

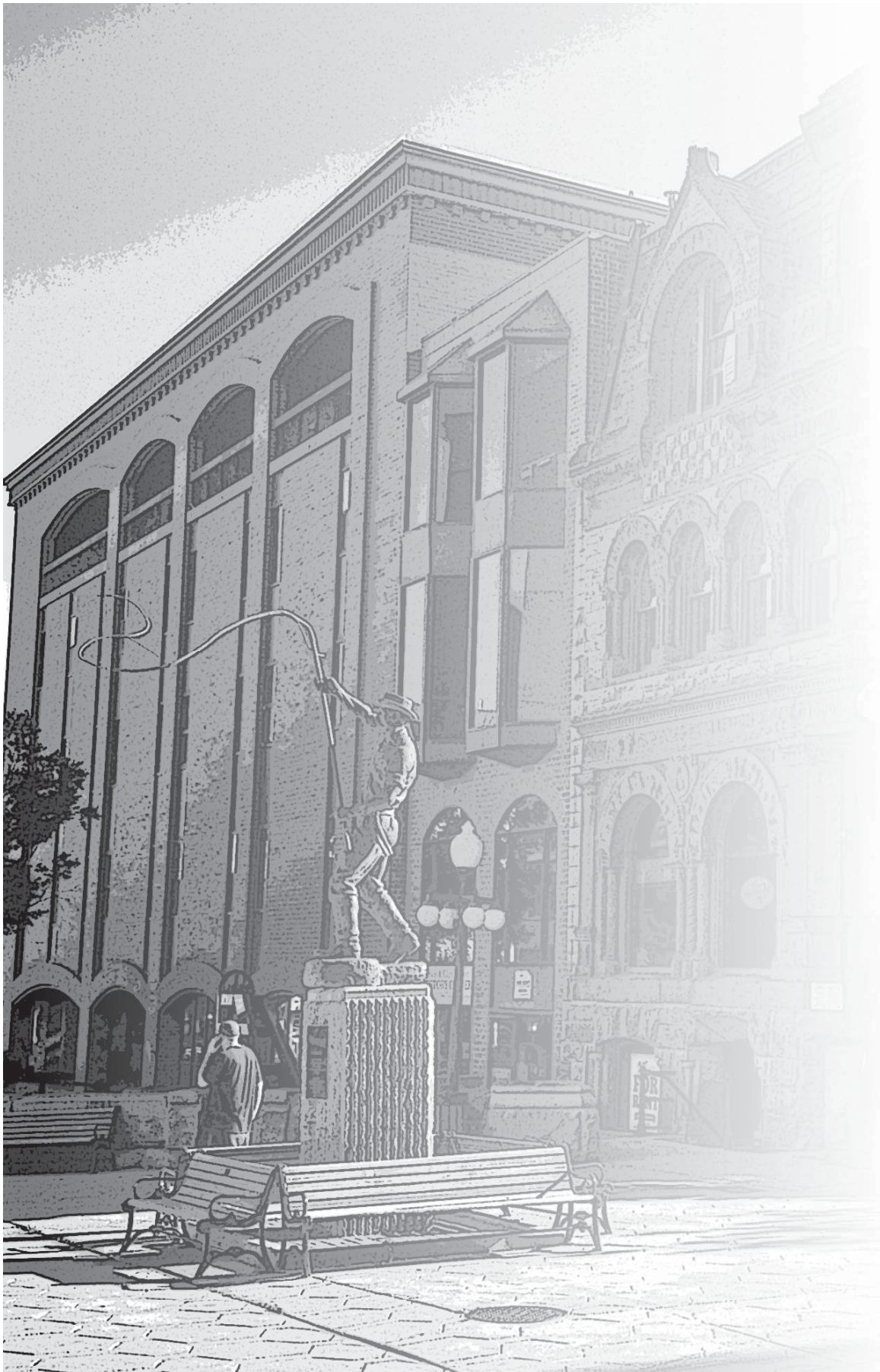
DOWNTOWN HELENA MASTER PLAN

2016 - 2036

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

April 6, 2016





Executive Summary

Downtown is the heart of Helena. It is a special, unique place that has a strong emotional bond with residents and visitors alike. The community has many pieces that all need to function together, but the Downtown is central to how the community is defined. Business owners, residents, employees and citizens of the broader community have a shared passion for Downtown. The Master Plan shapes that passion and provides a guide for implementing changes that will attract future growth and development in Downtown.

The Master Plan builds on Downtown's past success, leveraging its unique sense of place and historic identity to prepare for new opportunities in a changing marketplace. As many communities seek new approaches to economic development, Helena is well-positioned to offer what people are looking for.

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

Downtown Helena is well-poised for success. Current market trends favor Downtown growth, but the Plan must be proactive to capture these opportunities. Fundamental to the Plan is the idea that Downtown must not only sustain existing business, but capture demand for development that is currently occurring elsewhere.

** Place Value: How Communities Attract, Grow and Keep Jobs and Talent in the Rocky Mountain West, Sonoran Institute*

Planning for the Heart of Helena

The Downtown Helena Master Plan is the story of a grass roots effort to define, understand, and capture opportunities for the Downtown and the greater Helena community. The Master Plan is an exciting glimpse into the future, and will help Downtown Helena build on past success, leverage its unique sense of place, and prepare for new opportunities to achieve the best potential for this magnificent place.

The Master Plan:

- ✓ provides a tool for guiding Downtown economic growth;
- ✓ reaffirms Downtown's role in the community;
- ✓ guides decision-making for public improvements, private investments, and changes to existing regulations;
- ✓ anticipates foreseeable development opportunities; and,
- ✓ provides a clear path for leadership to successfully implement the Plan.

The Master Plan represents a community-based planning effort. The process engaged a wide range of stakeholders, business leaders, and the general public to create a plan with strong buy-in and support from the community. The process included three steps.

1

Issues, Ideas, & Barriers

The first step in the process identified issues, barriers, and assets within Downtown. The assets are catalogued in the Existing Conditions report (Appendix A). The ideas have been incorporated throughout the recommendations in the plan. The issues within Downtown determined what problems needed to be addressed.

Key Issues

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

2

Goals & Vision

The second step formed the goals and vision for Downtown. This step developed the Guiding Principles which provided the foundation for decision-making throughout the Plan and the Downtown Framework which provided a conceptual vision for Downtown.

Guiding Principles



Downtown is Walkable One of Downtown’s most important assets is the concentration of goods and services within easy walking distance. Above all else, walking in Downtown must be clean, comfortable, efficient, interesting, and safe.



Downtown is Connected to the Community As the heart of the community, Downtown must strengthen connections with other important community centers and destinations.



Downtown is a Desirable Place Downtown must enhance the unique, high-quality environment that attracts a wide variety of visitors, residents, and businesses. Downtown must be a desirable place to live, work, shop, learn, and play.



Downtown is Alive Downtown must be a vibrant, year-round destination for business and activity throughout the day and evening hours, including residential housing, arts and entertainment, events and activities.



Downtown is Convenient Downtown must have convenient access, circulation, parking, and every-day services that allow people to easily visit and stay Downtown.

Downtown Framework

The Downtown Framework provides a conceptual vision for Downtown, linking the modern Great Northern Town Center and the Historic Downtown with a strong retail backbone along Last Chance Gulch. The two “districts”, the Great Northern District and the Fire Tower District, are given distinct identities, but remain strongly connected by the Last Chance Gulch Retail Core. Each district is anchored by employment and entertainment uses that support the retail core, which provides a strong walking connection along a traditional retail shopping street.

The areas that surround the retail core provide a foundation to support and sustain the other districts by providing opportunities for workforce housing, business incubators and start-ups, and parking. Each area plays an important role and function in the success of the entire Downtown, and is necessary to strengthen Downtown’s potential.

The following page provides descriptions and imagery of the vision for each district. Each district should look to strengthen its individual identity while adding key elements to increase its desirability for residents, employees, and visitors.

Great Northern District

A modern center for business and family entertainment

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



Last Chance Gulch Retail Core

A traditional downtown shopping street with appeal for both tourists and local residents alike

The Last Chance Gulch Retail Core invites Helena and its surrounding communities into the Downtown for a unique experience with historic architecture, local shops and restaurants, and an active street life. The retail core celebrates the traditional main street character and charm with wide sidewalks, engaging storefronts, and the distinctive walking mall.



Fire Tower District

A hub of entertainment, recreation, history, arts and culture

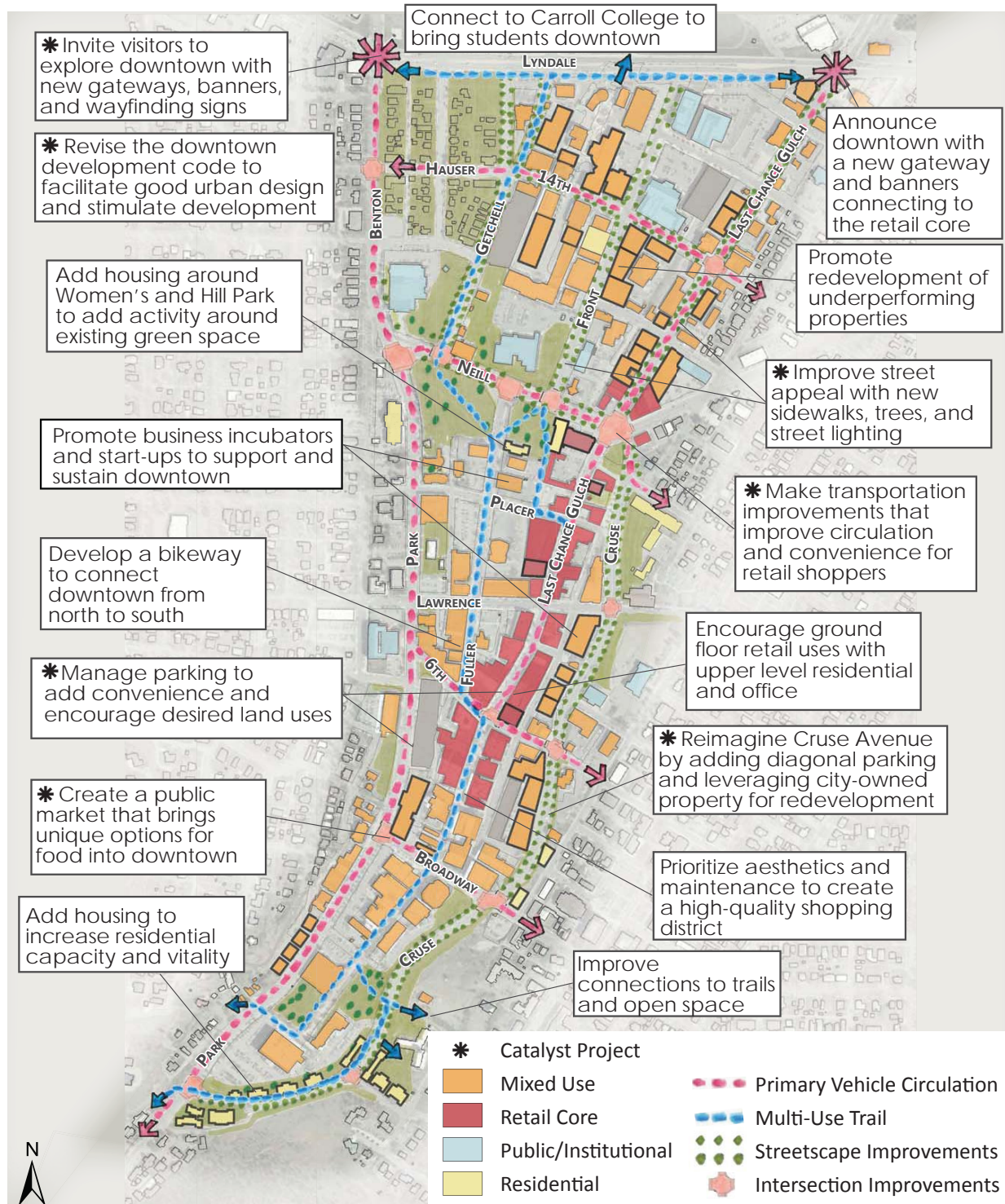
By embracing its eclectic mix of businesses and architectural styles, the Fire Tower District's casual atmosphere welcomes locals and visitors to hang out in a brewery, meet up with friends before hitting the trails, or pick up dinner from a local vendor at the public market. Condos and townhouses that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



3

Implementation Actions

The third step established and prioritized the Implementation Actions. The illustrative plan identifies land uses and specific projects that are steps to realizing the vision for Downtown.



Implementation Actions were organized into five categories. These categories broadly lay out the plan for how Downtown Helena can meet its goals, addressing marketing, land use, historic resources, parking, infrastructure, and circulation.

Downtown as a **Brand**

- Create one strategy for all of Downtown
- Prioritize aesthetics and maintenance to create a high-quality shopping district
- Create a high- quality downtown experience

Create a Dynamic Downtown

Environment

- Revise the Downtown development code to facilitate good urban design and stimulate development
- Promote redevelopment of underperforming properties
- Create a public market that brings unique options for food into Downtown
- Encourage Downtown Housing

Capitalize on Downtown's

Historic Assets

- Update historic resource inventories
- Promote historic preservation and context-sensitive design

Update & Manage Downtown's

Infrastructure Assets

- Manage parking to add convenience and encourage desired land uses
- Proactively invest in Downtown infrastructure that supports new development

Connect Downtown

- Increase transit options
- Invite visitors to explore downtown Downtown by improving access and circulation
- Optimize pedestrian connectivity
- Develop a comprehensive bike network
- Improve vehicle circulation and access to increase retail viability



Last Chance Gulch Streetscape Concept

Public investment in streetscape amenities will help support private investment in underutilized properties.

Marlow Market Concept

A public market with year-round space for 15-20 tenants will bring unique food options into Downtown.



Conclusion

Helena has an extensive trade area with a large high-income, well-educated population. The retail market analysis found Downtown has, conservatively, an existing demand for up to 142,900 square feet of retail developing producing up to \$41.4 million in sales. By 2020, this demand will likely generate up to \$46 million in gross sales which could be absorbed by existing businesses and/or the opening of 45-60 new stores and restaurants.

The Guiding Principles, Downtown Framework, and Implementation Actions form the vision for Downtown Helena and should be used to guide growth and investment in Downtown Helena over the next 20 years. The Implementation Actions require a diverse range of policy actions, physical changes, and marketing steps to support future growth and development in Downtown Helena. These actions will need the collective leadership of the Helena Business Improvement District, Downtown Helena, Inc., and the City of Helena along with strong support from partnering organizations for Downtown Helena to reach its potential.