MISSOULA MIDTOWN
MASTERPLAN

Midtown Missoula

Master Plan

Final Report
June 2023

Contents

01
Introduction + Background
- Introduction
- Process
- Development History
- Midtown Snapshot
- Community Voices

02
Vision + Framework
- Vision
- Plan Framework
- Midtown Character
- A Day in Midtown...

03
Recommendations
- Land Use
- Housing
- Business + Economic Development
- Mobility + Connectivity
- Parks + Open Space
- Equitable Development

04
Conclusion
- Acknowledgments
- Appendices

Introduction + Background

Introduction 6

Process 10

Community Voices 12

Development History 16

Midtown Snapshot 18

01

Introduction

WHY CREATE A MASTER PLAN?

As Missoula witnessed rapid growth in recent years, the Missoula Midtown Association and community members came together to advocate for a cohesive vision of Midtown's future. The community saw how new development could leverage Midtown's central location, development opportunities, and regional attractors like the Fairgrounds and Southgate Mall to serve local residents and visitors. They also saw the risks. Without a vision, the community risked being caught unprepared if development increased, threatening displacement of residents and established small businesses.

The area faces pressing challenges today. Rising housing prices, fast-changing employment trends, and urgent needs for an improved transportation and mobility network are among Midtown's greatest issues. Planning efforts dating back to 2000 have recognized that Brooks Street's current configuration hinders Midtown's chances for robust economic development and creates barriers to pedestrian connectivity. However, no plan considered how to leverage Midtown's assets or understand the kind of community that residents wanted. Midtown today has unrealized potential, with underutilized areas that present opportunities for new development that will support Missoula's goals for growing inward.

This Master Plan is the result of an unprecedented grassroots funding effort led by the Missoula Midtown Association (MMA). Through 2022 and 2023, the MMA worked with the Midtown Master Plan team and residents to develop the vision presented here. With this Master Plan in place, Midtown can define how to catalyze future investment in a way that reflects community values and meets the needs and future vision of the community in the next 10 years. New investments should enhance the neighborhood's character with features like gathering spaces, transit and bike/pedestrian networks, and access to green infrastructure.

The Master Plan will guide the City's infrastructure investments, call on other key partners to aid in implementation, and identify potential partnerships between private development and the public realm to create a place where residents can live, play, and work in Midtown.

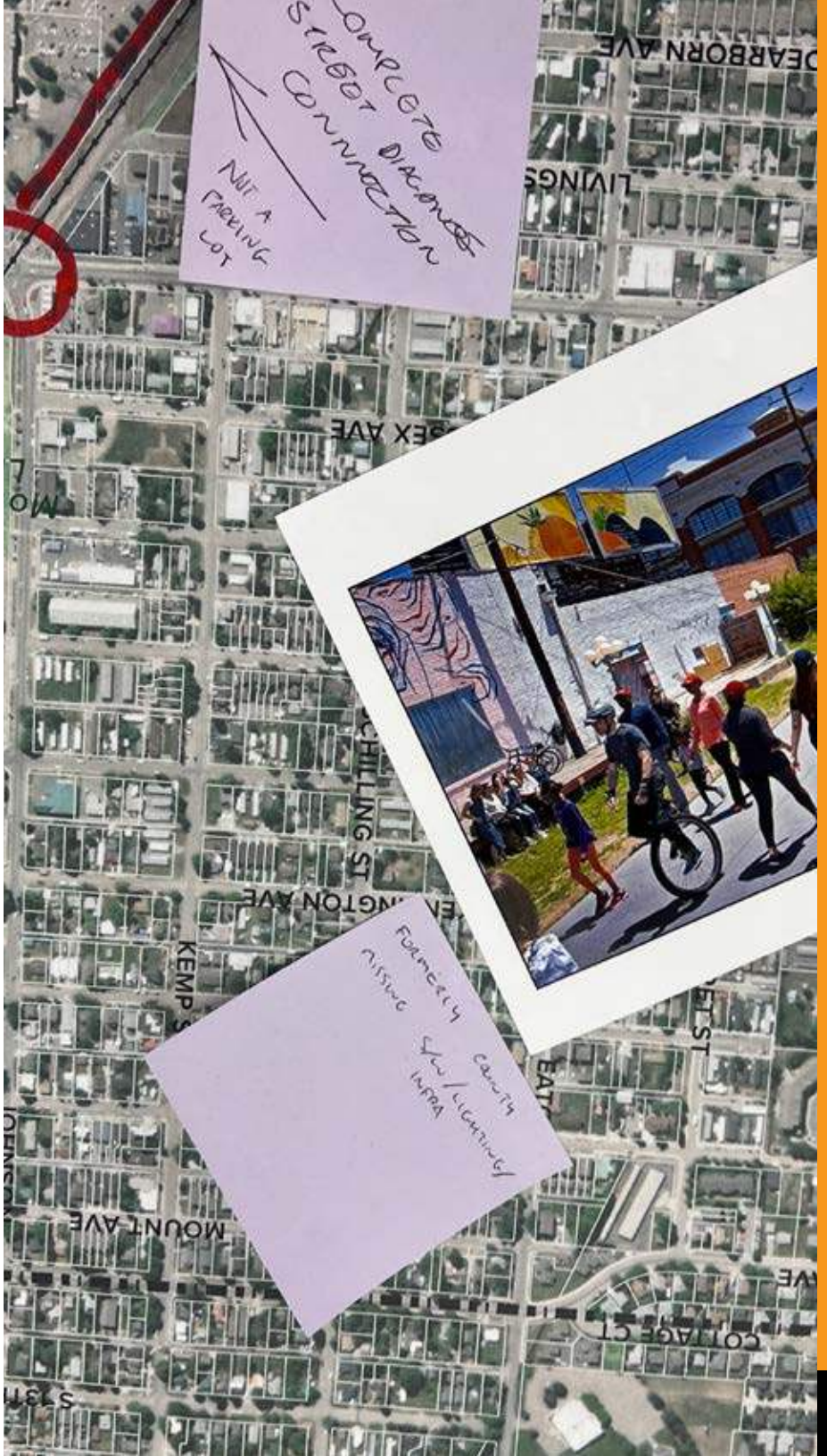
HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

Implementing the Master Plan will take a concerted effort across public agencies, private investment, and the Missoula community to realize the vision for Midtown. The plan provides a basis for how to guide decision-making and strengthen the role of Midtown within Missoula and the region. The plan emphasizes the many qualities and resources that make Midtown desirable and unique. It establishes a vision and framework that was developed in close collaboration with the Midtown residents and community members. The framework builds upon Midtown's assets and advances strategies and ideas to:

- Create a vibrant and inclusive community
- Develop new destinations and experiences
- Increase opportunities for residents
- Provide safe and comfortable streets for everyone
- Focus investment in major opportunity areas.

A glossary of technical terms is included in Appendix A.

**Disclaimer: This document is for planning purposes only, not for construction.*



LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The purpose of this Master Plan is to envision the future in the land of the place that we now call "Midtown." But to do that effectively, we have to situate this place in the context of time, and the transformation of Midtown has been incredibly recent. What is now western Montana and the Missoula area has been a central part of the homelands of the Salish and Kalispel people since at least the end of the last Ice Age. Their creation stories of Coyote and other animal people share both the origin of the world and "how deeply the people are tied to this particular place."[1]

In fact, "the entire period since 1800 comprises little more than 1 percent of the history of the Salish and Pend d'Oreille people."[1] In Salish and Kalispel ways of life, there is no more important and respected food than bitterroot, whose return each spring is welcomed in ceremony. In all of the vast tribal territories spanning both sides of the Continental Divide, there was no more abundant digging ground for bitterroot than the area now defined as Midtown–including the Fairgrounds, as well as the South Hills near Miller Creek, and a large section on the west side of Missoula, including the Russell Street area, the Reserve Street area, and Fort Missoula.

During the early twentieth century, tribal cultural ways coexisted with the emerging urban environment: "Tribal people sometimes rode streetcars between their camps and the digging grounds."[1] Salish and Kalispel people continued to camp at these places for several weeks up until the 1960s, when development finally pushed out the bitterroot encampments.

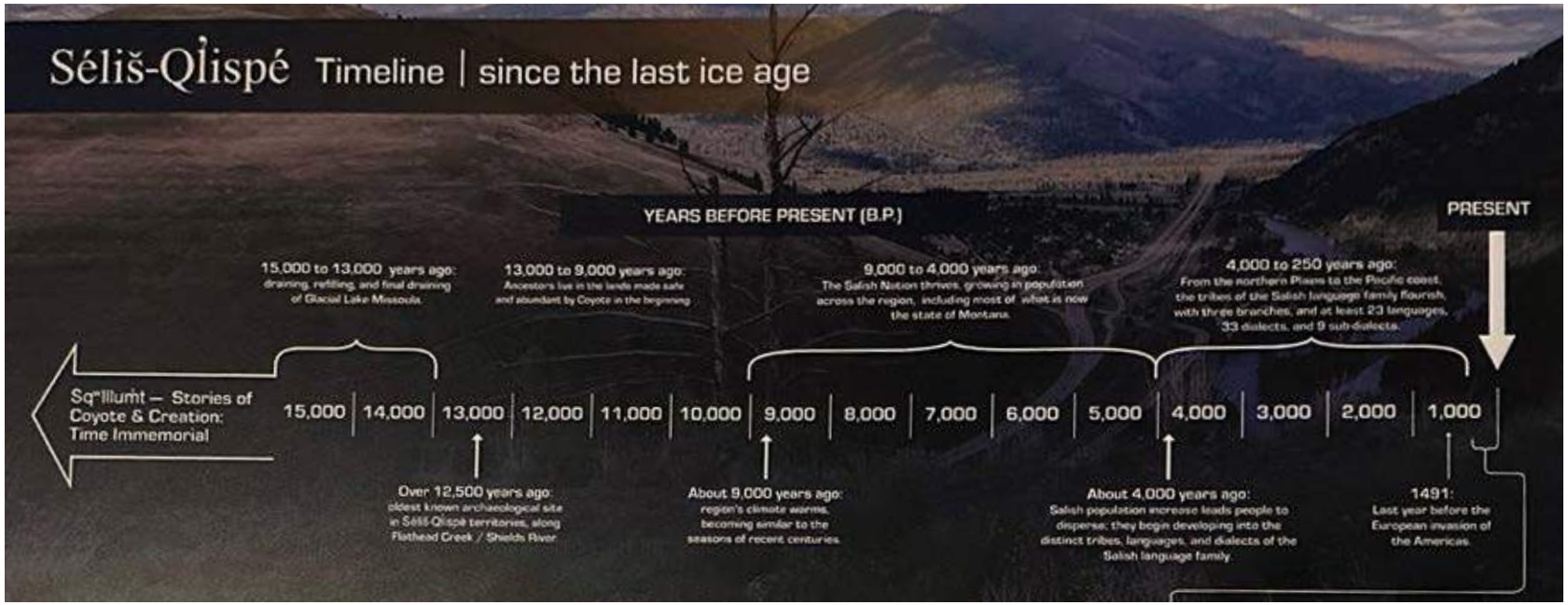


Photo of Séliš-Qlispé timeline interpretive sign at Beartracks Bridge.

[1] Statement provided by the Séliš-Qlispé Culture Committee for the January 26, 2023 Midtown Workshop. Quoted excerpts are from p. 7-9 The Salish People and the Lewis & Clark Expedition.

Process

OVERVIEW

Alongside engagement work, the project team conducted analysis of the built environment, market conditions, and the policy and regulatory context of Midtown to understand existing conditions, opportunities, and challenges. This analysis was used to develop the final Master Plan that reflects the vision of the community. This vision promotes equitable and feasible development, advances momentum for existing initiatives, and creates a sense of place and belonging for Midtown. The three phases of analysis are summarized below:

WHERE WE ARE STARTING FROM: EXISTING CONDITIONS

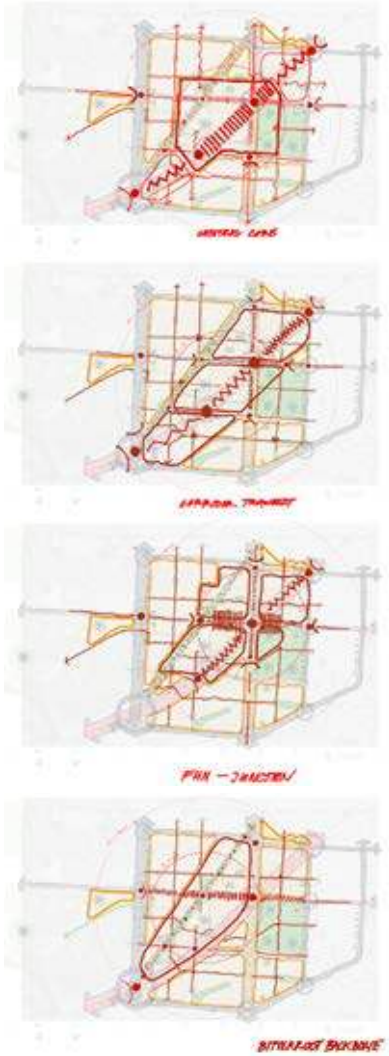
The project team assessed Midtown's built form, demographic and economic trends, land use, transportation network, parking, and infrastructure. The Midtown Snapshot section includes a summary of this work while the full document is located in Appendix B.

WHAT WE WANT: COMMUNITY VISION AND URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

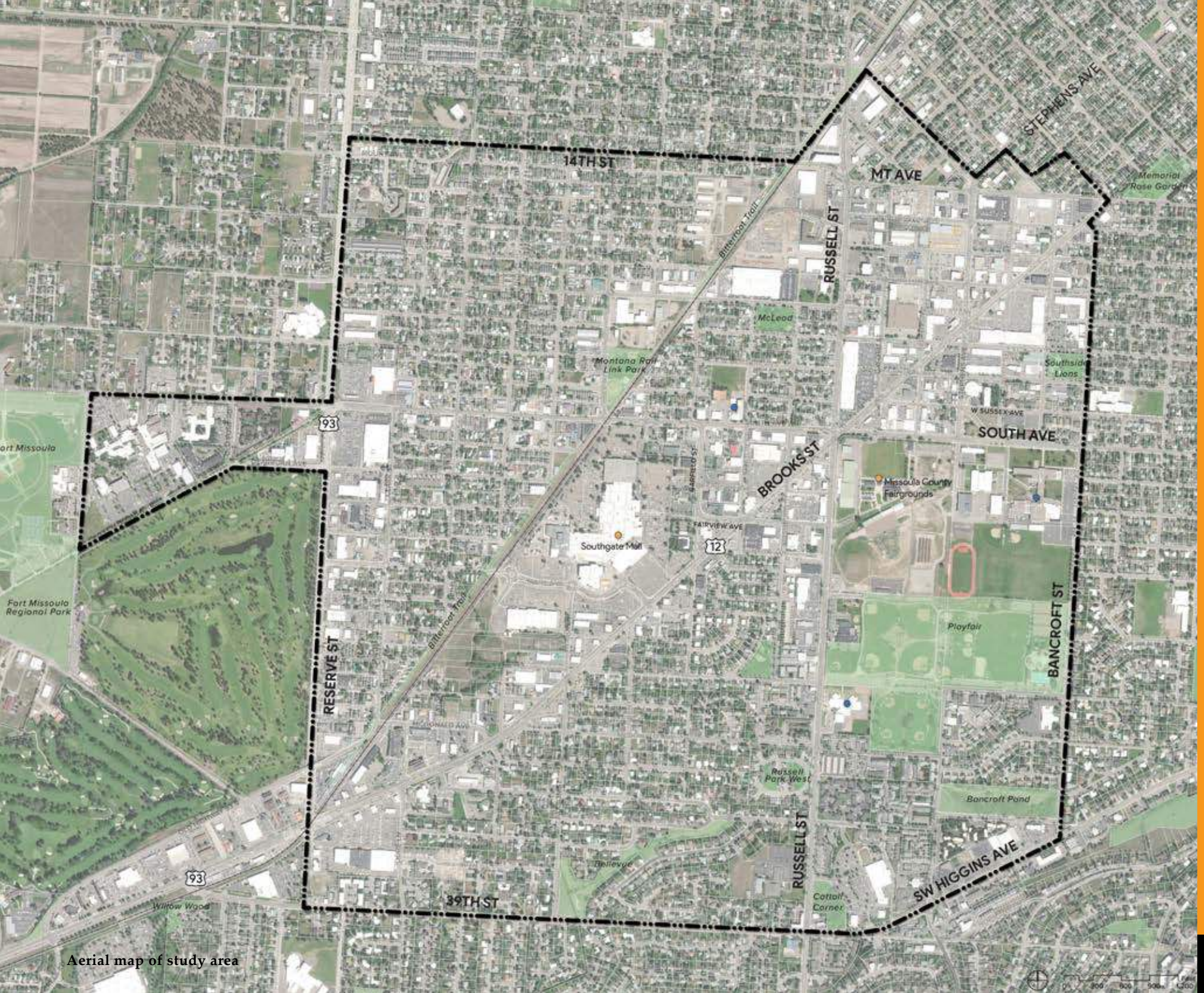
The project team combined the community engagement findings with the existing conditions analysis to develop a community vision and design framework to develop four plan concepts that highlight different ways the vision could be achieved (Appendix D). The team evaluated these concepts against the Project Compass and Vision (see Section 2 of this plan) to understand how each of the concepts ranked relative to the identified priorities for Midtown. To understand the potential impact on the community, the project team also assessed market feasibility and considerations for socioeconomic vulnerability to displacement of each concept (Appendices E and F).

HOW WE WILL GET THERE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

This Master Plan provides recommendations for land use and infrastructure, housing, community character and design, businesses and economic development, mobility and connectivity, parks and open space, and equitable development. The Implementation Strategy (Appendix A) identifies a path forward for the Missoula Midtown Association and partners to implement the recommendations and strategies of this plan.



Draft Plan Concepts were presented at the Community Workshop on January 26, 2023. Feedback on these alternatives informed the final Master Plan concept.



Aerial map of study area

Community Voices

PROCESS AND ACTIVITIES

The Master Plan is the result of a comprehensive community-driven process to envision the future of Midtown. Together, hundreds of community members helped identify and refine the Master Plan vision.

Community engagement for the Master Plan was a collaborative effort between the project team and Midtown's grassroots community engagement coordinator, Rachel Huff-Doria. Rachel began her process by speaking with neighborhood based community groups and organizations to better understand their past experiences engaging in planning processes. She used that feedback to inform community outreach efforts. To ensure community leadership during key points of the planning process and bolster community voices and insight the "Midtown Community Guide Committee" was created. The 15-member committee includes residents, past/current employees in Midtown, and people with a range of experiences, interests, and backgrounds who are committed to ensuring the Master Plan reflects the community's vision. With the support and expertise of the Community Guide Committee, the project team engaged with the public and special population groups who may be impacted by development but whose experiences and insights are often not heard in decision-making.

Using a variety of in-person and online engagement opportunities, the project team reached over 1,000 community members, as well as key community leaders and organizations. Over 250 people provided input through community workshops, over 1,000 mailers were sent out promoting community events, and hundreds of individual conversations with community members occurred throughout the process. The Community Vision Summary (Appendix C) provides details of the takeaways from each engagement activity throughout this phase of the Master Plan.

The team's engagement process focused on understanding how residents, workers, neighbors, and visitors experience Midtown today and on developing a clear direction to achieve what they envision for Midtown in the future. To frame these conversations at the outset, the project team also discussed a common understanding of equity and the implications for engagement efforts. This resulted in a working definition of equity used by the team through these different methods with the following approach:

> *An approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant; An effective place-based action for creating strong and livable communities; Clear expectations that the outcomes from development need to be responsive to **underserved** populations and **vulnerable** groups; In the process, lower-income residents and people of color are successfully guiding the changes that occur within their communities rather than reacting to them.*[2]

Community members provided input on the vision for Midtown at the Visioning Workshop on September 27, 2022 (top, bottom, right)

No matter who you are, how old you are, what your abilities and capacity are, you can navigate with ease and feel like you have a place.

- Local Resident, on a future vision for Midtown

[2] US EPA, "Equitable Development and Environmental Justice," April 13, 2015, https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/equitable-development-and-environmental-justice.

Community Voices

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS & FOCUS GROUPS

The team spoke with over 60 stakeholders through one-on-one interviews and targeted focus groups, including representatives from public agencies, City government, nonprofit organizations, business owners, landowners, developers, and residents working in retail and health and social services.

The grassroots engagement team also identified organizational stakeholders who represent or work with individuals from groups who are most at risk of being impacted by new development. The engagement team spoke with people who represent, advocate with or are underrepresented and/or underserved due to historical exclusion and barriers to access. The engagement team spoke with people who are houseless, people who are at risk of being displaced, Native Americans, tribal communities, resettled refugees, people with disabilities, people living in areas with the least access to services, people with lower incomes, people who rent, families with young children, and seniors.

VISIONING WORKSHOP & ONLINE SURVEY

Over 125 community members (including children) attended the Midtown Visioning Workshop held at the Missoula YMCA in September 2022. This event included a series of interactive stations that covered issues and opportunities related to neighborhood destinations, housing, commercial development, urban design, transportation, parking, and concurrent projects in the City. Attendees shared their thoughts with representatives from the MMA, our team, and the City. The event also included a children's activity where young community members could draw their ideas for the future of Midtown. An online survey to complement this event allowed for people who live, work, and visit Midtown to participate virtually.

PLAN CONCEPTS WORKSHOP & ONLINE COMMENTS

Over 150 community members (including children) attended the Midtown Visioning Workshop held at the Missoula County Fairgrounds in January 2023. The purpose of this event was to identify what elements of each concept resonated with the community to develop a final preferred concept. This event included a presentation of plan alternatives developed by the project team and table activities where attendees were able to discuss and give direction on the initial plan concepts. Representatives from the MMA, project team, and the City guided this work and provided context for community members. An online survey and website to complement this event allowed for people who live, work, and visit Midtown to participate virtually. The plan concepts were also shared on the project website with the opportunity for community members to provide feedback online.

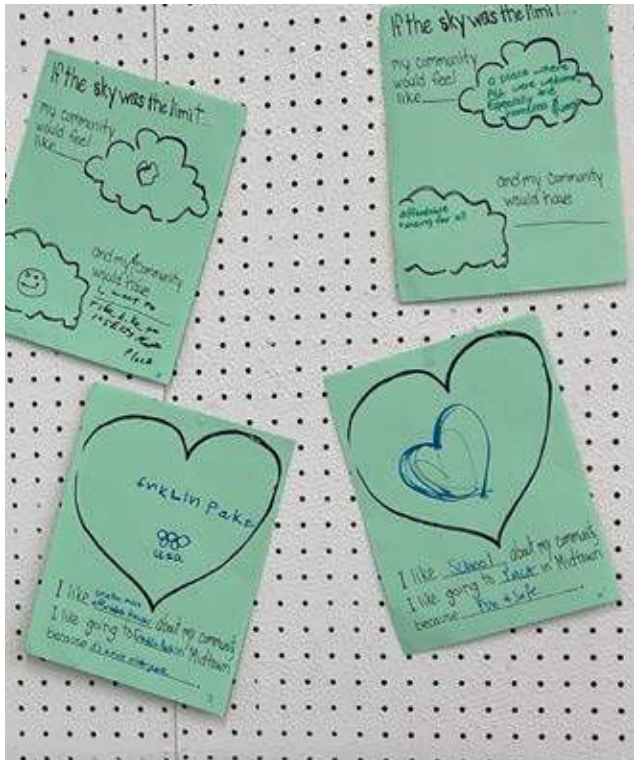
MIDTOWN COMMUNITY GUIDES

Fifteen volunteer Community Guides worked with the project team to reach population groups where they are, further enhancing the understanding of community needs, priorities, and a vision for Midtown. Activities were led at multiple events including but not limited to the Franklin to Fort Get the Scoop ice cream social on September 1st, the Lewis & Clark Sunday Streets event on September 18th, the Russell Elementary Walkathon on October 19th, and Community Workshops.

Initial Priorities and Key Themes

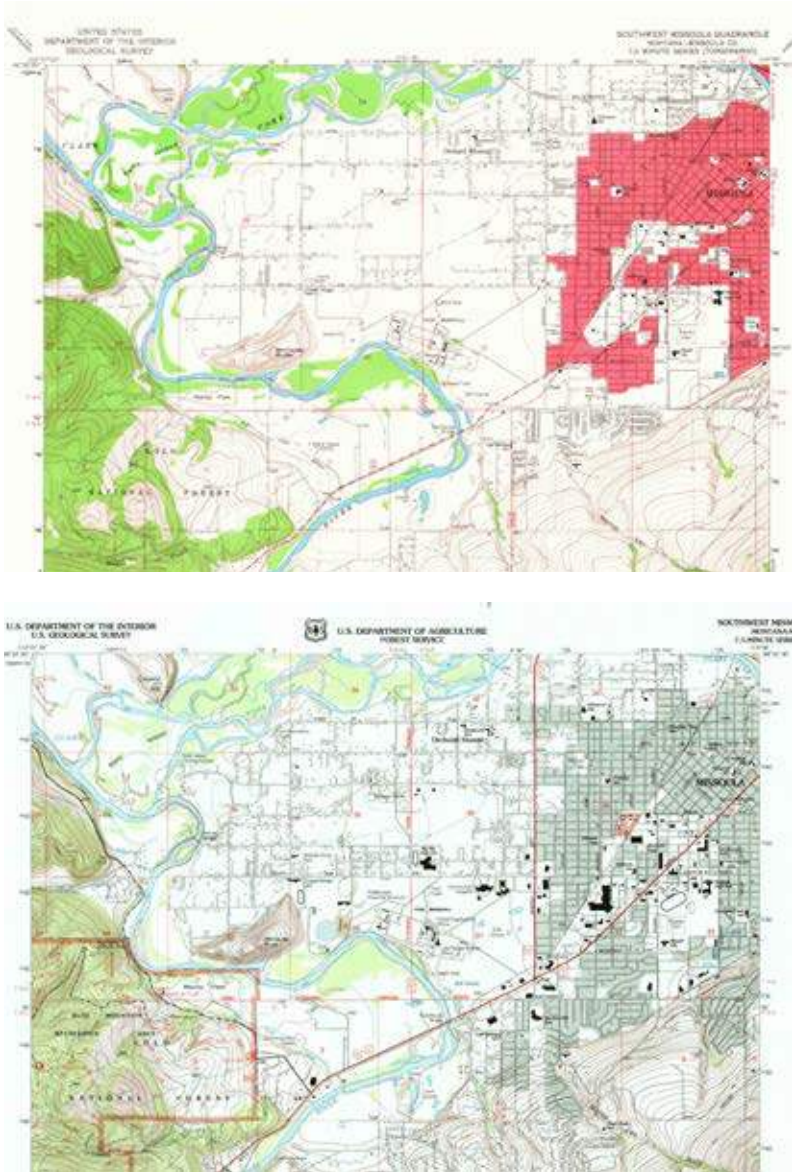
- **Increase ped-bike safety and infrastructure**
- **Support affordable housing and diverse housing types**
- **Provide robust, reliable public transportation**
- **Build an identity for Midtown and foster belonging**
- **Create more gathering spaces**
- **Support entrepreneurship and small business**

KICKOFF	UNDERSTAND EXISTING CONDITIONS	PLAN ALTERNATIVES	DRAFT MASTER PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION	FINAL MASTER PLAN & ADOPTION
JUN 2022	JUN-AUG 2022	SEP-NOV 2022	DEC-FEB 2023	FEB-JUN 2023



Community members provided input on the vision for Midtown at the Visioning Workshop on September 27, 2022

Development History



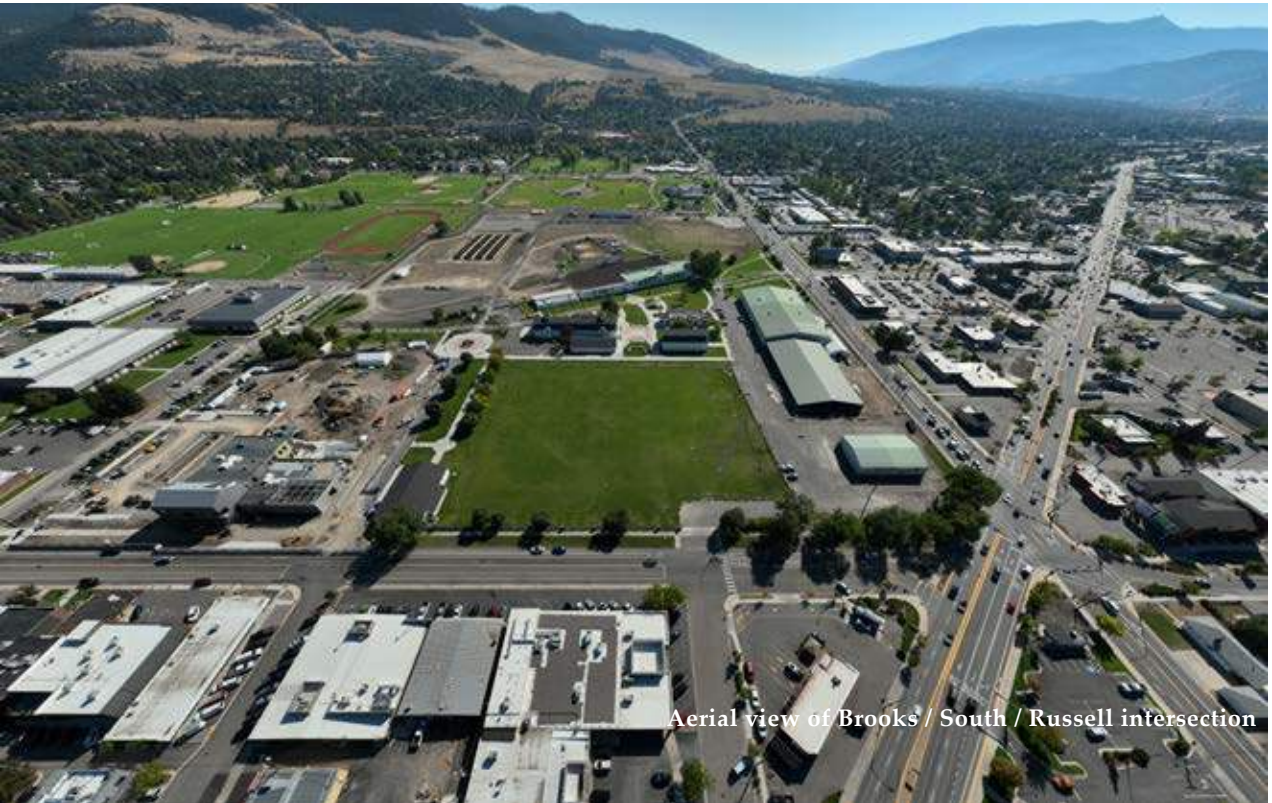
Top: USGS Map of Southwest Missoula, 1964. Bottom: USGS Map of Southwest Missoula, 1999.

OVERVIEW

Midtown's historic development since the 1900s occurred in fragments as Missoula's population and economy continued to grow. Changes in modes of transportation, including rail and automobiles, accelerated development in Midtown and created the development patterns we see today. Carriage roads in the early 1900s followed the topography and development of the railroad through Midtown connecting Fort Missoula to Downtown. Streetcars connected early suburbs of Midtown via a trolley line and later, more suburban development and commercial services, including the Southgate Mall, which populated the area. Through various modes of transportation, Midtown has connected residents and workers to areas where they can live, work, and play. The mix of residential and industrial areas has provided opportunities for local entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses within Midtown.

Once an isolated part of the City with the County Fairgrounds and the airport as the anchor destinations, Midtown evolved to be both a local and regional destination, drawing residents and visitors to shopping centers, parks, athletic fields, trails, medical services, and a range of events hosted at the Fairgrounds. These anchor destinations and activity hubs are located throughout the Midtown area, though it can be difficult to navigate to, from, and between these locations whether walking, biking, riding the bus, or driving.

Montana Rail Link Park


Aerial view of Brooks / South / Russell intersection

Missoula County Fairgrounds

Existing housing stock in Midtown

Entrance to Montana Rail Link Park from the Bitterroot Trail

Midtown Snapshot

OVERVIEW

An analysis of land use, market trends, demographic and employment changes, land use development, and urban design character established the foundation for the Midtown Master Plan. The following summarizes key findings from that analysis, with detailed content located in Appendix B.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND EMPLOYMENT

MIDTOWN IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF MISSOULA'S COMMUNITY

With a population of nearly 15,000, Midtown is one of the City of Missoula's most densely populated areas and is home to about one in five urban Missoulians. Compared to the City of Missoula as a whole, Midtown residents have lower incomes that are on average $7,000 lower than the City overall despite moderate growth in household income in recent years. Midtown also has a greater share of renter households, children, seniors, and people of color than Missoula as a whole. Midtown is also home to a number of critical community assets like schools, parks, and civic institutions that serve an important role in Missoula.

MIDTOWN IS AN EMPLOYMENT ENGINE

Midtown is a hub for the City of Missoula's top industries, including health care, retail, and a variety of services. Over a quarter of Missoula's workforce is employed in Midtown, with approximately 14,000 workers employed at jobs in the area. Midtown workers commute from all corners of Missoula, but only 8% of Midtown workers also live in the area. Midtown serves as a regional hub that attracts people to work, shop, and recreate at its regional destinations and major employers like Community Medical Center and Southgate Mall.

MARKET ASSESSMENT

KEY MARKET FINDINGS

Midtown's older building stock, low rents, and large underdeveloped parcels are contributing to housing and commercial development pressures. Vacancies are low for virtually every type of property, including retail, office, and multifamily housing. While rents across these property types remain relatively affordable compared to Missoula overall, low vacancy rates are likely to put upward pressures on rent-absent new construction of commercial space and residential units in Midtown.

OFFICE

The Midtown office submarket has enjoyed a decade-long period of stability. However, office rents have not increased like in other parts of Missoula and have remained below the City's average since 2013. In 2022, Midtown's vacancy rate continued to hover above the City overall at 4.6%. Midtown's office spaces experienced decreased tenant demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Office rents are starting to increase as of early 2023.

RETAIL

Retail rents have risen over the last decade, but have stayed below the City average. In 2022, retail rents in Midtown reached $14.66 per square foot, while across Missoula, rents averaged $17.07 per square foot. Vacancy rates have been extremely low in Midtown and citywide. Despite the growing influence of the e-commerce sector, increasing rents, low vacancy rates, and limited deliveries indicate a growing demand for retail space in Midtown. Compared to other similar auto-oriented corridors in communities across the West, Midtown has uncharacteristically low retail vacancy rates. This likely reflects strong demand for future retail as either stand-alone retail developments or integrated into future mixed-use development.

INDUSTRIAL/FLEX

Generally, industrial and flex rents in Midtown have decreased in the past decade, and vacancy rates have fluctuated widely, while Missoula overall has experienced stable rent growth with relatively low vacancies. Midtown's industrial/flex space has been challenged with high vacancy rates and low rents in recent years, suggesting that there are better opportunities for industrial space elsewhere in the City that meets the needs of industrial users, or allows for the redevelopment of industrial and flex properties for innovative uses like makerspaces or creative employment.

RESIDENTIAL

Residential trends show a strong and growing demand for multifamily rental housing and homeownership in Midtown. Midtown's extremely low multifamily vacancy rates indicate unmet demand for additional rental housing. Without additional multifamily housing supply added to the market, low vacancy rates are likely to put near-term upward pressure on rents as households and individuals are struggling with recent increases in rent and inflationary pressures.

Like the rental market, residential trends indicate a growing demand for additional housing. Home prices for residential ownership products have been steadily increasing since 2010. According to data from the Missoula Organization of REALTORs, the median home price has been rising quickly since 2019, increasing 74 percent by December 2022 to a median sale price of $465,000. Generally, condos and townhomes are more attainable than single-family homes. As of 2022, mobile homes remained the most affordable housing type in Midtown but have also experienced rising prices.

HOSPITALITY

Midtown's high visibility along US Route 12 (Brooks Street) and 39th Street/Higgins Avenue and central location to many regional destinations like the Missoula Fairgrounds and the Community Hospital would be supportive of a small boutique hotel or other hospitality uses that cater to leisure and tourism. While there are four existing hotels serving the Midtown area, they are generally older and categorized as economy and midscale. Most new hotels in Missoula today are concentrated in downtown and near the airport. The lack of newer hotel inventory in south Missoula, where several regional sports activities are hosted year-round, could signal this potential opportunity in Midtown in the near to medium term. Although the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the hospitality market as much as any real estate market sector, Missoula and Midtown's hospitality market recovered quickly and experienced growth in average daily rates while occupancy has remained stable in the past two years.

Residential construction in Midtown (top left); Brooks Street Motor Inn located on McDonald Avenue (bottom right)

Midtown Snapshot

Brooks St and S Reserve St intersection looking northeast

Missoula County Fairgrounds

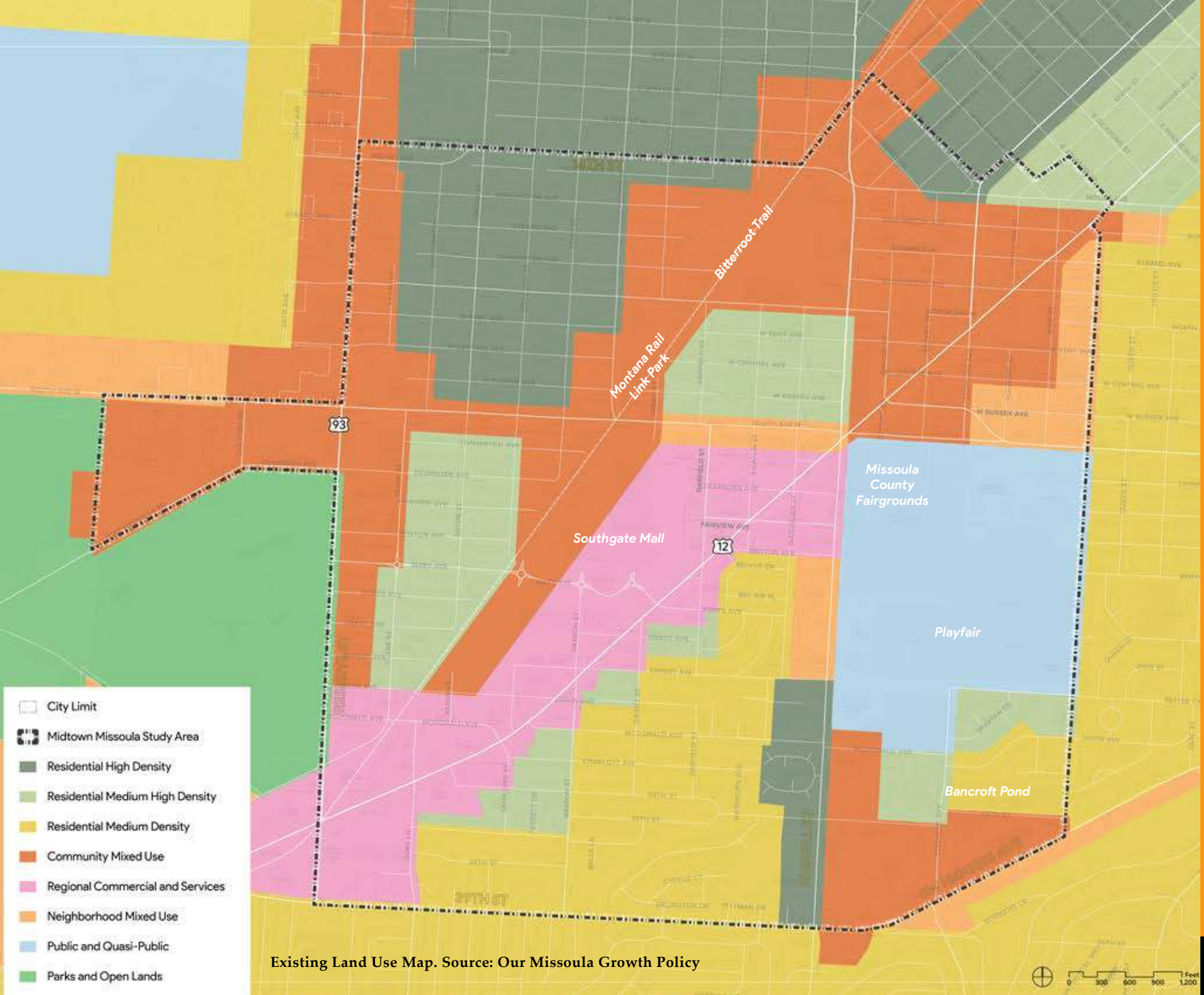
LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT

Midtown has a mix of commercial corridors and hubs, distinct residential neighborhoods, large public amenity areas like the Missoula Fairgrounds, and underutilized industrial sites. Existing zoning in the area do not always align with the current Our Missoula Growth Policy, with a patchwork of nineteen different implementing zones across Midtown, as well as the recent Design Excellence Overlay in many of the area's key corridors and nodes. Although many areas of Midtown already allow for more mixed-use and dense development, barriers in the City zoning code, land use review processes, and developer capacity limit what kind of development is feasible today.

As the Our Missoula Growth Policy and Code Reform project speeds up in 2023 and beyond, there are opportunities to make policy changes to better reflect the vision of the Midtown community and enable desired types of new development. Midtown's abundant surface parking lots, small infill lots, and several large underutilized sites present opportunities for new residential, mixed-use, and commercial uses with the right strategic partnerships between public agencies, property owners, developers, and community members.

URBAN DESIGN & CHARACTER

Midtown is a local and regional attractor with a mix of local and regional destinations. But it is an area you can arrive at and pass through without realizing it. Today, Midtown feels like a collection of different neighborhoods with no sense of transition or connection between them. In addition, the bisecting diagonal Brooks Street makes it very difficult to orient and navigate the area. Existing streets in the area are designed to move cars through quickly, with little attention paid to offering safe and high-quality spaces for pedestrians and bicyclists. The streets in Midtown currently function as barriers to pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, but with improvements, they could stitch the area together and establish a sense of place that is identifiably Midtown.



Existing Land Use Map. Source: Our Missoula Growth Policy

Midtown Snapshot

MOBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

Midtown is made up of large blocks and wide streets. Travel within the area is difficult for all modes of travel, but especially for people walking and biking. Midtown is missing key features that promote a walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly environment. Just as this is an unfriendly environment for pedestrians, the Brooks Street corridor is difficult to serve with transit and the lack of permeability makes routing across Brooks extremely difficult. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities in Midtown are limited and discontinuous, with many missing links in the network. Existing bike lanes have gaps in the network and encounter difficult intersections, especially crossing Brooks Street. Due to the several major street corridors in and around Midtown and the limited facilities, pedestrian and bicycle access to neighborhoods is constrained.

Midtown is home to major transportation arterials like Brooks and Reserve Streets, which serve a large volume of regional users, including transit service. These corridors which serve a vital role in connecting the greater area can also be barriers to bicycle and pedestrian connectivity. Although Midtown is home to transit hubs, facilities on Brooks can be hard to access, creating safety and connectivity challenges for transit users. These barriers can also have disproportionate impacts on people with disabilities, seniors, and youth. The Brooks Street BRT detailed planning study which is currently underway will provide an opportunity to further explore specific design recommendations to create a safer, more connected mobility network throughout Midtown.

Midtown's existing mobility network has several safety, connectivity, and accessibility barriers including high-traffic, high-crash corridors and intersections; intermittent sidewalks, with adequate access but poor connectivity from existing trails to on-road facilities; and a lack of connections from active transportation facilities to bus stops. Mountain Line's 2018 Strategic Plan prioritizes the need for the Brooks Street corridor to be improved to enable easy crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists, which is crucial for the success of public transit. The plan also includes a proposal for high-frequency transit service along the same corridor, subject to the completion of the necessary improvements. There are strong opportunities for system improvements, such as expanding the bicycle network, advancing mode shift, improving connections across major roadways, and promoting the Bitterroot Trail as a major pedestrian/bike spine.

Midtown's large off-street parking lots and parking regulations have created and encouraged low-density and disconnected single uses. This auto orientation makes Midtown an easier area to access by car, but a difficult place to park once and visit multiple businesses or destinations.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Midtown's infrastructure systems are generally equipped to handle future development. Midtown has eight water main improvement projects that will provide service to nonserved properties and improve fire flows for some of the limited flow hydrants that have been identified. The City of Missoula 2019 Water System Master Plan identified 16 water mains in Midtown as being over 75 years old or of a nondesirable pipe material, which are targeted for replacement. There are no sewer projects within Midtown identified in the City of Missoula 2019 Wastewater Facility Plan. The majority of the Midtown consists of gravel soils, overlain with loam, and these soils are conducive to use of infiltration sumps for stormwater disposal in accordance with City standards.

Aerial view of southern gateway to Midtown at Brooks Street and Reserve Street.

Vision + Framework

Vision	26
Plan Framework	30
Future Midtown Character	32
Future Midtown Public Space	34
A Day in Midtown...	36

02

Vision

Early in the planning process, community members provided input on their future vision for Midtown. Community members helped craft the vision statement below and selected the inspirational images - drawn from other communities - to illustrate that vision. Together, these aspirational words and precedent images set the tone for the Master Plan and provide a guide for the Midtown community as it creates a place that is unique to Missoula.

We will build a Midtown that is...

...an authentically **vibrant**, **inclusive**, and **fun** part of Missoula, with a high-quality of life and a distinct **quality of place**. Future development in Midtown will lead with **equitable** solutions to provide a **mixed-use district** that provides prime opportunities for living, learning, doing business, and outdoor recreation across all income levels.

Midtown will have a strong core with vibrant **activity hubs** and **public places** for community gatherings, surrounded by **diverse**, **inclusive**, and **complete** residential neighborhoods. Destinations and neighborhoods throughout Midtown will be **safe** and **convenient** to navigate by any form of transportation, especially by **active and public transportation** modes.

This is what Midtown could look like!

Vision

PROJECT COMPASS

The Project Compass is a tool to visually represent the community's vision and priorities for the Master Plan. The Project Compass includes six broad themes developed through community meetings and conversations with community guides, along with two to three subcategories that further describe the objectives of the Master Plan. The Compass was used to evaluate early plan concepts and to guide the development of the final Framework Plan. It can also be used as a tool to evaluate future implementation efforts in Midtown, ensuring that those efforts are in alignment with community priorities for the area.

EQUITY

Affordability
- Promote diverse housing types
- Encourage affordable business types
- Support local commerce/business

Community
- Create accessible gathering spaces
- Improve cultural reflection and representation
- Reinforce neighborhood character

ACTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

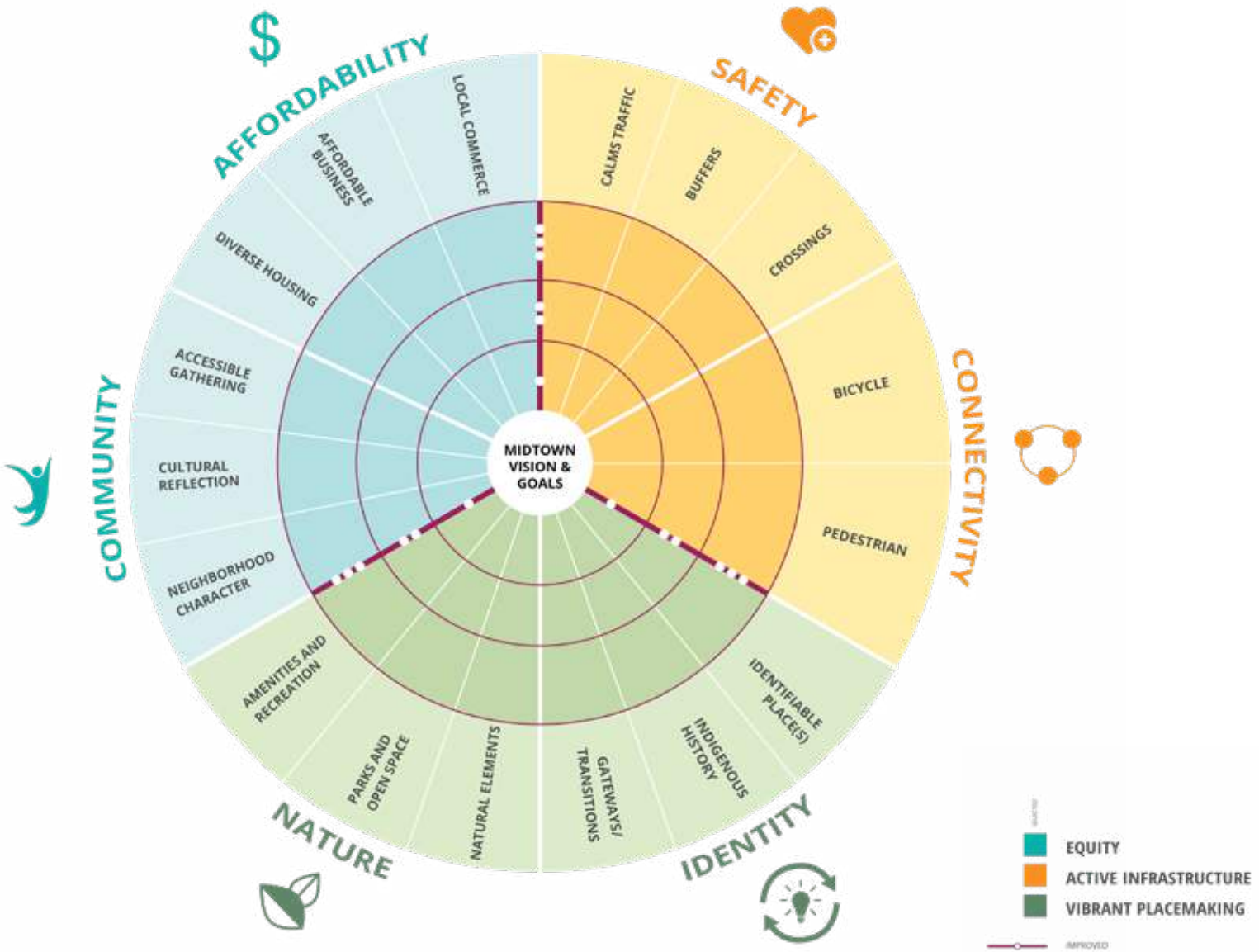
Safety
- Calm traffic along key streets
- Buffer people from cars
- Improve safety at key crossings

Connectivity
- Improve bicycle infrastructure
- Improve pedestrian infrastructure and connectivity to transit

VIBRANT PLACEMAKING

Nature
- Promote amenities and recreation
- Provide parks and open space
- Enhance natural elements

Identity
- Establish clear gateways/transitions
- Honor indigenous history
- Establish distinct and identifiable place(s)



PROJECT COMPASS

For more information on the use of the project compass for the Midtown Master Plan, see Appendix D.

Plan Framework

OVERVIEW

The Plan Framework illustrates a series of placemaking elements for re-envisioning Midtown. These elements, or layers, on the map also frame the material presented in the Recommendations section. The Framework Map represents the following elements:

CHARACTER AREAS

Character areas delineate areas that look and feel different from one another. The three main character areas shown in the Midtown Framework are the core transformation area of "Midtown Junction" (shown in dark orange), the transition areas of "Rose Park Center" and "Southgate Triangle" (shown in pink/salmon), and the subdistricts "Franklin to the Fort" and "Lewis and Clark" (shown in yellow). The land use and character section of the Recommendations chapter provides details on the scale and types of uses expected in each of these areas.

GATEWAYS

Three types of gateways announce different 'arrivals' to and within Midtown. The gateways into Midtown are shown in purple along the major corridors that serve traffic into and out of Midtown. Key internal gateways are shown in blue and indicate arrivals to character areas or key designations in Midtown. The Bitterroot Corridor gateways, shown in green, indicate key entry points to the Bitterroot Trail for pedestrian and bicycle access. These gateways could be signaled through a change in streetscape design, a change in development pattern or architectural style, public art, distinct landscaping, or through the use of literal gateways. The significance of these gateways is to acknowledge key moments of arrival and transition that will help people navigate through the area, and know when they have arrived in Midtown. While the gateways may be adjacent to future improvements to crossings, they are not intended to indicate bike/ped crossings.

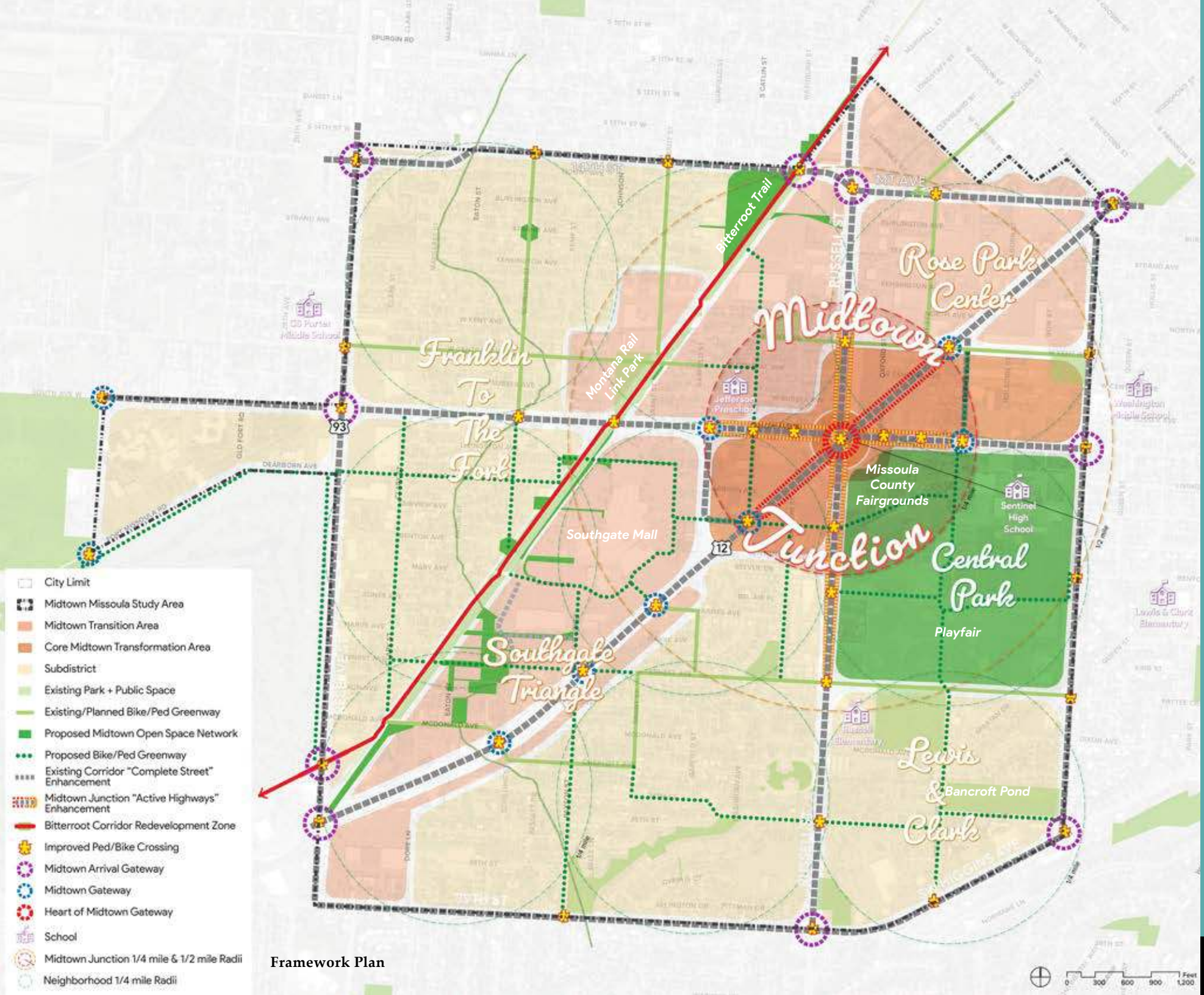
MOBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

The Framework suggests enhancements along existing transportation corridors that promote a "complete streets" network. These enhancements include streetscape improvements for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities. Corridor crossings (shown as yellow stars) improve pedestrian/bicycle safety and security of critical greenway system crossings with the main corridors. These mobility and connectivity opportunities are discussed further in the Recommendations section.

- Along **Brooks Street, Mount Ave/14th, and Bancroft Street**, this may include controlled access through improved access management (eliminate redundant street connections, reconfigure intersections, combine, share, and relocate private driveway curb cuts), as well as including signage, wayfinding, and placemaking enhancements.
- **Russell Street** inside Midtown Junction would be designed as an "active highway" marking the heart of Midtown. Potential strategies to achieve this may include implementing lower vehicle volume and speed, increasing landscaping, and providing a streetscape enhancement budget catered to attract and retain pedestrian vibrancy.
- **South Avenue** outside of Midtown Junction would limit existing vehicular capacity and improve streetscapes. Inside of Midtown Junction, South Avenue would be designed as an "active highway" marking the heart of Midtown through minimized vehicular through traffic, lower vehicle volume and speed, and increased landscaping, providing a streetscape enhancement budget catered to attract and retain pedestrian vibrancy. Additionally, a Festival Street design would enable community events.

OPEN SPACE NETWORK & GREENWAYS

The Midtown Framework identifies different types of open spaces within the network as well as potential connections via enhanced greenways. Central Park combines the open space characteristics of the County Fairgrounds, Sentinel High School, Playfair, and Splash Montana. These facilities offer a spatial quality that should be preserved and carefully evolved as Midtown grows and intensifies. The Bitterroot Trail creates a corridor that offers opportunities for redevelopment on key sites. New neighborhood open spaces are recommended to help augment and complete this network. And finally, a series of greenways stitch all of these green spaces together.



Framework Plan

Future Midtown Character

Currently, the experience across Midtown is highly varied and should continue to remain so. Future changes to the character areas of Midtown will be influenced by the scale of development, types of land uses, and the interaction of buildings and the street.

The future vision for Midtown is to reinforce the existing, distinctive qualities of each character area while creating more intentional transitions between them. The descriptions provided for each character area on the map, and associated graphic, reflect the potential future enhancements that align with the community's vision statement.

Midtown Junction is the future core of Midtown. It is centered on the Brooks / South / Russell intersection. South Avenue and Russell Street will become "active highways" that provide safe connections for all active modes of transportation. South Avenue will be enhanced to include a Festival Street with both permanent and temporary installations for community gathering and events.

Southgate Triangle and Rose Park Center serve as transition areas between Midtown Junction and residential areas. They will also see transformation in more mixed-use development and improved streetscapes that welcome more active modes of transportation and transit uses.

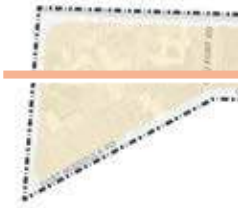
Franklin to the Fort and Lewis & Clark maintain much of their existing residential housing. As Midtown develops, key opportunity sites in these areas will provide increased housing density, with housing types that are compatible with existing residential. Development may also include neighborhood businesses that provide services to residents, promoting a more walkable neighborhood with key amenities.

Finally, Central Park continues to be an anchor for community gathering in Midtown. With a history of rich diversity and cultural identity, future expansion of open space in this area will require partnerships with agencies and organizations who represent and support this history.

Franklin To The Fort

- Subdistrict with wide range of housing types
- Strategic residential infill that maintains and bolsters affordable housing stock
- Mixed-use buildings where applicable with neighborhood-serving retail and service nodes

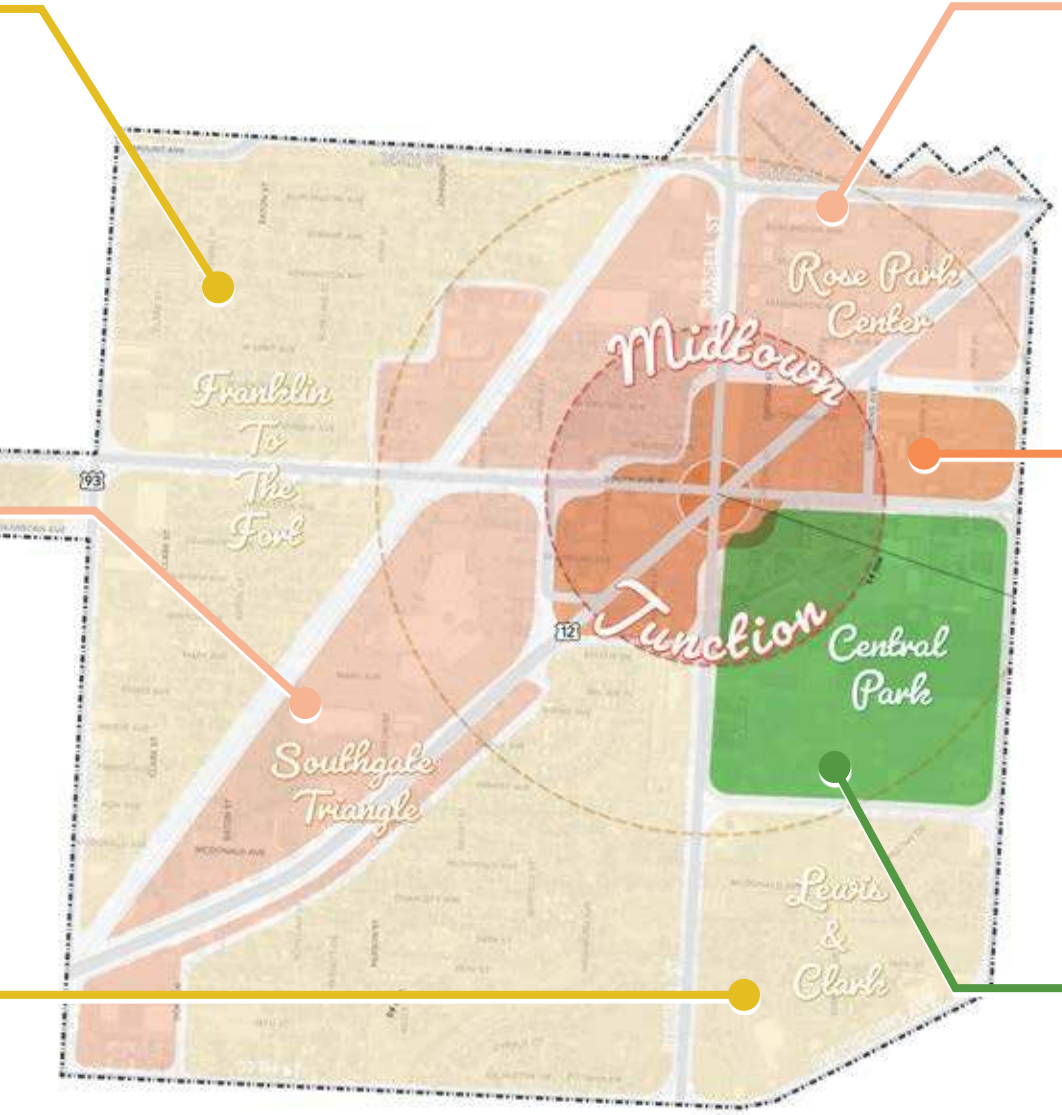
Southgate Triangle



- Transition area with widest mix of uses that includes office, manufacturing, retail, restaurants, and residential
- Dense multifamily housing types

Lewis & Clark

- Subdistrict with wide range of housing types from townhomes to dense multifamily
- Adjacent to major regional institutions for employment hubs such as Community Medical Center and commercial hubs like Southgate Center
- Neighborhood commercial and services



Future Midtown Character Areas

Rose Park Center

- Transition area acting as a “Gateway to Midtown”
- Creative district with mix of uses including residential, manufacturing, services, and local business (start-ups, business incubators, etc.)
- Urban housing ranging from townhomes to multifamily

Midtown Junction

- Transformation area that is the “Heart of Midtown”
- Mix of uses with vibrant ground floors, active frontages, spill out spaces, public amenities, plazas, and festival streets

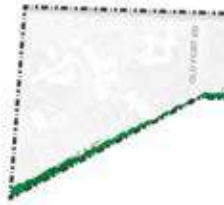
Central Park

- Preservation of large open space and views of the open sky with tree canopy that provides shade and cooling effects.
- Central gathering place for the community
- Flexible and programmable space for large events
- Preserves and enhances cultural identity and offers opportunities for collective reflection

Future Midtown Public Space

Each character area in Midtown is connected through a street and open space network. A complete vision for Midtown not only considers the types of future development and land uses, but also reimagines the public spaces that people navigate through and gather in. Enhanced streetscapes complete with landscaping, street trees, active ground floors, and safe active transportation facilities will create an enjoyable experience for residents and visitors traveling to and within Midtown. A well-distributed open space network will meet the needs of a wide range of visitors, offering quality spaces for people to gather, relax, and recreate.

- An expanded open space network includes a greater distribution of parks and open spaces, providing equitable access to all residents and visitors.
- Additional green spaces allow for opportunities for climate-friendly solutions including landscaping and increasing the tree canopy to allow for more shade and reduce urban heat island effects.
- The Bitterroot Trail is also a key opportunity for more street trees and landscaping to make this major active transportation connector and linear open space a more enjoyable commuting route and recreation destination.
- Future park development considers not only locational benefits in areas with an existing lack of parks and open space, but also maintenance requirements for regular upkeep.



Future Midtown Public Spaces and Street Improvements

Safe Connections

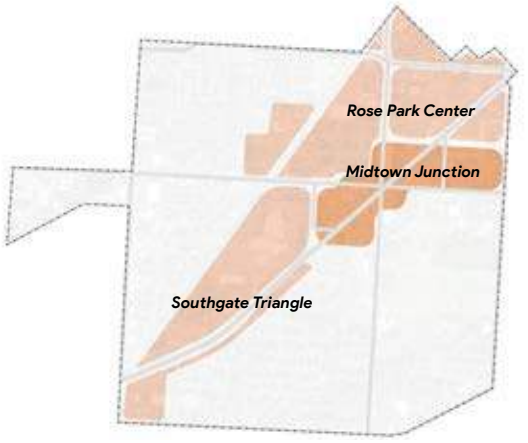
- Improvements to connections at key intersections provides greater permeability across major corridors.
- Safer crossings encourage more pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders to navigate Midtown.
- Increased traffic from active modes of transportation, along with improvements to the streetscape and active ground floors along major corridors, opens opportunities for businesses to reach a wider range of customers and build community.
- The "active highway" along South Avenue provides an enjoyable experience for bicyclists and pedestrians to connect to open spaces within and near Midtown, including Central Park, the Bitterroot Trail, and Fort Missoula.
- Streetscape improvements along major corridors, including Brooks Street, Russell Street, and South Avenue provide an opportunity for integrating street trees, native plantings, and other landscaping. These climate-friendly improvements benefit stormwater infrastructure, increase walkability through shade of street trees, and help counteract urban heat effects as Midtown density increases.

A Day in Midtown...

The framework for Midtown, presented previously in this section, provides an overview of the future for Midtown's character areas, streets, and open spaces. Now, we explore what it will look and feel like to navigate and experience these places at a street level.

You know you have arrived in Midtown when you enter Midtown Junction.

The newly transformed "heart" of Midtown is easily accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists. The intersection of South Avenue, Russell Street, and Brooks Street is a walkable core with vibrant ground floors, active frontages, spill-out spaces, public amenities, and plazas. The festival street on South Avenue offers opportunities for community gathering and a place that is uniquely Midtown.



Key Map of Character Areas

Southgate Triangle

Southgate Triangle offers an elevated but affordable version of a well-loved destination in Midtown. Enhancements around Southgate Mall provide a range of amenities and areas to live and work. Ground floor active frontages promote walkability, and improved connections offer more opportunities for safe bicycle and pedestrian access.

Rose Park Center

A “gateway to Midtown,” Rose Park Center is one of the first opportunities to experience Midtown’s unique identity from its northern access point. A hub for entrepreneurship and local business, Rose Park Center offers a central place to live and work in Midtown. A mix of neighborhood-serving amenities, business incubator spaces, and vibrant, active street edges offer the opportunity for the next great idea to spark on the streets of Midtown.

A Day in Midtown...

Franklin To The Fort

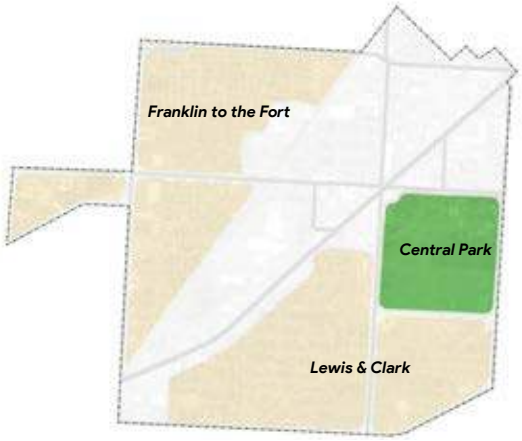
Franklin to the Fort offers a range of housing types to support a multigenerational community of neighbors, and a host of community amenities within short walking or biking distance. From single-family homes to apartment buildings, there is housing available for everyone. Residents can grab a coffee on their morning walk to one of the many small parks scattered throughout the district or access a nearby health clinic on their lunch break while working from home.

Lewis & Clark

The Lewis and Clark neighborhood is a haven for nature and urban enthusiasts alike! Access to local parks abound and walkable neighborhood shops offer amenities for local residents and visitors. Housing choices provide options for a wide range of households, with affordable and accessible options for all.

Central Park

Central Park is the ever-evolving core open space of Midtown. Through interpretive signage elements, it will encompass both the cultural and historic past of Midtown and look to its future. Community members across Missoula and beyond enjoy this space year-round for recreation, events, and community gatherings.



Key Map of Character Areas

Recommendations

Land Use 42

Housing 44

Business + Economic Development 46

Mobility + Connectivity 48

Parks + Open Space 50

Equitable Development 52

03

Land Use

Simplify the Development Process!

Zoning and land use regulations must allow for the types of development identified as a high priority by the community to happen in Midtown to achieve the vision of the Master Plan. Enabling the kind of housing, neighborhood commercial, and employment spaces that will make Midtown a more vibrant area can be achieved with the following strategies:

Simplify Zoning Designations and Remove Code Barriers. The current Missoula County Growth Policy includes seven land use types in Midtown, but the zoning code includes nineteen different designations within the study area. The patchwork of zoning designations in Midtown creates multiple challenges for development of community-desired uses, including middle housing, mixed-use buildings, and innovative commercial uses. Simplifying zoning districts to better align with the community's vision and implementing best practices for flexible use allowances, parking requirements, dimensional standards, objective design criteria, and clear approval processes can help achieve the vision of the Midtown Master Plan. Strategically including requirements for ground floor uses in transformative areas can help to ensure active street environments in core areas.

Streamline Land Use Approval Processes. Current land use review timelines can reduce feasibility of new development by adding costs to projects, in part because of discretionary criteria. Removing discretionary or inconsistent criteria as much as possible can ease the development process, including modifications to Design Excellence discretionary requirements and standards dependent on adjacent parcels. Allowing flexibility for phased development can also make larger-scale projects more feasible particularly for local developers.

**Land use categories are meant to reflect achievable development scale and density in Midtown. In some places height allowances or other standards for individual parcels may exceed what the map indicates as feasible today.*

How will we advance equity?

- Remove zoning barriers and simplify the process for developing diverse housing and commercial development types that can serve the whole community.
- Make targeted changes to development standards that can reduce the cost of housing.

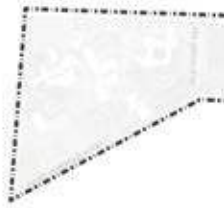
Neighborhood Residential:

Allow a mix of residential scales and housing types, as well as pockets of small local retail shops, and restaurants. Scale could vary from 1-4 stories.

Recommendations:

Many residential areas of Midtown do not need zone changes to accommodate community-desired types of housing, but existing barriers in the code should be removed to make these uses feasible throughout the study area:

- Allow for middle housing types (such as duplexes, triplexes, and cluster housing) in single-family residential zones that do not currently allow for these types.
- Reduce density requirements and minimum lot sizes to match best practices for middle housing types in residential zones.
- Reduce parking requirements to 1.0 space per unit for middle housing types of any unit size.



Neighborhood Mixed-Use:

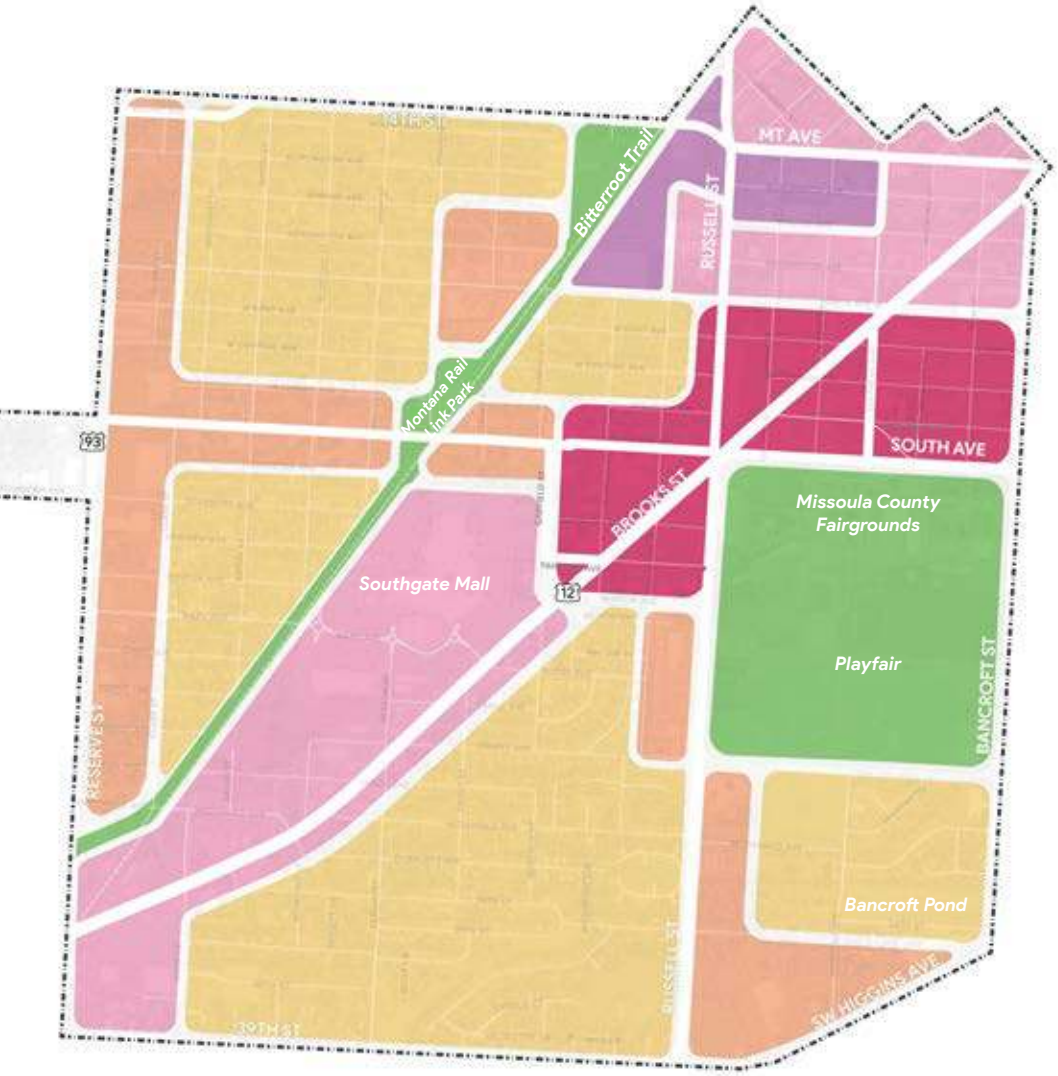
Encourage medium-scale mixed-use and active frontages along South Avenue, Reserve Street, and Russell Street. Mixed-use scale could vary from 2-6 stories.

Recommendations:

- Continue requiring parking to be located to the side or behind buildings to promote active street frontages.
- Review the Design Excellence Overlay in key corridors to reduce restrictive requirements and clarify standards.

LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS MAP

- Park/Open Space
- Neighborhood Residential
- Neighborhood Mixed-Use
- Commercial/Mixed-Use
- High-Intensity Commercial/Mixed-Use
- Employment Mixed-Use



Employment Mixed-Use and Commercial/Mixed-Use

Many of Midtown's large opportunity sites are in commercial or industrial-zoned areas, which should encourage employment uses, flex spaces that support local entrepreneurs, and opportunities for moderate-intensity mixed-use housing. Development scale could range from 2-6 stories.

Recommendations:

- Allow for shared parking solutions and/or reduce parking requirements for commercial zones.
- Simplify use allowances for retail, services, and light manufacturing in commercial and mixed-use zones.
- Build local capacity for redevelopment projects to encourage flex employment and creative commercial spaces.
- Simplify process of existing commercial buildings through change of occupancy permit review processes to support entrepreneurship and new locally serving businesses.

High-Intensity Commercial/Mixed-Use:

The Midtown core should support a higher intensity of a variety of uses. Particularly in major corridors in Midtown, mixed-use multifamily buildings with active ground floor uses should be supported through land use regulations and processes. Development scale could range from 4-6 stories.

Recommendations:

- Remove requirements for specific square footage share of ground floor commercial in vertical mixed-use buildings (see page 46).
- Reduce parking requirements to encourage medium- to large-scale multifamily development.
- Create a clear regulatory process to allow for multiphased development of larger projects.
- Simplify or remove requirements for setbacks and stepbacks for commercial development adjacent to residential-zoned parcels.
- Require parking to be located to the side or behind buildings to promote active street frontages.

Housing

Allow Housing Everywhere in Midtown!

Midtown has an urgent need for housing that can accommodate the area's diverse households and fast-growing population. Midtown also plays an important role within Missoula for growing inward in coming decades, with the area's infrastructure, employment opportunities, and central location making it an ideal place for new development. The Midtown Master Plan advocates for housing strategies that align with community priorities to provide greater housing options, including:

Promote Diverse Housing Types. Midtown today is lacking "middle housing" types between single-family homes and apartments. The variety of housing types in Midtown should match the character and scale of development expressed in the community's vision, ranging from townhomes to larger mixed-use multifamily buildings. A combination of regulatory actions, resource allocation, and policy decisions should be implemented to foster these opportunities.

Support Affordable Housing. Housing prices are quickly rising in Midtown and across Missoula. Current and future Midtown residents need housing opportunities at a range of price points that are available to all income levels. Creating more dedicated affordable housing, preserving existing affordable units, and increasing opportunities for lower-cost homeownership should be a priority as Midtown continues to grow and attract new residents and workers. Housing preservation can also be an important tool that benefits sustainability, affordability, and preservation of resources.

Create Housing Opportunities Near Transit and Services. The Midtown Master Plan advocates for the development of new businesses, community services, and transit connections in the study area. Location-efficient housing near these investments should be encouraged to increase the vibrancy and livability of Midtown, while contributing towards other priorities for transportation, sustainability, and equity. (See the Mobility and Connectivity recommendations section for further discussion.)

How will we advance equity?

- Increase the supply of housing to meet the diverse needs of current and future residents.
- Support the development of new ownership housing that is attainable to a wider spectrum of household incomes.
- Reduce development costs and explore new incentives for affordable housing.
- Enhance housing stability for existing Midtown residents.
- Explore innovative, low-cost housing solutions to serve people experiencing homelessness.

Support the Development of a Range of Housing Types Desired by the Community:

A combination of strategic actions, partnerships, and use of existing resources can support the types of housing envisioned for Midtown, including:

- Make regulatory and policy changes to support the development of more middle housing types (including townhomes, triplexes, etc.) to increase lower-cost homeownership options.
- Remove regulatory barriers to medium- to high-density housing development in mixed-use areas to support the vision of the Midtown Master Plan.
- Allocate resources from the Housing Trust Fund to support affordable homeownership (such as middle housing and mobile homes) through down payment assistance, weatherization, and home rehabilitation programs.
- Require active ground floor orientation and design on key pedestrian and transit corridors.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS MAP

- Allow housing by itself
- Encourage housing by itself and above businesses
- Encourage housing above businesses

Support Rental Housing Stability:

A sufficient supply of rental housing is important for maintaining a range of choices for Midtown residents. Actions to support rental housing include:

- Use County, City, and other available resources to acquire and preserve naturally occurring affordable rental housing buildings.
- Provide rental assistance to vulnerable households such as low-income apartment and mobile home renters in areas with high displacement risk.
- Align zoning, development standards, and regulations to create transit-supportive multifamily housing near future BRT stops.

Create and Preserve Dedicated Affordable Housing:

To ensure that Midtown is accessible to all income levels, dedicated affordable housing strategies should include:

- Exempt local impact fees and expedite permit processes for affordable housing developments.
- Provide height bonuses and other regulatory incentives for affordable housing developments.
- Advocate for allocation of the City's Housing Trust Fund dollars to build new dedicated affordable units in Midtown.
- Acquire and/or lease City-owned property at reduced rates for affordable housing development.
- Support the creation of a permanent shelter near transit and services; explore opportunities to locate on City-owned properties.

Business + Economic Development

Support Existing Businesses and Nurture New Ones!

Midtown is an employment engine for Missoula. Nearly a quarter of Missoula's workers are employed within the area, and it is home base to a growing number of local businesses and entrepreneurs. The Midtown Master Plan envisions vibrant commercial areas that support economic opportunities, which can be achieved through the following key strategies:

Support Existing Businesses and Entrepreneurs. Midtown has a strong community of entrepreneurs and businesses, ranging from small, home-based start-ups to large, established retail outlets. Retaining existing businesses and providing options to scale up operations is critical to continuing the current momentum for business development.

Attract a Range of New Businesses and Services to Midtown. As Midtown grows, the area has high potential to attract new commercial development. Providing greater flexibility in commercial use types, expanding the range of available sites at different scales, incorporating ground floor commercial requirements in strategic areas, and encouraging creative redevelopment projects can set the stage for more businesses to choose to locate within Midtown.

Support Major Destinations and Commercial Corridors. Midtown is home to regional destinations and high-traffic corridors, including the Missoula Fairgrounds, Southgate Mall, Brooks Street, and South Avenue. The Master Plan should seek to leverage these assets and implement actions that further develop tourism activities in Midtown.

How will we advance equity?

- Work with existing small and BIPOC-owned businesses to identify barriers to staying in or expanding in Midtown.
- Integrate new neighborhood-serving businesses and services into new development projects.
- Creating more higher-paying jobs to support household prosperity.

Encourage Incremental Infill on Larger Sites in Auto-Oriented Corridors:

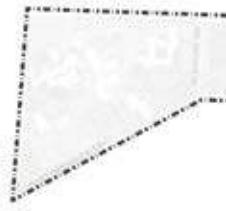
- Look for opportunities to leverage URD III funding for pedestrian improvements such as seating and bicycle amenities
- Encourage outpad development on surface parking lots for large format commercial uses. When this occurs, support active orientation and design.

Support Mall Economic Activity and Incremental Redevelopment:

- Allow a broader range of businesses that support walkable pedestrian environment.
- Reduce parking requirements, support shared parking across land uses, and encourage creative parking solutions.

Foster Economic Growth by Removing Regulatory Barriers:

- Allow more types of businesses in commercial and mixed-use zones.
- Support live-work housing types and flex creative office spaces.
- Support higher-density development along Brooks Street to support transit-oriented development.
- Retain ground floor commercial requirements in core areas, with greater flexibility in standards.



BUSINESS + ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS MAP

- Park/Open Space
- Neighborhood Residential (No Retail)
- Encourage Active Ground Floor Uses
- Encourage Commercial & Mixed-Use Development
- Encourage High-Intensity Commercial & Mixed-Use Development
- Encourage Employment Focused Development
- Ground Floor Commercial Required

Provide Support for Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses:

- Support new affordable commercial and light manufacturing space for emerging businesses to scale up.
- Establish a business incubator with partners to improve technical assistance and support networks.
- Identify partnerships to connect start-ups with financial support through grants or low-interest loans.

Support South Avenue Main Street:

- Encourage street activation and business activities on South Avenue, including pop-up and promotional events with pedestrian infrastructure improvements.
- Explore a farmers market to bring in visitors and promote South Avenue.
- Look for opportunities to provide technical assistance and resources to small shops and restaurants on South Avenue.

Attract New Businesses and Assist Existing Businesses:

- Establish a coordinated marketing and business promotion strategy for the Missoula Midtown Association to support and attract new businesses.
- Coordinate with partners to support effective administration of technical assistance programs for small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Establish a construction disruption assistance program for major capital projects.

Promote Tourism and Major Destinations:

- Market major destinations to increase tourism.
- Support the development or adaptive reuse of a new hotel.
- Develop branding and placemaking theme for Midtown.
- Implement the Wayfinding Master Plan.

Mobility + Connectivity

Create Safe Connections for Everybody to Everywhere!

A safe, comfortable, connected, and convenient transportation system will make Midtown a more attractive place to live, work, and visit. The Midtown Master Plan recommends a transportation system that accommodates people of all ages, abilities, and modes. The Brooks Street BRT detailed planning study currently underway will provide opportunities for community input and collaborative work between agencies to develop recommendations that foster safe connections across Brooks.* This process should explore how to enhance safety, realize active pedestrian uses for the corridor, and consider trade-offs in the alignment for Midtown Junction. These goals represent opportunities to transform transportation and mobility in Midtown:

Reduce or eliminate serious injury and fatal crashes, especially for vulnerable road users. Most crashes in Midtown occur along major streets and at intersections. Prioritizing safety in Midtown will require slower vehicular speeds, upgraded crossings, dedicated spaces for people to walk and bike, and better multimodal connectivity.

Increase the number of walking, bicycling, and transit trips. More people choose walking, biking, or using transit over driving when nondriving modes are convenient, comfortable, and joyful. Expanding existing transit options and the active transportation network will connect more people to more places, including key transportation and recreation destinations and opportunities. Offering diverse, safe transportation options in Midtown will result in more users choosing to use alternative modes. Increasing demand for significant capital investment can help build transportation infrastructure that efficiently serves the mobility needs of everyone.

*Many key corridors in Midtown are part of state and federal highway systems, which will require coordination with the Montana Department of Transportation on engineering, design, and planning.

How will we advance equity?

- Provide equal and fair access to transportation options that connect Missoula Midtown community members to essential services and job opportunities.
- Invest in building out a transportation network that addresses the needs and safety of all users, regardless of age, race, and ability.
- Offer affordable transportation options that reduce household transportation costs.

Priority Projects

1. Coordinate with the ongoing Brooks Street Detailed Planning Study to provide safe and frequent pedestrian and bicycle crossings across Brooks Street that provide short crossing distances, good visibility, and reduced conflicts with motor vehicles. Key crossing locations include those at:
    - Schilling Street/MacDonald
    - Mary/Agnes Avenue
    - Fairview Avenue
    - South Avenue
    - Kent Avenue
    - Mount Avenue
    - Dore Lane
    - Paxson Street
    - Garfield Street
    - Stephens Avenue
2. Redesign the Brooks Street/Russell Street/South Avenue intersection to prioritize pedestrian and bicycle travel, network connectivity, and safety.
3. Increase access between the Bitterroot Trail and key destinations, including other high-comfort pedestrian and bicycle travelways, existing or proposed parks and open spaces, and schools.
4. Advance the build-out of the planned greenway network starting with the Schilling/McDonald Greenway, which introduces an important east-west connection across Midtown and Brooks Street.

MOBILITY + CONNECTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS MAP

- Existing Corridor "Complete Street" Enhancement
- Bitterroot Corridor
- Existing/Planned Ped/Bike Greenway
- Proposed Ped/Bike Greenway
- Improved Ped/Bike Crossing
- Midtown Arrival Gateway
- Midtown Gateway
- Heart of Midtown Gateway

5 Expand the currently planned greenway network to include this Plan's new connections along low-volume and low-speed neighborhood streets to close gaps in the greenway system and provide a safe, secure, and convenient pedestrian and bicycle network.

Other Recommendations

6 Apply Complete Streets planning, design, and operational principles to Midtown's boundary and connector streets including Reserve Street, Brooks Street, Russell Street, South Avenue, Mount Avenue/14th Street, SW Higgins Avenue, and Bancroft Street.

7 In and around the Brooks Street/Russell Street/South Avenue intersection, incorporate countermeasures to lower vehicle volumes and speeds, attract pedestrian activity, and cultivate a vibrant pedestrian environment.

8 Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety at critical greenway network crossings along Russell Street, 14th Street, Mount Avenue, South Avenue, and Brooks Street.

9 Encourage trail-oriented development, enhance travel, and generate pedestrian and bicycle activity along and around the Bitterroot Trail with lighting, signage, wayfinding, placemaking, and active and passive recreation opportunities for all ages. Encourage new development next to the trail to front onto it (trail-oriented development).

10 Expand pedestrian and bicycle access to the Central Park district by upgrading existing pathways and building new trail connections.

11 Throughout Midtown increase frequency of Mountain Line transit service in Midtown, upgrade transit stops, and ensure first- and last-mile connectivity to transit stops.

Parks + Open Space

Preserve and Build More Open Space!

The existing parks and open space network includes both local and regional attractions for community members in Midtown to recreate, gather, and linger in a variety of public open spaces. These types of spaces are especially important to distribute in urban areas, as they provide climate-friendly solutions, including shade and cooling effects from street trees as well as stormwater benefits from landscaping elements. The framework for Midtown proposes a more distributed and connected network of parks and open space to allow for improved access for all Midtown residents, especially areas west of the Bitterroot Trail in the Franklin to the Fort neighborhood. It is especially important to increase the availability of accessible parks and open spaces in this area of Midtown, to serve residents with disabilities as well as students at nearby schools. The recommendations highlight the opportunities across the open space network in Midtown to achieve the following goals:

Create a well-distributed open space network. The existing parks and open spaces in Midtown are concentrated in the areas east of Brooks Street. Investments in new open spaces or parks in Midtown should look at opportunities on the west side, especially in the Franklin to the Fort neighborhood, including opportunities for smaller parks.

Provide connections to new and existing open spaces through an enhanced greenway network. Midtown has the potential to provide not only open spaces for gathering but also connected greenways for recreation and commuting. A complete greenway system would achieve goals related to nature and recreation as well as those related to connectivity and safety.

How will we advance equity?

- **Create safe, inclusive, and fun spaces for people to relax and recreate.**
- **Enhance equal access to parks for all neighborhoods of Midtown.**
- **Provide accessible spaces for people with disabilities.**

Parks and Open Space:

- Analyze the existing and future community needs for parks and open spaces.
- Fill service-level gaps, in particular in the Franklin to Fort Neighborhood.
- Consider potential for smaller open spaces to expedite gap closures.
- Incorporate landscaping that includes native plants and street trees to provide shade, cooling effects, and stormwater benefits.
- Strive for a connected parks and open system with the proposed Greenway System.
- Combine new parks with neighborhood amenities such as retail and services (e.g., public bathrooms and drinking water).
- Work with Missoula Parks and Recreation to coordinate recommendations with the upcoming plan update.

Greenway System:

- Expand the currently planned Greenway System to include additional connections that promote a safe and convenient network of bike/ped connections.
- Select existing low-volume and low-speed neighborhood streets that connect to existing and newly proposed trails.
- Fund and build street improvements to implement an effective greenway system.
- Include signage, wayfinding, and placemaking enhancement to promote and brand the system.
- Fund and implement all-season maintenance protocols, and specifically manage snow, leaves, and stormwater.

PARKS + OPEN SPACE RECOMMENDATIONS MAP

- Existing Park + Public Space
- Potential Future Open Space Network*
- Bitterroot Corridor
- Existing/Planned Ped/Bike Greenway
- Proposed Ped/Bike Greenway
- Drainage/Irrigation Channel

* Potential future park locations in Franklin to the Fort were an outcome of community workshop feedback. Location of future parks will require additional analysis and coordination with Missoula Parks and Recreation.

Drainage/Irrigation Channel:

- Elevate this fundamental landscape element to enhance it as a linear habitat and placemaking feature.

Bitterroot Trail and Surrounding Open Space (The "B-line"):

- Increase access to and from existing trail, especially to and from the pedestrian/bike greenway system.
- Maintain potential future passenger rail revival capacity.
- Enhance park and open space quality of the corridor with active and passive recreation opportunities for all ages.
- Enhance safety and security improvements.
- Expand open space connections between the corridor and existing or proposed parks and open spaces nearby.
- Include signage, wayfinding, and placemaking enhancements
- Enhance the corridor in the context of its regional reach and potential for commuting, recreation, and tourism.

Central Park:

- Establish view corridors to the surrounding mountains to be preserved.
- Connect existing pathways and provide new trail connections through the district.
- Identify development opportunities that enhance the character of this district as Midtown's Central Park.
- Maximize pedestrian and bicycle connectivity through, to, and from the district.
- Explore interpretive signage through engagement with the Séliš-Qlispé Culture Committee.
- Engage in a planning process for Playfair Park.

Equitable Development

Support Stability of Existing Residents, Businesses and Service Providers while Creating Equitable Outcomes in New Development.

As Midtown sees new development through the implementation of the Master Plan, it will require targeted actions to support the community and ensure that impacts and benefits are distributed equitably. These recommendations will support equitable outcomes for groups who often face higher vulnerability to displacement (described in Appendix F), including people of color, low-income households, seniors, people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, and LGBTQ+ residents:

Implement Anti-Displacement Programs and Policies. Development pressures in Midtown create the risk that existing households will face residential displacement in coming years, and may already be facing these pressures today. Areas with higher socioeconomic vulnerability should be prioritized for proactively pursuing anti-displacement tools to preserve the community and prevent disparate impacts.

Increase Opportunities for Attainable Homeownership. As housing prices rise, purchasing a home in Midtown is becoming increasingly out of reach for lower-income households and groups who have been historically excluded from homeownership opportunities. Tools that create paths to attainable homeownership should be developed and supported as a critical way to stabilize households and help residents gain equity in their homes.

Partner with Affordable Housing Developers and Existing Service Providers. Midtown today is home to a variety of critical community services related to housing and other needs, including the shelter for houseless individuals because of Midtown's central location and access to critical services. Decision makers implementing the Midtown Master Plan should join forces with affordable housing developers and nonprofit service providers to advance conversations about continuing and expanding these services and incorporating them with new development projects.

How will we advance equity?

- **Invest to support the stability of households that are vulnerable to displacement that are in Midtown today.**
- **Support the long-term stability of existing community-serving businesses and service providers.**
- **Integrate locally owned business and affordable housing into new developments and work with partners to advance long-term affordability strategies.**

High-Vulnerability Residential Areas: 1

Southgate Triangle and Lewis and Clark have the highest concentration of vulnerable groups in Midtown and a higher share of multifamily apartments. Concentrating equitable development strategies in high-vulnerability areas can help to prevent displacement, including:

- Prioritize available funding for low-income homeowners and renters with homeownership support, rent assistance, and other resources.
- Proactively engage with community members to identify specific unmet needs for housing and services (such as homebuyer education and tenants' rights counseling).
- Build partnerships with service providers to identify ways to continue programs and build capacity.

Low-Vulnerability Areas: 2

The northeast showed the lowest concentration of vulnerable groups. But all areas of Midtown should continue to be monitored as development occurs in nearby areas:

- Track changing socioeconomic and real estate trends across Midtown.
- Re-evaluate where to prioritize strategies as the plan progresses if new areas become more vulnerable or show signs of displacement occurring.

VULNERABLE GROUP CONCENTRATION MAP

Changing Residential Areas: 3

It's likely that displacement is already occurring in some areas of Midtown. Franklin to the Fort shows a lower concentration of vulnerable groups, which is possibly due to ongoing displacement based on community input. Strategies to support low-income residents in changing areas include:

- Support preservation and rehabilitation of naturally occurring affordable housing such as mobile home parks.
- Promote homeownership programs for weatherization, accessibility improvements, and down payment assistance.
- Pursue shared ownership models such as community land trusts, land banking, and housing cooperatives.
- Encourage outpad development on surface parking lots for large format commercial uses with pedestrian orientation and design to incrementally add density and provide opportunities for entrepreneurship.

Midtown Core Transformation Area: 4

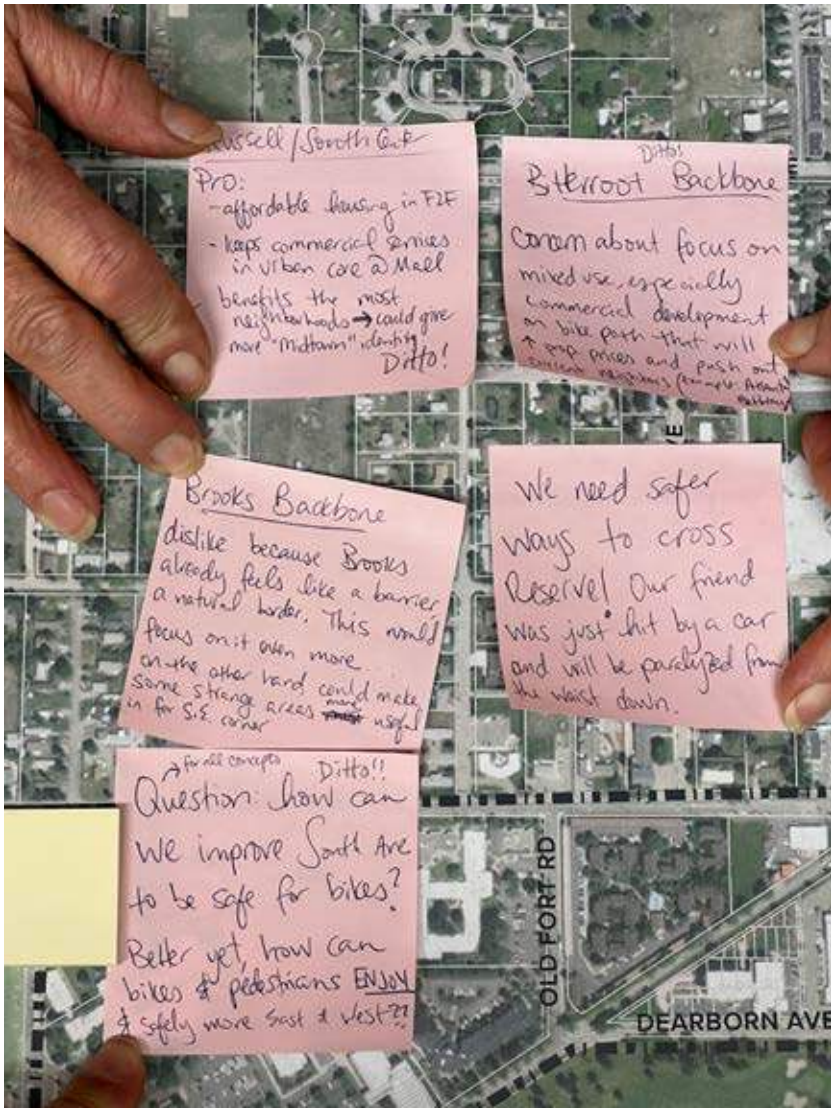
The Midtown Core Transformation Area is where the greatest scale of new development is expected to occur with the implementation of the Master Plan. This area may provide new opportunities for transit-oriented multifamily rental housing and neighborhood-serving businesses located near transit and services. Strategies to advance equitable development in this area include:

- Seek partnerships with affordable housing providers and opportunities for low- or mixed-income rental housing.
- Provide opportunities for entrepreneurs and locally owned businesses to locate in new mixed-use projects.
- Initiate stabilization programs for existing businesses such as grants, low-interest loans, and technical support.
- Support longer-term presence of key community-serving organizations, nonprofits, and service agencies currently located in the core area.

Conclusion

This Master Plan offers a vision for the future of Midtown that leverages its location at the heart of Missoula, its many regional destinations, and its passionate residents and business owners that came out in droves to support the Master Plan creation. Community members envision a future for Midtown which prioritizes development that serves the community, a safe and connected street network that emphasizes better connections across neighborhoods, and vibrant parks and open spaces that foster a cohesive sense of identity. The community is confident in Midtown Missoula, knowing that it has the potential to become a recognizable district that stands on its own with a unique and authentic sense of place.

How will we get there? Midtown is well-positioned for growth that serves the entire community, but it needs targeted investment and dedicated partners to reach its potential. Attracting new development to Midtown will take a coordinated effort by the Missoula Midtown Association, Missoula Redevelopment Agency, public sector partners, businesses, and private investors. Because limited public funds are available for capital projects and programs, it is necessary to prioritize critical investments that can be leveraged to sustain momentum. The Implementation Strategy in Appendix A is a roadmap for these targeted investments and partnerships that Midtown needs to achieve the community's vision. The Missoula Midtown Association and its partners stand ready to implement the Master Plan and make the community's vision a reality.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Missoula Midtown Community Guide Committee

- Ally Mabry
- Andrea Beaty
- David Gray
- Elizabeth Mills-Low
- Hannah Kosel
- Jennifer Meyer
- John Rhoades
- Laura Baxter
- Madeline Alpert
- Mark Milanick
- Matt Thome
- Megan Thornton
- Menodora LeMaster
- Paige Pavalone
- Rajiem Seabrook

Project Funders

$25,000 and up

- Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Missoula Redevelopment Agency

$10,000 – $24,999

- Allegiance Benefit Plan Management
- First Interstate Bank
- First Security Bank
- Jackson Contractor Group, Inc.
- Missoula County
- Missoula Midtown Association
- Missoula TBID/Destination Missoula
- Southgate Mall

$5,000 – $9,999

- Clearwater Credit Union
- DJ&A
- Mountain Line
- Stockman Bank
- University of Montana

$1,000 – $4,999

- AlphaGraphics Missoula
- BlueLine Development, Inc
- Encompass Design
- Farmers State Bank
- Glacier Ice Rink
- The Foster Group
- IMEG
- Patrick J. Lawler
- Mann Mortgage
- Missoula Association of REALTORS
- Missoula Parking Commission
- Morrison-Maierle
- Northwestern Energy
- Opportunity Bank
- Sterling CRE
- WGM Group
- Woodbury Corporation

$250 – $999

- Ahead by 11
- Big Dipper Ice Cream
- Pinion (Anderson ZurMuehlen)
- Berkshire Hathaway Montana Properties
- Flanagan Motors
- Missoulian
- 0S2 Office Solutions & Services
- Trail Head River Sports
- TrailWest Bank
- Trempers Shopping Center
- Big Dipper Ice Cream

In-Kind Donors

- Berkshire Hathaway Montana Properties
- Missoula County Fairgrounds
- Missoula Family YMCA
- Missoula Organization of REALTORS

Missoula Midtown Master Plan Steering & Technical Committee Members

- Emily Brock, Missoula County Land & Economic Development, Chair
- Aaron Wilson, City of Missoula Infrastructure & Mobility Planning Manager
- Amber Sherrill, Missoula City Council Ward 4
- Annette Marchesseault, Missoula Redevelopment Agency
- Barb Neilan, Destination Missoula - TBID
- Ben Brewer, City of Missoula Long-Range Planning Supervisor
- Corey Aldridge, Mountain Line
- Dirk Visser, Allegiance Benefit Plan Management
- Ellen Buchanan, Missoula Redevelopment Agency
- Eran Pehan, Missoula Community Planning, Development & Innovation Director
- Grace McKoy, Pinion
- Gwen Jones, Missoula City Council Ward 3
- Ian Ortlieb, Missoula Parking Commissioner
- Jeremy Keene, Missoula Public Works & Mobility Director
- Jim Bachand, Missoula Organization of REALTORS
- Jordan Hess, Mayor of Missoula
- Josh Kendrick, Opportunity Resources
- Julie Lacey, Missoula Economic Partnership
- Lauren Hutchison, First Security Bank
- Laval Means, Missoula Community Planning Manager
- Mark Bellon, IMEG
- Melanie Brock, Missoula Midtown Association
- Nate Richmond, Blue Line Development
- Rachel Huff-Doria, RHD LLC
- Skye McGinty, All Nations Health Center
- Vicky Crnich, Montana Department of Transportation

Consultant Team

- ECONorthwest
- SERA Design
- Toole Design Group
- WGM Group
- Big Sky Public Relations
- Rick Williams Consulting

APPENDICES

The following documents are appendices to this plan.

Appendix A. Implementation Strategy

Appendix B. Opportunities / Challenges Report + Appendices

Appendix C. Community Visioning Summary

Appendix D. Midtown Alternatives and Workshop Themes Memorandum

Appendix E. Development Feasibility Memorandum

Appendix F. Socioeconomic Vulnerability Assessment

Appendix G. Midtown Alternatives Compass Evaluation

Thank you.