

Railroad District Spatial Vision

Helena's Railroad District is one of the town's oldest communities, centered around the historic train depot. It has evolved over time to create several interrelated but unique areas, described here in terms of what each may promise in the years ahead. This vision sets out aspirations expressed by community members during this process' early stages and will be refined as community conversations continue.

Corridor District

Montana Avenue and Lyndale Street are the axes for the corridor district. Much of it also serves as US Highway 12, linking the Railroad District to the east-west highway route. This corridor transforms to address "malfunction junction" with a roundabout and the rail crossing with an underpass, setting the stage for new types of mixed office, retail, and residential development. The corridor is still predominantly auto and freight oriented, but it is becoming more welcoming to pedestrians and cyclists as improvements are made.

Recreation District

Helena's Centennial Trail runs east-west, generally paralleling Lyndale Avenue and connecting Helena's western neighborhoods to East Helena. A key portion of the trail runs through the Railroad District, linking Memorial Park and Carroll College to the Depot District and Shops District. The Recreation District lies west of Montana Avenue along the Centennial Trail, accessing Kindrick Field and connecting it to various businesses and spaces compatible with leisure activities.

Trolley District

Helena Avenue was a streetcar corridor, linking the rail depot to Helena's civic center. While the street is nearly as busy as Lyndale, its character is more modest. The middle school, residential buildings, churches, and small-scale shops and offices line the street's edges, creating a visual envelope accentuating the views of Mt Helena to the west and the rail depot to the east.

Depot District

A commercial district grew up at the depot, with restaurants, bars, hotels, merchants, and warehouses. The bones of this commercial district remain, with the historic depot at its focus. More contemporary uses fill in the historic storefronts, along with new apartments on the upper floors, making the Depot District vibrant and still a bit quirky. It remembers its railroad roots, while offering a mix of social, cultural, commercial, and artistic activities unique to this part of town.

6th Ward North

The northern neighborhood retains its rail worker housing scale and character, with small bungalows and "shotgun" houses serving households of all sizes and economic conditions. Folks who live here appreciate the neighborhood's edgy vibe, compact form, walkable streets, and easy access to Cedar Street's commercial corridor to the north and the Depot District to the south.

Railyard

The district's railyard is its historic center of activity, moving trains east and west and employing scores of workers. Trains stop here for many reasons, one of which is to bring on "helper" engines to add power to climb the grades on either side of town. The yard continues to be an active place, noisy, busy, and in motion. It's not particularly clean, either, with the grit and dust expected with this type of activity. It's a place where people come to work, and it is visually prominent in Helena's landscape, both as people cross the tracks at Montana Ave and Roberts Ave and travel on I-15 to the east.

Shops District

South of the railyard and east of the Depot District lies the Shops District. This area mixes small-scale warehousing, trades shops, artists studios, and bungalows, with space available for live-work structures, small apartments, and cottages. This is a creative space, with a wide and surprising mix of activities, enjoying its proximity to all of what the Railroad District has to offer.

6th Ward South

The southern portion of the planning area is emerging as a center for education and recreation. There are houses here, too, enjoying proximity to the schools, parks, and college and to the commercial districts and Capitol complex further south.