

CREATE A DYNAMIC DOWNTOWN ENVIRONMENT

Capturing the opportunities in Downtown requires creating an environment that encourages private investment in projects that are sensitive to the historic context and topography of Downtown, and provide the diversity to attract Downtown residents and employees. This includes creating a downtown development code that promotes good design, exploring opportunities to redevelop underutilized and under-performing properties, and encouraging housing, food, and neighborhood support services.

Revise the Downtown development code

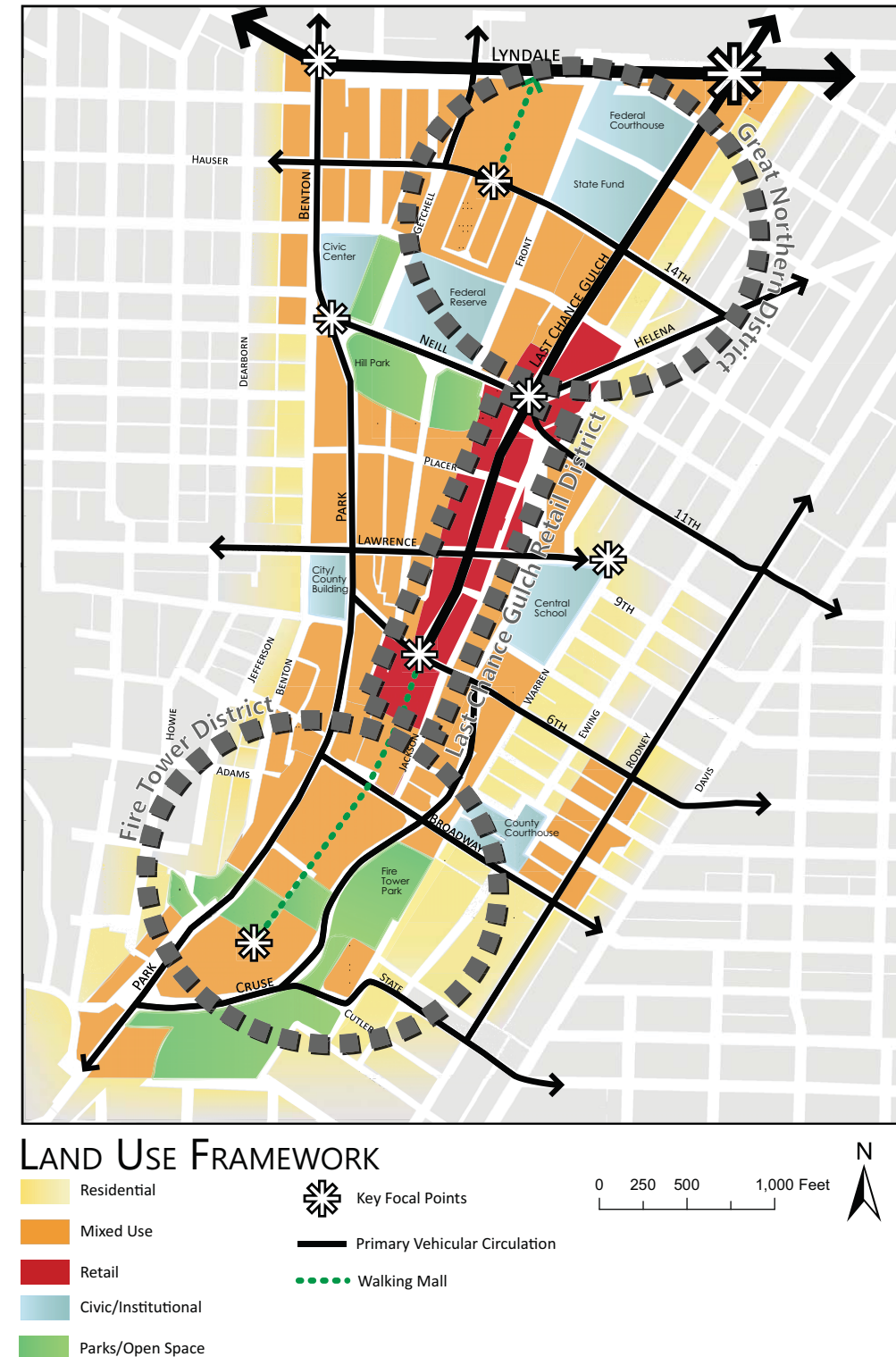


The existing zoning code focuses on bulk and dimensional requirements and the separation of dissimilar land uses into individual districts. While it generally allows flexibility for Downtown development, it does not actively facilitate the design elements necessary to create a lively, successful Downtown.

A modern development code should guide development and consistently produce quality design reflective of the vision for Downtown. The code should be forward focused and anticipate new development, incorporating design elements that are essential to a good Downtown environment. The code should be an enabler and facilitator for investment in Downtown, emphasizing physical character, quality design, and Downtown identity.

- ✓ **Consolidate Downtown zoning.** Create one zoning district to serve as the base framework for all of Downtown. This will simplify the development process and allow regulatory incentives that are unique to the Downtown. The zoning code must balance individual rights with public good, and provide fair, predictable outcomes for both the developer and the community. The zoning code should recognize context, providing for stability in areas that need to be protected (i.e. historic buildings) and change in areas that need placemaking and new context (i.e. Great Northern). Standards should focus on appropriate building form and scale, setbacks, and the relationship to the street, including off-street parking lots and parking structures.
- ✓ **Eliminate off-street parking requirements.** Eliminating the requirement to provide parking creates a comparative advantage for Downtown by reducing the cost of development. The decision to provide parking becomes market-driven – some projects will choose to provide parking on an individual basis, while others will choose to use the available supply of public parking.
- ✓ **Develop design guidelines.** Unlike zoning standards, which are prescriptive and easily measured, design guidelines are discretionary, performance based, and flexible. Design guidelines allow a design review process as an option to simply meeting the code. Design guidelines often provide a menu of alternative solutions, and can include incentives to promote the desired land use and form. For example, a zoning code that requires windows and transparency along the street frontage may not work for certain building uses. Design guidelines can provide options such as architectural detailing, art work, or landscaping to create a pedestrian friendly street edge.

Design guidelines should be incorporated into the Downtown zoning district and could include elements specific to each district. Design guidelines should provide a statement of intent and act as a guide for the key elements necessary to facilitate the desired future conditions, such as sidewalk widths, on-street parking, streetscape amenities, and necessary utility infrastructure.



Promote redevelopment of underperforming properties



- ✓ **Create a Tax Increment Financing District.** Evaluate the opportunity to create a new urban renewal district for all or part of Downtown. Under state law, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a powerful tool for redevelopment in qualifying areas.
- ✓ **Leverage city-owned properties.** Explore opportunities to utilize city-owned surface lots, right-of-ways, and surplus properties for redevelopment. This could include public/private partnerships, housing co-operatives, or long-term land leases for specific uses that are desirable in the Downtown. Potential partners could include the School District and the Helena Housing Authority, which also own significant property in Downtown.
- ✓ **Encourage ground-floor retail use.** Explore opportunities to increase ground-floor retail activity. This could include allowing pop-up retail (such as booths, carts, food trucks) and liner buildings (narrow shops in front of non-active uses) within public right-of-way to create an active streetscape. Review the existing process for granting right-of-way agreements for cafe seating, garbage receptacles, and food trucks for opportunities to expand these uses. Review the existing process for granting right-of-way agreements for cafe seating and food trucks for opportunities to expand these uses.
- ✓ **Encourage business incubators and startups.** With Helena's skilled but aging workforce, there are opportunities for retirees to mentor the younger generation and pass on a wealth of experience. Encourage startups and new businesses by creating a permitting "pink zone" that pre-permits portions a building permit and expedites review. Other incentives could include tax abatements, discounted parking rates, and utilizing city-owned property to reduce land costs.



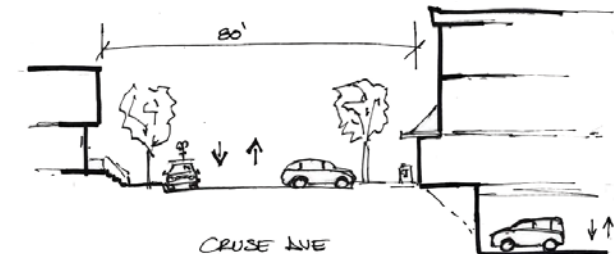
Last Chance Gulch Streetscape Concept
Public investment in streetscape amenities will help support private investment in underutilized properties.



Encourage Downtown housing



- ✓ **Recruit neighborhood services.** Seek to attract businesses and organizations that provide basic services, like grocery and household goods, medical services, and social opportunities that allow Downtown residents to stay Downtown for everyday needs.
- ✓ **Support neighborhood schools and colleges.** Neighborhood schools are a significant factor for residents and businesses choosing a place to locate. Colleges and universities play a vital role in providing a qualified work force for businesses. Central School, Carroll College, and other learning opportunities are critical for successful Downtown housing.
- ✓ **Encourage workforce and affordable housing.** A full range of housing choices is important for Downtown Helena and affordability. Seek partnerships that provide senior housing, market-rate workforce housing, and subsidized affordable housing in the Downtown.
- ✓ **Add housing around Women's and Hill Parks.** Encourage housing to add activity around existing green spaces. Parks area a valuable amenity for Downtown housing and the presence of more people tends to discourage undesirable behavior in the parks. Explore opportunities for adaptive re-use of existing buildings like BCBS for residential purposes.
- ✓ **Assess the feasibility of converting Cruse Avenue to a local street.** The majority of Cruse Avenue carries less than 2,000 cars per day. Its wide right-of-way would be better utilized for parking, sidewalks, trails, and landscaping that support new development rather than a high-volume traffic corridor. Explore opportunities to leverage city-owned property to create mixed-use housing and structured parking.



Cruse Avenue Concept
De-emphasizing traffic on Cruse Avenue will create new opportunities for redevelopment.

- ✓ **Create Cruse Avenue housing.** Take advantage of underutilized right-of-way along the southern portion of Cruse Avenue by eliminating the landscaped island to make room for condos and townhomes. Better utilization of the space and opportunity for construction of new housing that appeals to baby boomers and millennials, with trails and open space out the back door in a walkable, urban neighborhood, could be a catalyst project for the Fire Tower District.



Cruse Avenue Housing Concept

Housing along the south end of Cruse Avenue could be a catalyst project for the Downtown.



Create a Public Market

- ✓ **Study the feasibility of a Downtown market.** Identify economic feasibility and location for a public market consisting of 20,000 - 30,000 square feet of year-round space and 15-20 tenants. The market should provide convenient grocery and household goods that allow residents to stay Downtown and should be in a prominent location with ground-floor access and convenient parking.



Marlow Market Concept

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

The Marlow Theater was a major destination for touring vaudeville companies and motion pictures. The theater was torn down in the 1970s when Broadway was extended to Park Avenue.

