

# DOWNTOWN HELENA MASTER PLAN

## Appendix A: Existing Conditions Report

historic  
home community  
art live history  
play helena  
place potential  
work fun commercial  
core family  
heart  
downtown

March 31 2016



# DOWNTOWN HELENA MASTER PLAN

## Existing Conditions Report

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# Introduction

This report summarizes the existing conditions pertaining to the Master Plan, including historical context, physical conditions and regulatory environment, and identifies issues and opportunities to be addressed in the Master Plan.

## Downtown History

In 1864, four prospectors from Georgia, on a final hunt before heading home, discovered gold in Prickly Pear Canyon. The claim was staked and named “Last Chance Gulch,” thus marking the beginning of Helena’s Downtown core at what is now the city’s main street. With the boom brought on by the 1864 gold strike, Helena became the “Queen City of the Rockies.”

Situated on Last Chance Gulch at the base of Mount Helena, Downtown quickly grew from a tent camp to a thriving business, retail, fine dining, arts and entertainment district. By 1888, an estimated 50 millionaires made Helena their home. Last Chance Gulch produced an estimated \$3.6 billion (in today’s dollars) in gold over a 20-year period. The Spokane Bar Mine is one of half a dozen digging sites, and numerous old mines and settlements exist nearby.

In 1875, the territorial capital was moved from Virginia City to Helena. When Montana became a state in 1889, the fight for the location of the state capital pitted ‘Copper King’ Marcus Daly, who supported Anaconda, against rival William A. Clark, who supported Helena. Helena won, and in October 1898, ground was broken for the State Capitol Building.

Helena’s glorious past can be seen in the spectacular 19th-century mansions, historic Last Chance Gulch businesses, in restored pioneer dwellings in Downtown Helena, and in the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The St. Helena Cathedral, overlooking Downtown, exemplifies Helena’s architectural prosperity, as it is modeled after the cathedral in Cologne, Germany, and is a replica of the Votive Church in Vienna.



**Historic Main Street**

Source: [www.helena.mt.com](http://www.helena.mt.com)  
Walking Tour: Historic Last Chance Gulch



**Walking Mall - 1978**

Source: [www.helenahistory.org](http://www.helenahistory.org)

Central School, built in 1915 and expanded in 1921, overlooks Downtown as well. The Original Governor's Mansion, constructed in 1888, is four blocks from Last Chance Gulch and contains 20 rooms all restored to turn-of-the-century elegance and furnished with antiques.

In 1964, 100 years later, a group of Downtown merchants gathered to create Downtown Helena Incorporated (DHI) which encouraged Downtown businesses to attract visitors, shoppers, and customers to the over 500 Downtown businesses. The upheaval of the 60s and 70s led to a nationwide movement called urban renewal, where communities worked to eliminate the old and create the new. In Helena, urban renewal contributed to the shaping of what Downtown Helena is today with the demolition of several historic structures and the creation of the State's only walking mall. Encompassing two blocks with a mix of architectural styles and unique businesses, the Walking Mall provides a pedestrian friendly park-like setting for Downtown visitors and businesses to enjoy.



**Walking Mall - 2015**



Downtown property owners and merchants created the Helena Downtown Business Improvement District in the late 1980s as a way to work together for the betterment of Downtown. The organization was a state filed nonprofit. By 1993, as urban renewal was closing, Downtown property owners approached the City to tax themselves, creating a pool of funds to help with revitalization efforts. The Helena Business Improvement District (BID) was created to enhance the physical environment of the greater Downtown area in an effort to improve the value of properties within the area. The BID has worked to maintain a thriving Downtown and works closely with Downtown Helena Inc. to market and promote Downtown Helena. BID is a quasi-governmental agency created by State statute through resolution of the City of Helena. After its initial creation, the BID has been renewed in 2000 and 2010, and is up for renewal in 2020.

The 1990s also marked the redevelopment of the rail yard just north of the historic core of Downtown. The Great Northern Town Center sits on the former site of the depot for the Great Northern Railroad. Infrastructure construction began in 1998 and today houses the nation's 10th Best Western Premier Hotel, an interactive museum of science and culture (ExplorationWorks), unique boutiques, galleries, salons, restaurants and some of the Northwest's top accounting, financial planning and engineering firms. The centerpiece of the Great Northern Town Center is the carousel. Completely hand-built, the carousel is one of the world's most stunning, with vibrant, hand-carved animals and adornments. Judged by the National Carousel Association as the finest new carousel in the United States, the Great Northern Town Center's carousel features animals that call Montana home: bison, big horn sheep, antelope, otters, bobcats, grizzly bears, cutthroat trout and more.

Anchored by the Great Northern Town Center, the surrounding area continued to develop with the new Federal Building and Federal Courthouse, another commercial building, and the Gold LEED certified Montana State Fund building.



**Great Northern Town Center - 2015**



# Land Use

The section provides an overview of existing regulatory policies, land uses, historic resources, and parking.

## Regulatory Policy

### **2011 City of Helena Growth Policy**

The strength of the City of Helena Growth Policy, at the time of its adoption, lies in its comprehensive and thorough description of Helena and surrounding areas. The document provides an excellent baseline of existing conditions and trends for the community. Within the document are goals, objectives and implementation strategies that apply generally throughout the city. However, by design, the Growth Policy does not establish vision, goals, objectives or implementation plans for the future development of specific neighborhoods or areas. Through a community driven planning process, this Master Plan creates a vision for Downtown Helena, with goals and objectives specifically created to achieve that vision. The Downtown Helena Master Plan will be adopted as an amendment to the Growth Policy, adding specificity for the Downtown area that the Growth Policy lacks. City Commissioners established this relationship when they adopted the Growth Policy.

*While the Growth Policy provides a ‘30,000-foot aerial view’ of the city, master plans and neighborhood plans dive into the details of specific areas.*

Under Montana law, the recommendations of the Plan must be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Growth Policy. The Downtown Master Plan is consistent with the Growth Policy in these two principal ways:

- The Growth Policy designates future land use areas throughout the City’s planning area. The future land use areas express the City’s vision for how those areas should develop. The Planning Area for the Downtown Master Plan is within Mixed Use Area I, the description of which is found below. In many ways the Downtown Master Plan seeks to execute this description.

*Mixed Use Area I: Downtown/Carroll College. This area is the cultural center of the City, which includes a mixture of the historic Downtown with more recent development and redevelopment. Uses are predominantly commercial/office and educational (Carroll College) with some residential uses. It is desirable to encourage continuation of mixed use of this area; promote more residential uses particularly in and adjacent to the Great Northern Town Center; and promote more intense and higher density uses closer to Last Chance Gulch and Lyndale Avenue. Mixed use of services and low intensity commercial could be expanded into adjacent areas, including areas between Benton and Davis Street, while preserving the historic character of the district. Better connectivity with all areas should be encouraged.*

- The implementation measures in the Growth Policy call for area plans to be drafted in order to bring vision, goals and objectives to specific areas of the City. As an amendment to the Growth Policy, the Downtown Master Plan is in accordance with this implementation measure.

## **Zoning**

Zoning is one of the most influential tools for shaping development patterns and the built environment within a downtown. Zoning is an implementation mechanism of a planning process used to work towards a plan's vision, meet its objectives, and execute policy. The Downtown Master Plan establishes a vision for Downtown Helena, and the details of the City of Helena Zoning Code will either facilitate a development pattern that works towards meeting this vision, or will work against it.

The City of Helena's Zoning Code is Euclidean, based on the establishment of districts to separate incompatible uses. Euclidean Zoning also traditionally establishes bulk and dimensional requirements and design standards. In a Euclidean Zoning code, the jurisdiction is divided into districts where each district has a separate purpose. The Downtown study area has four primary zoning districts: PLI, R-O, B-3 and B-2.

*The PLI (public lands and institutions) district provides for and applies only to public and quasi-public institutional uses and lands, and recreational, educational, and public service activities for the general benefit of the citizens of the city.*

*The R-4/R-O (residential-office) districts provide for a compatible mix of higher density residential development with professional and business offices and associated service uses.*

*The B-2 (general commercial) district provides for compatible residential uses and a broad range of commercial and service uses that serve large areas of the city and that are normally required to sustain a community.*

*The B-3 (central business) district is the central focus of the city's business, government, service, and cultural activities, and allows compatible residential development.*

## **Building Codes**

Helena has adopted the 2012 International Building Code (IBC) following the State of Montana's adoption. The code defines building construction requirements based on size, number of stories, proximity to property lines and many other parameters. Helena's Downtown consists of two, three and four story buildings typically, with a few older historic structures that go as high as six stories. As a general rule, two and three story buildings can be built of wood construction. When a building reaches four stories or higher, construction must be of steel or concrete which is more expensive to construct. Through the use of fire separations (both floor separations and wall separations) and





**HELENA**  
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

**WGM**  
GROUP

automatic sprinkler systems, certain exceptions to height and size limits can be utilized to aid in making construction more flexible. One example being used is building wood framed residential units above concrete parking levels below.

### **Seismic Activity**

Helena, and Montana in general, is historically seismically active. Major earthquakes have occurred in Helena in the past and tremors occur on a daily basis. The USGS and FEMA have created maps that designate the level of potential seismic activity. The IBC defines the criteria that is used in the design of buildings in Helena's Downtown and it varies based on the type of use. New construction must comply with the design criteria. Any major remodel or change of use to an existing building is affected by modern building code requirements as well. The IBC also publishes an Existing Building Code which should be explored when any existing building undergoes a change of use or major remodel. The EBC does have some flexibility that can aid in reducing costs.

### **Issues & Opportunities**

Does the City of Helena Zoning Code work towards meeting the vision of this plan? Some aspects do, and some do not. Most importantly, the zoning code does not have elements that proactively facilitate the type of development that will be most effective at working towards the vision of Downtown Helena.

Many Euclidean zoning ordinances make the traditional downtown development pattern non-conforming by requiring setbacks between buildings and the street, and by prohibiting a mixture of uses. Helena has avoided many of these issues. The City of Helena Zoning Code does not require minimum lot sizes or setbacks in the Downtown zoning districts, and has liberalized the separation of uses in the B-2 and B-3 zones, allowing a mix of uses that a Downtown typically needs. These actions taken by the City do not prevent development that meet the Plan's vision, yet there are aspects of the zoning that are somewhat prohibitive, as detailed below.

### ***Zoning Designations***

The first issue isn't related to the text of the zoning code, but the application of the zoning districts. The zoning map, which defines the boundaries of each district in Downtown, is essentially a codification of the existing development pattern. This Downtown Master Plan is a plan for the future, and the zoning map should be updated to anticipate and guide that future. For example, much of the Downtown is zoned PLI, which for a downtown area is rather restrictive. Some of these areas are primed for redevelopment, which would require a zone change. Zone changes aren't impossible, but they are unpredictable, take time, and cost money. Zoning for the future, which would eliminate the need for individual zone changes, is a small step the City can take towards facilitating development, and if done according to the Master Plan, will help work towards the plan's vision.

### ***Off-Street Parking***

The current structure of the off-street parking requirements in the zoning code is a barrier towards achieving the vision of Downtown Helena. The City of Helena's zoning code requires landowners completing a project in the Downtown zoning districts to include off-street parking. Off-street parking in Downtown is especially costly, and these costs can act as a significant barrier to both new development and re-development. For small development projects, this means relying heavily on surface parking on the lot, as we have seen on the 800 and 900 blocks of Last Chance Gulch. For larger development projects, such as the Glacier Town Center, it means relying on public funding through mechanisms like TIF districts to provide parking.

In Downtown, the off-street parking requirements for businesses can be met when a building/use is within 700' of a parking garage or surface parking lot. Required ADA spaces may also be located off-site if there is an accessible route to the business from the parking. Providing adequate ADA accessible parking is a challenge for the local government as well as local businesses due to existing conditions and topography.

Parking is essential to a downtown, yet where the parking is located and how it is designed are critical considerations to beneficial urban design. Helena's off-street parking requirements do not consider the location of parking on a property relative to the building and streets. Designated off-street parking areas can be located along the street, a development pattern that is not conducive to the vision in the Downtown Master Plan.

A common issue with parking requirements is tying the number of spaces to the square footage of a building. This is a generic approach which results in the overbuilding of parking spaces for certain land uses. The methodology in the zoning code does not take into account the different modes of transportation available in Downtown, and the mix of uses. For a simplified example, a person might drive Downtown for one purpose (perhaps their job), and then walk to other activities (perhaps go out to dinner), but the current code would essentially require two spaces for that one person, even though they only need one. Essentially, the zoning code is requiring property owners in Downtown to build more parking than there is demand.

### ***Design***

The City of Helena's zoning code is passive. It doesn't entirely prevent the type of development the Plan envisions, but it doesn't facilitate it either. The City of Helena Zoning code should be proactive to encourage or incentivize the type of development that will lead toward meeting the vision of this Plan. Specific standards can be put into place that are flexible, simplify the development review process, and facilitate appropriate development.

The largest gap is the lack of focus on the design of Downtown. The form of buildings, how they relate to the street, the sidewalk, neighboring buildings and uses, is incredibly important to a successful downtown. The historic character of Downtown is one of its greatest attributes, and one that makes Downtown Helena unique. Focusing on the design of a building can ensure new development blends with the old. The design of buildings influences the amount of pedestrian traffic, which is important for businesses. The design of a building can also be just as or more important to mitigating impacts on adjacent properties than regulating the uses inside.



## Existing Land Use

Existing land use closely follows the existing zoning. Buildings typically consists of two, three and four stories, with a few older historic structures that go as high as six or seven stories. The total estimated Downtown gross leasable area is 3.3 million square feet. Major landowners include the City of Helena, State of Montana, Helena Housing Authority, and the Helena School District.

### Recent Construction

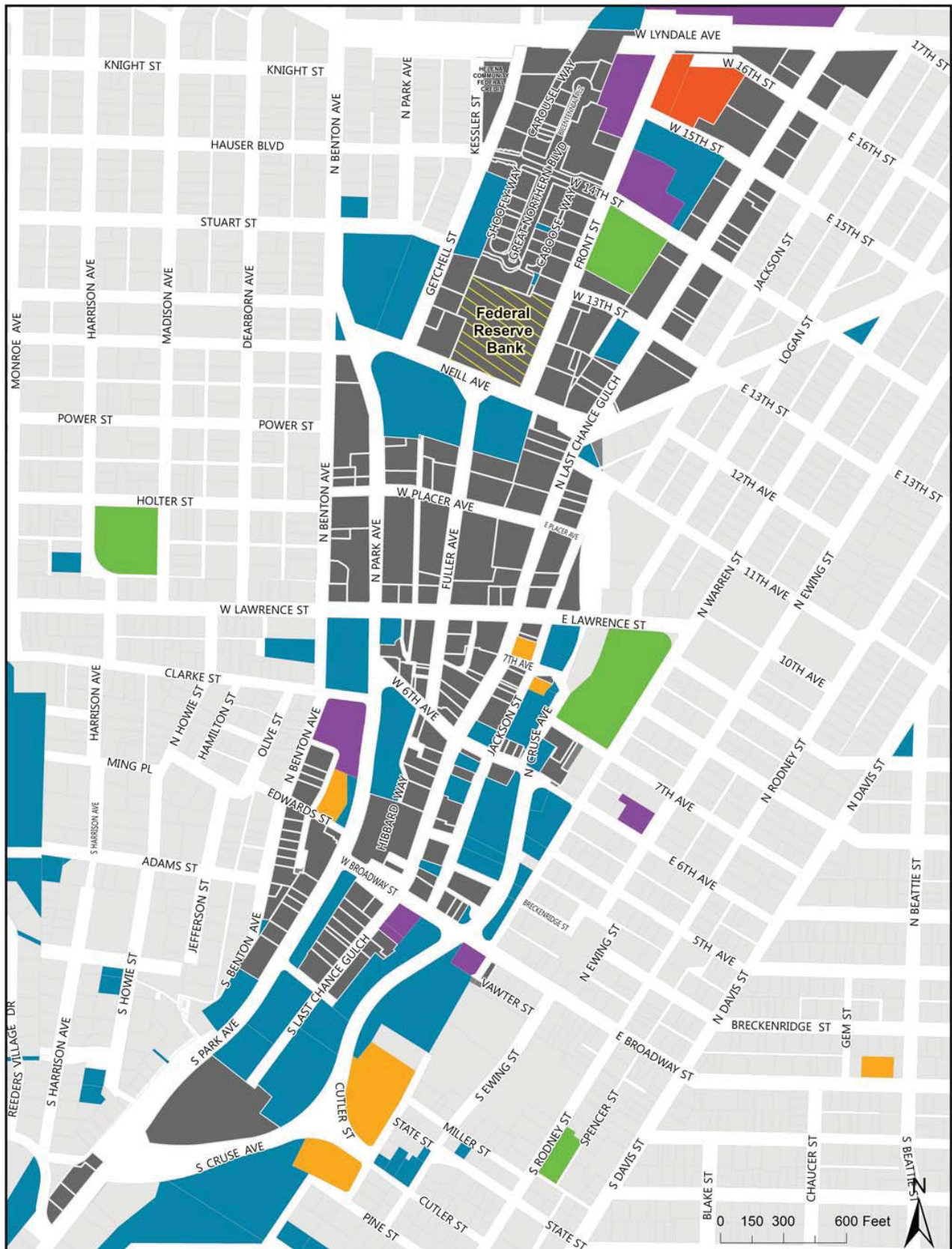
Recent construction has primarily focused on land around the Great Northern Town Center, but also includes renovation projects like the historic Placer Hotel, which was remodeled as residential condominiums.



**Montana State Fund**



**Paul G. Hatfield Courthouse**



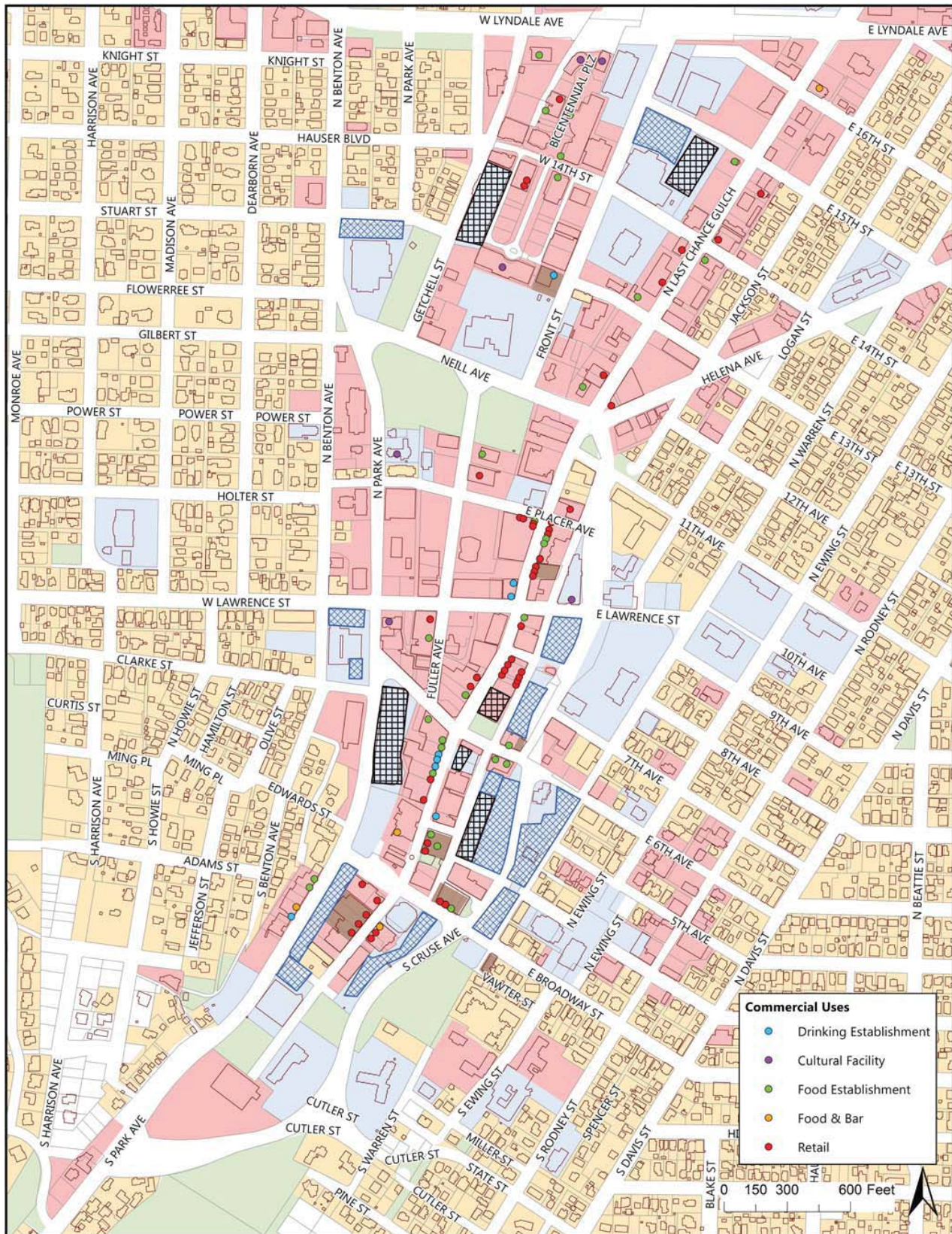
## LANDOWNERS

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<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:blue; border:1px solid black;"></span> City of Helena	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> Helena Housing Authority
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:purple; border:1px solid black;"></span> State of Montana	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:green; border:1px solid black;"></span> School District

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 REVIEWED: KD  
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## EXISTING LAND USE

- |                            |                               |                           |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Public Parking Garage      | Commercial/Industrial         | Urban Density Residential |
| Public Surface Parking Lot | Public/Government             | Parcels                   |
| Building Footprints        | Recreational/Open Space/Parks |                           |
| Mixed Use                  |                               |                           |

PROJECT: 150326  
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BY: MG/smo  
 REVIEWED: JMK  
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## **Redevelopment Opportunities**

Redevelopment opportunities abound in Downtown. Underutilized properties – defined as properties where the land value exceeds the value of improvements – make up over 31% of the Plan Area.

According to Montana cadastral data, 188 properties comprising approximately 80 acres in the Plan Area have building values exceeding the land value, while 85 parcels comprising approximately 33 acres have land values that exceed the value of buildings or other improvements. A number of these properties are city-owned surface parking lots that could be converted to new Downtown buildings with structured parking.

Other redevelopment opportunities include:

- School District property on 14th and Front Street
- City-owned property on 13th and Last Chance Gulch
- Budget Inn property on the 500 block of Last Chance Gulch
- Blue Cross Blue Shield property on Park Avenue
- US Bank drive thru/parking structure on the 300 block of Last Chance Gulch
- City-owned property on 6th and Last Chance Gulch (Constitution Park\*)
- City-owned parking structure on the walking mall
- Holiday Inn parking lot at Park and Broadway
- Cruse Ave right-of-way between Cutler at Park Avenue

\* Information provided by the City Parks Department indicated that Constitution Park was constructed as a transitional use. Meeting notes from a 1987 Commission meeting state that “the Committee understands that whatever they do would not be considered permanent, that if someone comes forward with a legitimate building, the Commission would rather add to the tax rolls precluding the use”. The notes also document that the word “transitional” should be associated with the park, showing the intent was not to keep the parcel as a park forever.



## **Redevelopment Opportunities**



## LAND UTILIZATION

- 188 Utilized Properties
- 85 Underutilized Properties

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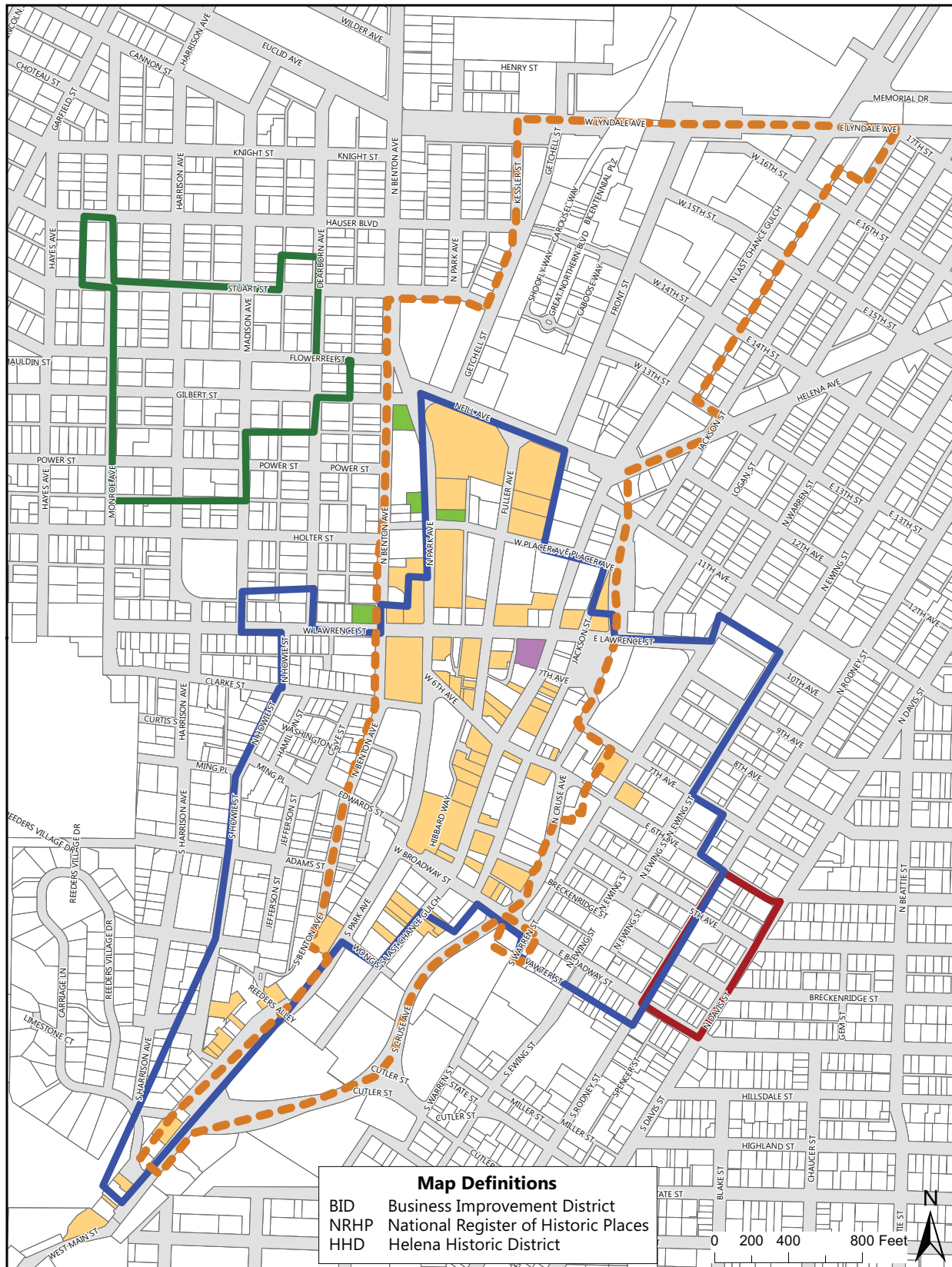


## Historic Resources

Helena's BID encompasses the heart of the Helena Historic District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The majority of the BID is a part of the Historic District—at its core, the BID is essentially an historic Downtown commercial neighborhood. It is, moreover, a neighborhood that is integral to the history not just of the local area but of the State of Montana and beyond. Most of the properties in the BID's core are listed in the NRHP as components of the Helena Historic District. Several additional properties in and adjacent to the BID are individually listed in the NRHP. Finally, there is one property within the BID that has been recently evaluated and determined eligible for listing in the NRHP. Existing conditions are shown on the adjacent map, which contains the best available information about existing NRHP-listed properties. Sixteen of the NRHP-listed buildings in the Downtown section of the HHD have 1989 survey addresses that don't show up on current Montana Cadastral data: these are not shown on the map. Where exactly these buildings are, and whether they still exist, is unclear. This fact, among others, underscores the need for an updated survey of historic resources within the BID, the Downtown section of the HHD, and the HHD more generally.

The current boundaries and content of the Helena Historic District reflect several periods of development. Based on a 1968 survey of historic resources, the District was first listed in the NRHP in 1972. At the time the district comprised two distinct, discontinuous sections: a smaller "West Residential" section (that extended roughly from Stuart Street on the north and Power Street on the south and from Monroe Avenue on the west to Dearborn Avenue on the east) and a much larger "Downtown" section. The Downtown section generally included the area currently bounded by the intersection of S. Park Avenue and S. Cruse Street at its southwest corner, by S. Howie Street on the west, Lawrence Street on the north, and Rodney Street on the east.

In the late 1970s, "Urban Renewal" planning initiatives demolished a large portion of Helena's National Historic District, razing a roughly 7-block area that contained the District's oldest buildings (dating mainly from the 1860s-1880s). Some 240 irreplaceable historic buildings were destroyed in this section. By the mid-1980s, so, too, were numerous historic buildings in other areas of the BID. In the wake of this destruction, the Downtown section of the HHD was re-surveyed in 1989, which resulted in two boundary adjustments in the Downtown section of the HHD. Much of the southern section of the original Historic District was removed from the boundaries since the historic buildings in that portion were destroyed. At the same time, the Historic District was expanded on the north end, with the north boundary moving generally from Lawrence St. to Neill Avenue. In 1993, the Historic District boundary was adjusted a third time: a 3-block area along Rodney St. (bounded roughly by E. 6th, N. David, Broadway, and N. Rodney) was surveyed and added to the NRHP-listed Helena Historic District. The BID area has been the subject of limited additional surveying of historic resources. A handful of buildings within the BID have been individually listed in the NRHP over the years and, in 2010, several BID buildings were inventoried and evaluated as part of a state-wide "Post-World War II-Architectural Survey." One of these buildings was determined eligible for listing in the NRHP.



## HISTORIC RESOURCES: EXISTING CONDITIONS

- Helena BID Boundary
- HHD - Downtown
- HHD - Rodney St Neighborhood
- HHD - West Residential
- NRHP-listed (as component of HHD)
- NRHP-listed (individually)
- NRHP-eligible (recently evaluated)

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BY: CEG/smo  
 REVIEWED: JWK  
 DATE: 2/12/2016

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## **Issue & Opportunities**

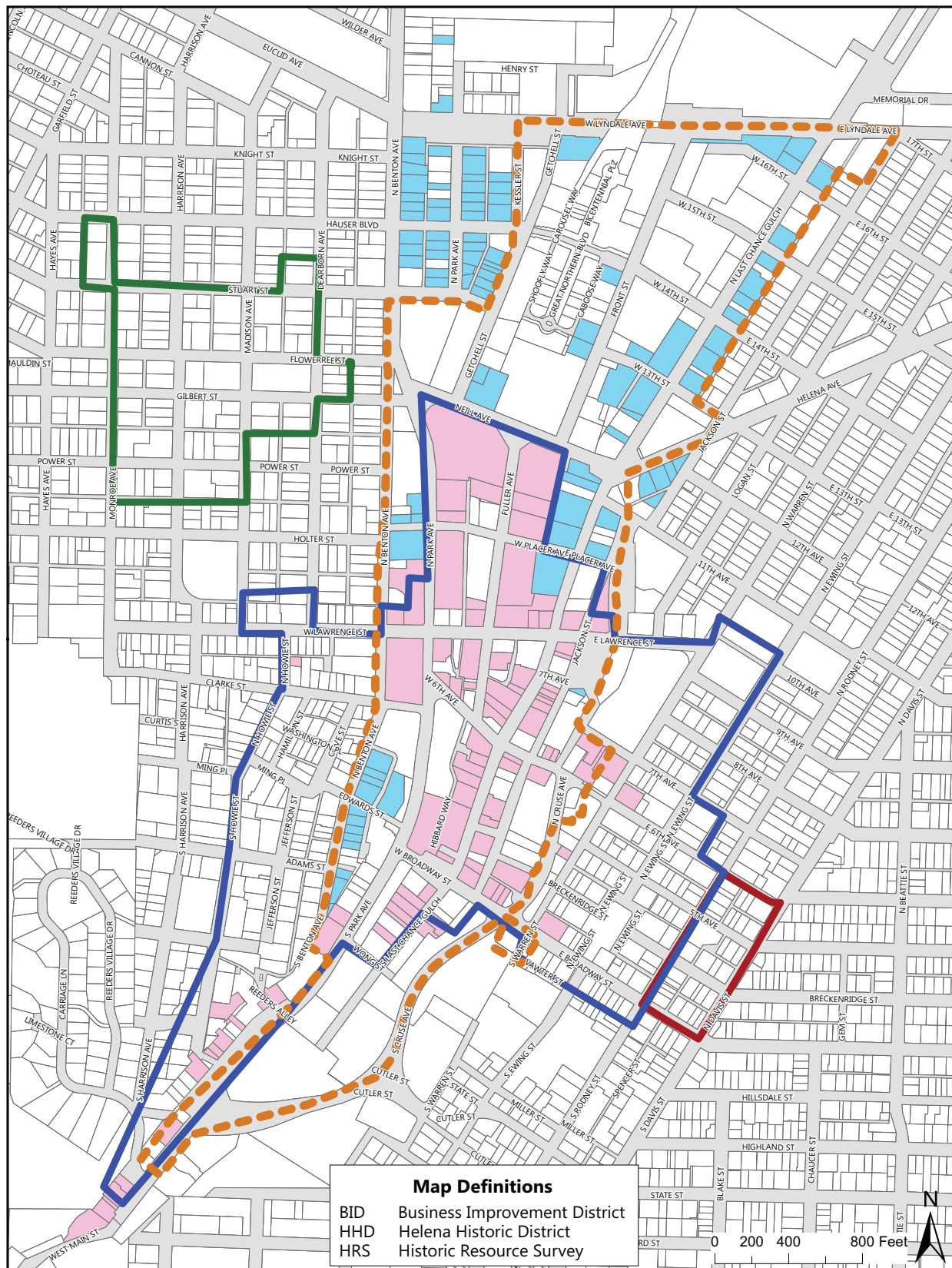
Despite the fact that Helena's BID is for the most part a National Historic District, information on historic resources in the BID is woefully out of date and inaccurate. Only one of the almost 90 NRHP-listed historic resources in the BID has been surveyed since 1989 (and that was in 1991): the information on the NRHP-listed properties in the BID is 27 years out of date. This renders information on NRHP-listed properties useless for planning purposes. There is no clear grasp of the current condition of NRHP-listed properties in the area. The 1989 survey information is so out of date that about 20% of the buildings surveyed at that time have survey addresses that do not correlate to existing Montana Cadastral data. Not only is the NRHP-eligibility status of these buildings unclear, but there is no information as to where they are, or whether they even still exist. Moreover, in accordance with federal regulations, only those properties that were 50 years old or older in 1989 were eligible for listing in the NRHP at that time. In the intervening 27 years, many properties in the BID have attained an age of at least 50 years, and are therefore potentially eligible for listing in the NRHP. Only four of these properties have been surveyed and evaluated since 1989: this occurred in 2010, when four BID properties were evaluated in the course of a state-wide "Post-World War II-Architectural Survey." Within the BID there are many buildings that meet the age criteria for NRHP-eligibility that have never been evaluated.

An overview of issues and opportunities is included on the adjacent map, which contains the best available information about existing historic-period properties. Forty-six of the historic-period properties in the Downtown section of the HHD have 1989 survey addresses that don't show up on current Montana Cadastral data: these are not shown on the map.

Historic properties are critical to the Downtown's economic health and to its broader importance in Helena and Montana as a whole. More broadly, historic preservation has proven to be crucial to every successful downtown revitalization effort in the United States. Preservation planning is sorely needed in the BID. Specifically, these planning activities should include:

- Updating the Historic District inventory to accurately reflect current conditions and assets. The inventory was last updated in 1989, and is over 27 years out of date.
- Updating the Historic District context so that it covers the mid-century period, and identifying buildings from this period that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The current (1989) historic district nomination covers only properties built before 1948. Buildings constructed between 1948 and 1971 need to be identified and evaluated.
- Expanding the historic building inventory so that it covers all of the BID. Current historic building inventories cover only a portion of the BID (see Historic Resources maps). The additional area needs to be surveyed in order to identify historic building assets and to evaluate the area for potential inclusion in the Downtown historic district.
- Accurately mapping historic resources with current GIS applications so that they can be efficiently and effectively managed by decision-makers.





# HISTORIC RESOURCES: ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

- Helena BID Boundary
- HHD - Downtown
- HHD - Rodney St Neighborhood
- HHD - West Residential

- HRS Needed: Never Surveyed
- HRS Update Needed: Surveyed 1989

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## Parking

While downtown charm is often based on walkability, convenient parking is crucial to the success of businesses and the appeal of housing. Downtown Helena relies on visitors from other parts of town and from the surrounding trade area to support Downtown businesses. These visitors, by and large, access Downtown by car and expect to find parking within easy walking distance of their destination.

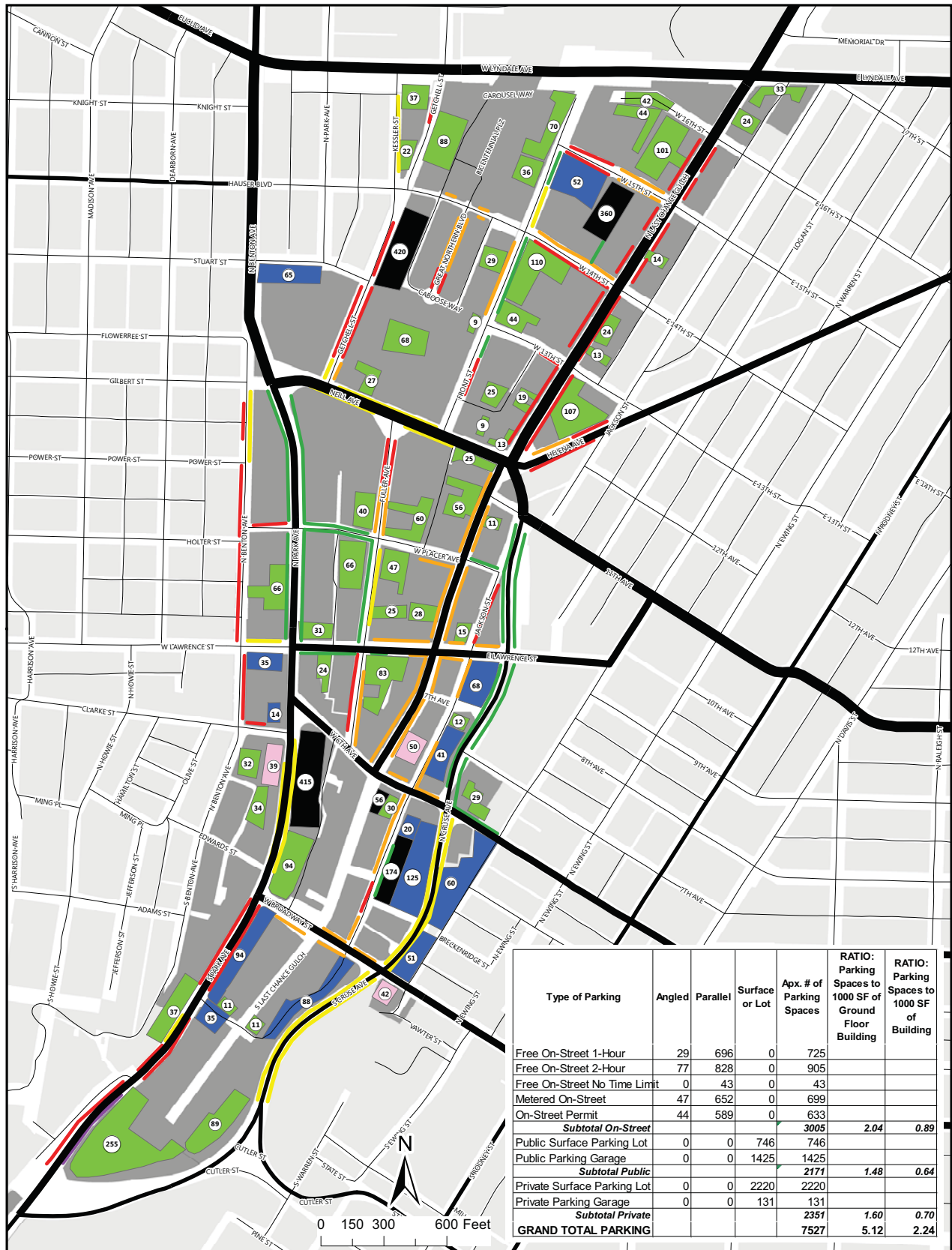
Managing the supply of public parking to support the desired retail and residential growth in Downtown is a primary role of the Helena Parking Commission. Public parking reduces the need for individual buildings to provide parking on their own – reducing the cost of development and improving the land use within Downtown. Downtown currently offers over 3.3 million square feet of Gross Leasable Area (GLA). The Parking Commission manages over 3,000 on-street parking spaces and over 2,200 off-street parking spaces in surface lots and parking structures. Private surface lots and structures provide approximately 2,300 additional parking spaces, for a total parking supply of approximately 7,500 spaces.

The current parking ratio of 2.24 spaces per 1,000 square feet of GLA generally falls within recommended guidelines for mixed-use, downtown areas. 2015 parking data provided by the Parking Commission show that 2,059 of 2,754 permit spaces were being utilized (75%), suggesting there is an adequate supply of parking in Downtown. As new development occurs, additional parking will be required, with particular attention to location and proximity to key destinations.

### **Issues & Opportunities**

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.

- ✓ Price parking to create high-turnover in desirable/convenient locations. It should be more expensive to park in front of a business than in a garage. Retail parking should turnover 20 times per day.
- ✓ Meter all on-street parking within Downtown. This is the most effective way to manage time limits and pricing.
- ✓ Provide free 20-minute “quick stop” parking and accessible (handicap) parking in strategic locations.
- ✓ Reinvest revenue from parking meters in maintenance and beautification to make the experience of parking Downtown a good one.
- ✓ Offer first hour free parking in garages and surface lots, with pay as you leave technology.
- ✓ Integrate parking wayfinding signs with the pedestrian and vehicle wayfinding system.
- ✓ Provide well-lit, well-maintained sidewalk routes to get to and from the parking lots.
- ✓ Eliminate on-street lease (permit) parking. All long-term lease parking should be in garages or surface lots. This frees up more flexible parking on-street for short-term visitors.
- ✓ Eliminate residential parking permits and time limits. The neighborhoods surrounding Downtown have a large volume of existing parking within easy walking distance that can support Downtown activity. Reserving these spaces for residential use or short-term parking leaves much of this parking underutilized.



## PARKING

20 Number of Parking Spaces

- On Street Permit Parking
- Metered Parking
- 1-Hour Free Parking
- 2-Hour Free Parking
- No Time Limit
- Private Surface Parking Lot
- Private Parking Garage
- Public Parking Garage
- Public Surface Parking Lot

PROJECT: 150326  
FILE: Parking  
PATH: W:\Projects\150326\GIS\MXD\Parking.mxd  
BY: MG/sma  
REVIEWED: JWK  
DATE: 2/11/2016  
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# Circulation

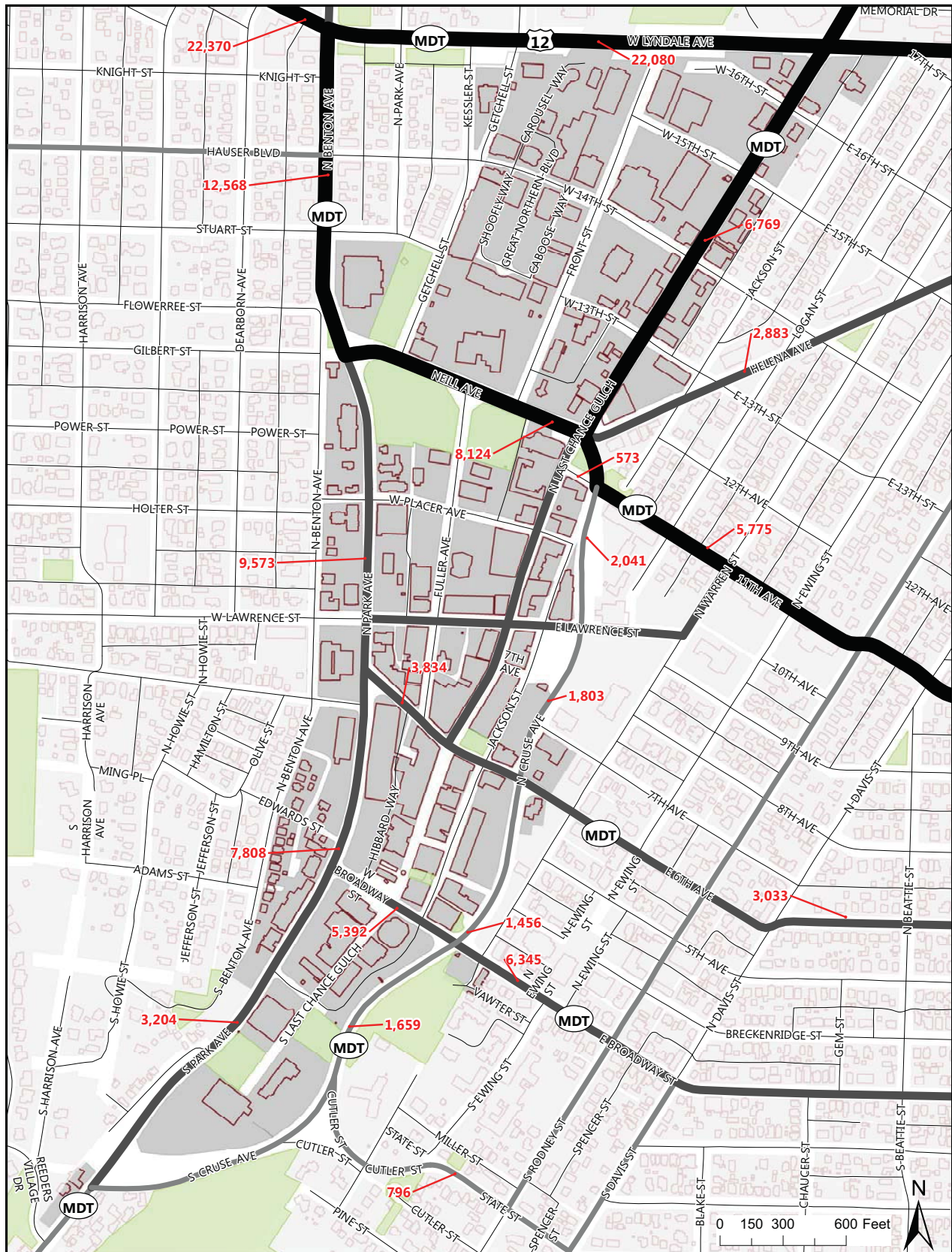
## Street Network

The Downtown street network consists of arterial, collector, and local streets accessing Downtown from Lyndale Avenue (U.S. Highway 12) and the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Principal arterials include Benton Avenue, Last Chance Gulch, and Neill Avenue, which are on the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) Urban Federal-Aid System. Additional MDT routes include Park Avenue, 6th Avenue, and Broadway Street, which are classified as minor arterials. Cruse Avenue is classified as a major collector on the MDT system.

### Issues & Opportunities

Past projects placed a high priority on motor vehicle circulation and, in particular, leaving Downtown. The majority of streets have good capacity and level-of-service, making driving Downtown relatively easy. However, wide multi-lane streets that are favorable to cars negatively affect the walkability and scale of Downtown, and one-way streets affect the viability of Downtown businesses.

- ✓ Reduce the number of lanes. All streets in Downtown should be two-lanes (one lane in each direction) with auxiliary turn lanes at intersections. Current traffic volumes and 20-year traffic projections in the Long Range Transportation Plan are well below the typical threshold for two-lane streets with auxiliary turn lanes (18,000 vehicle per day).
- ✓ Convert one-way streets. National studies have shown that two-way streets promote lower speeds, easier access, and higher property values. Converting Last Chance Gulch and Hauser Boulevard to two-way traffic will improve access and visibility for important retail areas in the Downtown.
- ✓ Simplify intersections. Reducing crossing distances and eliminating right-turn slip lanes would greatly improve pedestrian comfort and safety without significantly affecting traffic operations. The five-point intersection of Neill, Last Chance Gulch, Helena, and Cruse (“Mini-Malfunction Junction”) is one of the few intersections in Downtown that experiences poor level-of-service. Reducing the number of streets entering the intersection would improve operations and make the intersection more pedestrian-friendly.
- ✓ Improve the network. The Hauser/14th Street corridor provides an important link between the Great Northern Town Center, adjacent neighborhoods, Helena Avenue, and the 6th Ward/Railroad District. A new traffic signal at 14th Street/Last Chance Gulch would help establish this corridor, as well as provide important circulation options around the five-point intersection. A signal should also be considered at the intersection of Benton/Hauser to complete this corridor.
- ✓ Convert Cruse Avenue to a local street. The majority of Cruse Avenue carries less than 2,000 cars per day. Its wide right-of-way would be better utilized for parking, sidewalks, trails, and landscaping that support new development rather than a high-volume traffic corridor.



## EXISTING STREET NETWORK

### Street Classification

- Principal Arterial
- Major Collector
- Minor Arterial
- Local
- Recreational/Parks
- Building Footprints



MDT Route

(number) Annual Average Daily Traffic

PROJECT: 150326  
 R.E. StreetNetwork  
 PATH: W:\Projects\150326\GIS\MXD\StreetNetwork.mxd  
 BY: MG/sma  
 REVIEWED: JWK  
 DATE: 2/11/2016  
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**HELENA**  
 BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

**WGM**  
 GROUP

## Transit & Non-Motorized

Transit and non-motorized transportation are cornerstones of Downtown circulation. The ability to get Downtown and move around without using a car differentiates Downtown from other places in the community.

### **Transit Service**

The Helena Area Transit Service (HATS) operates a limited, but growing, transit system. HATS offers general public curb-to-curb service, one “checkpoint” fixed-route in town, and an East Valley “deviated” fixed-route. HATS operates Monday through Friday excluding weekends and holidays. The Checkpoint bus route has 21 stops, including the Downtown, and runs every 75 minutes from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM. The curb-to-curb service bus starts at 6:30 AM and ends at 5:30 PM. The East Valley bus connects with the Checkpoint bus for travel within Helena.

The HATS Five Year Transit Development Plan Update 2013-2018 calls for expanding fixed-route service and hours of operation. Goals include:

- Strengthening the economy by improving access to jobs.
- Helping to support and improve the vitality of the Downtown area.
- Facilitating independent living for seniors and people with disabilities by providing more options to access health care, social services, shopping, and educational opportunities.

A “Capital Commuter”, which ran in 2009 and 2010 before funding was cut from the state budget, was widely praised in HATS surveys and public outreach as an example of service stakeholders would like to see.

### **Bicycles & Pedestrians**

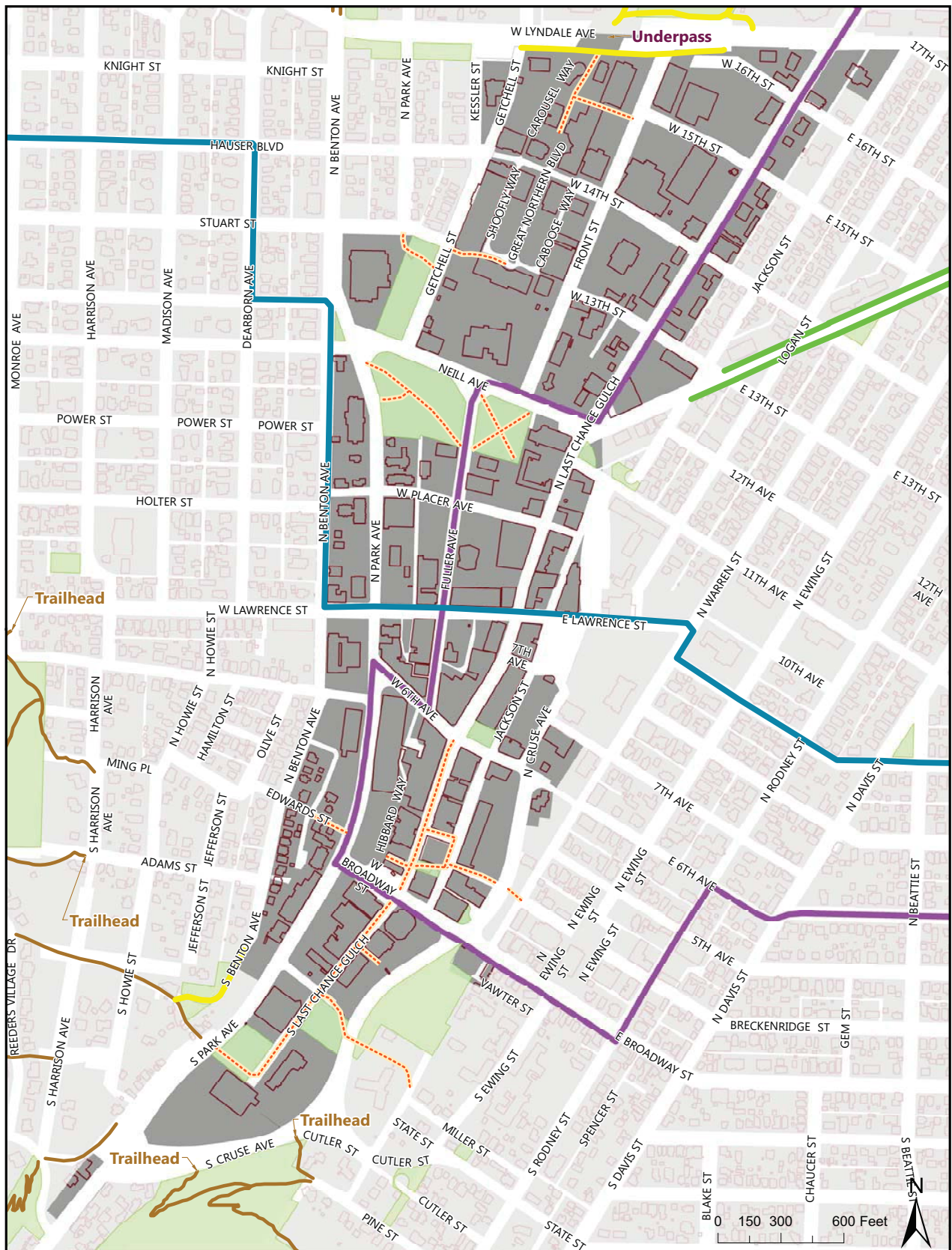
Downtown Helena is generally very walkable. Walk Score, a website that measures walkability based on the distance to amenities, population density, and road metrics such as block length and intersection density, ranks the intersection of 6th and Last Chance Gulch as a “Walker’s Paradise” with a score of 91 out of 100.

In fact, the City of Helena ranks second in the state for walking to work, and third for bicycling to work (7.5% and 3.3%, respectively). Helena also has the lowest share of working age commuters using an automobile to commute to work (83 percent). Helena residents, on average, have shorter travel times (13.5 minutes), with nearly 70 percent spending less than 15 minutes commuting to work.\*

The Helena area has approximately 150 miles of off- and on-street bicycle network facilities. This includes bike lanes, shared lane markings, signed bike routes, shared-use paths, and natural surface trails. Designated bike facilities within Downtown are limited to one east-west bike route that bisects Downtown on Lawrence Street.

\* Greater Helena Area Long Range Transportation Plan – 2014 Update





## EXISTING TRANSIT & NON-MOTORIZED

- Bike Lanes
- Bike Route
- Multi-Use Trail
- - - Pedestrian Walkway
- Trail
- Bus Route
- Building Footprints
- Recreational/Parks

PROJECT: 150326  
 FILE: Transit  
 PATH: W:\Projects\150326\GIS\MXD\Transit.mxd  
 BY: MG/sma  
 REVIEWED: JWK  
 DATE: 2/11/2014  
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One project the City is working on to improve pedestrian activity is the development of the Centennial Trail – a five-mile corridor connecting Spring Meadow Lake State Park to the east side of Helena near Highway 12 and 18th Street along the BNSF railroad corridor. Portions of the trail are complete, while others are still in the planning stage.

### **Issues & Opportunities**

Downtown Helena’s grid street system lends itself well to non-motorized transportation use. Most streets have sidewalks and there are relatively few gaps. Block lengths are generally short and numerous formal and informal pedestrian routes exist to connect the the finer grid of streets in the neighborhoods east and west of Downtown. However, these routes are typically stairways or steep paths that are not well-maintained and do not provide ADA accessibility.

Pedestrian improvements like bulbouts, signage, and benches, as well as outdoor seating, interesting shops, and public art along Last Chance Gulch and the Walking Mall contribute to the unique experience of walking Downtown. However, many of these improvements are in poor condition and need maintenance to update their appearance and function.

Additionally, there are many areas in Downtown that do not invite walking. Wide intersections, with long crossing distances and lack of ADA accessible ramps, create barriers to pedestrians. Parking lots that break up the pattern of buildings and ground-floor office uses that do not promote street activity also tend to discourage walking.

- ✓ Address deferred maintenance.
- ✓ Balance needs of cars with pedestrian comfort, safety, and accessibility.
- ✓ 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; 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, tuning stations.
- ✓ Connect Downtown to trails and open space.
- ✓ Connect Downtown to Carroll College.
- ✓ Strengthen transit service to Downtown and the Capital Area.





# Infrastructure

The City of Helena owns and operates municipal water, sanitary sewer, and storm drainage utilities within Downtown Helena. Some of this infrastructure was built as far back as 1916 and is comprised of out-of-date or failing materials. Upgrades and the addition of new facilities should be considered when development opportunities exist.

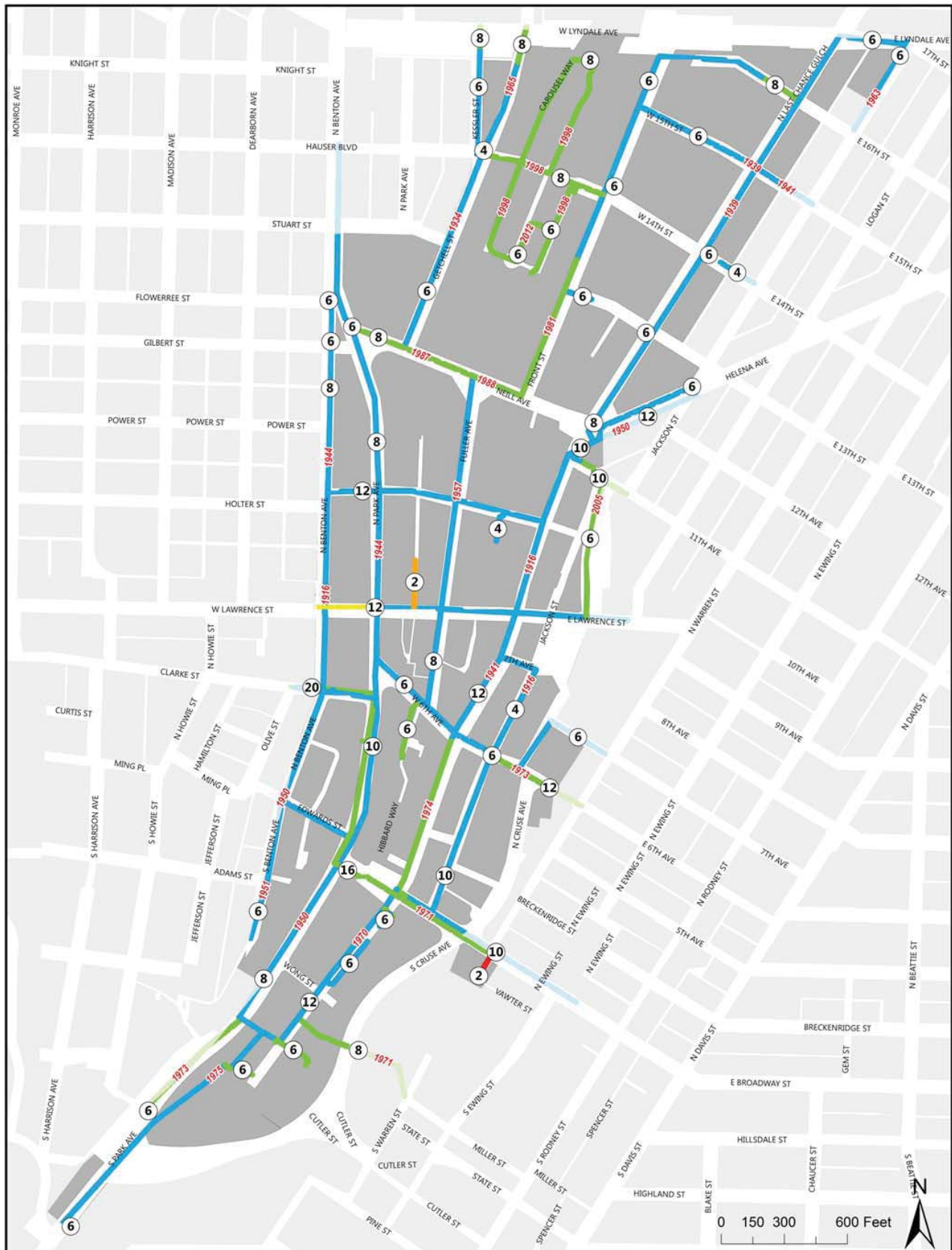
## Water

According to the Helena Water Facilities Plan (2005), the City of Helena operates two water treatment plants and two well sources to meet water demand. Water is delivered from the City's treatment plants to the Downtown area through City-owned distribution mains and reservoir pumping stations. According to the City's GIS records system, the water distribution system in the Downtown study area consists primarily of cast iron and ductile iron pipe that was installed as early as 1916. There are several major backbone segments in the system that are more than 75 years old. The American Water Works Association (AWWA) estimates that cast iron pipe has an average service life of 75 to 130 years and ductile iron pipe has an average service life of 60 to 110 years. Although the precise lifespan of iron pipe depends upon installation conditions and local soil corrosivity, it is a good general rule of thumb to use an average design life of 70 years.

Leakage loss rates and unaccounted for water (UAW) in older water distribution systems can be significant. The Helena Water Facilities Plan reported the water system's average loss was 23% in 2002. The City has implemented a water conservation plan primarily based around leakage detection through new water meter placement. The City also allocates annual funding to complete leak detection services by a contractor, who has generally found leakage results to be satisfactory. The City's UAW has dropped from over 50% in 1980 through detection and replacement programs.

The Helena Water Facilities Plan indicates that the Downtown study area has several areas with undersized pipe, older pipe with low hydraulic efficiency (i.e. Hazen-Williams coefficients less than 60), and dead end pipe segments. These factors contribute to inadequate fire flow capacities in the study area including the Front Street corridor and the vicinity near the intersection of Park Avenue and Cruse Street. The water main in Front Street is scheduled for replacement and a preliminary engineering study has been commissioned. After the Front Street water main replacement has been completed, future steps to achieve adequate fire flow capacity in that area will include upsized connections on 15th Street and 16th Street between Front Street and Last Chance Gulch.

Since the backbone water service infrastructure is essentially adequate, the key action will be to take advantage of opportunities to replace aging pipe infrastructure and complete further system looping as private and public redevelopment occurs. Water service can be a major limitation to urban development projects if adequate fire flow service is not available. High replacement cost and major streetscape disturbances are significant limitations to water services. Remedying limitations in water service may involve complicated replacement of undersized pipe segments to gain connection with larger backbone segments.



# WATER

20 Pipe Diameter (inches)  
2015 Pipe - Year, if available

**Water Lines**  
— CAST IRON  
— DUCTILE IRON  
— COPPER & GALV  
— COPPER  
— STEEL

PROJECT: 150326  
 FILE: Water  
 PATH: W:\Projects\150326\GIS\MXD\Water.mxd  
 BY: MG/sma  
 REVIEWED: JWK  
 DATE: 11/10/2015  
 Disclaimer: This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as such. WGM Group does not guarantee the accuracy, current status, or completeness of this information or its derivatives. This map is a graphic representation and is to be used for general planning purposes only.



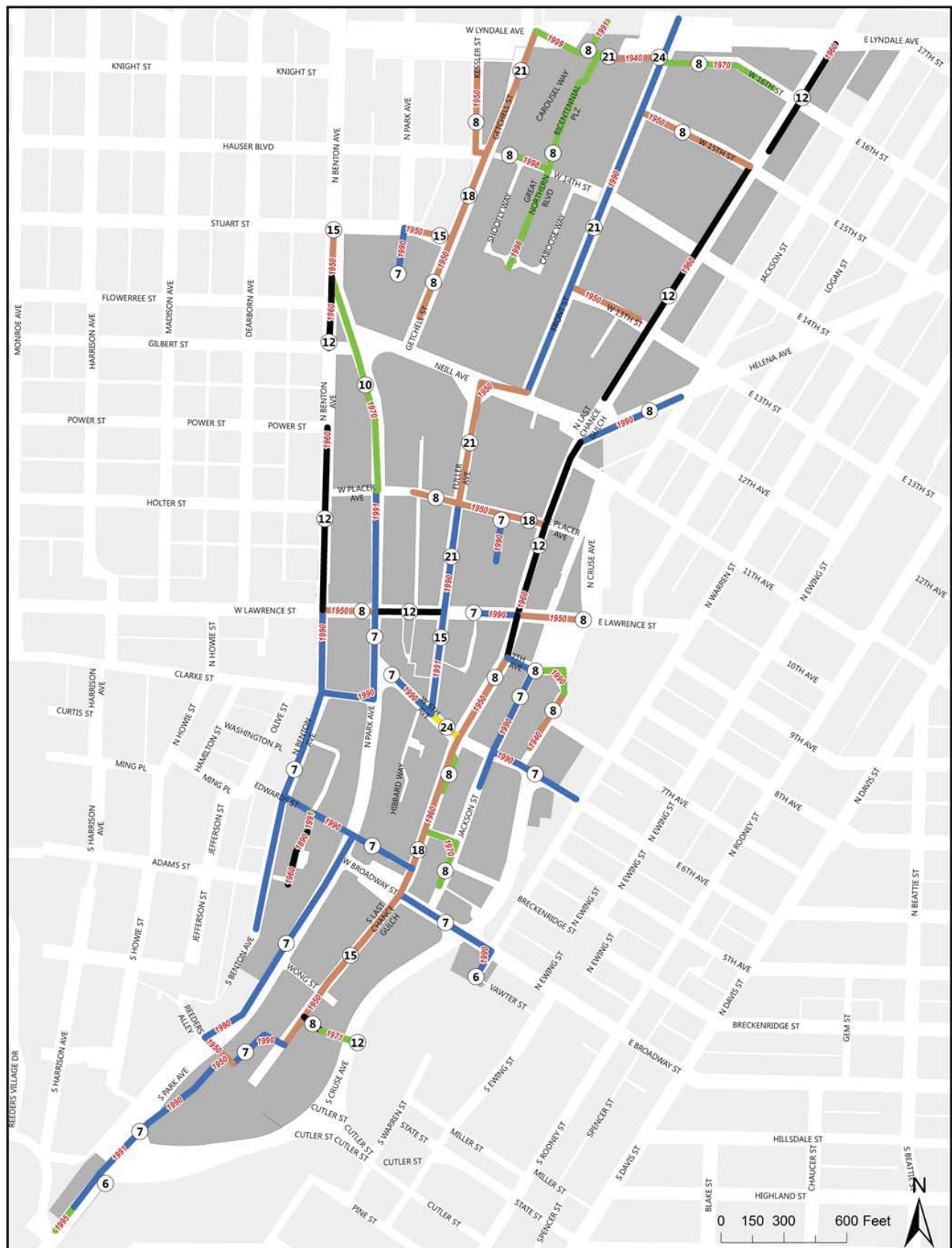
## Sanitary Sewer

Gravity sanitary sewer infrastructure serves the entire Downtown study area. Some shorter segments in the pipe system date back to installation in the 1940s, however, the majority of pipe installations were performed between 1950 and 1998. Pipe materials currently in place include vitrified clay, concrete, reinforced concrete pipe (RCP), polyvinyl chloride (PVC), and pipe slip lined with polyethylene (PLP). There are several long segments of vitrified clay pipe installed in the 1950s throughout the Downtown area. Older more brittle clay pipe materials may be susceptible to higher damage during earthquake events.

The City of Helena Wastewater Collection System Master Plan (2008) does not identify any capacity-related deficiencies in the Downtown area, but it does note that aging pipe infrastructure continues to be a long-term challenge. The City is currently addressing this issue by scheduling old pipe to be slip lined with polyethylene. Many pipe segments in the Downtown corridor have already been slip lined, most occurring in 1990 and 1991. The City has recorded a notable decrease in wastewater inflow at the treatment plant since the slip lining program began despite an increase in overall service connections.

As new development occurs, it will be important to take advantage of opportunities to improve aging sanitary sewer infrastructure through pipe replacement and slip lining. Priorities include older segments of concrete and vitrified clay pipe. Although most historic sump pump and storm drain cross connections in the system are believed to have been eliminated, it will be important to remedy these situations as they are identified.





## SANITARY SEWER

20 Pipe Diameter (inches)  
2015 Year, if available

### Sewer Lines

CLAY  
CONCRETE  
PLP  
PVC  
RCP

PROJECT: 150324  
FILE: Sewer  
PATH: W:\Projects\150324\GIS\MXD\Sewer.mxd  
BY: MG/sma  
REVIEWED: JWK  
DATE: 11/10/2015  
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## Storm Drainage

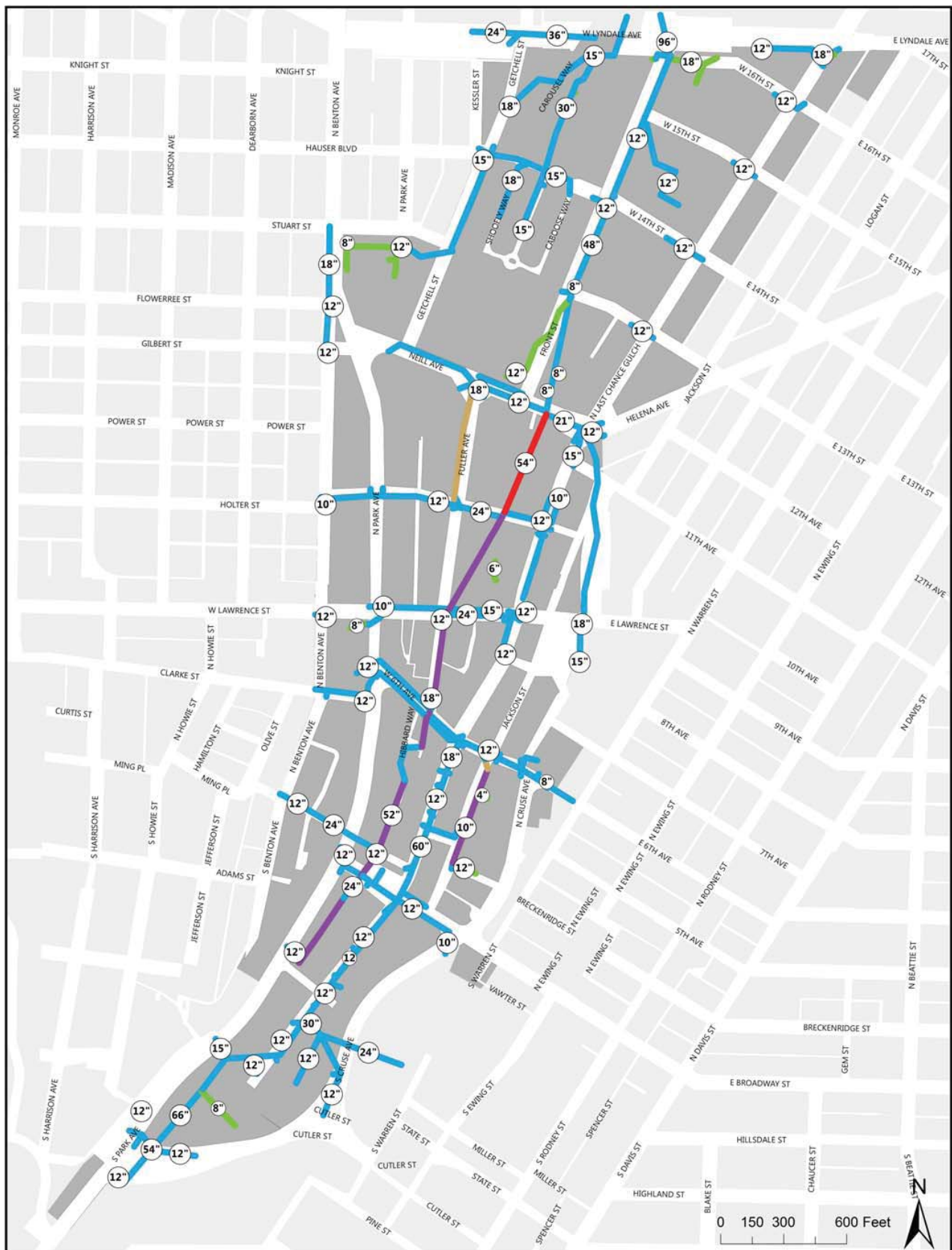
An underground storm drain system with street inlets serves the entire Downtown corridor. The storm drain system not only accommodates urban drainage, but conveys runoff from the large rural Last Chance Gulch watershed located upstream of the City. As such, there is a backbone network of large diameter pipes through the heart of Downtown to enable passage of high peak flows generated from the large watershed. There is currently no substantial stormwater detention or water quality treatment facilities incorporated into the system within the Downtown area, however, a large regional pond at the Nature Park provides opportunity for both storage and treatment.

Comprehensive installation date records are not readily available for the storm drain system, but the City of Helena Stormwater Master Plan (2003) indicates that the majority of the stormwater backbone interceptor is undersized or in poor condition and needs repair or replacement. Most of the pipe system is comprised of reinforced concrete pipe, though some older sections are comprised of clay, poured-in-place concrete, and brick-and-mortar construction techniques. Some segments of the pipe system have been slip lined with new polyethylene pipe to improve structural integrity and reduce infiltration and exfiltration. Slip lining, however, does not address capacity issues. A preliminary engineering study is currently examining the replacement of about 1,800 feet of the interceptor pipe along the Front Street corridor between Neill Avenue and Lyndale Avenue.

Replacement of the storm drain poses 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.

Generally, development in the Downtown corridor is required to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) if an activity alters the quantity or quality of stormwater runoff. The City requires stormwater control through Chapter 6 of the City Code. Engineered stormwater BMPs are currently required for the following specific conditions: development requiring subdivision, development that increases impervious area by 5,000 square feet or more, projects that affect critical MS4 infrastructure areas, and planned unit developments.

Current and future stormwater management requirements directly affect the cost of new development. Therefore, these requirements should be carefully examined during the feasibility stage. The City is currently negotiating the terms of a new stormwater general discharge permit with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to satisfy requirements in the Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MPDES) for Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s). The result of negotiations will likely involve an increase in requirements for stormwater management in the City by using BMPs to control both quantity and quality of stormwater runoff.





## Power (Gas & Electric)

Northwestern Energy is the service provider for electricity and gas in Downtown Helena. The main service lines for Downtown come from the north, and branch out at various locations. Power lines are generally placed underground in areas north of Neil Avenue and South of 6th Avenue and are generally found above ground for the rest of Downtown. Northwestern Energy was not willing to provide maps of their facilities for this report.

As new development occurs, some gas and electrical lines may need to be updated or improved upon. Real estate is the primary constraint for this utility provider. 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.

## Communications

Traditional phone service and cell phone coverage is available throughout all of Downtown Helena. Capacity is not an issue. Service providers include CenturyLink, Treasure State Internet, and Charter Communications.

Internet, which is now an essential utility for most businesses, is available throughout Downtown. Service is typically provided through cable or phone lines; however some areas are served by a wireless network. How internet is delivered to a property and at what “speed” is rapidly changing due to technological advancements. Fiber optics is currently the fastest form of broadband technology, and increasingly in demand within the business community. There are a handful of properties in Downtown served by fiber.

Where fiber is available, capacity isn’t an issue. The challenge is to expand service throughout Downtown. Cost is the principal constraint to expanding service. In the classic “last mile” scenario, the cost of extending the fiber optic lines from the main line to individual properties can be prohibitive to many property owners and businesses. Also, older buildings were not designed to accommodate fiber, adding additional costs. Service providers typically respond to individual requests for service, although one provider is extending fiber into Downtown in a more planned approach.





home community  
art live history  
play helena  
**place** potential  
work fun commercial  
core family  
business heart  
downtown