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, and Broadwater Counties. All three counties are expected to continue to add population supported by the growth of the Helena economy.

¹ <https://ceic.mt.gov/Maps/Demographics/Population>

² As of March 2019, Helena's unemployment rate was 3.2% while the unemployment rate for the state was approximately 3.8%, and the nation, around 3.9%. Source: Montana Department of Labor & Industry

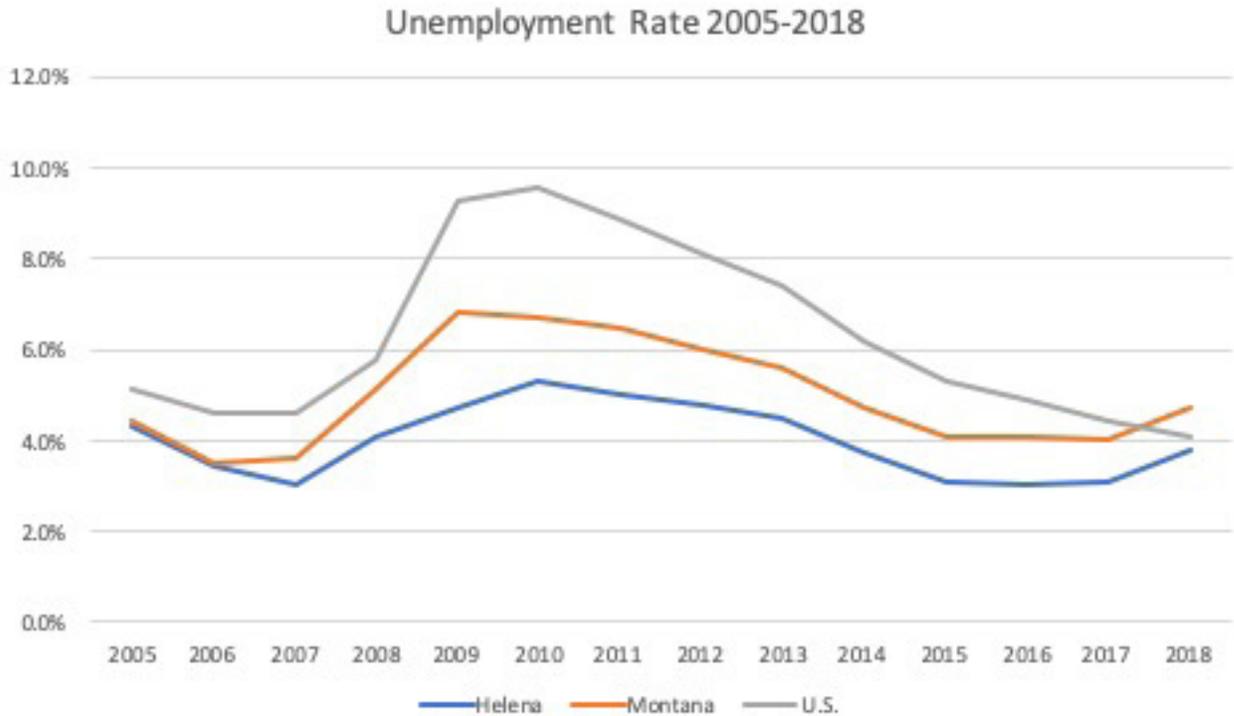


Figure 2.01 – Unemployment Rates in Helena, Montana and the U.S. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; U.S. Census 2000, 2010)

Employment

The employment rate of an area is one indicator of a community’s economic health. The annual average unemployment rates for 2005-2018 for the City of Helena, the State of Montana and the U.S., according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, are shown in Figure 2.01. Helena’s unemployment rate has been consistently less than both the state and national averages. One reason for the low unemployment rate is the type of employment available in Helena, specifically, the large number of government and service-sector jobs in the area.

Employment Projections

According to the Montana Department of Labor & Industry, Montana’s labor force is expected to grow at an average of 1.0% statewide, or 4,500 workers per year through 2026.³ This growth is 1,000 jobs less than average employment growth, leading to unemployment rates as low as 2% by 2026. Employment growth is expected in all five regions of Montana, with the fastest growth anticipated in Helena’s region (Southwest), at 1,873 jobs per year, or 1.2% annually.

³ “Montana Employment and Labor Force Projections, Job Growth from 2016 to 2026”; Montana Department of Labor & Industry.

Table 2.06 – Helena Area Employment

Industry	2000	2010	2017	Change 2000-2010	Change 2010-2017
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining	162	273	263	68.5%	-3.7%
Construction	692	756	823	9.2%	8.9%
Manufacturing	349	391	440	12.0%	12.5%
Wholesale trade	199	179	287	-10.1%	60.3%
Retail trade	1,346	1,595	1,248	18.5%	-21.8%
Transportation, warehousing and utilities	330	299	211	-9.4%	-29.4%
Information	583	248	326	-57.5%	31.5%
Finance and insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	902	1,029	1,306	14.1%	26.9%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste-management services	1,290	1,779	1,676	37.9%	-5.8%
Educational services, health care and social assistance	2,840	3,504	3,757	23.4%	7.2%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	1,282	1,720	1,645	34.2%	-4.4%
Other service except public administration	679	679	1,016	0.0%	49.6%
Public administration	2,637	2,443	2,882	-7.4%	18.0%
Total civilian employed population 16 years and over	13,291	14,895	15,880	12.1%	6.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates; U.S. Census 2000, U.S. Census 2010

Statewide, the healthcare industry is expected to add the most jobs over the next ten years. This industry is the largest industry in terms of employment and has shown steady job growth over the last couple of decades, both contributing factors to the steady and large expected growth. Average job growth since 2010 has been 1,300 jobs per year, which is expected to continue through 2026. Healthcare employment is expected to grow fastest in Helena’s region, and in the Northwest and South-Central regions of the state.

The professional, scientific, and technical services industry is the second fastest growing industry with a projected rate of 1.9%. This line of work typically consists of workers providing accounting, legal advice and representation, consulting services, research services, and other professional services. Workers in these fields typically require a significant amount of training and expertise. This sector has added significantly to Montana’s economy in recent years through added income, jobs, and GDP.

Montana’s accommodation and food services industry added a significant amount of jobs between 2011 and 2016, averaging just over 1,400 jobs. However, this pace is forecast to slow to roughly 500 per year statewide, or 0.9% annual growth through 2026. This slower growth is consistent with national projections.

The government sector is the area’s second largest employer, including state and local government (City of Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Helena School District). Despite this, growth rates in government are expected to remain relatively flat, with forecast rates ranging from 1.4% annual rates

Table 2.07 – 2017 Worker Class

Worker Class	Helena No.	Helena %	Montana %	U.S. %
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	15,880	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Private for-profit wage and salary workers	8,095	51.0%	63.6%	72.0%
Private not-for-profit wage and salary workers	2,236	14.1%	9.6%	8.1%
Local government workers	1,013	6.4%	7.3%	6.8%
State government workers	2,925	18.4%	6.5%	4.6%
Federal government workers	680	4.3%	3.8%	2.5%
Self-employed business workers and unpaid family workers	931	5.9%	9.2%	6.1%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017

for Local Government through 2026 to just 0.6% in State Government and -1.7% per year in Federal Government jobs. Fort Harrison, home to the Montana National Guard, Army and Navy Reserve units, the Veteran’s Administration (VA) Hospital, Montana Military Museum and Service Club, is also a factor, with more than 1,000 military and civilians employed there. Employment forecasts for manufacturing in Lewis and Clark County have been boosted by Boeing plans to boost employment by up to 200 jobs over the next few years.

Employment by Industry

Employment trends observed between 2000 and 2017 reveal a stark difference in industry growth before and after the 2010 Census, potentially due to the shake-up of the Great Recession. Regardless of growth, the largest employment industries in Helena have remained unchanged since 2000. These include the educational services, health care and social assistance industries, as well as jobs in the public administration category. Since 2010, Helena has experienced large job increases in Wholesale Trade Industry (60.3%) and Services (49.6%). Meanwhile, there have been significant losses in the retail trade industry (-21.8%) and the transportation and in warehousing, and utilities (-29.4%). See Table 2.06 for details regarding this topic.

Employment Sectors

Table 2.07 shows how the profile of the local economy in Helena differs from the economy of Montana and the U.S. as of 2017. Helena has a much higher percentage of state government workers because it is the capital of the state. Helena also has a higher percentage of federal government workers than both the state and the nation, but slightly fewer local government workers. Private non-profit jobs also account for a higher percentage of workers in Helena than they do at the state or national level. Private for-profit workers and self-employed workers account for a lower percentage of jobs than they do for Montana or the United States.



Figure 2.02 – Growth Policy objectives seek to diversify the local economy, building on government-sector jobs as an important foundation. (Image: SCJ Alliance, Inc.)

Business Climate

Helena has several positive features that provide a good business climate. The quality of the workforce is an asset that can attract employers to the area. Helena has a highly educated work force. Helena also has a variety of training programs through the school system and other organizations, such as the Helena Workforce Innovation Networks (WINS) program, partnerships with Helena College, Carroll College, and the Laborers AGC Apprenticeship Program that help provide a skilled workforce.⁴

Quality of life can be a deciding factor when companies are looking to expand or locate a new business. The Helena area is the center of an expanding trade area and has abundant amenities that can attract business. As other chapters in the Growth Policy describe in detail, Helena and the surrounding area have many cultural and historic assets, recreational opportunities, good public and private schools, a low crime rate, a clean environment, abundant natural resources, high civic involvement, and a variety of entertainment venues. The rate of home ownership and the quality of housing stock are good, and the area

has a stable financial base. The Helena area has experienced steady population growth over the last several years, and this growth is expected to continue fueling economic expansion.

For businesses to thrive, adequate infrastructure and space must be available. Helena has sufficient water and sewer systems, access to multiple transportation networks (roads, interstate, airport, and trains), access to fiber optic networks, cell phone coverage, and other infrastructure that can accommodate new and existing businesses.

⁴ Helena WINS is a program led by the Helena Area Chamber of Commerce designed to attract, develop and retain local workforce talent. The program has nearly 80 local partner organizations, including the City of Helena.

Table 2.08 – Top 10 Employers in Lewis and Clark County, 2016

Employer	No. FTE*
State of Montana (Lewis and Clark County)	6,000
Local Government (City, County, School District #1)	1,700
Federal Government (Lewis and Clark County)	1,650
St. Peter’s Hospital	1,700
Blue Cross Blue Shield	550
WalMart	435
VA Hospital	425
Montana State Fund	400
Albertsons / Safeway (3)	340
Carroll College	225

**FTE = Full-time employees Source: Helena Area Chamber of Commerce Trends Report, 2016*

Although vacant land within the city had been limited in the past, annexations have provided more opportunities to develop larger projects with City infrastructure and services. Development within the city allows more efficient expansion that can be an asset to both the city and the business community. As identified in the objectives framework, working in cooperation with abutting communities and Lewis and Clark County to develop joint standards could facilitate high-quality growth.

Helena is home to several groups and civic organizations that promote business interests in the area. The Helena Area Chamber of Commerce, Montana Business Area Connection, the Business Improvement District, Carroll College, Helena College, unions, and several service groups and non-profit organizations support both business and employees. This network can be an asset in good economic times and a necessity when there is a downturn in the economy. The City works with these organizations to provide funding for economic development, technical assistance, job creation, expansion of existing and attracting new industries. This cooperation and support should be continued.

The Fort Harrison Military Installation, located about one mile west of the City limits, is another local asset. Sized at approximately 6,700 acres, the fort is a major training center for the Army National Guard. The fort contains a wide variety of live-fire ranges and a 220-acre campus complex for offices, classrooms, barracks, dining and maintenance facilities, storage, and fire stations. In addition to the campus complex and training facilities, Fort Harrison hosts the Veteran’s Administration hospital, cemetery, and a variety of administrative and maintenance facilities. Proponents hope for additional development in the area, but use types should be given special consideration, avoiding land uses that might compromise the utility and effectiveness of the installation.

Table 2.08 identifies the top ten employers in the Helena area. The results support the conclusion that the economic base for the area is rooted in government and the service sector, particularly medical services.

Future Trends

Helena's government and service sectors have played a significant role in keeping employment numbers positive and the local economy stable. The city's educational system, airport, housing supply, cultural amenities, natural setting, recreational diversity and a host of other factors provide ample attractions that support economic growth.

Although Helena has a solid business climate, the area's reliance on government and service-sector jobs is a concern. Recent trends suggest that, while the government sector will continue to play a substantial role, it will not grow proportionately to other sectors of the economy. Looking forward, key growth areas include:

- 1) Non-wage income (pensions and passive earnings), which is expected to swell with the current inter-generational transfer of wealth and the coming retirement boom;
- 2) Services, including both professional and consumer service-oriented activities;
- 3) Heavy industry, including manufacturing and distribution.

Building a more diverse, stable economy suggests that Helena add to its service-sector strengths with more industrial-sector jobs, increasing employment options and providing an even more stable economic base for the city. The addition and 2017 expansion of a Boeing precision fabrication plant in Helena is an excellent example.

Helena incomes have not always increased with inflation and living expenses. Anecdotal information indicates some employers have had difficulty attracting new employees from outside the area because salaries have not kept up with housing prices. For this reason, it is important to attract employers that provide jobs that pay salaries and benefits sufficient to support families and contribute to the economy of the community.

Objectives Summary

This Growth Policy aims to optimize growth and change by focusing growth patterns within the city, helping coordinate and direct growth where services are already available, and providing increased housing diversity to help address affordability and provide residents both young and old the option to lead a more social, less car-dependent lifestyle.

As the city expands, development patterns that help preserve more of the area's open-space and recreational features should be prioritized. Toward this end, this plan's objectives describe land use patterns that generally

curb outward growth in favor of several mixed-use, higher-density areas within existing City limits. These “neighborhood centers” – located where infrastructure is already in place – have the potential to serve neighborhood needs more effectively and provide the opportunity for business to thrive.

The framework also encourages the City to work with the County and other agencies to develop regulations that accommodate new development while mitigating environmental impacts, leveraging short and long-term efficiencies, and conserving more of what makes Helena special. “Green” building and renewable energy investments are another key area for Helena’s consideration, with strong potential to provide jobs, reduce energy costs, and strengthen the community’s sustainability.⁵

Other approaches supported by this plan suggest economic “clustering”, which encourages grouped location of allied business types, helping improve efficiencies and creating localized business dynamics. For example, objectives in this plan support ongoing work with the Helena Regional Airport Authority to facilitate growth in aviation, aeronautical, and light manufacturing businesses related to aviation within the area encompassed by the Airport Master Plan.

Businesses focus on a number of factors when evaluating a location, including energy and transportation costs, available technology, market conditions, and the local labor force. Communities benefit when land use and zoning patterns provide businesses with ample locations situated near infrastructure and basic resources. In this way, many of this plan’s non-economic objectives – such as those related to utilities and transportation – may also support economic growth.

For Helena, supporting economic vitality and sustaining the area’s many attractions are closely related. This Growth Policy urges the City to continue its work to preserve and enhance what’s already attractive about Helena, including forging partnerships wherever necessary, to keep life here special and grow a strong, robust regional economy.

⁵ The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines green building as “The practice of maximizing the efficiency with which buildings and their sites use resources — energy, water, and materials — while minimizing building impacts on human health and the environment, throughout the complete building life cycle — from siting, design, and construction to operation, renovation, and reuse.”

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■ Population & Economy Goals & Objectives

Goals

[G.01] Promote and sustain Helena’s economic vitality, supporting existing businesses and attracting a diverse range of economic sectors that provide employment opportunities.

Discussion: In seeking long-term prosperity, Helena residents understand the need to build economic diversity – capitalizing on access to neighboring areas as well as developing a strong business base within City limits. This plan supports strategies that build and sustain a diverse, balanced economic base, retain existing quality of life assets, and help keep Helena prosperous.

[G.02] Support provision of housing that is safe, available, accessible, and affordable for all Helena residents.

Discussion: Helena’s ongoing success depends on the ability of residents to afford safe, comfortable and convenient housing. This goal provides the foundation for a wide range of objectives supporting housing provision, guiding decisions regarding housing diversity, land use patterns, facilities provision, transportation, funding mechanisms and supporting services.

[G.04] Provide and support Helena’s parks and recreational opportunities on-pace with growth.

Discussion: Helena residents cherish current open space access, and parks and recreational services, and wish to retain the same or higher levels of service as the community grows. This goal directs the City to consider open space, parks and recreational needs in all related plans and actions, including land use decisions, regulatory requirements and budgeting.

[G.05] Establish and maintain a strong multi-modal transportation system for Helena, providing opportunity for all to travel safely and efficiently, on-pace and in concert with demand and overall Growth Policy objectives.

Discussion: All cities require functional, resilient transportation networks providing for the flow of people and materials. In assisting with this Growth Policy, residents urged improvements to the existing fabric and criteria that provide a full-featured street network for Helena, improving the efficiency, function and value of the City. Residents also recognize the importance of coordinating design of facilities with surrounding land uses, using transportation systems to complement existing patterns.

[G.07] Provide an adequate and stable supply of safe and economical water to all users in the Helena community, while protecting the quality of both ground- and surface-water in the Helena area watershed.

Discussion: City livability, health and value are fully dependent on clean, safe and sustainable water supplies. This goal underscores Helena’s commitment to maintaining both supply and quality of ground and surface water, recognizing them as essential to the community’s survival.

[G.08] Sustain and expand Helena’s arts, cultural and civic environment, including visual and performing arts, historical assets, library and educational facilities, and recreational opportunities.

Discussion: Residents of Helena value and support the arts, cultural and social organizations, events and facilities. This goal and supporting objectives direct the City to encourage and expand community arts programming, historic and cultural resources – benefitting the civic health, quality of life, and economic vitality of Helena.

[G.09] Sustain the historic downtown as the “heart” of Helena, bringing the community together and enhancing its commercial, service and civic vitality.

Discussion: In preparing this plan, residents made it clear that the historic city center should still be considered the ‘heart’ of Helena. Maintaining a vibrant city center will require supporting its numerous and necessary functions, including a strong commercial base, community services, public space availability and access, parking and diverse housing options. This plan provides objectives and actions that help foster an environment in which the downtown can thrive, in turn aiding the attractiveness, efficiency and value of the entire community.

[G.10] Plan for and establish types and quantities of land uses in Helena supporting community needs, neighborhood centers, aesthetics and the City’s long-term sustainability.

Discussion: Cities exercise considerable influence over land use, in turn influencing the type and character of development, patterns of growth, and the short and long-term financial impact of growth on the local economy. Consequently, this plan supports the allocation of land use types, supporting features and facilities sufficient to achieve overall plan objectives.

[G.11] Coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions and agencies, including East Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Jefferson County, and Broadwater County on issues that have regional impacts.

Discussion: In the past, Helena was a more centralized, independent place. Today, the City's fortunes and that of its residents depends on a set of dynamic, inter-dependent relationships between East Helena, Lewis and Clark, Jefferson and Broadwater Counties, and other agencies and forces that shape the region. Over the course of this plan's life cycle, it is expected that inter-agency collaboration will become even more important. Accordingly, this plan's goal and objectives framework supports actions building the economic health and resilience of the region as a whole, especially as it relates strategically to the unique qualities Helena residents enjoy.

Objectives

- [O.01] Create and sustain a diverse local economic base by:
- Helping retain, promote and expand existing businesses and industry;
 - Supporting innovative, entrepreneurial enterprises;
 - Creating 'business campus' and mixed-use models;
 - Developing mechanisms that promote provision of workforce housing;
 - Attracting new businesses and clean industry.
- [O.02] Support the maintenance and growth of local businesses, providing infrastructure and developing resources and educational programs.
- [O.03] Support efforts to encourage the creation and expansion of small businesses in Helena.
- [O.04] Encourage partnerships between public and private business sectors in the Helena area, promoting a healthy business community.
- [O.05] Create and maintain incentive programs and other financial resources promoting job development, including expansion of existing industries and attraction of new ones.
- [O.06] Encourage the creation of "living wage" jobs that pay salaries and benefits sufficient to support families and contribute to the local economy, including providing active assistance to businesses and individuals, where appropriate.
- [O.07] Work closely with the Helena Regional Airport Authority to facilitate growth in aviation, aeronautical and light manufacturing businesses related to aviation, in concert with the Airport Master Plan.
- [O.08] Continue support for the Montana Business Assistance Connection's efforts to attract new and grow existing businesses within the Helena metropolitan area.

- [O.09] Work cooperatively with other jurisdictions on issues that impact Helena’s economy.
- [O.10] Work to retain existing business and commercial enterprises in Helena’s downtown.
- [O.11] Seek and support opportunities to leverage Helena’s rich open space and natural areas setting in promoting tourism and economic growth.
- [O.12] Promote and maintain development of a diverse housing stock, helping to:
- Minimize depletion of natural resources;
 - Reduce land consumption and demands on the physical environment;
 - Provide housing options for all residents;
 - Optimize infrastructure use;
 - Prepare Helena to meet emerging needs.
- [O.31] Provide and maintain a full range of quality park facilities, open spaces and recreational opportunities for citizens of all abilities and age groups.
- [O.69] Work to preserve or mitigate potential loss of historic, cultural or aesthetically-significant features, boosting overall economic vitality, tourism and local quality of life, including:
- Landscapes and open space areas;
 - Skylines, sightlines and viewsheds on the City’s south border;
 - Buildings, districts or objects of historic significance.
- [O.71] Work to maintain Helena’s downtown as the city’s ‘heart’ and key focal point, combining commercial, civic, cultural, residential, and recreational uses.
- [O.72] Promote the economic and social vitality of historic districts.
- [O.76] Support land use patterns that:
- Promote compatible, well-designed development;
 - Foster the long-term fiscal health of the community;
 - Maintain and enhance resident quality of life;
 - Implement related master plans and/or facility plans.
- [O.86] Promote the redevelopment of vacant or under-utilized properties with a mix of uses, supporting local and citywide objectives.
- [O.97] Continue to improve permitting for new development, supporting the public interest and long-term community objectives.
- [O.99] Promote the concentration of specialized industries within the city where specialized infrastructure, information, and labor advantages may promote economic development and desirable growth.