

# City of Great Falls Downtown Master Plan



Photo Credit: Rion Sanders

Planning & Community  
Development Department



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## Acknowledgements

This Plan would not have been possible without the cooperative efforts of a number of dedicated citizens, stakeholders, city staff, and elected and appointed officials.

The Downtown Master Plan planning process officially began in August of 2011. Since then, over 100 community members have contributed nearly 1,100 hours toward the preparation of the Plan. City staff facilitated 24 public meetings, as well as routinely met with local service groups and organizations.

Community input and public participation is the foundation of the Downtown Master Plan. Without the citizens of Great Falls' ongoing participation and support, this Downtown Master Plan would not have been possible.

## City of Great Falls

### City Commission

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**Commissioner Bill Bronson**  
**Commissioner Fred Burow**

**Commissioner Mary Jolley**  
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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

The Downtown Master Plan (the Plan) provides a strategically focused, goal driven “blueprint” for the future growth and development of Downtown. The plan builds upon the assets and advantages of Downtown as the cultural and civic center of Great Falls, with its historic buildings, parks and open spaces and proximity to the Missouri River. As a center of employment, commerce, shopping, dining and entertainment, and host to numerous community and special events throughout the year, Downtown is uniquely situated to become the heart of Great Falls. The primary goal of the Plan is to facilitate the creation of a Downtown that is more active, vibrant, accessible and livable.

Downtown Great Falls, like downtowns in many cities throughout the United States, has faced its share of challenges over time. Our growing dependence on the automobile and inexpensive and abundant land has led to businesses relocating outside the central core taking their customers with them. At this time, although Downtown is amenity rich, it lacks the critical mass and diversity of uses needed to sustain a thriving environment.

The City of Great Falls, especially Downtown, is at a pivotal juncture where opportunities for renewal and revitalization has the potential to be realized. This Plan creates a vision and outlines actions, partnerships and timeframes that will facilitate the “re-birth” of a regional destination. The extraordinary outcome of the assiduous efforts of the nearly 100 community members who participated in creating the Plan will benefit generations to come. However dynamic the Plan may be, to influence the future it must become a living document that is thoughtfully considered, continually consulted and perhaps, on occasion amended.

This is not a plan that will sit on the shelf and gather dust. This is a plan that will inform and guide public-private partnerships, public funding decisions, private investment commitments, development plans and existing as well as future programs. As we move forward in turning vision into reality, there will inevitably be some ideas that may never get realized; yet every strategy in this Plan is attainable and therefore has been assigned a timeframe and list of prospective partners who can work together to carry the Plan from vision to reality. Implementation of this Plan can only happen with willing and active partners, but with the Plan there is a road map to get to that destination.

### **The Planning Process**

The Plan was developed around four community Working Groups:

**Vitality:** Downtown's role as the center of commerce, culture, and community events - year-round, throughout the day and into the night.

**Livability:** the enrichment of the physical, social, and personal well being of Downtown residents, employees, and visitors.

**Character:** the physical elements that create a unique sense of place that distinguishes the Downtown area from other parts of the city.

**Mobility:** the ability of residents, employees, and visitors to have the option of using multiple modes of transportation to reach Downtown destinations in a safe and efficient manner.

## The Plan

The result is 82 strategies that each serve to make Downtown Great Falls a more desirable place to live, conduct business, recreate and visit. Enhancements to the built environment and transportation network have a direct correlation to the desirability of a community in terms of economic growth and the sustainment of the population. Businesses and individuals both seek a location that has a balance of amenities, social capital, transportation options, goods and services, and cultural, entertainment and educational opportunities. This Plan was not developed with only these focus areas in mind, but they became the focus areas through an organic process based on citizen input, engagement and dialogue. The goals, objectives and strategies within the Plan address these key components, which reflect a thriving city and ensure the vitality of Great Falls into the future.

We ask that the Planning Advisory Board and the City Commission accept, adopt and embrace the Downtown Master Plan, which reflects the hard work and shared vision of a committed group of stakeholders and citizens in a process that has taken a year to complete. We believe that adoption of this plan, as a component of the City's overall Growth Policy, will lay the foundation for robust future growth and development of Downtown Great Falls.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Master Plan (the Plan) is the first plan prepared specifically for Downtown Great Falls. Although the Plan is a City-initiated process facilitated by the Planning and Community Development Department, it is the community's vision for Downtown. The Plan is the result of comprehensive community outreach and extensive public participation. The product is a blueprint for growth that will guide public funding and facilities and private development into the future. The Introduction provides information on the planning process, a history of Downtown and recent investments, and provides the framework for the Plan.



**Downtown Vision**  
**Planning Process**  
**Public Participation**  
**Downtown History**





## Downtown Quick Facts

### Downtown Residents:

- ~ 7,000

### Downtown Workforce:

- ~ 8,800

### Downtown Area:

- ~1.07 square miles

### Neighborhoods:

- Council 7
- Council 8
- Council 9

## Downtown Vision

*Downtown is the heart and center of Great Falls. Like the Missouri River, it is dynamic, fluid, attractive, and welcoming, connecting our heritage to our future. The River's Edge Trail, historic neighborhoods, and parks and open space support and enhance a unique mix of local shops, restaurants, entertainment and special events that make Downtown the place to be – day and night.*

## Planning Process

Many citizens contributed to this plan throughout the course of the 12 month process. The Plan has been created for and by Downtown residents, business owners, employees, representatives of various stakeholder groups and organizations, and community members concerned with the future of Downtown.

## Plan Organization

In an effort to encourage a comprehensive approach to planning for Downtown, the Plan is organized around four primary plan elements Livability, Character, Accessibility, and Vitality. Each element consists of a number of topics that impact Downtown. The mix of topics within each plan element resulted in the convergence of a diverse mix of community members and stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds and experiences sharing ideas and visions.

### Livability

Livability is the enrichment of the physical, social, and personal well being of Downtown residents, employees, and visitors. A livable Downtown is welcoming to people of all ages and incomes and provides a friendly and safe environment that encourages social interaction.

### Character

Character is composed of the physical elements that create a unique sense of place that distinguishes the Downtown area from other parts of the city.

### Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the ability of residents, employees, and visitors to have the option of using multiple modes of transportation to reach Downtown destinations in a safe and efficient manner.

### Vitality

Vitality refers to Downtown's role as the center of commerce, culture, and com-

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community events - year-round, throughout the day and into the night. A Downtown with vitality has thriving offices, businesses, culture, and events.

## **Public Participation**

The public participation component of the Plan was extensive and far-reaching. An early and continuous commitment to a transparent and inclusive planning process provided the framework for the Plan and provided a forum for community members and stakeholders of all demographics and interests to participate in the development of the Plan. Public participation was structured around three primary components: the Steering Committee, Working Groups and Community Open House meetings. In total, City staff facilitated 24 official meetings and met with numerous community groups and organizations throughout the planning process.



## **Working Groups**

Each of the four elements of the Plan was guided by a dedicated Working Group consisting of 12 to 30 community members and a Planning Staff member. The Working Groups met on a monthly basis to develop the primary content of the Plan. This work included identifying the assets and issues of Downtown, brainstorming “best ideas” for the future, and finally developing the goals, objectives, and strategies that will bridge the gap between Downtown today and the community’s vision for Downtown.



## **Steering Committee**

Each Working Group elected co-chairpersons to represent them on the Plan Steering Committee. Working Group co-chairs were joined on the Steering Committee by a Planning Staff member who worked with each group.



The Steering Committees’ primary role was to ensure coordination among the Working Groups by developing the Downtown Vision Statement, working with Planning Staff to finalize plan goals, objectives, and strategies, and developing an approach to implement the Plan strategies.

## **Community Open House Meetings**

Three Community Open House meetings were held over the course of the planning process. These meetings included a plan kick-off meeting in late August 2010, a follow-up open house meeting in September 2010, and finally an open house meeting to conclude the public participation phase of the Plan in late May 2011. These meetings provided the community with an opportunity to learn



about the Plan, comment on the development of the Plan and provide input on the vision and recommendations contained within the Plan.

Two of the Community Open House meetings featured key-note addresses by national planning experts. The September 2010 open house featured a presentation by Paul Zykofsky, Director of Land Use and Transportation at the Local Government Commission (LGC). Mr. Zykofsky shared with the audience key components of vibrant and thriving downtowns. He also provided a series of examples of communities that have revitalized their downtowns, including before and after images, and examples of the planning processes that these communities have used. Nearly 100 community members were in attendance to hear Mr. Zykofsky speak.



The Community Open House meeting concluding the public participation phase of the Plan in May 2011 featured a presentation by Dan Burden, founder and Executive Director of the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute. Mr. Burden gave an inspiring presentation on innovative best practices that he has helped communities around the country implement to become more healthy, active and vibrant places. Prior to the Community Open House, Mr. Burden led a group of twenty-five interested City staff, elected officials and community stakeholders, on a “walking audit” of Downtown. On the walking audit, Mr. Burden identified both strengths and weaknesses of the Downtown built environment, and offered suggestions to improve the overall livability of Downtown.

## Downtown History



Downtown Great Falls has been shaped by planning since the City was first plotted by Paris Gibson in 1883. Gibson laid out the streets and avenues that make up Downtown Great Falls on an east-west and north-south axis, centered on the 90-foot-wide Central Avenue. The traditional block-grid pattern that defines Downtown today can be attributed to the foresight of Gibson and other early City founders. This configuration, along with the City’s location on the Missouri River, helped to establish Great Falls as a center for transportation, commerce, and manufacturing.



In its earliest days, Downtown served Great Falls and the greater region as the central hub of activity and services. Commercial businesses have lined both sides of Central Avenue and the adjacent streets and avenues since these streets were first constructed. Government offices and services have been located Downtown since its founding. City and County officials eventually built permanent structures, with the construction of the Cascade County Courthouse in 1902 and the

# Chapter 1



City of Great Falls Civic Center in 1940. Gibson Park, located in the heart of Downtown and recognized as the crown jewel of the City's extensive park system, has provided residents with a place to congregate and recreate since it was given to the City by the Great Falls Power & Townsite Company in 1891. The City's first neighborhoods, including the Historic Northside Residential District, are located Downtown, within walking distance of these early amenities. This pattern of development continued through the first half of the 20th century as Downtown thrived through World War II.



The decades of the 1950s and 1960s brought with them an increase in automobile ownership and the construction of new highways across the country. This phenomenon led to commercial businesses and services vacating their traditional Downtown locations and relocating near fringe areas with easy highway access.



By the 1970s, Downtown Great Falls, like many downtown areas, was witnessing high vacancy rates and resulting blighted conditions. Realizing the need to address this issue, Downtown stakeholders and City officials teamed up to develop and adopt the 1977 Central Place Revitalization Program. The program covered a geographical area similar to this Plan, stretching west to east from the Missouri River to 10th Street and north to south from Park Drive to 10th Avenue South. The three-part program included a proposed zoning ordinance for the area, a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) based financing plan, and a list of recommendations including land acquisition, building demolition or rehabilitation, and infrastructure improvements. Although adopted by the City Commission, the program had limited success and was never fully implemented.



The 1998 Great Falls City-County Growth Policy identified the need for the City to take an active role in leading a Downtown planning effort. The subsequent 2003 and 2005 updates of the Growth Policy maintained this position and contained a number of specific recommendations for Downtown, including a recommendation to:

*“Prepare, adopt, and implement a Downtown Revitalization Plan. Like the Missouri River corridor, Downtown Great Falls is a vitally important component of the community in need of special attention. A Downtown plan would focus on specific issues to bring people and activity back into the Downtown and strengthen it as the community’s center for commerce, finance, entertainment, and culture.”* The policy suggests addressing a number of issues including:

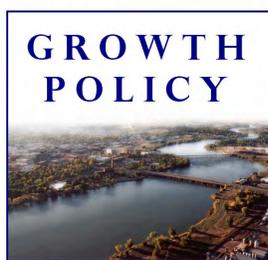
- Design guidelines for building facades and canopies
- Traffic flow (one-way street pairs)

## Previous Plans Consulted

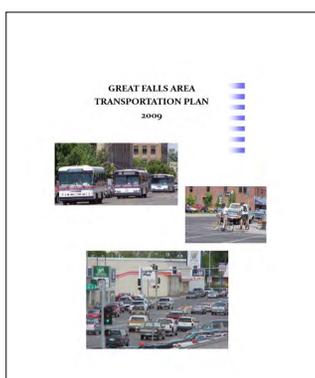
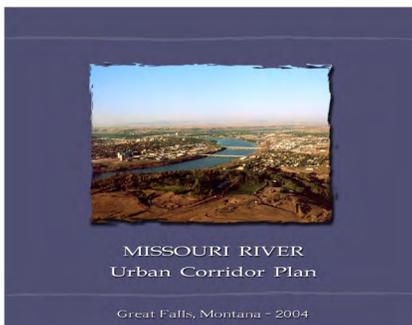
The Plan is not starting from a blank slate - the City of Great Falls has prepared a number of planning documents that were consulted, including:

- Pedestrian and bicyclist safety, accessibility, and circulation
- Parking
- Transit
- Retail base
- Marketing and promotion
- Linkages to Broadwater Bay, Gibson Park, and adjacent neighborhoods
- Residential uses
- Landscape/streetscape design

CITY OF  
GREAT FALLS, MONTANA



Adopted on June 21, 2005  
by the Great Falls City Commission



## Recent Downtown Planning Efforts

In recent years, the community has recognized the need for and voiced a desire to take action on Downtown. This desire has led to a number of groups and organizations forming or joining together to work toward Downtown revitalization.

### Imagine Downtown

Imagine Downtown was a 2007 visioning effort that focused on identifying a catalytic project intended to accelerate the long-term vision of Downtown Great Falls. Over the course of a year, the 84 participants were organized into committees including housing, loans, and tax incentives. Although a catalytic project did not ultimately materialize, this effort helped create momentum, interest and excitement for this Plan.

### Downtown Action Alliance

The Downtown Action Alliance is a group composed of representatives from 17 different organizations with an interest in Downtown. The Alliance mission is to “*capitalize on our collective resources to create a vibrant Downtown through good communication and collaborative actions.*” The Alliance continues to meet on a monthly basis and has begun the process of identifying select projects to support to foster action Downtown.

### International Economic Development Council

In 2009, through an application from the Great Falls Weed & Seed Program, the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) provided the City with a team of professionals to identify revitalization strategies to improve Downtown. Through a series of interviews, meetings, and a site visit, the IEDC team produced a report outlining recommendations for successful Downtown revitalization. The recommendations focused on the following primary areas: adopt a focused approach to Downtown; make Downtown the place to be; identify target audience

and develop strategies to attract them to Downtown; and, begin restoring Downtown as the heart of the city. The IEDC recommendations are shown in the sidebar to the right.

## Recent Downtown Investment

Although the City has not prepared a plan specifically for Downtown, the City, other public entities, private investors, and partnerships between these public entities and private parties have invested in and made improvements to Downtown since the adoption of the Central Place Revitalization Program in the late 1970s. Recent public and private Downtown investments are documented in Figure 1 on the following page.

### IEDC Recommendations:

#### High Priority:

- Identify a lead agency / champion to lead Downtown revitalization efforts
- Conduct a parking pilot program
- Expand the partnership between Downtown Great Falls Assoc. and the Business Improvement District
- Promote and market Downtown amenities and Downtown living
- Place marketing materials in hotels and other sites
- Attract more people to Downtown with events
- Address safety concerns / perception of safety
- Share plans and resources to address issues in Downtown
- Engage youth in revitalization efforts
- Improve aesthetics in Downtown
- Aggressively pursue saving the Public Drug Building
- Restore one-way streets to two-way
- Develop and implement a parking plan
- Define and promote connections to the river

#### Lower Priority

- Recruit a wi-fi coffee shop
- Explore the opportunity of a major regional draw
- Align incentives to revitalization plan

**Figure 1. Recent Downtown Public/Private Investment**



Transportation & Parking	Commercial / Office	Recreation	Urban Design	Institutional
City of Great Falls South Parking Garage	Cropgrowers Building rehabilitation	Gibson Park Playground Equipment installation	Central Ave streetscape	Vinegar Jones Cabin Rehab
1st Ave S and Park Dr S parking lot	Milwaukee Depot rehab	Gibson Park Duck Pond rehab	1st Ave S streetscape	Civic Center rehab
1st / 2nd Ave S reconstruction	Credit Union rehab	Gibson Park Walking Trail	1st Ave N streetscape	Whittier/Margaret Parks rehab
1st/2nd Ave N reconstruction	Johnson Hotel Condo rehab	River's Edge Trail	5th St S streetscape	Paris Gibson Square establishment/rehab
14th /15th St reconstruction	Great Falls Gas Co rehab	Electric City Water Park	Downtown trash containers	The History Museum establishment/rehab
9th Street reconstruction	Montana Building Condo and Commercial rehab	Elks Riverside Park tennis courts	Library Plaza/Fountain	C.M. Russell Studio restoration
River Drive/1st Ave N intersection realignment		Riverside Rail Yard Skate Park	Lady Liberty restoration	C.M. Russell Museum expansion
Civic Center overflow parking lots		Conversion of vacant DeMolay Building to Community Recreation Center	Davidson Plaza/3rd St Plaza	City/County Health Building
Construction of 3rd Ave S from 2nd St to River Drive			Rocky Mountain Building public art project	Children's Museum establishment /rehab
Great Falls Transit District transfer center				Rainbow Senior Living rehab
				Park Manor rehab



## 2. DOWNTOWN CONTEXT

Downtown is the City's melting pot. It houses a diverse population of all ages and incomes, a dynamic workforce and a mix of land uses, zoning districts, historic resources, institutional boundaries and transportation networks. These factors, among others, contribute to the current conditions of Downtown today. The Downtown Context provides a snapshot of the current conditions of Downtown.

### Downtown Planning Area & Current Conditions



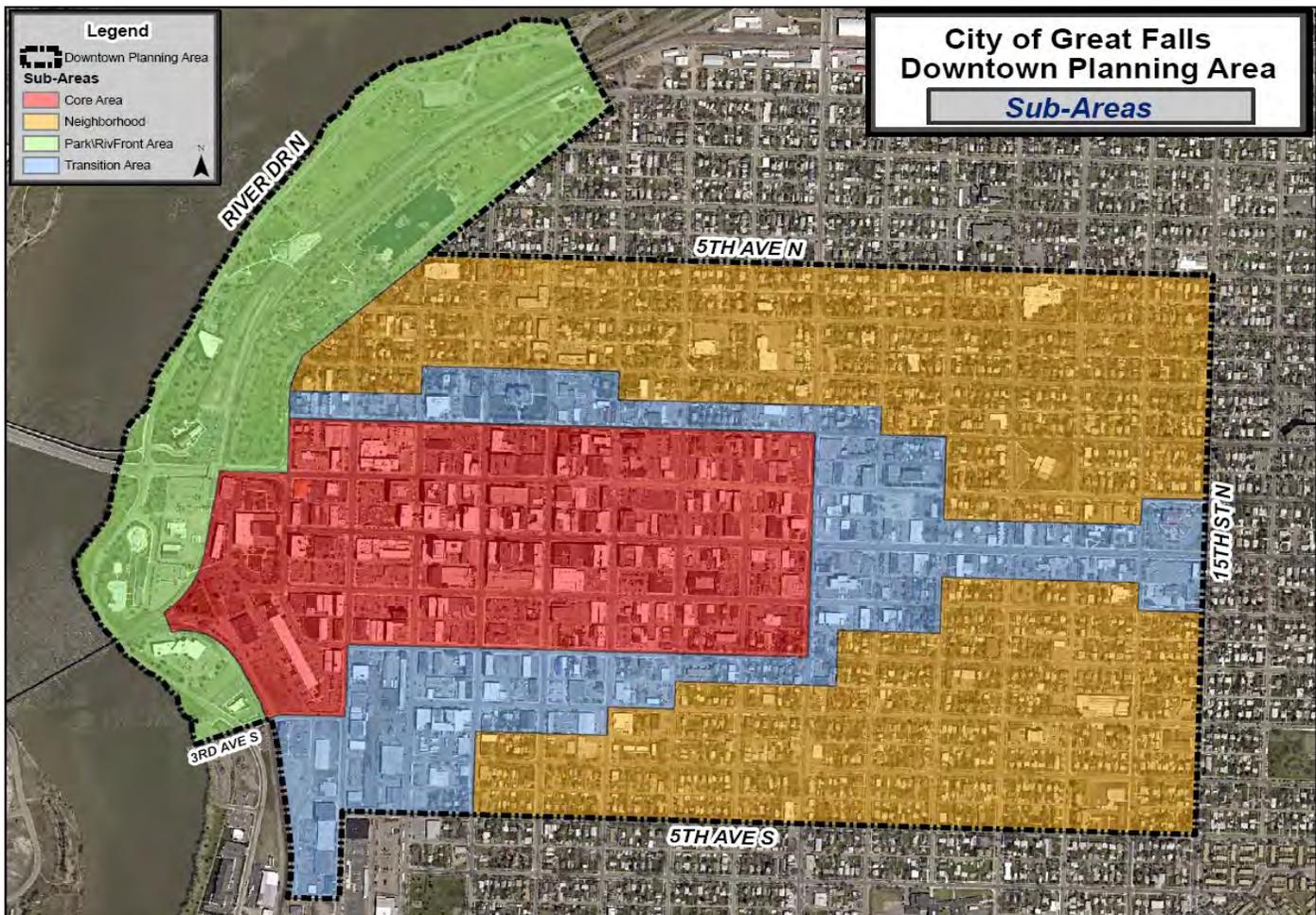
## Downtown Planning Area

Downtown lies within the boundaries displayed in Exhibit A below. The area covers 687.4 acres (1.07 sq. mi.) of the original townsite of Great Falls. Streets define the northern (5th Avenue North), southern (5th Avenue South), and eastern (15th Street) boundaries, while the Missouri River forms the western boundary.

## Sub-areas

Contained within Downtown are four smaller sub-areas. The four sub-areas each have a unique identity based primarily on their respective locations and land use characteristics. While it may be useful and appropriate to address the topics contained within the Plan according to sub-areas, the primary purpose of these sub-areas is to facilitate the use of common terminology when referring to different geographical locations within the Downtown Planning Area. The four sub-areas are the Core, Transition, Neighborhood and Park and Riverfront Sub-areas.

Exhibit A: Downtown Planning Area



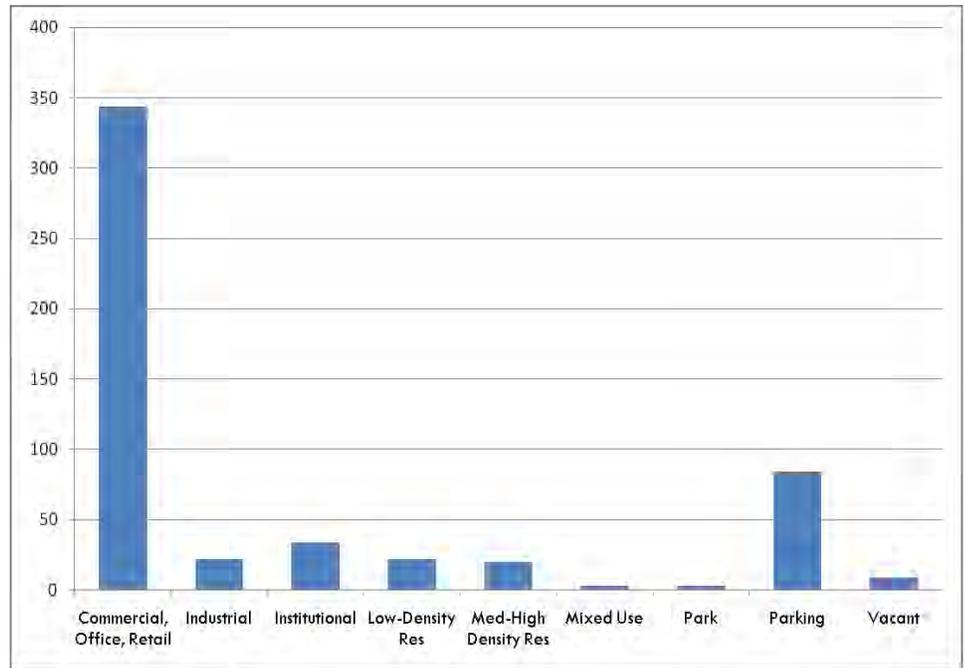
# Chapter 2

## Core Sub-area

The Core sub-area contains the historic commercial heart of Downtown – Central Avenue and its parallel business arterial streets – and is the economic, cultural, and civic center of Great Falls. The Core is characterized by multi-story buildings primarily containing commercial, office, and retail land uses, as well as multiple surface parking lots and structures and institutional facilities. A limited number of residential structures are located in the Downtown Core, and those are typically multi-family. This Core is bisected by Central Avenue, and is surrounded by the Transition and Park and Riverfront Areas.



Figure 2: Core Sub-area Land Use by Parcel



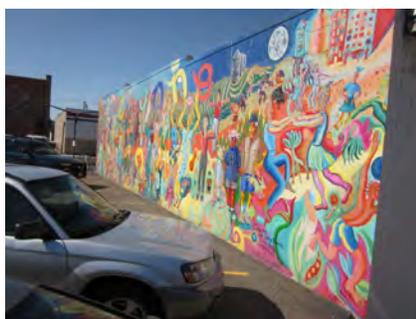
### Office Land Uses



### Transit Center



### Public Art



### Street Level Commercial

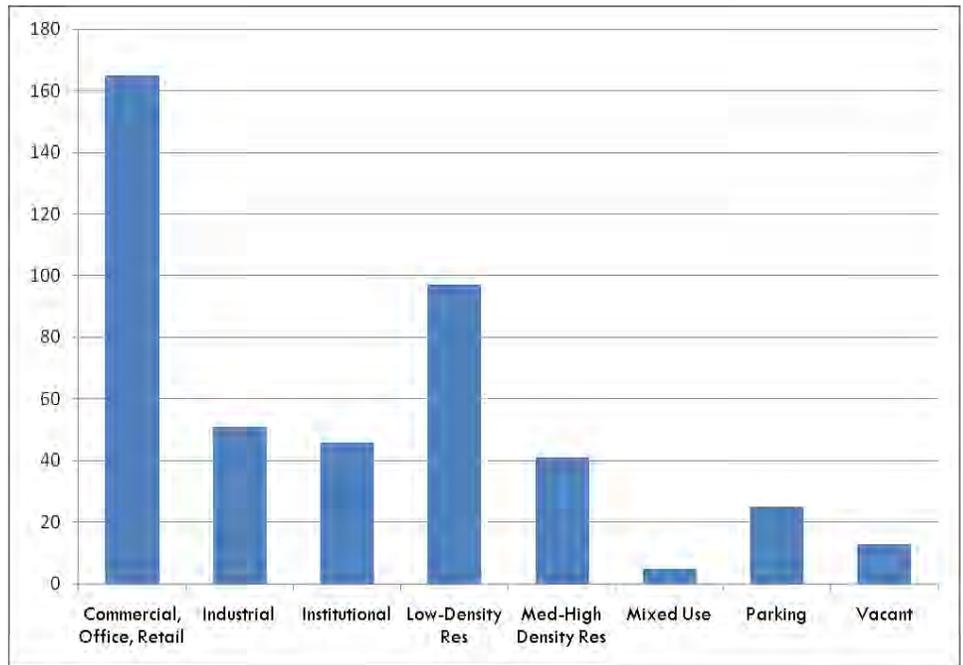


## Transition Sub-area

The Transition sub-area is a vital part of Downtown Great Falls - where land uses gradually shift from the primarily non-residential Core to the primarily residential Neighborhood sub-area. Approximately two-thirds of the parcels in the Transition sub-area are dedicated to non-residential land uses, including a concentration of industrial land uses in the southwest corner of Downtown. Other non-residential uses include a relatively even mixture of retail, office and service uses. The remaining one-third of the parcels is divided between low density and medium-high density residential units.



Figure 3: Transition Sub-area Land Use by Parcel



### The History Museum



### Med-High Density Housing



### Great Falls Public Library Plaza



### Commercial Facility



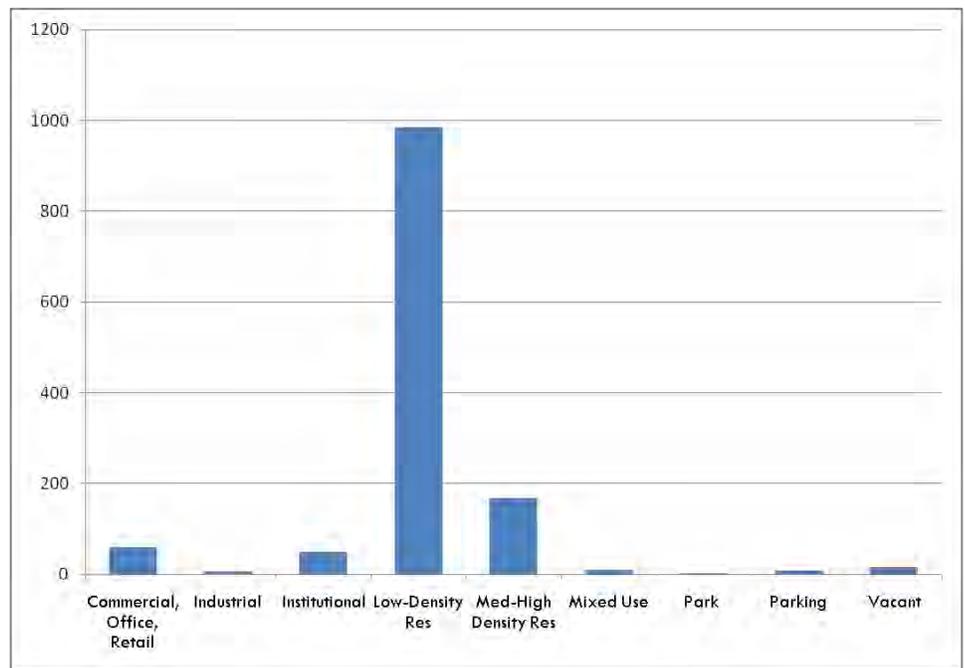
# Chapter 2

## Neighborhood Sub-area

The Neighborhood sub-area makes up the northern, eastern, and southern periphery areas of Downtown Great Falls. As the name suggests, the majority of parcels in the Neighborhood sub-area are dedicated to residential land uses – consisting of both single family and multiple family units. This area is home to the City’s original neighborhoods and includes the homes of many of Great Falls’ earliest families. The occasional non-residential parcels are primarily dedicated to institutional, educational, commercial, office, and retail land uses.



Figure 4: Neighborhood Sub-area Land Use by Parcel



### C.M. Russell Museum Complex



### Homes on the National Registry



### Traditional Neighborhoods



### Med-High Density Residential

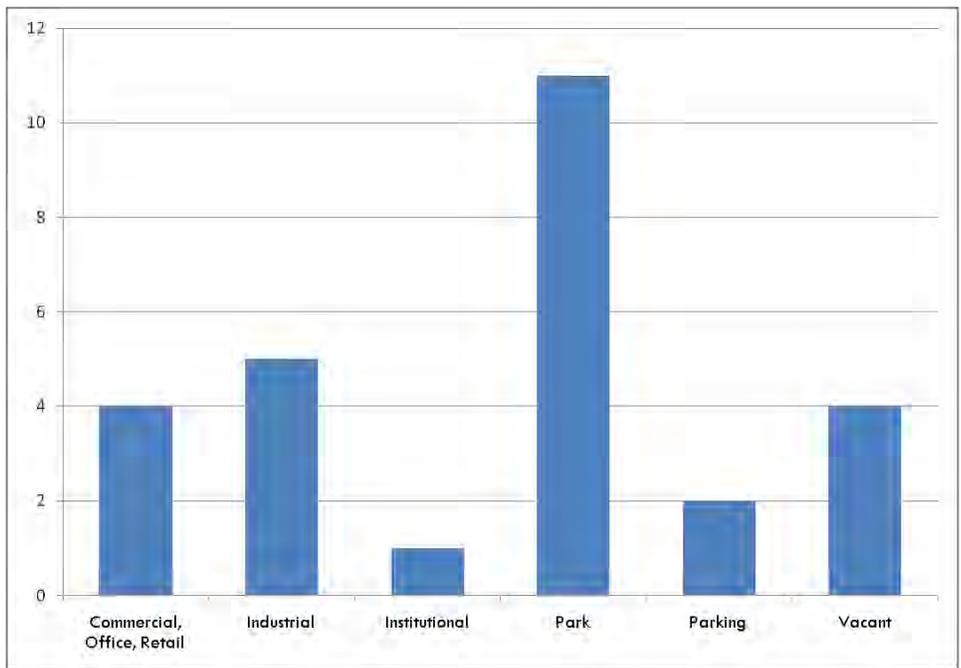


## Park and Riverfront Sub-area

The Park and Riverfront sub-area contains nearly all of Downtown’s parks including: Gibson Park, Elk’s Riverside Park, and the park areas around Mitchell Pool. The Rivers Edge Trail, the City’s award-winning pedestrian and bike trail, passes through the Park and Riverfront sub-area, connecting this area with many destinations throughout Great Falls and beyond. In addition to open space, recreation facilities and trails, the Park and Riverfront sub-area contains a small amount of commercial, office, and retail land uses and is bisected or bordered by the railroad.



Figure 5: Park and Riverfront Sub-area Land Use by Parcel



### Elks Riverside Park



### Office Land Use



### Gibson Park and Pond



### River's Edge Trail



# Chapter 2

**Figure 6: Downtown Employment**

Industry	Number	%
Finance and Insurance	1596	18.30%
Public Administration	1112	12.70%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	934	10.70%
Health Care and Social Assistance	810	9.30%
Accommodation and Food Services	684	7.80%
Retail Trade	566	6.5
Other Services (except Public Administration)	529	6.10%
Admin. & Support and Waste Mgmt. and Remediation Services	427	4.90%
Information	363	4.20%
Transportation and Warehousing	354	4.10%
Wholesale Trade	275	3.10%
Manufacturing	210	2.40%
Educational Services	191	2.20%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	187	2.10%
Construction	139	1.60%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	130	1.50%
Mining	106	1.20%
Utilities	64	0.70%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	40	0.50%
Unclassified	23	0.30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8739</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Downtown Employment

Downtown Great Falls employs nearly 9,000 workers. Local employment data, provided to the City by the Montana Department of Transportation, show that Finance and Insurance, Public Administration, and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services are the primary sources of jobs Downtown.

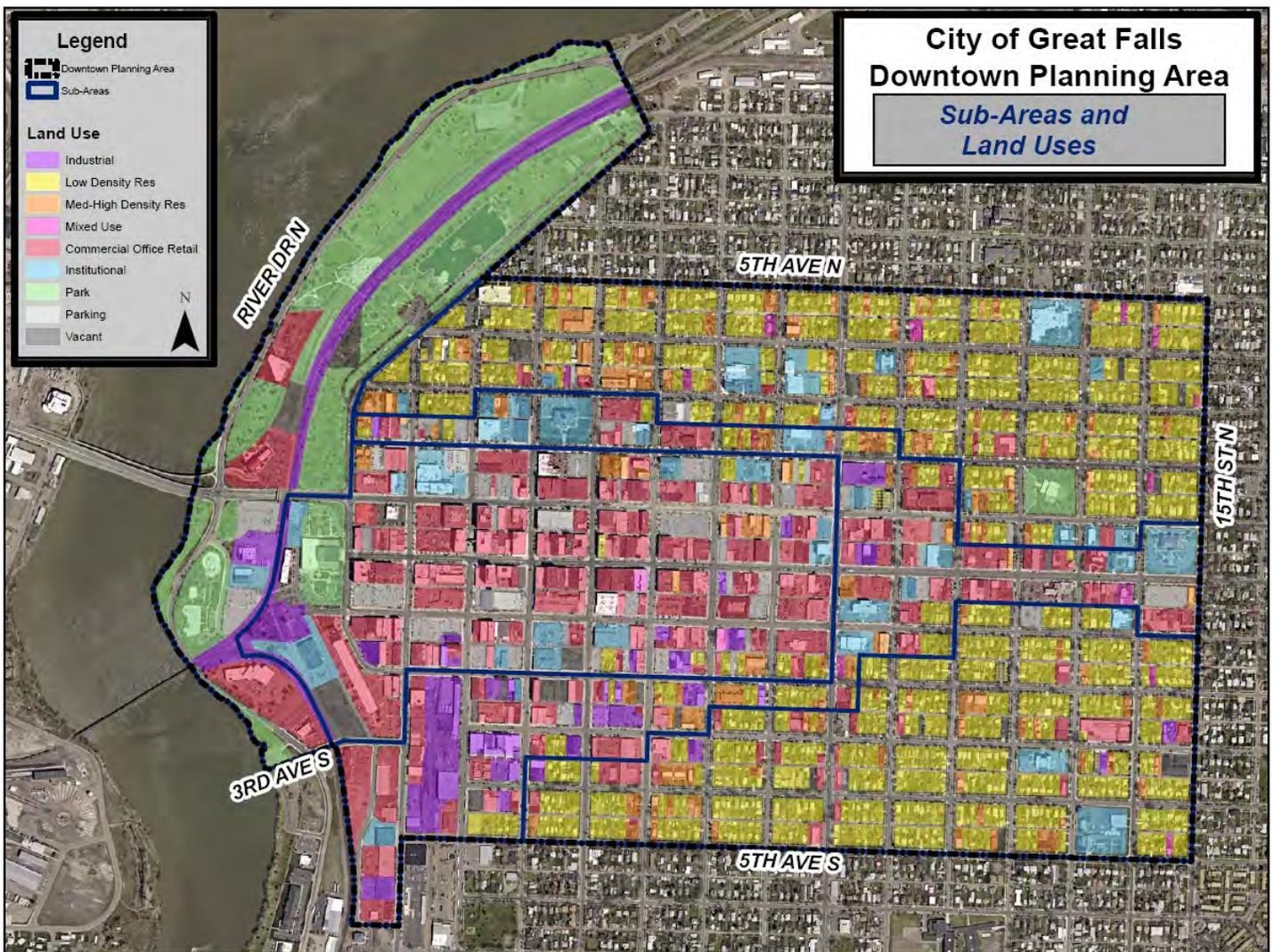
Large Downtown employers include: NEW Corporation - which accounts for approximately 650 jobs Downtown - Cascade County, Davidson Companies, the United States Postal Service, J.C.C.S. Certified Public Accountants and the City of Great Falls, to name a few.

Although the industries listed above contribute the most employees to the Downtown workforce, locally owned retail shops, restaurants, and service providers play a major role in shaping the employment picture of Downtown.

## Land Use

Land uses in Downtown Great Falls are generally characterized by commercial, office, and retail uses in the Core sub-area, transitioning outward to primarily residential land uses in the Neighborhood sub-area. Between these two sub-areas is a general mix of parks, industrial, institutional, and parking facilities as well as many of the City's cultural, civic, and historical resources. Downtown provides a wide array of land uses in a relatively small, concentrated area in the geographic center of Great Falls.

EXHIBIT B: Downtown Land Use

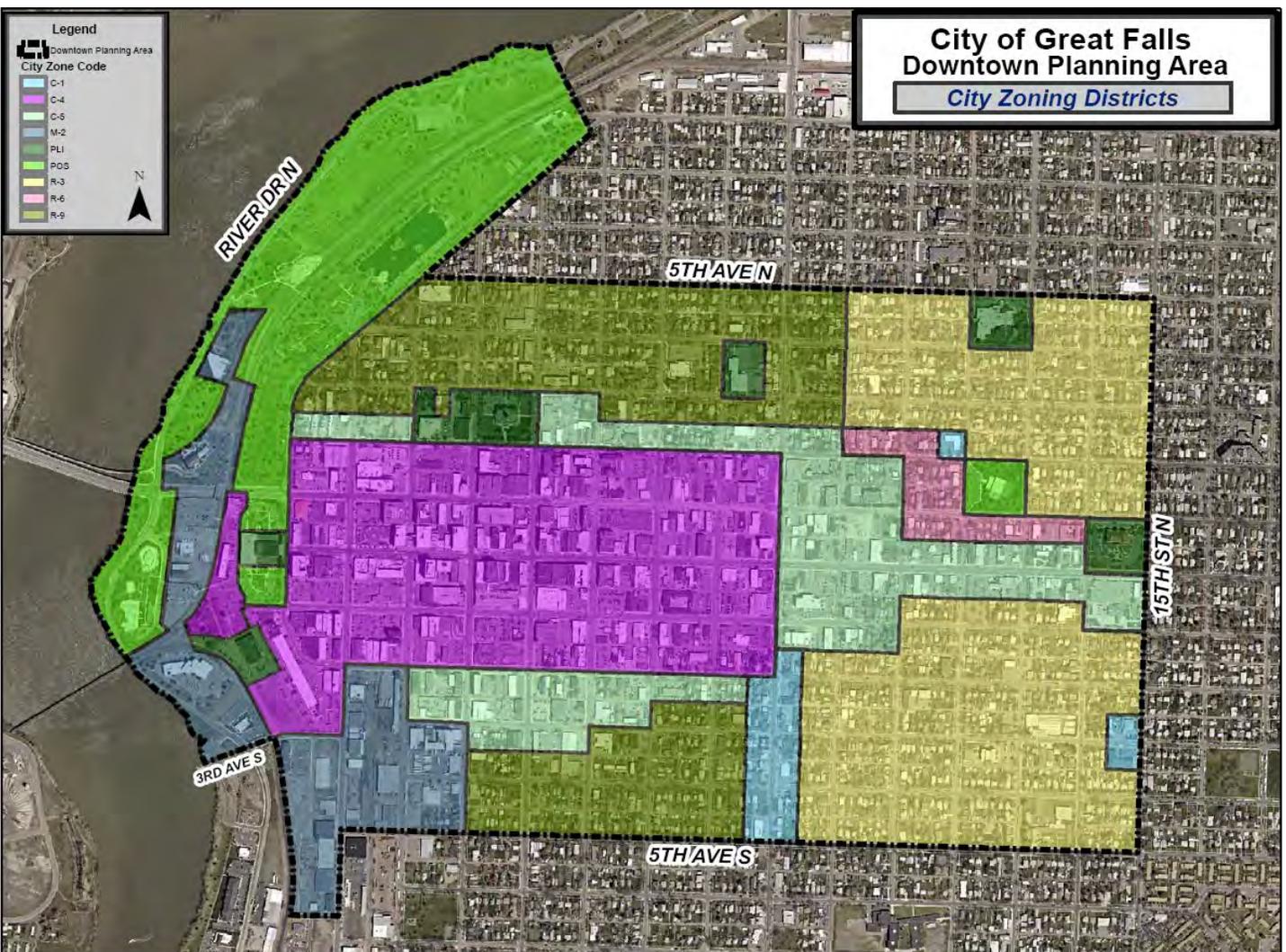


# Chapter 2

## Zoning

Great Falls has 19 zoning districts, nine of which are found Downtown. Commercial zoning districts Downtown include the C-1, C-4, and C-5 districts. Residential zoning districts include the R-3, R-6, and R-9 districts. Downtown is also home to the M-2 mixed use district, the POS parks and open space district, and the PLI public lands and institutional district. For a full description of zoning districts Downtown see Figure 9 in Appendix.

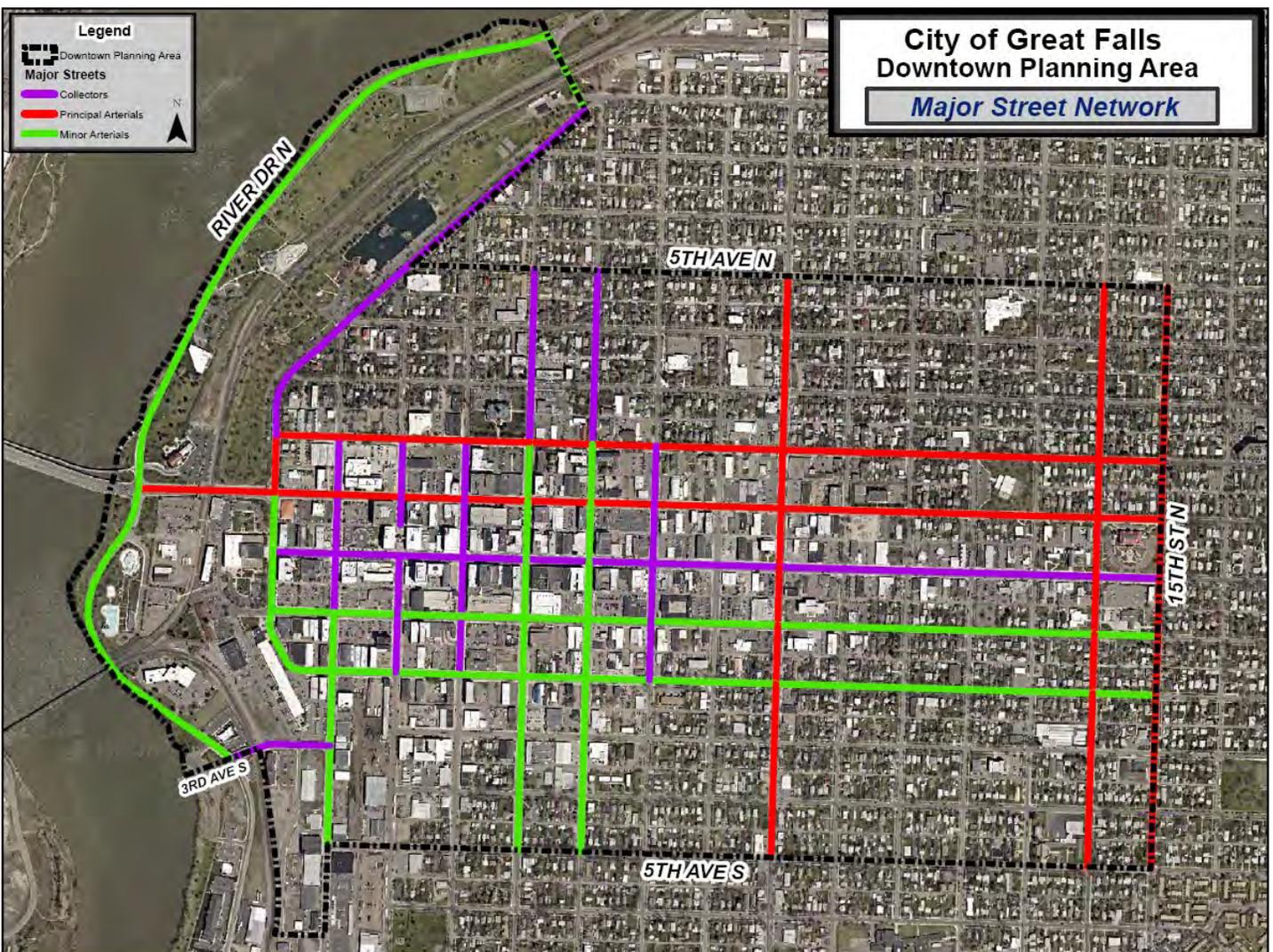
EXHIBIT C: Downtown Zoning



## Street Network

Streets in the City of Great Falls are defined in the 2009 Great Falls Area Transportation Plan based on purpose, capacity and speed. The map below identifies the arterial (principal and minor) and collector streets found Downtown. These streets provide the primary means of moving automobile traffic into and through Downtown. The remaining streets are local streets, providing low-speed access to and from neighborhoods

EXHIBIT D: Downtown Street Network

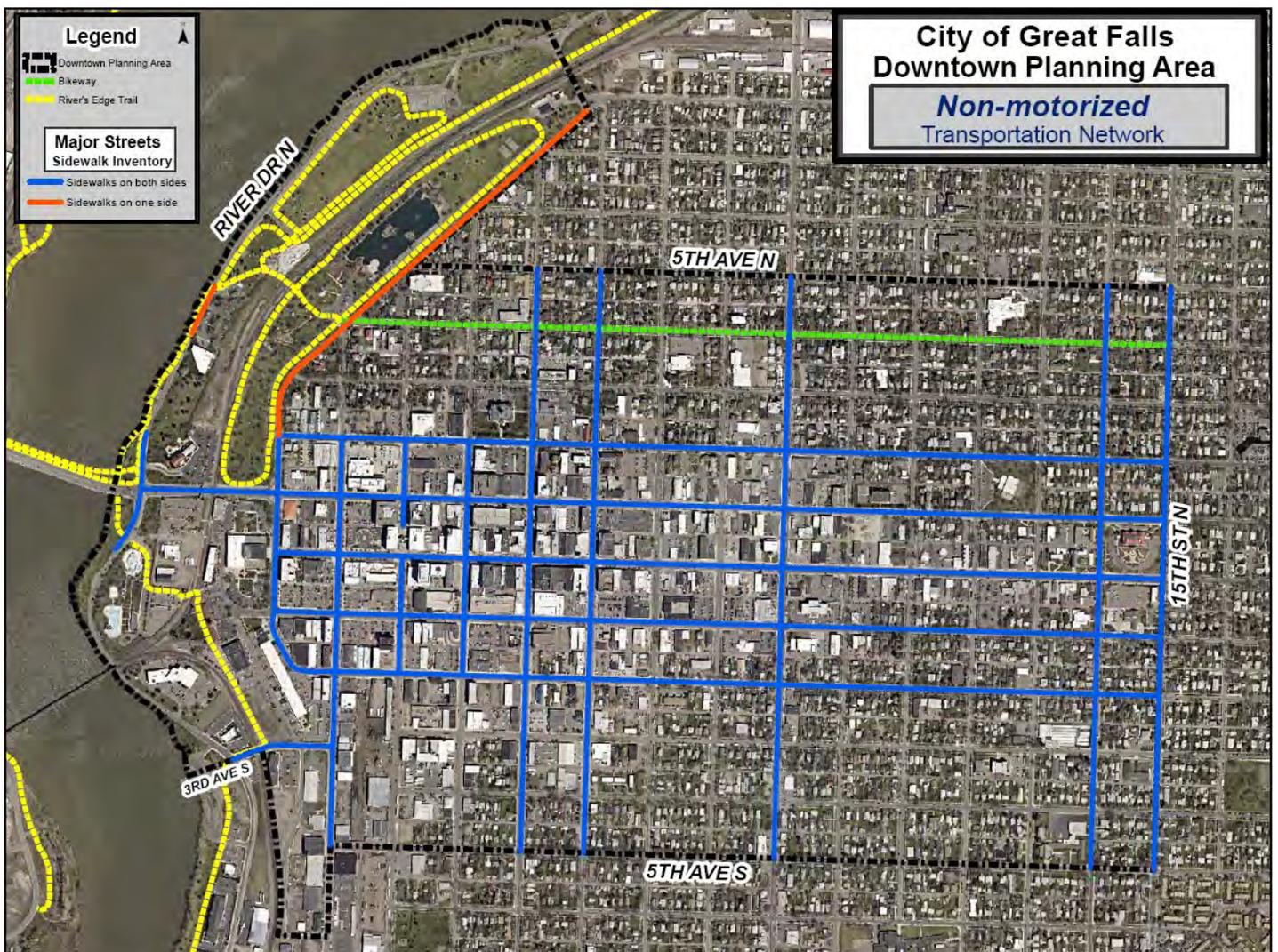


# Chapter 2

## Non-Motorized Transportation Network

The nationally acclaimed River's Edge Trail - a 40 mile mixed use trail system - links many of the City's parks and destinations, and provides commuting and recreational opportunities for residents throughout the City. The trail is a primary component of Downtown's non-motorized transportation network, providing access to and from Downtown without reliance on the private automobile. When walking Downtown, residents, employees, and visitors are provided sidewalks on both sides of most streets. Additionally, the 4th Avenue North bike route provides an east/west link from the River's Edge Trail through Downtown to other neighborhoods and destinations.

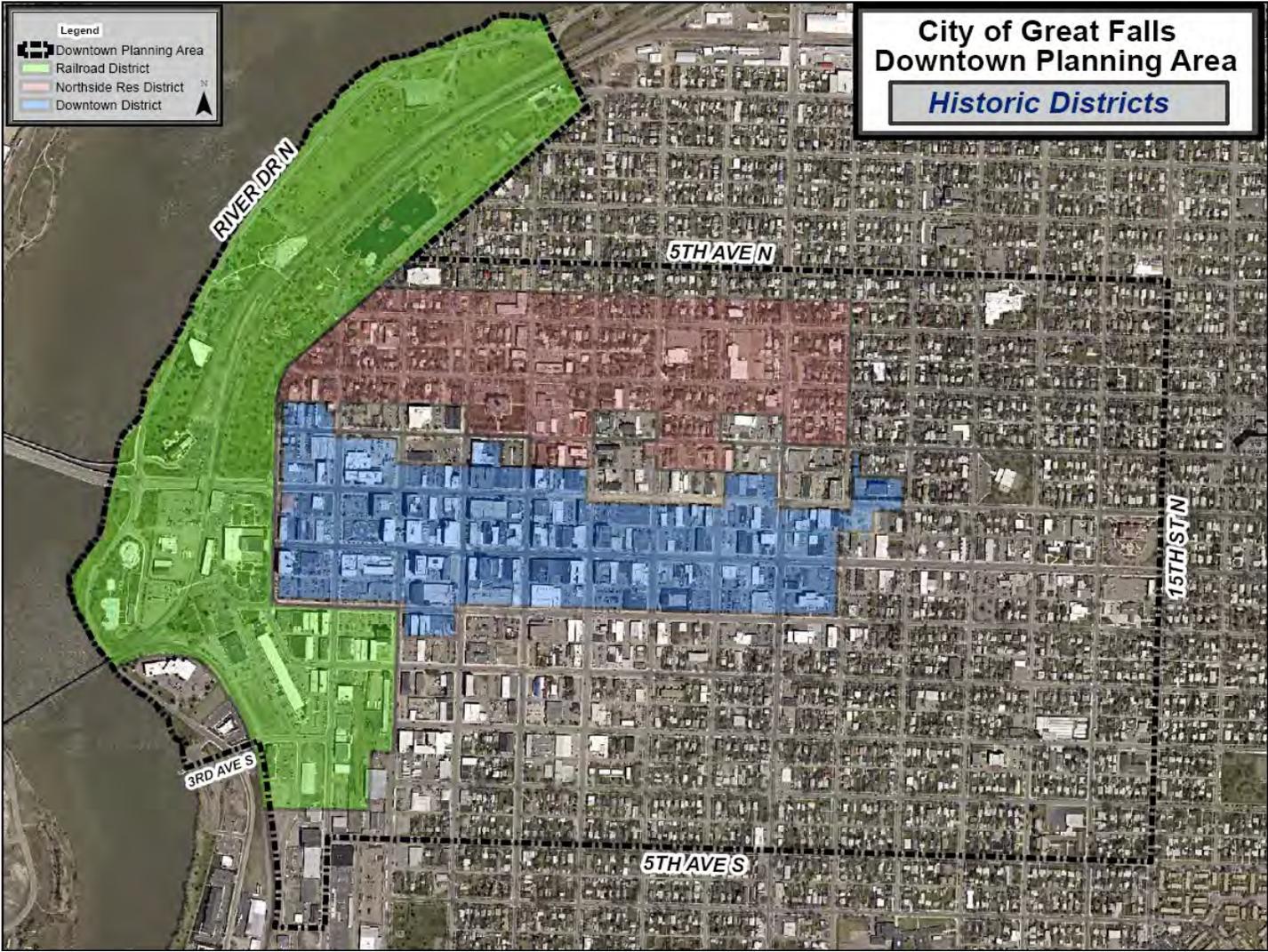
EXHIBIT E: Downtown Non-motorized Transportation Network



## Historic Resources

Downtown is home to three of the City's Historic Districts recognized by the National Register of Historic Places, the Nation's honor roll of properties considered worthy of preservation. The Central Business, Northside Residential and Railroad Historic Districts contain 411 properties that contribute to the history of Great Falls. Within the Plan boundary, Paris Gibson Square is listed individually on the National Register and the C.M. Russell Studio and Residence are listed as National Historic Landmarks. These properties preserve and enhance the character, culture, and heritage valued by the citizens of Great Falls.

EXHIBIT F: Downtown Historic Resources

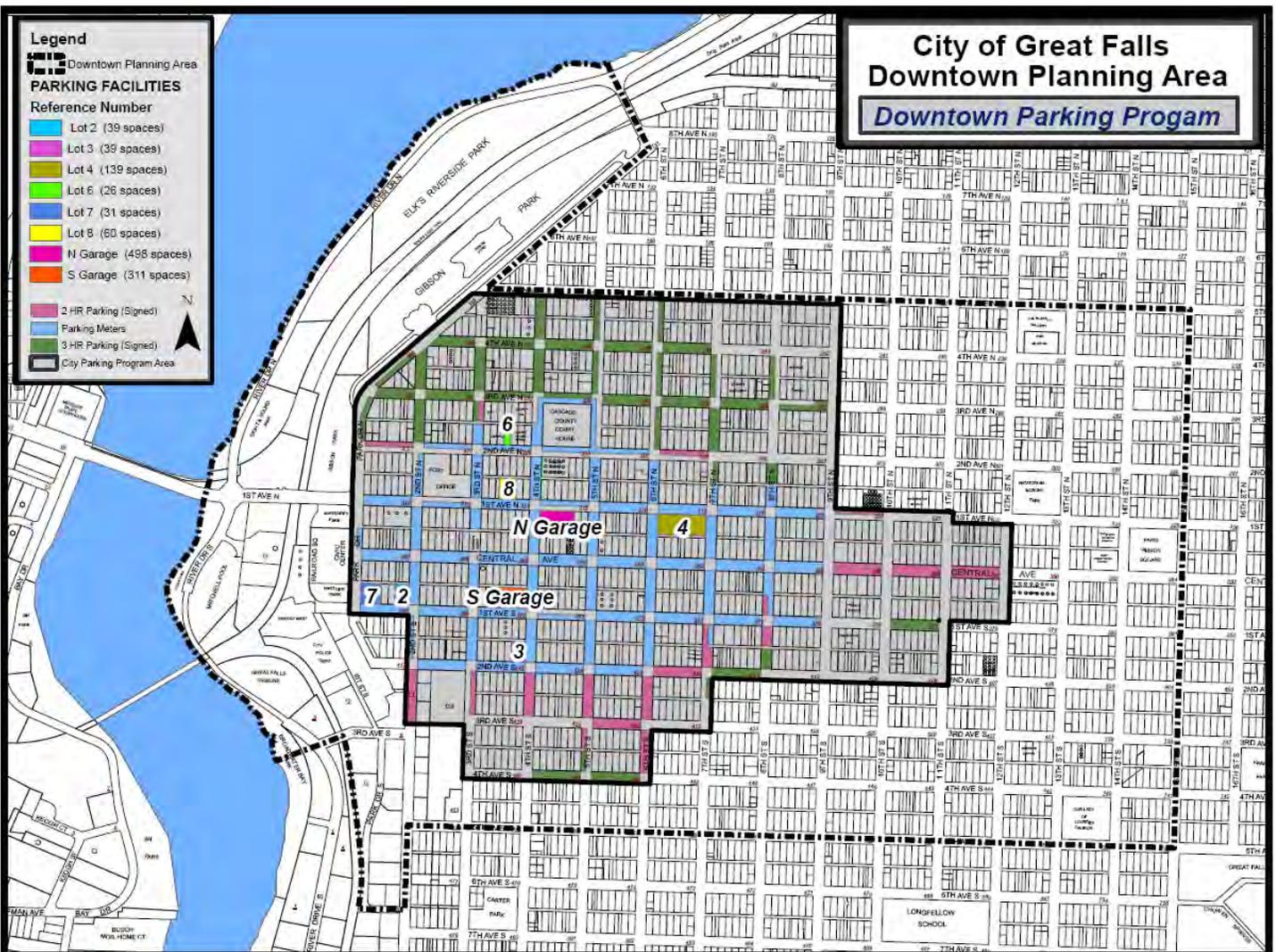


# Chapter 2

## Parking

Downtown offers an abundance of parking options through public and private parking facilities. The City of Great Falls administers the Downtown Parking District which covers 62 blocks throughout Downtown. The City inventory includes 809 spaces within two parking structures, 334 spaces in six surface lots and approximately 1,100 metered spaces located throughout the parking district. To ensure the availability of parking for residents who live within the Downtown Parking District, on-street parking in predominantly residential areas is restricted to two or three hours, except for residents with a residential permit. Private surface and structured parking is provided as ancillary uses to existing commercial, residential uses and is often leased on a daily or monthly basis. Finally, outside of the private lots and the Downtown Parking District, on street parking is available for use free of charge.

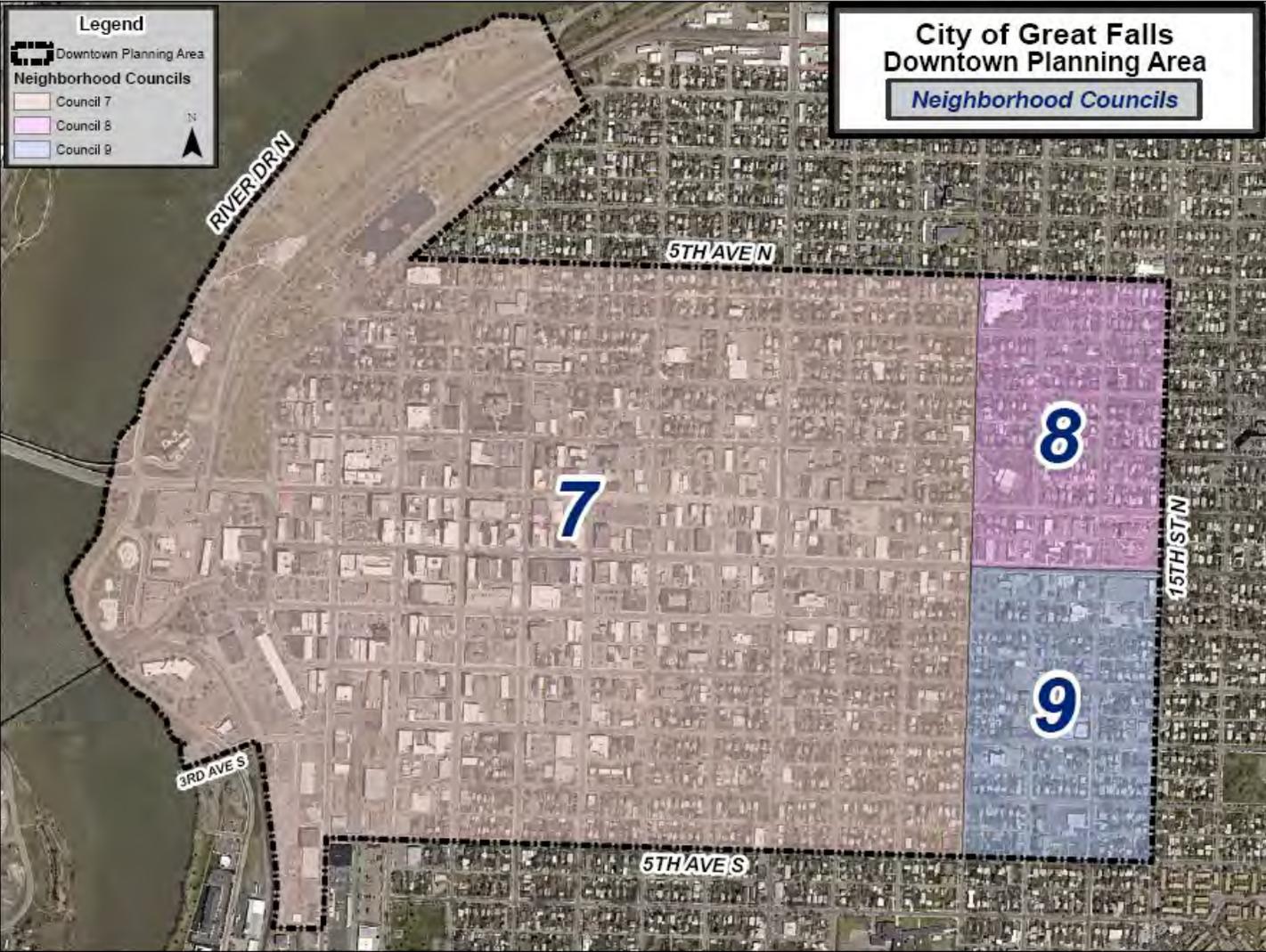
EXHIBIT G: Downtown Parking



## Neighborhood Councils

Neighborhood Councils provide a means for the citizens of Great Falls to participate in local government through formal organization at the neighborhood level. Councils address neighborhood issues and provide input to the City Commission and City staff on various issues. The majority of Downtown is within the boundary of Neighborhood Council Seven, but also included in Downtown are small portions of both Neighborhood Councils Eight and Nine.

EXHIBIT H: Downtown Neighborhood Councils





## 3. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Implementation Plan is composed of the goals, objectives, and strategies that put the Plan to work. The Implementation Plan is intended to bridge the gap between Downtown today and the Downtown that is envisioned in the future. This framework was developed from community input obtained through Downtown Working Groups between the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011.

### Goal Overview

**Goal 1: Connected Downtown**

**Goal 2: Flourishing Downtown**

**Goal 3: Downtown Destination**

**Goal 4: Downtown Living**

**Goal 5: Downtown Aesthetics**

**Implementation Table**

**Conclusion**

## **Goal Overview**

### **1. Connected Downtown**

#### **Overview:**

A transportation and circulation system that provides users with a variety of modes and a diversity in choices is fundamental to the future success of Downtown and will enhance Downtown's value as a place to live, work, shop and recreate.

Quality infrastructure for walking, biking, driving and transit provides choice in terms of the safest, healthiest, most-efficient and less-expensive route to reach Downtown's various amenities and destinations.

Downtown's existing infrastructure - the traditional street grid, the presence of sidewalks and the River's Edge Trail - provide a solid foundation to build a connected transportation and circulation system Downtown.

### **2. Flourishing Downtown**

#### **Overview:**

A flourishing Downtown is a key indicator of the overall economic health of Great Falls and plays a primary role in shaping the general perception and image of the City. By strengthening the existing business community and incentivizing new investment, Downtown has the potential to evolve into a flourishing place that enhances the image of the City and the region.

### **3. Downtown Destination:**

#### **Overview:**

Downtown has historically served as the City's center for entertainment, culture, shopping and dining. A diverse mix of retail shops, restaurants and cultural and entertainment facilities continue to serve as the core around which additional attractions can locate.

Plan participants have identified a small-scale entertainment venue, restaurants open in the evening and a local brew pub as destinations that would draw people Downtown. By supporting existing business and actively pursuing new uses, Downtown can once again become the regional destination.

### **4. Downtown Living**

#### **Overview:**

A strong residential component is vital to the long term health and vitality of Downtown. Great Falls' first neighborhoods were located Downtown and provided our earliest residents with quality housing in the City's core.

Today quality housing within close proximity to Downtown's concentrated mix of retail, services and restaurants provides residents with the opportunity to bike or walk to meet their daily needs and carry out other activities. This lifestyle is attractive to people of all ages and incomes and facilitates a vibrant Downtown environment.

## 5. Downtown Aesthetics

### Overview:

Great Falls has a strong historic base and the clear center of this base is Downtown. Downtown's buildings, streetscapes, parks, and the Missouri River play a primary role in articulating the rich culture and heritage of the City, and are a source of pride for the community.

Not only does the quality and character of Downtown's built environment enhance the value of the area, it also serves as a catalyst to retaining existing and attracting new residents and businesses. Additionally, this environment is a welcoming place for community members and guests to shop, relax and recreate.

The unique aesthetics of Downtown are an asset that should be preserved, enhanced and celebrated to propel Downtown toward a vibrant and sustainable future.

## **Goal 1. Connected Downtown**

**Enhance Downtown's transportation and circulation system to connect and integrate Downtown's amenities and destinations by multiple modes of transportation.**

**Objective 1: Improve pedestrian connectivity and safety Downtown.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Ensure streetscape improvements are designed to enhance pedestrian safety and pleasure by providing sufficient space for pedestrian needs and uses.
- b. Develop public/private partnerships to ensure Downtown is safe, clean and accessible for all users.
- c. Identify, prioritize and correct accessibility barriers to sidewalks, curbs, pedestrian signals and other pedestrian facilities.

**Objective 2: Develop a comprehensive Downtown bicycle network to connect into a city-wide system.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Prepare a complete streets policy to guide roadway construction and rehabilitation.  
*See Exhibit I for a Closer Look: Complete Streets*
- b. Update the bikeway chapter of the Long Range Transportation Plan, including prioritization of improvements and routes for implementation.
- c. Improve and expand bicycle connections to the River's Edge Trail through signage and routes.
- d. Ensure that bike routes link and connect neighborhoods, employment centers, amenities and destinations.
- e. Develop public education and marketing programs to maximize the use of the bicycle network.

**Objective 3: Reduce or eliminate Downtown one-ways.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Effectively communicate the costs and benefits of one-way conversions to all stakeholders.  
*See Exhibit J for a Closer Look: One-way Conversions*
- b. Prepare a one-way conversion plan to help facilitate an environment that is pedestrian and retail friendly, improves local circulation, and increase access to Downtown businesses.
- c. Develop roadway and streetscape design standards to further the intended benefits of one-way conversions for all users.

**Objective 4: Improve connectivity to the Missouri River, River's Edge Trail, and Gibson Park for bicycles and pedestrians.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Improve the attractiveness and enhance the visibility of railroad crossings and underpass tunnels that connect

# Chapter 3

## Exhibit I: A Closer Look: Complete Streets



Photos 1 & 2 Courtesy of EPA Smart Growth

### What are complete streets?

Complete streets are streets that are designed and operated to enable safe and convenient access for users of all modes of travel including: pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and public transportation riders. There is no singular design for complete streets - each design is unique and responds to its community context with the goal of increasing safety and accessibility.

### How do we create complete streets in Great Falls?

The first step in creating complete streets is to adopt an ordinance, resolution or policy directing transportation planners and engineers to design streets with all users in mind. An ideal complete streets policy includes:

- A vision for how and why the community wants to complete its streets.
- Specifies that 'all users' includes pedestrians, bicyclists and transit passengers of all ages and abilities, as well as trucks, buses and automobiles.
- Is adoptable by all agencies to cover all roads.
- Applies to both new and retrofit projects, including design, planning, maintenance, and operations, for the entire right of way.
- Makes any exceptions specific and sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval of exceptions.
- Directs the use of the latest and best design criteria and guidelines while recognizing the need for flexibility in balancing user needs.
- Directs that complete streets solutions will complement the context of the community.
- Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes.
- Includes specific next steps for implementation of the policy.

## Exhibit J: A Closer Look: One-way Conversion

Downtown is a destination that should be traveled to and not simply bypassed. Currently, the Downtown one-ways are designed to move people through Downtown, rather than to and within Downtown. Reducing or eliminating one-ways can help Downtown achieve a healthy balance of safety, access, convenience and connectivity.

A successful conversion of one-way streets to two-way streets will require an analysis of the costs and benefits of the conversion to all users and an extensive public participation and citizen outreach and education process. The conversion has the potential to provide the community with a number of benefits including:

- Traffic moves to and through Downtown at comfortable and moderate speeds.
- Alternative on-street parking arrangements can be considered.
- Streetscape amenities such as trees, benches, planters and public art can be incorporated.
- Motorists are more likely to make random stops at Downtown shops, restaurants and destinations.
- Increased visibility for and multi-directional access to businesses.
- Reduced out-of-direction travel for drivers with multiple Downtown destinations.



The series of images above display a simulated conversion of 1st Avenue South from its current configuration as a three lane one-way street, to a two lane two-way street with bike lanes and streetscape features - now a complete street.

# Chapter 3

Downtown to the Missouri River, River's Edge Trail and Gibson Park.

- b. Identify locations and create design options for an additional separated grade bike and pedestrian crossing of railroad tracks.
- c. Utilize signage, pathways and striping to provide pedestrians and bicyclists with safe and efficient connections between Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods.

## Objective 5: Develop a comprehensive Downtown wayfinding system.

### Strategies

- a. Pursue funding options to hire a design professional to work with the community to develop a comprehensive wayfinding program.
- b. Incorporate a series of named or themed pathways that connect Downtown amenities and destinations.
- c. Supplement proposed wayfinding program with printed maps and brochures, digital and audio tours and websites and apps to guide visitors throughout Downtown.

## Objective 6: Optimize Downtown parking for all stakeholders.

### Strategies

- a. Conduct a comprehensive parking study to guide Downtown parking program.
- b. Improve bicycle parking facilities Downtown.

## Objective 7: Expand the use of public transit Downtown.

### Strategies

- a. Promote the use of transit for Downtown specific events.
- b. Encourage expanded partnership between the Great Falls Transit District and Great Falls Public Schools to promote transit usage to reach Downtown events and activities.
- c. Encourage Downtown businesses to work with the Great Falls Transit District to provide subsidized bus passes for employees as an alternative to Downtown parking.

## **Goal 2: Flourishing Downtown**

**(Re)Create a diverse and Flourishing Downtown by strengthening the existing business environment and attracting new private and public investment.**

**Objective 1: Identify and support an organization to lead and champion Downtown revitalization.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Establish a formal Downtown Development Partnership within the City of Great Falls, in partnership with public and private entities, to foster new development and redevelopment Downtown and implement the goals, objectives and strategies identified in the Plan.

**See Exhibit K for a Closer Look: Downtown Development Partnerships**

- b. Establish a Downtown Tax Increment Financing District (TIFD) to fund Downtown projects, improvements and organizational changes.

**See Exhibit L for a Closer Look: Tax Increment Financing**

- c. Update zoning and land use regulations to support recommendations of the Plan.

**Objective 2: Improve the public realm to provide a safe, attractive and welcoming environment.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Encourage a partnership between Downtown organizations and stakeholders and the City Police Department to ensure a clean and safe environment.
- b. Establish a volunteer based Downtown clean-up day and/or program.
- c. Increase street level vitality by encouraging the active use of ground floor space in the Downtown core.

**Objective 3: Identify and attract high paying employers and jobs to Downtown.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Develop a comprehensive Downtown business retention and development plan that focuses on successful and emerging business clusters Downtown.
- b. Utilize GFDA's business attraction and retention resources to leverage Downtown business investment.
- c. Actively pursue the development of a Downtown boutique hotel.

**Objective 4: Support existing and attract new commercial and retail business Downtown.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Establish a mentor program to pair new entrepreneurs with successful Downtown business owners.
- b. Utilize national research and trends to identify and attract "Downtown friendly" retailers.
- c. Conduct a Downtown market analysis to guide commercial and retail development.
- d. Provide existing business owners with market research and technical and financial assistance.

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## Exhibit K: A Closer Look: Downtown Development Partnership

### Development Partnership

The Plan recommends the creation of a Downtown Development Partnership to foster new development and redevelopment Downtown and implement the goals, objectives and strategies of the Plan. Many communities throughout Montana and across the U.S. have established similar organizations that have been successful in transitioning the recommendations of their respective planning documents from vision to reality. The model envisioned for Downtown Great Falls is a partnership, managed by a Board of Directors representing various Downtown stakeholder groups and organizations, that would work toward Downtown revitalization. If a TIF district were to be created Downtown, the Downtown Development Partnership could be responsible for managing the TIF budget and making recommendations to the City Commission for allocation of TIF funds.

### Board of Directors and Staff

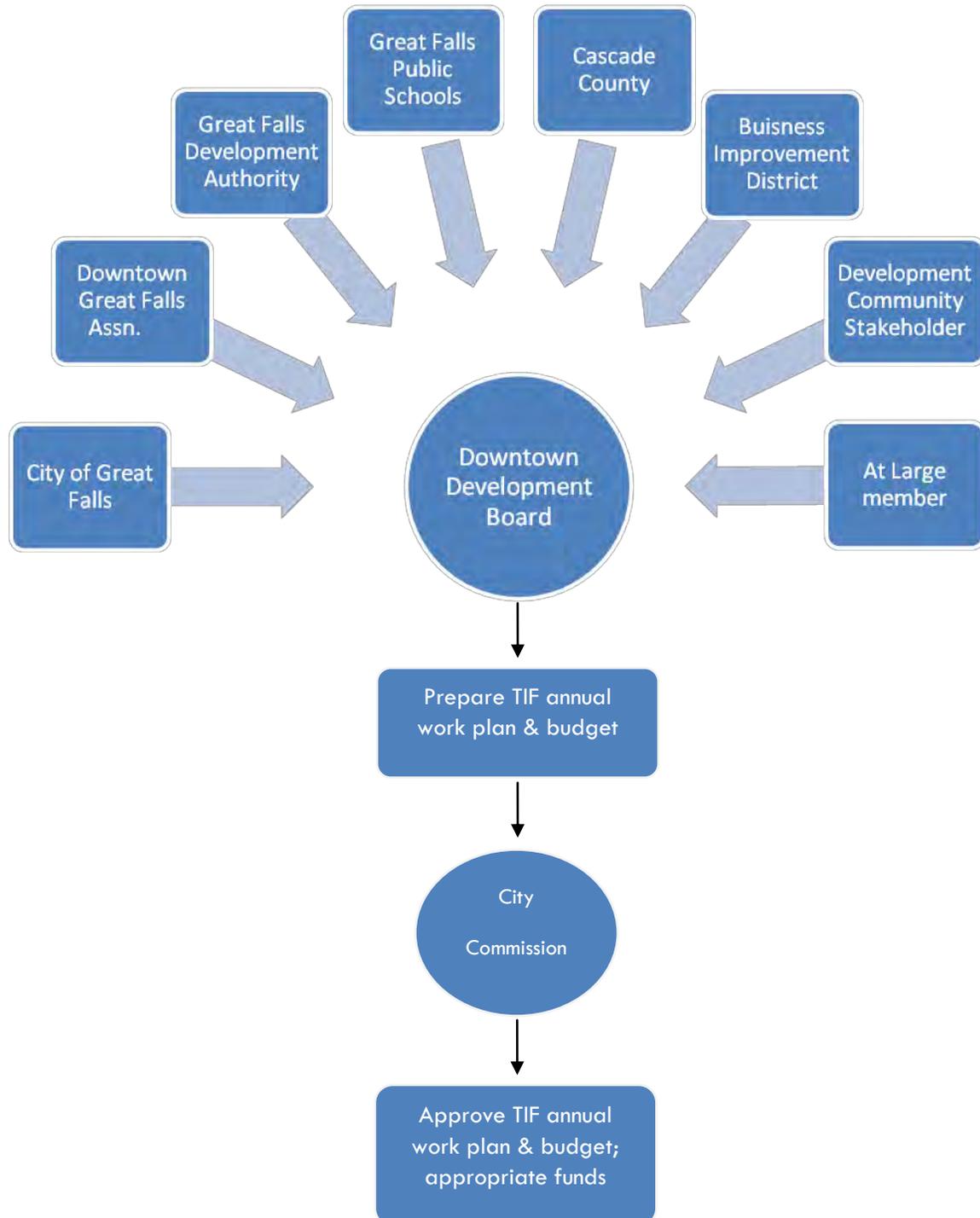
It is envisioned that the Board of Directors would be comprised of representatives of various Downtown stakeholder groups and organizations. Figure 7 on the right displays an example of the potential composition of the Downtown Development Board of Directors and the function and responsibilities of the Board of Directors. The Downtown Development Partnership would establish by-laws to clearly articulate board membership, responsibilities and functions. Responsibilities may include: establishment of goals and policies for the partnership, long range and strategic planning efforts, recommendation of a work plan and budget and, finally, recommendation of projects and programs to be undertaken by the partnership.

It is envisioned that staff from the City of Great Falls would assist in the initial operation and administration of the Partnership. As the Partnership obtains the necessary funds, it will have the opportunity to hire a president or executive director and the City would no longer provide staff. The Downtown Billings Partnership for example, has employed an executive director using funds from its Downtown TIF. Responsibilities of staff would include scheduling and facilitating meetings, developing quarterly and annual reports, administering contracts and serving as a liaison between the partnership and the City Commission. Although the Partnership would not be an official City Advisory Board, the Board of Directors would initially be provided staff in a manner similar to a City Advisory Board.

### City Commission's Role

The City Commission would work closely with the Downtown Development Partnership to implement the goals, objectives and strategies of the Plan. If a Downtown TIF district was established, the Partnership could develop a budget and work plan for the funds created by the TIF. The work plan then would be presented to the City Commission, who would have the final vote in the allocation and expenditure of these funds.

**Figure 7: Possible Structure of Downtown Development Board**



## Exhibit L: A Closer Look: Tax Increment Financing

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a funding mechanism that allows cities to direct property tax dollars that accrue from new development within a specifically designated district, to community and economic development activities and public improvements within that designated district.

A base year is established from which incremental increases in property values are measured. Increases in property values that occur after the base year are placed in a special fund for redevelopment and economic development purposes established in the TIF plan. TIF does not require tax payers in the district to pay any additional taxes; rather the difference is simply in how the funds are distributed once they are collected.

Each taxing jurisdiction continues to receive its share of taxes collected in the district based on the original assessed value of base year of the district. The district only receives funds that are created from the increase in prop-

erty values.

### Urban Renewal TIF District

To utilize TIF Downtown, an Urban Renewal District must be established and the use of TIF funds must be specifically noted in the ordinance establishing the district.

### Establish a Boundary

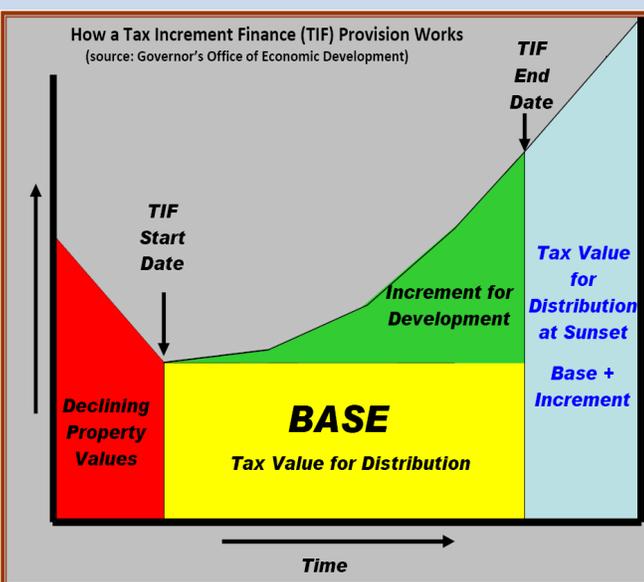
The first step in creating a Downtown Urban Renewal TIF District is establishing a boundary for the District. The State of Montana does not regulate the size and shape of districts, but advises that the boundary be reasonable and defensible. Typical boundaries include existing transportation corridors, zoning districts or changes in types of land uses.

The district should be large enough to generate adequate funds but should not be so large that improvements for the entire district are not feasible. Ultimately, the size and shape of the district should be such that the City can achieve the goals, objectives and strategies of the Downtown Master Plan and the subsequent Urban Renewal Plan.

### Prepare a Finding of Need

Once a boundary for the district has been established, the next step is to prepare a finding of need for TIF to aid in the revitalization of Downtown. The City Commission must determine that “blight” exists Downtown, which can be determined by the presence of the following conditions:

- Buildings with physical dilapidation, deterioration or defective construction;
- Inadequate ventilation, light, sanitary facilities or open spaces;
- Inappropriate mix of land use and buildings;
- Defective or inadequate street layout;



- Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness;
- Defective or unusual conditions of title;
- Improper subdivision or obsolete platting;
- Existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes.

## Assign Responsibilities

Following the determination of “blight”, the City should assign responsibilities for the operation and management of the district. Missoula, Butte and most recently Kalispell have established Urban Renewal Agencies or Commissions within the existing city government structure to manage the TIF and Urban Renewal funds and projects. The agencies have staff and a Board of Directors that are appointed by the mayor and approved by their respective City Commissions.

Billings, on the other hand, has entered into an agreement with the Downtown Billings Partnership (DBP), a 501C (4) organization, to manage and operate the City’s N. 27<sup>th</sup> St. Urban Renewal District. The DBP was formed to implement and shepherd the City’s Downtown Framework Plan and the N. 27<sup>th</sup> St. URD. The recommendations of the Downtown Framework Plan are incorporated into the URD plan.

The DBP consists of a Board of Directors composed of representatives appointed from various public and private stakeholder groups and taxing entities. The board must have at least one and up to 5 at large members who are approved by vote of the board. The DBP provides recommendations to the City Commission on the URA/TIF work plan and budget, but the City Commission makes the ultimate decision on both the budget and the fund.

This is the recommended model to be used in Downtown Great Falls. The goals, objectives and strategies of the Plan would be included in the annual work plan for the district and should be used to guide the annual TIF budget.

## Creating the District

The final step in the process is the creation of the TIF District. This is accomplished by the City Commission adopting an ordinance that creates the district and an associated Urban Renewal Plan (URP).

## The Urban Renewal District Plan

The URP is intended to guide the development of the work plan and annual budget for the district. All or parts of the Downtown Master Plan would serve as the basis of the URP, which should include at a minimum the following:

- A description of the proposed district
- A statement of need and associated documentation
- Activities to be undertaken at/in the TIF
- Statement of intention to use TIF to fund activities in the district
- Program administration, and
- A method for amending the plan

The City would have the ability to update or modify the plan as goals, objectives and strategies are met or as City priorities evolve. The size and shape of the district may also change through amendments to the URP.

- e. Conduct a Downtown business and building inventory to establish and maintain an accurate database of what is currently located Downtown and what opportunities exist for business expansion, attraction and relocation.

## **Objective 5: Attract a diverse mix of visual and performing artists to live and work Downtown.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Revive and support the Great Falls Arts Council to develop and promote arts programs, events and education.
- b. Encourage the development of lofts, studios and live/work spaces in vacant or underutilized buildings to attract artists to Downtown and increase arts and cultural activity.  
**See *Exhibit M for a Closer Look: Artist Live/Work Spaces***
- c. Develop a roster of visual and performing artists and craftsperson's living in and around Great Falls to utilize for Downtown programs and events.
- d. Capitalize on the success of Western Art Week by drawing visitors to Downtown galleries, shops and restaurants.
- e. Continue to promote Downtown art galleries and artists through events such as the First Friday Art Walk.

# Chapter 3

## Exhibit M: A Closer Look: Artist Live/Work Spaces

Like a number of Downtowns across the country, Great Falls is home to multiple vacant or underutilized multi-story buildings. Many of these buildings have open and spacious retail space on the ground floor and one or more apartments or office spaces above.

With a little investment, care and a creative touch, these spaces offer the perfect location for artists to live, work and display their art.

The following steps could be taken to attract artists to live, work and display their arts and crafts Downtown:

- Establishment of an arts advocate or promotional organization to manage an artist attraction program
- Inventory vacant or underutilized buildings Downtown
- Update zoning and land use regulations to accommodate live, work and display units in vacant or underutilized properties
- Develop marketing and promotional material for the district
- Provide incubator space for emerging artists

An artist attraction program would provide a number of benefits to the community including:

- Utilization of vacant buildings
- Increased arts and culture
- Artist re-investment in the community



Photo 1 & 3 courtesy of: Artspace Projects

## **Goal 3: Downtown Destination**

### **Make Downtown the regional Destination for entertainment, culture, shopping and dining.**

#### **Objective 1: Market Downtown's entertainment, culture, shopping and dining.**

##### **Strategies**

- a. Continue to actively cross-promote and package Downtown's entertainment, culture, shopping and dining facilities with Downtown events.
- b. Work with various groups and organizations including the Convention and Visitors Bureau, Tourism BID, Montana Expo Park and Airport Authority to promote Downtown as a tourism and convention destination to the region and Canada.
- c. Develop a comprehensive and coordinated Downtown marketing campaign utilizing print, radio, television and social media.

#### **Objective 2: Promote a broad range of family friendly entertainment and recreational opportunities and activities Downtown.**

##### **Strategies**

- a. Review existing Downtown events and add free or low cost activities that engage a variety of age groups including: families, teens, young adults and older adults.
- b. Promote new and exciting events in Downtown's parks, pools and recreational facilities that attract families with young children.
- c. Encourage Downtown organizations and facilities to establish programs for parents to drop children off while they utilize Downtown's shopping and amenities.

#### **Objective 3: Ensure Downtown is active and vibrant during the evenings and weekends.**

##### **See Exhibit N for a Closer Look: Weekend and Evening Activity**

##### **Strategies**

- a. Actively pursue the development of a Downtown boutique hotel to provide quality lodging and amenities for Downtown visitors.
- b. Develop programs and events that provide opportunities for people to remain in and visit Downtown in the evening and on the weekend.
- c. Actively recruit an already successful restaurant to relocate or expand into Downtown.
- d. Work with existing restaurant and bar/tavern owners to identify, develop and promote a Downtown Dining District.
- e. Market Downtown's amenities and activities to current employers and employees to encourage the workforce to stay Downtown after business hours.

# Chapter 3

- f. Create a year-round public market/food and arts incubator that would cater to residents, employees and visitors.

## **Objective 4: Increase the utilization of the Convention Center and Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts (Mansfield).**

### **Strategies**

- a. Develop public/private partnerships to package the facilities at the Civic Center and Mansfield with catering and dining services and lodging facilities to enhance the attractiveness of Downtown as a convention destination.
- b. Enhance partnerships with entertainment promoters to utilize the Mansfield as a concert venue.
- c. Educate potential users of the Civic Center and Mansfield regarding the opportunities available at the facility, policies and prices.

## Exhibit N: A Closer Look: Weekend and Evening Activity



Photos Courtesy: MML

A consistent theme that has emerged throughout the planning process is the lack of activity and vitality Downtown during the evening and weekends.

Community members serving on the Plan Working Groups and Steering Committee identified this lack of activity as an issue that must be proactively addressed by the Plan.

Over half (60%) of the citizens who participated in the Plan's on-line survey (see Appendix) indicated that Downtown currently lacks entertainment, dining, or retail options in the evening and on the weekend. Specific facilities such as a movie theater, brew pub or fine dining establishment were identified by the community as missing elements that would add life Downtown after the normal business hours.

Currently, many of Downtown's commercial and retail businesses and restaurants close at 5 p.m. during the week and are not open on the weekend. New establishments should support the current mix of existing uses and create an environment that is vibrant and active, into the evening and nighttime, seven days a week.

A number of communities have successfully added activity and vitality to their downtowns in the evening and weekend by developing a variety of retail, entertainment and cultural facilities. The images on the left are examples of these uses.

## **Goal 4: Downtown Living**

**Create more living options Downtown by encouraging a variety of new housing types and preserving and enhancing existing neighborhoods.**

**Objective 1: Promote a wide range of housing choices throughout Downtown.**

***See Exhibit O for A Closer Look: Downtown Housing Options***

### **Strategies**

- a. Ensure that the City of Great Falls Downtown Development Partnership provides leadership for Downtown housing development.
- b. Evaluate zoning and land use regulations to ensure policies allow for and encourage Downtown housing in the form of rehabilitation and preservation of existing buildings, infill development and new construction.
- c. Conduct a Downtown housing inventory to establish and maintain an accurate database of housing and property available for rent, ownership, and/or rehabilitation.

**Objective 2: Ensure existing housing is safe and attractive.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Actively monitor the condition of existing housing and enforce the City's Property Maintenance Code.
- b. Promote and utilize the City of Great Falls Housing Rehab Loan program to enhance existing homes and rental properties.
- c. Develop a volunteer based residential improvement plan to ensure Downtown neighborhoods are clean and safe.

**Objective 3: Attract private investment and financing for Downtown housing.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Create new and promote existing incentive programs to encourage residential development.
- b. Prepare a housing market study to assist developers, lending institutions and private property owners in developing Downtown housing.
- c. Establish a clearinghouse and/or database of residential financing options and incentives.

**Objective 4: Attract retailers and neighborhood services that cater to Downtown residents.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Survey Downtown residents and utilize national research to identify neighborhood based commercial, retail and services that are missing Downtown.
- b. Encourage mixed-use development that places residents within close proximity to commercial activities.

## Exhibit O: A Closer Look: Downtown Housing Options



A strong and robust Downtown residential population is critical to the overall health and vitality of the area. Downtown residents provide a steady and consistent clientele for the retail, services, dining and entertainment uses found Downtown and create around-the-clock vibrancy for the area.

Downtown is home to a dynamic population that spans a wide range of ages and incomes. Each segment of the Downtown population has diverse set of housing needs and preferences that should be reflected in the types of housing provided Downtown.

There are various types of housing options that can meet a diverse Downtown housing market. General categories include upper floor rental units, apartment buildings, townhouses, live/work spaces, and single family residences. These options typically involve re-using existing buildings as well as in-fill construction on vacant or underutilized properties.

Placing residents within close proximity to jobs and amenities increases street level activity and creates a vibrant environment throughout Downtown. Public and private entities should work together to identify housing needs and preferences and, foster partnerships to meet these needs.



## **Goal 5: Downtown Aesthetics**

**Enhance the unique Aesthetic character of Downtown by capitalizing on the historic buildings, streetscape, parks and Missouri River.**

**Objective 1: Preserve, restore, and reuse Downtown’s historic buildings and sites.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Market Downtown’s historical resources to facilitate improvements and restoration of properties through tax incentives and preservation grants.
- b. Educate current property owners and developers of the funding programs available to make improvements to Downtown buildings.
- c. Establish a technical assistance and incentive program to encourage the adaptive re-use, rehabilitation and preservation of historic buildings and sites.

**Objective 2: Increase the number and diversity of public spaces Downtown.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Actively pursue the development of an indoor/outdoor community gathering space to host activities and events and attract residents, employees and visitors throughout the year.  
**See Exhibit P for A Closer Look: Indoor/Outdoor Gathering Space**
- b. Encourage diversity in the form and function of Downtown parks, plazas and gathering spaces.
- c. Explore the feasibility of developing rooftop garden spaces.

**Objective 3: Promote quality design and construction in Downtown’s built environment.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Develop design guidelines to enhance the character of Downtown through the quality design and construction of Downtown’s built environment.
- b. Evaluate the function, authority and scope of the City’s Design Review Board to ensure aesthetic goals of the Plan are achieved.

**Objective 4: Create attractive gateway design features that welcome residents and visitors to Downtown.**

**See Exhibit Q for A Closer Look: Downtown Gateway and Wayfinding**

### **Strategies**

- a. Identify priority entrances into Downtown to construct gateway design features.
- b. Establish a program to encourage community and/or service groups, private businesses and other

## Exhibit P: A Closer Look: Indoor/Outdoor Gathering Space

Across the country and around the world, the most vibrant Downtowns are home to dynamic public places where the community can gather and a broad array of social, civic and entertainment activities can occur.

Successful public places share four common elements: they are comfortable, accessible, sociable, and a variety of activities are occurring there simultaneously.

**Comfortable:** A comfortable place is safe, clean and provides a variety of areas to sit and relax.

**Accessible:** An accessible public place is easy to get to and is visible from a distance but built to the human scale.

**Sociable:** A sociable place is where people meet their friends and neighbors, feel comfortable engaging strangers, and interact and celebrate with their fellow community members.

**Activities:** Activities give people a reason to initially go to and return to a public place. Without a variety of activities, whether active or passive, a place will likely be empty.

The City of Great Falls should work with other public entities and private organizations to develop an indoor/outdoor community gathering space that encompasses the elements listed above and provides a place to host events and celebrations, a place for residents and visitors to relax and recreate, and is attractive to all users throughout the year.



# Chapter 3

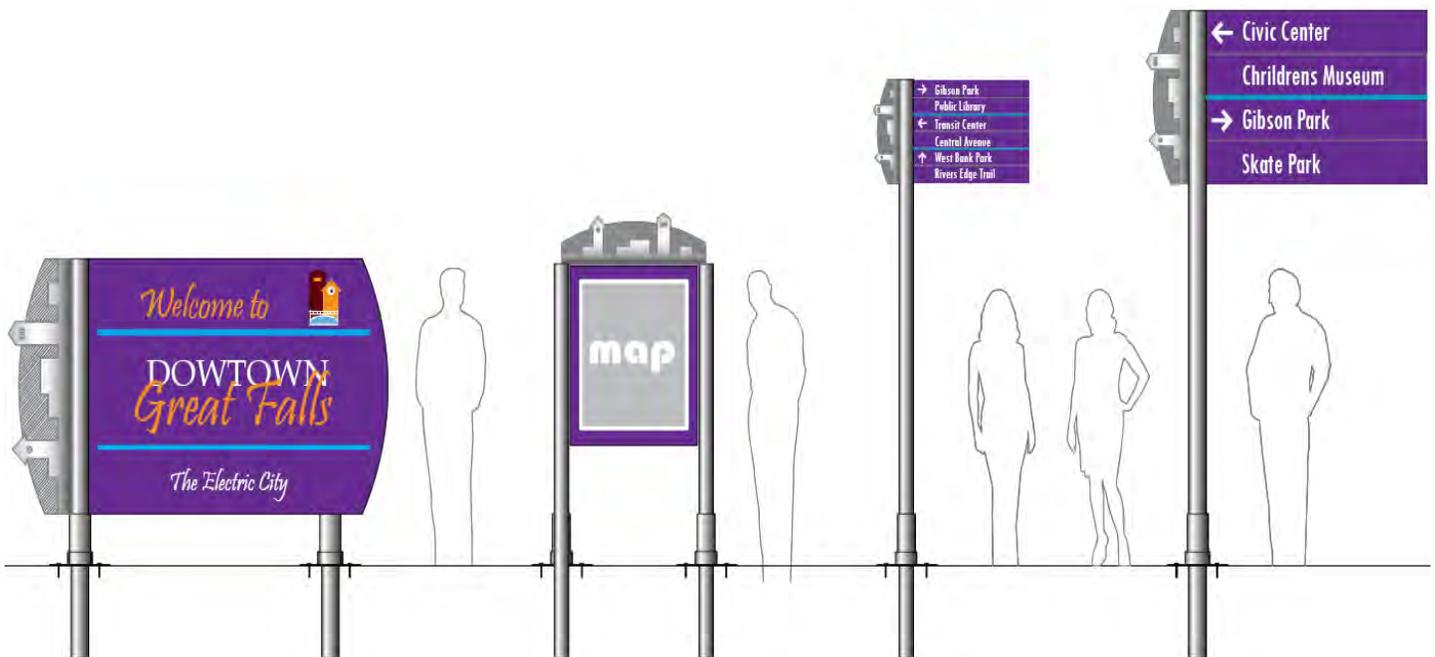
## Exhibit Q: A Closer Look: Downtown Gateway and Wayfinding

Downtown Great Falls is home to multiple cultural, recreational, public, natural and commercial amenities. Yet many residents and guests are unaware of these amenities or simply do not know where to find these features or how to reach them.

The image of Downtown is critical to the success of the revitalization of Downtown. Visible and attractive gateway features located at strategic entryways into Downtown welcome visitors and guests, announce that you have arrived some place distinct, and provide a positive first impression of the area. Gateway features should reflect the unique character of the district and its amenities.

Once people have arrived Downtown, wayfinding signage can guide and orient visitors in and around Downtown. Signs should adhere to a uniform design and include Downtown's logo.

Signage can provide directions to specific amenities and public facilities; reinforce the identity and unique character of the district; and eliminate confusion for all users. Information kiosks, maps and other streetscape elements can be included in the wayfinding program.



Gateway and wayfinding signage that could be utilized Downtown

stakeholders to “sponsor” the construction of gateway features.

## **Objective 5: Expand and enhance the existing Downtown streetscape.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Develop a comprehensive Downtown streetscape that prioritizes future improvements and builds upon the existing streetscape.
- b. Ensure streetscape improvements are implemented in coordination with the construction of gateway design features.
- c. Work with the City Forester to establish an Arbor Day tree planting program and other volunteer and sponsored tree planting programs throughout Downtown.

## **Objective 6: Actively pursue the preservation and rehabilitation of the Rocky Mountain Building.**

### **Strategies**

- a. Identify an organization or partnership to lead restoration efforts including assisting in permitting process and requirements, identifying funding options, leading fundraising efforts and recruiting a mix of building tenants.
- b. Encourage the current building owners to move forward with restoration improvements before weathering and damage continue to a point where rehabilitation is no longer feasible.

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## Implementation Table

The goals, objectives and strategies of the Plan provide the framework for transitioning from Downtown today to the community’s vision for Downtown. The transition will not happen overnight, and there is not a single group or organization that has the capacity to implement all of the strategies developed in the Plan. The following table provides a “roadmap” for implementing the recommendations of the Plan - by identifying potential key partners for each strategy as well a general timeline and category.

Figure 8: Plan Implementation Table

Table Legend		Timeframe to Initiate Project	
<b>Potential Partners</b>		<b>On-going</b>	Currently taking place
<b>BID</b>	Downtown Business Improvement District	<b>Immediate</b>	Begin with completion of the plan
<b>CofGF</b>	City of Great Falls	<b>Short</b>	Begin within two years of adoption of the Plan
<b>CC</b>	Cascade County	<b>Medium</b>	Begin within five years of adoption of the Plan
<b>CVB</b>	Great Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau	<b>Long term</b>	Begin within 20 years of adoption of the Plan
<b>DAA</b>	Downtown Action Alliance	<b>Category</b>	
<b>DGFA</b>	Downtown Great Falls Association	<b>Regulatory Framework</b>	Recommended changes to land use policies and zoning regulations necessary to implement the programs, capital improvements and site-specific developments listed below and to direct private sector development in a manner that is consistent with the vision for Downtown Great Falls.
<b>GFBC</b>	Great Falls Bike Club	<b>Program</b>	Key programs and initiatives intended to maintain and enhance the vitality of the Downtown Great Falls.
<b>GFCC</b>	Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce	<b>Capital Improvement</b>	Capital improvements are intended to improve the function, safety and aesthetics of Downtown Great Falls through a series of improvements including basic upgrades of public infrastructure and strategic projects to encourage and stimulate Downtown investment. Capital improvements include transportation improvements affecting access, connectivity, and pedestrian and bicycle movements throughout Downtown. Other improvements include streetscape and gateway and wayfinding signage to provide amenities for users of Downtown.
<b>GFDA</b>	Great Falls Development Authority	<b>Site Specific</b>	Specific projects that incorporate multiple recommendations that are intended to catalyze a key block or site within the overall Downtown. Ideally, these projects will help spur additional development Downtown. To be successful, catalyst projects will require the development of strategic public/private partnerships and private investment.
<b>GFGF</b>	Get Fit Great Falls		
<b>GFTD</b>	Great Falls Transit District		
<b>GFIA</b>	Great Falls International Airport Authority		
<b>GFPS</b>	Great Falls Public Schools		
<b>HBA</b>	Home Builders Association of Great Falls		
<b>HPAC</b>	Historic Preservation Advisory Commission		
<b>MCPA</b>	Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts		
<b>MDT</b>	Montana Department of Transportation		
<b>MTEP</b>	Montana Expo Park		
<b>NC</b>	Neighborhood Councils		
<b>NW</b>	Neighborworks Great Falls		
<b>P&amp;CD</b>	Planning and Community Development Dept.		
<b>PW</b>	Public Works Department		
<b>P&amp;R</b>	Park and Recreation Department		
<b>RTI</b>	Recreational Trails Incorporated		
<b>TA</b>	Cascade County Tavern Association		
<b>TBID</b>	Tourism Business Improvement District		
<b>TWG</b>	Trails Working Group		
<b>W&amp;S</b>	Great Falls Weed and Seed		

Strategy	Partners	Timeframe	Category
<b>1. CONNECTED:</b>			
<b>1. Improve pedestrian connectivity and safety Downtown.</b>			
a. Ensure streetscape improvements are designed to enhance pedestrian safety and pleasure by providing sufficient space for pedestrian needs and uses.	CofGF (P&CD, PW)	Short	Regulatory Framework
b. Develop public/private partnerships to ensure Downtown is safe, clean and accessible for all users.	CofGF, DAA (Safety team)	Immediate	Program
c. Identify, prioritize and correct accessibility barriers to sidewalks, curbs, pedestrian signals and other pedestrian facilities.	CofGF (P&CD, PW) Accessibility group	Short	Program
<b>2. Develop a comprehensive Downtown bicycle network to connect into a city-wide system.</b>			
a. Prepare a complete streets policy to guide roadway construction and rehabilitation.	CofGF, GFGF, GFBC	Immediate	Regulatory Framework
b. Update the bikeway chapter of the Long Range Transportation Plan, including prioritization of improvements and routes for implementation.	CofGF (P&CD, P&R), GFBC, RTI, TWG	Short	Regulatory Framework
c. Improve and expand bicycle connections to the River's Edge Trail through signage and routes.	CofGF (P&CD, P&R), GFBC, RTI, TWG	Short	Capital Improvement
d. Ensure that bike routes link and connect neighborhoods, employment centers, amenities and destinations.	CofGF (P&CD), GFBC, RTI	Short	Regulatory Framework
e. Develop public education and marketing programs to maximize the use of the bicycle network.	RTI, GFBC	Short	Program
<b>3. Reduce or eliminate Downtown one-ways.</b>			
a. Conduct a one-way conversion plan to help facilitate an environment that is pedestrian and retail friendly, improves local circulation, and increase access to Downtown businesses.	CofGF (P&CD, PW), MDT	Medium	Program
b. Effectively communicate the costs and benefits of one-way conversions to all stakeholders.	CofGF, DAA (BID, DGFA)	Medium	Program
c. Develop roadway and streetscape design standards to further the intended benefits of one-way conversions for all users.	CofGF	Medium	Regulatory Framework
<b>4. Improve connectivity to the Missouri River, River's Edge Trail, and Gibson Park for bicycles and pedestrians.</b>			
a. Improve the attractiveness and enhance the visibility of railroad crossings and underpass tunnels that connect Downtown to the Missouri River, River's Edge Trail and Gibson Park.	CofGF (P&CD, PW, P&R), RTI	Medium	Capital Improvement
b. Identify locations and develop design options to develop an additional separated grade bike and pedestrian crossing of railroad tracks.	CofGF (P&CD, PW, P&R), RTI	Long	Capital Improvement
c. Utilize signage, pathways and striping to provide pedestrians and bicyclists with safe and efficient connections between Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods.	CofGF (P&CD, PW), RTI, TWG	Short	Capital Improvement
<b>5. Develop a comprehensive Downtown wayfinding system.</b>			
a. Develop a comprehensive wayfinding program.	CofGF, DAA (GFDA), Private Business	Short	Capital Improvement

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b. Supplement proposed wayfinding program with printed maps and brochures, digital and audio tours and websites and apps to guide visitors throughout Downtown.	CofGF (P&CD), HPAC, CVB, TBID	Medium	Program
c. Incorporate a series of named or themed pathways that connect Downtown amenities and destinations.	CofGF (P&CD), HPAC, CVB, TBID	Long	Capital Improvement
<b>6. Optimize Downtown parking for all stakeholders.</b>			
a. Conduct a comprehensive parking study to guide Downtown parking program.	CofGF (P&CD)	Short	Regulatory Framework
b. Improve bicycle parking facilities Downtown.	CofGF (P&CD, PW), GFBC, BID, private business	Short	Capital Improvement
<b>7. Expand the use of public transit Downtown.</b>			
a. Promote the use of transit for Downtown specific events.	GFTD, DGFA	Short	Program
b. Encourage expanded partnership between the Great Falls Transit District and Great Falls Public Schools to promote transit usage to reach Downtown events and activities.	GFTD, GFPS, DAA (DGFA)	Short	Program
c. Encourage Downtown businesses to work with the Great Falls Transit District to provide subsidized bus passes for employees as an alternative to Downtown parking.	DGFA, BID, GFTD, Private Business	Short	Program

## DESTINATION:

### 1. Market Downtown's entertainment, culture, shopping and dining.

a. Continue to actively cross-promote and package Downtown's entertainment, culture, shopping and dining facilities with Downtown events.	MT, MEC, DGFA	On-going	Program
b. Work with various groups and organizations including the Convention and Visitors Bureau, Tourism BID, Montana Expo Park and Airport Authority to promote Downtown as a tourism and convention destination to the region and Canada.	DAA (CVB, TBID), MTEP, GFIA	Short	Program
c. Develop a comprehensive and coordinated Downtown marketing campaign utilizing print, radio, television and social media.	DAA (all), TA	Immediate	Program

### 2. Promote a broad range of family friendly entertainment and recreational opportunities and activities Downtown.

a. Review existing Downtown events and add free or low cost activities that engage a variety of age groups including: families, teens, young adults and older adults.	CofGF (P&R), DGFA	Short	Program
b. Promote new and exciting events in Downtown's parks, pools and recreational facilities that attract families with young children.	CofGF (P&R), DGFA	Short	Program
c. Encourage Downtown organizations and facilities to establish programs for parents to drop children off while they utilize Downtown's shopping and amenities.	Private Business, DGFA, Museum Group	Short	Program

### 3. Ensure Downtown is active and vibrant during the evenings and weekends.

a. Actively pursue the development of a Downtown boutique hotel to provide quality lodging and amenities for Downtown visitors.	DAA (GFDA, CofGF), Private Business	Medium	Site Specific
b. Develop programs and events that provide opportunities for people to remain in and visit Downtown in the evening and on the weekend.	DAA (DGFA), CofGF (P&R)	Short	Program
c. Actively recruit an already successful restaurant to relocate or expand into Downtown.	GFDA, BID, DGFA	Short	Program

d. Work with existing restaurant and bar/tavern owners to identify, develop and promote a Downtown Dining District.	DGFA, TA, DAA (all)	Medium	Program
e. Market Downtown's amenities and activities to current employers and employees to encourage the workforce to stay Downtown after business hours.	DAA (DGFA), TA, Restaurant owners	Immediate	Program
f. Create a year-round public market / food and arts incubator that would cater to residents, employees and visitors.	GFDA, DGFA, CofGF	Medium	Site Specific

#### 4. Increase the utilization of the Convention Center and Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts (Mansfield).

a. Develop public/private partnerships to package the facilities at the Civic Center and Mansfield with catering and dining services and lodging facilities to enhance the attractiveness of Downtown as a convention destination.	CVB, TBID, MCPA	Medium	Program
b. Enhance partnerships with entertainment promoters to utilize the Mansfield as a concert venue.	MCPA	Short	Program
c. Educate potential users of the Civic Center and Mansfield about the opportunities available at the facility, policies and prices.	MCPA	Immediate	Program

### FLOURISHING:

#### 1. Identify and support an organization to lead and champion Downtown revitalization.

a. Establish a formal Downtown Development Agency within the City of Great Falls, in partnership with public and private entities, to foster new development and redevelopment Downtown and implement the goals, objectives and strategies identified in the Plan.	CofGF, DAA (all), Private Business	Immediate	Regulatory Framework
b. Establish a Downtown TIF and associated Urban Renewal Plan district to fund Downtown projects, improvements and organizational management.	CofGF, GFPS, CC	Immediate	Regulatory Framework
c. Update zoning and land use regulations to support recommendations of the Plan.	CofGF (P&CD)	Short	Regulatory Framework

#### 2. Improve the public realm to provide a safe, attractive and welcoming environment.

a. Encourage a partnership between Downtown organizations and stakeholders and the City Police Department to ensure a clean and safe environment.	DAA (W&S), GFDP	Short	Program
b. Establish a volunteer based Downtown clean-up day and/or program.	DAA (W&S)	Short	Program
c. Increase street level vitality by encouraging the active use of ground floor space in the Downtown core.	CofGF (P&CD), BID, DGFA	Short	Regulatory Framework

#### 3. Identify and attract high paying employers and jobs to Downtown.

a. Develop a comprehensive Downtown business retention and development plan that focuses on successful and emerging business clusters Downtown.	GFDA, CofGF	Short	Program
b. Utilize GFDA's business attraction and retention resources to leverage Downtown business investment.	GFDA	Immediate	Program

#### 4. Support existing and attract new commercial and retail business Downtown.

a. Establish a mentor program to pair new entrepreneurs with successful Downtown business owners.	DGFA, BID, GFDA	Short	Program
b. Utilize national research and trends to identify and attract "Downtown friendly" retailers.	GFDA, BID, NW	Short	Program

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c. Conduct a Downtown market analysis to guide commercial and retail development.	GFDA, BID, DGFA	Medium	Program
d. Provide existing business owners with market research and technical and financial assistance.	CofGF, GFDA, DGFA, BID	Medium	Program
e. Conduct a Downtown business and building inventory to establish and maintain an accurate database of what is currently located Downtown and what opportunities exist for business expansion, attraction and relocation.	CofGF (P&CD), BID, DGFA	Immediate	Program
<b>5. Attract a diverse mix of visual and performing artists to live and work Downtown.</b>			
a. Revive and support the Great Falls Arts Council to develop and promote arts programs, events and education.	CofGF, DAA (all)	Short	Regulatory Framework
b. Encourage the development of lofts, studios and live/work spaces in vacant or underutilized buildings to attract artists to Downtown and increase arts and culture activity.	CofGF (P&CD), DAA (GFCC, GFDA)	Medium	Program
c. Develop a roster of visual and performing artists and craftsperson's living in and around Great Falls to utilize for Downtown programs and events.	DGFA	Short	Program
d. Capitalize on the success of Western Art Week by drawing visitors to Downtown galleries, shops and restaurants.	DAA (GFCC)	Immediate	Program
e. Continue to promote Downtown art galleries and artists through events such as the First Friday Art Walk.	DAA (DGFA)	Immediate	Program

## LIVING:

### 1. Promote a wide range of housing choices throughout Downtown.

a. Ensure that the proposed City of Great Falls Downtown Development Agency is a champion of Downtown housing development.	NW, CofGF (P&CD)	Short	Regulatory Framework
b. Evaluate zoning and land use regulations to ensure policies allow for and encourage Downtown housing in the form of rehabilitation and preservation of existing buildings, infill development and new construction.	CofGF (P&CD)	Short	Regulatory Framework
c. Conduct a Downtown housing inventory to establish and maintain an accurate database of housing and property available for rent, ownership, and/or rehab.	NW, W&S, CofGF (P&CD)	Short	Program

### 2. Ensure existing housing is safe and attractive.

a. Actively monitor the condition of existing housing and enforce the City's Property Maintenance Code.	CofGF (P&CD), W&S	On-going	Program
b. Promote and utilize the City of Great Falls Housing Rehab Loan program to enhance existing homes and rental properties.	CofGF	On-going	Program
c. Develop a volunteer based residential improvement plan to ensure Downtown neighborhoods are clean and safe.	W&S, NC	Short	Program

### 3. Attract private investment and financing for Downtown housing.

a. Create new and promote existing incentive programs to encourage residential development.	NW, CofGF	Short	Program
b. Prepare a housing market study to assist developers, lending institutions and private property owners in developing Downtown housing.	Realtors, HBA, NW, GFDA	Short	Program
c. Establish a clearinghouse and/or database of residential financing options and incentives.	Realtors, HBA, NW, GFDA	Short	Program

## 4. Attract retailers and neighborhood services that cater to Downtown residents.

a. Survey Downtown residents and utilize national research to identify neighborhood based commercial, retail and services that are missing Downtown.	NW, NC	Immediate	Program
b. Encourage mixed-use development that places residents within close proximity to commercial activities.	CofGF (P&CD)	Short	Regulatory Framework

## AESTHETICS:

### 1. Preserve, restore, and reuse Downtown's historic buildings and sites.

a. Market Downtown's historical resources to facilitate improvements and restoration of properties through tax incentives and preservation grants.	CofGF, HPAC	Immediate	Program
b. Educate current property owners and developers of the funding programs available to make improvements to the Downtown buildings.	HPAC, DAA (BID)	Immediate	Program
c. Establish a technical assistance and incentive program to encourage the adaptive re-use, rehabilitation and preservation of historic buildings and sites.	CofGF, HPAC	On-going	Program

### 2. Increase the number and diversity of public spaces Downtown.

a. Actively pursue the development of an indoor/outdoor community gathering space to host activities and events and attract residents, employees and visitors throughout the year.	CofGF, Private Business	Short	Site Specific
b. Encourage diversity in the form and function of Downtown parks, plazas and gathering spaces.	CofGF (P&CD, P&R)	Medium	Regulatory Framework
c. Explore the feasibility of developing rooftop green spaces.	CofGF (P&CD, PW), Private business	Medium	Regulatory Framework

### 3. Promote quality design and construction in Downtown's built environment.

a. Develop design guidelines to enhance the character of Downtown through the quality design and construction of Downtown's built environment.	CofGF, DAA (all)	Short	Regulatory Framework
b. Evaluate the function, authority and scope of the City's Design Review Board to ensure aesthetic goals of the Plan are achieved.	CofGF	Short	Regulatory Framework

### 4. Create attractive gateway design features that welcome residents and visitors to downtown.

a. Identify priority entrances into Downtown to construct gateway design features.	CofGF (P&CD, P&R), GFDA	Short	Capital Improvements
b. Establish a program to encourage community and/or service groups, private businesses and other stakeholders to "sponsor" the construction of gateway fea-	DAA (all)	Short	Capital Improvements

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<b>5. Expand and enhance the existing downtown streetscape.</b>			
a. Develop a comprehensive Downtown streetscape plan that prioritizes future improvements and builds upon the existing streetscape.	CofGF (P&CD, PW)	Short	Regulatory Framework
b. Ensure streetscape improvements are implemented in coordination with the construction of gateway design features.	CofGF (P&CD)	Short	Regulatory Framework
c. Work with the City Forester to establish tree planting programs throughout Downtown.	DAA (BID), NC	Short	Program
<b>6. Actively pursue the preservation and rehabilitation of the Rocky Mountain Building.</b>			
a. Identify an organization or partnership to lead restoration efforts including assisting in permitting process and requirements, identifying funding options, leading fundraising efforts and recruiting a mix of building tenants.	CofGF (P&CD), DAA (all)	On-going	Program
b. Encourage the current building owners to move forward with restoration improvements before weathering and damage continue to a point where rehabilita-	CofGF (P&CD), DAA (all)	On-going	Program

## Conclusion

This Plan sets forth the vision for Downtown Great Falls and provides a series of recommendations, in the form of goals, objectives and strategies to achieve that vision. This Plan grew out of the community's desire to create a comprehensive framework for public and private growth and development Downtown and will guide investment in the area for the next 25 years.

This Plan is built upon a foundation of public participation and community outreach. Over 100 community members have contributed nearly 1,100 volunteer hours to the development of the Plan. The Plan participants have created an enthusiasm and momentum that will carry the Plan forward into the immediate future.

Successful implementation of the Plan will depend on committed leadership from the public and private sectors. Capitalizing on the collective strengths and abilities of the stakeholder groups and organizations is paramount to the improvement of Downtown. The recommendations from the Plan fall into a variety of categories, ranging from updates to the City's regulatory framework to site-specific public and private sector investments, all of which are intended to enhance the livability, vitality, connectivity and aesthetics of Downtown. As implementation occurs and Downtown transforms and evolves, the Plan must also evolve and be evaluated and updated on a regular basis.



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## **APPENDIX**

**Potential Funding Sources**

**Downtown Best Ideas**

**Downtown Assets and Issues**

**Downtown Zoning Districts**

**Downtown Survey Results Summary**



## **Potential Funding Sources**

### **Federal Sources**

#### **Brownfield Economic Development Initiative (BEDI)**

BEDI is a competitive program used to spur the return of brownfields to productive economic reuse. BEDI grants must be used in conjunction with HUD Section 108 guaranteed loans.

#### **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)**

CDBG grants are funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for community revitalization through housing, infrastructure and economic development programs that serve the interests of low and moderate-income populations.

#### **Economic Development Administration (EDA) Grant**

EDA grants can be used to finance construction and rehabilitation of infrastructure and facilities that are necessary to achieve long-term growth and economic vitality.

#### **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Assessment Grant**

Assessment grants provide funding for a grant recipient to inventory, characterize, assess, and conduct planning and community involvement related to brownfields sites.

#### **EPA Brownfield Cleanup Grant**

Cleanup grants provide funding to carry out cleanup activities at brownfield sites. An applicant must own the site for which funding is requested at the time of the application.

#### **Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program (HPTC)**

The HPTC program provides developers with a federal tax credit up to 20% of the costs associated with the renovation or rehabilitation of a building listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **HOME**

HOME provides grants to states and municipalities to fund a wide range of activities intended to assist in building, buying and or rehabilitating affordable housing.

#### **Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program**

The LIHTC program provides a dollar to dollar tax credit to attract equity investments to finance the development of affordable housing.

#### **Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP)**

NSP grants are funds made available to acquire and rehabilitate abandoned or foreclosed upon housing or residential properties in neighborhoods.

#### **New Market Tax Credit (NMTC) Program**

The NMTC Program attracts investment capital to qualifying low-income census tracts by permitting individual and corporate investors to receive a tax credit against their Federal income tax return in exchange for making equity investments in specialized financial institutions called Community Development Entities (CDEs).

#### **Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU)**

SAFETEA-LU is intended to fund improvements and maintenance to surface transportation infrastructure throughout the U.S. The funds are distributed through the Montana Department of Transportation (DOT).

#### **US Department of Transportation (DOT) Tiger Grant**

U.S. DOT Tiger Grants provide funds for investment in road, rail, transit and port projects that promise to achieve critical national objectives that make communities more livable and sustainable.

## State and Local Funding Sources

### Downtown Business Improvement District (BID)

#### Façade Grant Program

The goal of the facade grant is to stimulate investment and development of Downtown properties, and to continue upgrading the appearance of Downtown. Facade grants are made to qualifying applicants located within the BID boundaries by the BID board on a case by case basis.

#### BID New and Existing Building Grant

In order to partner with the businesses and property owners within the Great Falls Business Improvement District (BID) toward a shared vision of Downtown revitalization, the BID offers an incentive program to locate, upgrade or expand the interior of a business in Downtown Great Falls. The grant is not a rebate program for deferred maintenance or for projects that have already started or are completed.

#### BID Residential Grant

For residential redevelopment projects with an expenditure that exceeds \$40 per square foot, the BID will grant an amount per square foot that is 10% of the total cost per square foot. No single grant award will exceed \$50,000.

### City of Great Falls General Fund

The City of Great Falls general fund provides revenue for most major City functions such as the administration of local government and the provision of public services.

### City of Great Falls General Obligation Bonds

The sale of general obligation bonds can be used to finance public infrastructure and facility improvements. General obligation bond sales are subject to voter approval and can provide the financing required for large capital projects.

### Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA) Downtown Revolving Loan Fund

This fund provides gap financing to developers and new and expanding businesses for commercial and multi-family residential real estate renovations, improvements and new construction. Applicants can apply for a maximum loan of 20% of total project costs or \$100,000. Loans may be amortized up to 20 years with a balloon repayment within 5 years.

### Tax Increment Financing Funding

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a funding mechanism that allows cities to direct property tax dollars that accrue from new development within a specifically designated district, to community and economic development activities within that designated district.

## Downtown Best Ideas

The Downtown Master Plan Working Groups were asked to imagine what Downtown might look like in the year 2035 if we are successful in implementing the Plan. The following table summarizes the participants answers to this question and provided guidance to the Working Groups as they developed the goals, objectives and strategies contained within the Plan.

**Figure 9: Downtown Best Ideas**

Livability	Character	Accessibility	Vitality
A safe and vibrant area	Expanded Streetscape – Develop a character focused streetscape throughout downtown – graphically tell our story through the streetscape	Fantastic wayfinding system	Develop a Downtown event center – including indoor/outdoor facility, sports, concerts, conference center, and kids and family events (Weissman Property)
Good mix of green space and development on the river – good connectivity/access between Downtown and the river	Develop Downtown specific design guidelines – core and sub-area based	River and riverside is fully connected to Downtown	Co-op development group – financing tool with public support or incentives
More people living Downtown, more quality housing – appealing to a variety of residents	Focus on preserving the historic character of Downtown	Streets and sidewalks are well maintained for all users with the mechanism to get people Downtown and keep them there	System of sky-walks connecting upper stories of Central Avenue buildings – possibly a walking mall
New quality development, and development of commercial and residential buildings	Develop a “civic space” on the corner of 2nd Ave N and 4th St.	A more active transportation system – more people walking and biking, fewer vehicles	Dining District (brew pub, nightlife, synergy) – beginning near the event center – weaving down 2nd through Machinery Row – towards Central
Design Guidelines – Form based codes (not limiting creative development)	Fill in the voids (parking lots) on the avenues adjacent to Central Ave.	Vehicular Transportation system functions smoothly	Quality housing for all incomes throughout Downtown
Downtown police officer and volunteer Downtown Force	Have a concentration of building density and heights in the core - both gradually decreasing out from the core	Long distance passenger railway station	Adaptive re-use of buildings
Enhanced Code Enforcement		Light rail or trolley Downtown and beyond	Restore theater inside Rocky Mountain Building for community events
Develop an alternative transportation network		Streetscape complete through central core	Add multiple urban parks
		No parking meters	Maintain current land use mix

## Downtown Zoning Districts

Figure 10: Downtown Zoning Districts

Zoning District	Description
<b>C-1 Neighborhood commercial</b>	This district is found near established and developing residential areas and is intended to accommodate low intensity commercial activities that serve the nearby residential area. Development standards ensure the compatibility of this district to those residential districts that may adjoin.
<b>C-4 Central business core</b>	This district is intended to accommodate and create a high level of business and social activity from morning through the nighttime hours. This district hosts a wide range of employment and businesses. Retail operations and specialty stores are common on the street level along with professional offices. Residential uses can occur in this district primarily on the upper levels of buildings. Entertainment occurs in this district and helps to create a destination. Sidewalk cafes and food vendors are common during the warmer months of the year. Off-street parking is available, but occurs primarily in multi-level parking garages and on-street parking. Civic buildings help to build a critical mass of activity.
<b>C-5 Central business periphery</b>	This district is generally found around the core of the downtown. It is intended to serve as a buffer between the downtown area and the surrounding residential districts. Although commercial uses are allowed in this district, they are typically businesses with lower levels of traffic compared to those found in the downtown area. Buildings are smaller in this district to create a physical transition in building bulk from predominant residential uses and the intensely developed downtown area. Buildings have setbacks and landscaping requirements. Exterior storage or display is not allowed.
<b>M-2 Mixed-use transitional</b>	This district is intended to promote a transition over time to a predominately mixed-use land use pattern. Because of changing economic conditions and other factors, some current uses do not represent the highest and best use, given other more suitable areas. Current industrial uses and warehouses are not considered nonconforming. As such, industrial uses and warehouses existing at the time of adoption (2005) are allowed to expand or to be re-established, if damaged, provided development and appearance standards under the purview of the Design Review Board are met.
<b>PLI Public lands and institutional</b>	This district is intended to include areas of significant public lands including public schools and significant public and quasi-public institutional uses or facilities.
<b>POS Parks and open space</b>	This district is intended to include lands that are undeveloped and unimproved, or are public parks or recreational areas.
<b>R-3 Single-family high density</b>	This district is intended to accommodate single-family residences at the highest urban density. Home occupations can occur in this district to the extent they are compatible with residential uses found in this district. Schools and other public facilities are often found in close proximity.
<b>R-6 Multi-family residential high density</b>	This district is intended to accommodate multi-family units of the highest density allowed in the City. These districts are typically found close to work and leisure, and are close to the downtown.
<b>R-9 Mixed residential</b>	This district contains a mix of housing types including single-family, two-family, and multi-family dwellings. New projects developing under this classification must be at least 5 acres in size and include a mix of housing types consistent with a set of prescribed standards.

## Downtown Survey

To better understand how the community uses and perceives Downtown, an on-line survey was made available to the public during the month of October 2010. The responses from the nearly 450 citizens who completed the survey were used to guide the development of the goals, objectives and strategies of the plan. Below are the responses to the 16 multiple choice and five open-ended questions that made up the survey.

### Multiple Choice Questions

#### 1. How often do you frequent Downtown?

Daily	52%
Weekly	19%
Monthly	18%
Annually	7%
Never	1%
Other	2%

#### 2. If you do frequent Downtown, why do you come Downtown?

Shopping	56%
Services	37%
Dining	42%
Entertainment	29%
Recreation	11%
Employment	52%
I live Downtown	5%

#### 3. What brings you Downtown most often?

Shopping	16%
Services	14%
Dining	8%
Entertainment	7%
Recreation	2%
Employment	49%
I live Downtown	3%

#### 4. What mode of transportation do you most often use when coming to Downtown?

Auto	94%
Bus	0%
Walk	4%
Bike	2%

#### 5. Downtown is safe

Disagree Strongly	3%
Disagree	21%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	21%
Agree	47%
Agree Strongly	8%

#### 6. Downtown is clean

Disagree Strongly	3%
Disagree	19%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	16%
Agree	56%
Agree Strongly	6%

## 7. Downtown has great shopping opportunities

Disagree Strongly	11%
Disagree	36%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	27%
Agree	24%
Agree Strongly	2%

## 8. Downtown has great entertainment options

Disagree Strongly	14%
Disagree	42%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	27%
Agree	15%
Agree Strongly	3%

## 9. Downtown has great parks

Disagree Strongly	6%
Disagree	17%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	26%
Agree	44%
Agree Strongly	9%

## 10. Downtown is a desirable place to raise a family

Disagree Strongly	20%
Disagree	42%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	28%
Agree	9%
Agree Strongly	1%

## 11. Downtown has desirable housing choices

Disagree Strongly	20%
Disagree	46%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	23%
Agree	11%
Agree Strongly	1%

## 12. Downtown hosts great events

Disagree Strongly	2%
Disagree	10%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	26%
Agree	54%
Agree Strongly	8%

## 13. Downtown offers a variety of activities for families

Disagree Strongly	6%
Disagree	25%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	35%
Agree	32%
Agree Strongly	2%

## 14. Downtown offers a variety of activities for teenagers

Disagree Strongly	18%
Disagree	48%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	30%
Agree	4%
Agree Strongly	0%

## 15. Downtown offers a variety of activities for adults under 40

Disagree Strongly	11%
Disagree	30%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	31%
Agree	28%
Agree Strongly	1%

## 16. Downtown offers a variety of activities for adults over 40

Disagree Strongly	7%
Disagree	27%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	31%
Agree	33%
Agree Strongly	1%

## Open Ended Responses

### 17. I would visit Downtown more often if:

Respondents identified a number of factors that would lead them to visit Downtown more often. Over half (60%) indicated that Downtown currently lacks one or more of the following: viable entertainment, dining, or retail options. Specific facilities such as a movie theater, brew pub, or fine dining establishment – that provide opportunities for evening and nighttime activity were listed as missing elements Downtown. Less than a fifth of respondents (18%) stated that changes to Downtown parking would bring them Downtown more often – with the majority of those citing parking meters as a deterrent. Others (8%) mentioned adding parks and civic spaces or other changes to the built environment and increased safety (7%) as factors that would lead people to visit more often.

### 18. What changes in the Downtown might motivate more people to live there or nearby?

Roughly a third (32%) of respondents would be more likely

to live Downtown if it were livelier, with more restaurants, entertainment options, and core services available to residents. Others (24%) would be more likely to live Downtown if there were a greater variety in the quality, type, and price of housing available. Respondents identified updated apartments with modern amenities, urban loft and condos, and middle income units as missing components from the housing currently available Downtown. A cleaner and safer environment, with better landscaping and more green space would be appealing to some (23%) respondents. Finally, parking issues (9%) were identified by some respondents as detriments to Downtown living.

### 19. Favorite thing about Downtown is:

Approximately a third (32%) of respondents identified unique retail shops and restaurants, such as Dragonfly Dry Goods, the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Diner, Planet Earth, and Candy Masterpiece as their favorite thing about Downtown. Another third (32%) identified characteristics of the built environment, such as the historic buildings and architecture, the ease of walking, and streetscape elements as their favorite thing about Downtown. Events such as the Farmers Market, Alive at Five, and the Christmas Stroll were identified by 15% of respondents as their favorite thing about Downtown. Other favorites included Gibson Park and the Rivers Edge Trail (5%), the convenient central location (4%), and the historic feel (6%) of Downtown.

### 20. Least Favorite thing about Downtown is:

There is not a single factor or theme that stands alone as respondents' least favorite thing about Downtown. Vacant and unused buildings, unkempt property, and other negative factors of the built environment were cited most frequently (29%) as people's least favorite thing about Downtown. The lack of entertainment and dining options, especially in the evening and nighttime hours, was identified by some (23%) as their least favorite thing about Downtown. Others identified the lack of diversity of the commercial and retail shops, as well as the fact that most of the businesses close at 5:00 p.m. Parking issues, such as metered

parking, was also recognized by nearly a quarter (24%) of the respondents. Finally, others (23%) pointed to their perception of Downtown as dirty and unsafe, and the type of people attracted to this environment, as their least favorite thing about Downtown.

## **21. The one thing I would like to see in Downtown in 10 years is:**

Almost two-thirds (62%) of respondents identified a facility that would add nightlife to Downtown, such as a retail, restaurant, or entertainment venue, as the one thing that they would like to see in 10 years. Facilities such as a movie theater, grocery store, or large retail store, as well as a brew pub or nightclub were mentioned frequently as potential anchor projects. People stated that they would like to see existing buildings full, with a mix of uses, including residential uses on the upper floors. Changes in the built environment included creating a bike and pedestrian only area, such as a large walking mall, or adding more parks and green space to Downtown, was identified by approximately a quarter of respondents. Finally, removing parking meters (6%), increased safety (3%), and more housing (3%) were topics that were identified.

## **Survey Summary**

The survey was a critical element in addressing the current conditions of Downtown. The nearly 450 respondents provided valuable insight into how the community uses and perceives Downtown. The results of the survey assisted the community Working Groups and Steering Committee in creating the vision for Downtown and establishing the goals, objectives and strategies to achieve the vision.

## Downtown Assets

Historic Buildings



Developable Buildings and Lots



Rivers Edge Trail



Public Transit and Great Falls Transit Center



Downtown Events



Art Museums, Shops and Galleries



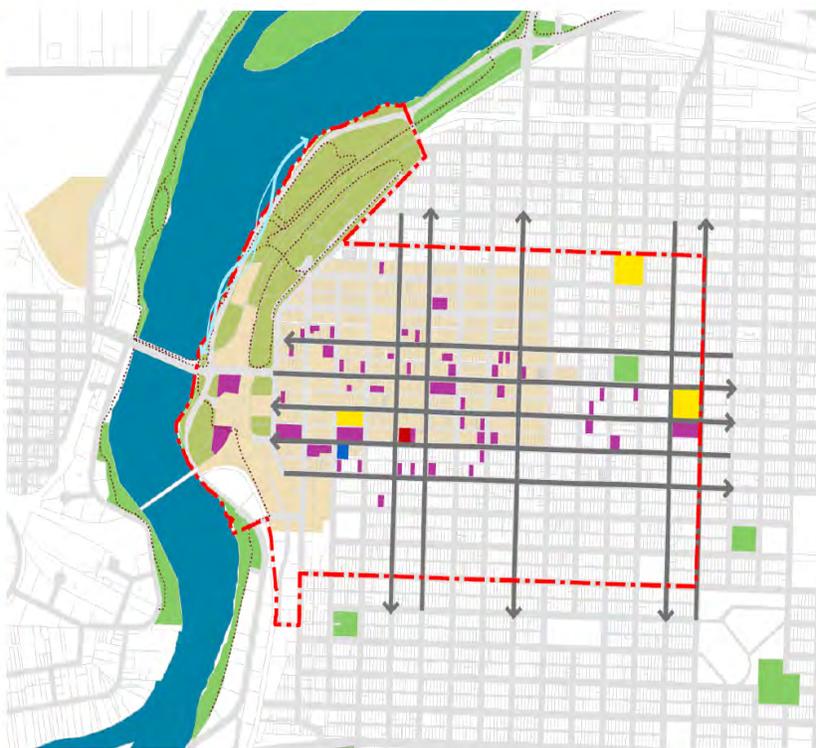
Parking Availability



Downtown Streetscape



### Downtown Assets



#### Downtown Assets

The assets displayed above are strengths, identified by the Working Groups that should be capitalized on for the Downtown to become the place described in the Downtown Vision Statement. The Downtown Master Plan capitalizes on these assets through the implementation of goals, objectives and strategies.

#### Map Legend

- Rivers Edge Trail
- Art shops and Galleries
- Neighborworks
- Grid System
- Riverfront Area
- Available Parking
- Downtown Parks
- Historic Districts
- Transit Center
- Downtown Boundary



Locally Owned Stores



Riverfront Area



Walkability of Downtown



Neighborworks



Downtown Parks



Historic Districts



Grid System of Roadways

## Downtown Issues

Lack of connection to the River and parks



Street and sidewalk maintenance



Auto-orientation of one-way streets



Building vacancies / Vacant upper floors



Lack of wayfinding signage and maps



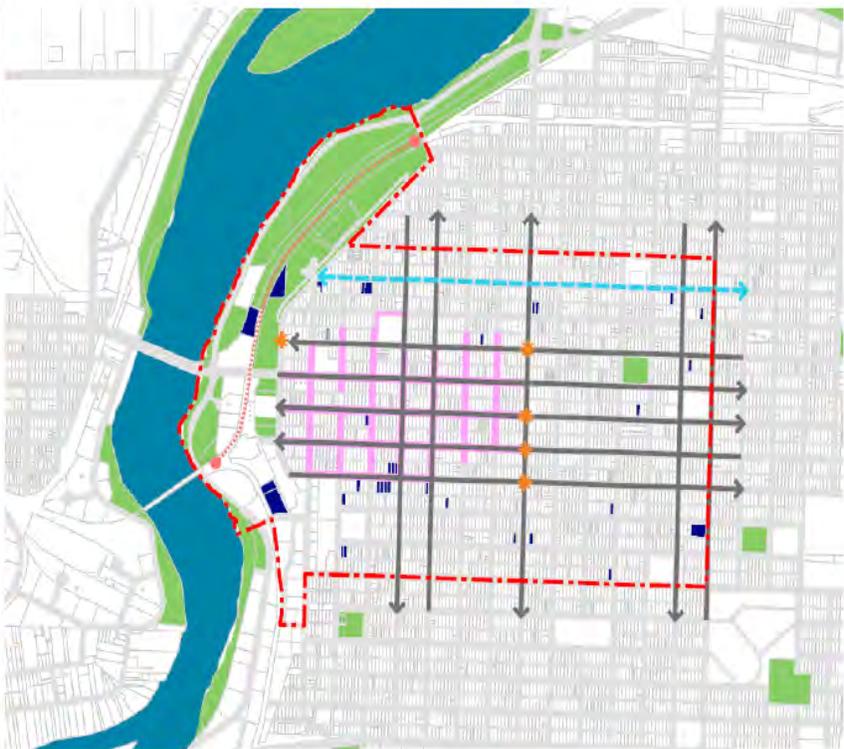
Deteriorating residential buildings



No quality Downtown Hotel



Downtown Issues



Vacant Lots



Confusion at some intersections



Parking meters



Lack of bike paths, routes, or lanes



No Downtown commercial anchor



Lack of public gathering space

**Downtown Issues**  
The issues displayed above are barriers, identified by the Working Groups that should be proactively addressed for Downtown to become the place described in the Downtown Vision Statement. The Downtown Master Plan addresses these issues through the implementation of goals, objectives and strategies.

- Map Legend**
- Motorist Parking Area
  - Only bike routes
  - One-way streets
  - Vacant Lots
  - Confusion at intersections
  - Lack of connection to the River and parks
  - Downtown Boundary