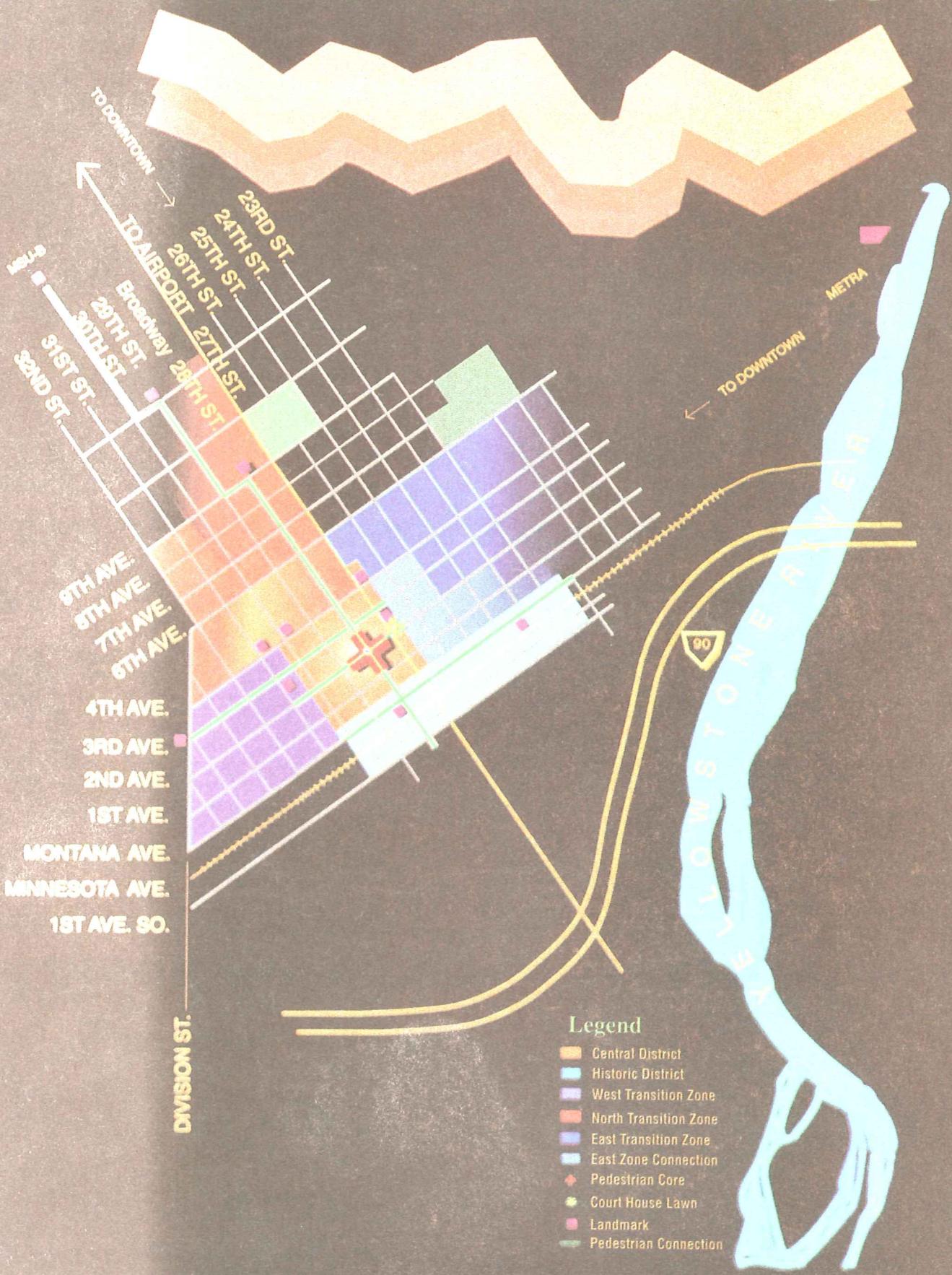


FRAM E W ORK

DOWNTOWN BILLINGS



DOWNTOWN BILLINGS FRAMEWORK PLAN

AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN BILLINGS

Created in cooperation with the citizens of Billings,
the Montana Tradeport Authority and the City of Billings

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The Downtown Billings Framework Plan was unanimously approved by:
the Billings City Council on December 22, 1997, and
the Yellowstone County Commissioners on December 23, 1997.

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Letter from Charles F. Tooley, Mayor, City of Billings



To the Citizens of Billings:

I am very pleased to forward to you the report presented to me and the City Council by the Downtown Billings "Everyone's Neighborhood" committee.

In partnership with a number of businesses who made financial commitments, the City of Billings contributed \$150,000 to make the planning process a reality.

The dedication and hard work of all those involved in the plan is a testament to the power of volunteerism in a community. They were able to form a community-wide consensus as to what the Downtown area could become, and suggest an action plan of programmed improvements to reach that end.

When you read this report, you will see that this committee has provided a vital service to our community and capably fulfilled its mission. Their work is an important milestone in strengthening and revamping our Downtown area. I invite you to join with us in bringing about a bright future for Downtown Billings.

Sincerely,
Charles F. Tooley
Mayor

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles F. Tooley".

Letter from the Steering Committee

Dear Current and Prospective Citizens of Billings:



It will matter little, in future decades, who contributed what to the effort that produced this Framework for Downtown "Everyone's Neighborhood." It will only matter that the vision evolved, that our self-worth was rediscovered, that our sense of community became re-energized and that future generations of citizens and visitors will feel privileged to experience this special place.

This Framework Plan is a combination of big and small dreams mixed with big and small realities as well as with a touch of needs and wants. A large dose of practical provides some balance for a little "sizzle"; but through it all, we still remain Downtown Billings, Montana, a place where all people can sense that they are at the soul of a naturally wonderful community.

Harry C. Gottwals, Co-Chair
Steering Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harry C. Gottwals".

Kay Foster, Co-Chair
Steering Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kay Foster".

Steering Committee Members

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Harry Gottwals	Co-Chair
Kay Foster	Co-Chair
Jerry Thomas	Montana Tradeport Authority
Dan Berry/	
Jon Coxwell	Downtown Billings Association
Mark Watson/	
Fred Alley	City of Billings
Butch Ott	Chamber of Commerce
Bill Arnold	City-County Planning

STANDING COMMITTEES

Kurt Corey	Technical Review Committee (Design & Engineering)
Judy Johnson	Project Resources Committee
Ann Miller	Public Information & Education

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Chuck Barthuly	Merchants Issues Committee
John Brewer/	
Judy Johnson	Tourism/Host City Committee
Ernie Dutton	Real Estate/Property Owners Issues
Donna Forbes	Art/Entertainment Committee
Vince Huntington/	
Don Knapp	Pedestrian Experience Committee
Sandra Merwin	Downtown Faith-Community Leaders
John Walsh	Adjacent Neighborhoods Committee
Ron Wenger	Transportation & Parking Committee

OTHER MEMBERS

Don Alweis	Property Owner/Merchant
Chuck Gainan	Property Owner/Merchant
Lynn Davis	City Council
Michael Deisz	City Council
Michael Larson	City Council
Ziggy Ziegler	County Commissioner
Cindy Lyle	Medical Community
Linda Baugh	Medical Community
Ken Woosley	MSU-Billings
Sandra Hawke	MetraPark
Steve Corning	Commercial Development
Bob Waller	Banking/Finance

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Harry Gottwals	Project Coordinator
Gladys Phelps	Administrative Assistance
Mechelle Schultz	DBA Marketing Director

Leadership

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*Pat Creighton
Lynn Davis
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Mark Elison
Dan Farmer
*Kevin Justis
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*Norm Kolpin
Michael Larson
John Michunovich
*Owen Neiter
Milton Ohnstad
Jeff Regnier
Ralph Stone

(*Former)

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James "Ziggy" Ziegler

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Marion Cooke
Lynn Davis
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Bill MacIntyre
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Jerry Thomas
Nathan Tuberger

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James Cromar

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Sandy Fischer		Jim Bos

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Montana Tradeport Authority

Bair Family Trust
Deaconess-Billings Clinic
St. Vincent Hospital
First Bank Billings
First Interstate Bank
Norwest Bank

Alweis Realty
Billings Gazette
CONOCO
First Citizens Bank
Herbergers
Sam/Greg McDonald
Denny Ménholt - Frontier
Chevrolet
Ponderosa Inn
Joe Sample
George Selover
United Industries

Billings Area Chamber of Commerce
Billings Association of Realtors
Downtown Billings Association
Gainan's
Hines Motor Supply
Montana Power Company
Pierce Flooring
Radisson Northern Hotel
Jack & Bob Sukin
Sheraton Hotel
U. S. West
Western Federal Savings Bank

Crowley Law Firm
Steve Corning
Corning, Scott, Thomas
Dude Rancher
Harry Gottwals
KOA

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Pierce RV's
Planteriors Unlimited
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The Rex Hotel
Gene Rockman
Bill Ryan

A & E Architects
Chuck and Kris Barthuly
Basket Creations
Briggs Distribution
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James Clark Properties
Colborn's

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Cook Travel
Pat Davison
Delaney & Company
Econo Print
Felt, Martin Attys.
Fischer & Associates
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G.M. Petroleum Distributors
Goldsmith Gallery
High Plains Production
Hoffman Associates
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KCTR

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Dave Lambert/Midas
Merrill Lynch
Moulton Law Firm
MSE/HKM Inc.
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Pug Mahon's
Mike Sample
St. Patrick's Parish
Schutz Foss
Smith Funeral Chapels
Stella's
Tacos N Stuff
TolCo Management
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Walker's Grill
Western Drug
Al White
Wright, Tolliver & Guthals
Charlie & Carolyn Yegen
Jack Yurko

John Bohlinger
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Discover Billings
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Kevin Justis
Thomas Lambert
Landmark of Billings
Leuthold Real Estate
Lillis Insurance
Fred Liquin
Ann Miller
Montana Heart Institute
Billie Ruff
John Vogt
Western Heritage Center

Credits

Billings Cultural Partners
Yellowstone Art Museum
Western Heritage Center
Alberta Bair Theater
Moss Mansion
Parmly Billings Library
Billings Symphony

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Kandy Bramble
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James Holden
Holly Lucara
Karin Lucas
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Linda Stevens
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Don Knapp, Co-Chair
Paul Burley
Allyn Faught
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Chuck Gainan
Jim Hartung
Mark Keys
Don Olsen
Kevin Richau
Paul Whiting

Task Forces

Housing Task Force

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Ron Anderson
Micheal Burke
Joe Berst
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Ernie Dutton
Sandy Fischer
Kay Foster
Judy Johnson
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Darla Scarlett
Jerry Thomas

Directional Signage Task Force

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Donna Forbes
Sandy Fischer
Gail Kenson, City-County Planning

Transportation/Shuttle Task Force

Ron Wenger, Chair
Dan Berry
Barbara Shenkel
Debbie Kindsfather
Bill MacIntyre
Sandra Hawke
Vern Bass
Scott Walker
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David Hummel
Nathan Tubergen
Mark Foos
Glen Hladek
Jim Foley
Steve Tostenrud
Connie Wardell

Organization Task Force

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Jerry Thomas
Chuck Barthuly
Tim Powers
Mark Watson
Harry Gottwals
Dan Berry
Kay Foster
Vern Bass
Charlie Yegen
Chuck Gainan
Sandra Merwin
Sandy Fischer
Bruce Hofmann
Greg Ando
Mechelle Schultz

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Bill Cunningham, Leland Group
Jim Fletcher
Jerry Glick
Dave Leland, Leland Group
Kevin Maifeld
Rick Pederson, Ross Consulting
Brad Segal, P.U.M.A.
Anne Tankersley, Leland Group

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Jim Bos
Jim Collins
James Cromar
Dennis Deppmeier
Sandy Fischer
Ric Heldt
Chris Martison
Sara Jane MacLennan
Jason Maloney
Don Olsen
Lin Takeuchi

Meeting Place Donors

Radisson Northern Hotel
Deaconess Medical Center -
Mary Alice Fortin Center
MetraPark
Montana Tradeport Authority
MSU - Billings
The Antique Depot
1st Interstate BancSystem
Sheraton Billings Hotel
The Rex
The Event Club
Broadway Place
St. Patrick's Co-Cathedral
The Perfect Place

Photographs

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Sara Jane MacLennan
Lin Takeuchi

Audio-visual equipment and photos
High Plains Productions, Inc.

Media

The Billings Gazette
Billings Outpost
Community Channel 7
High Plains Productions, Inc.
KTVQ-2
KULR-8
Production West
SunCreek Productions
Paul Whiting

Executive Summary

For eighteen months, a group of Billings' citizens representing public and private interests met to create a Plan for the future of their Downtown. This Steering Committee began by describing what they wanted their Downtown to become as it approaches the next century and beyond. They wanted Downtown to be bustling with people and activity, to be economically strong, to house the community's cultural institutions, and, in short, be the heart and soul of the community.

After examining the current state of Downtown - its economic health, its physical condition, its assets - the Committee listed five major Issues that needed to be addressed so that Downtown can become what they want it to be. Making Downtown the Community Center; easing access for cars, pedestrians, and bicyclists; stabilizing the economic base; establishing active leadership; and reinforcing the Montana image became the work program for the ensuing months.

The Framework

The Committee created a diagram that described the physical attributes and organization of Downtown. This Framework Diagram described the desired connections, identified Downtown's districts, and created a logical physical approach for growth and development. The Framework identifies the heart of Downtown at 2nd and Broadway in the Central District. It connects that point to the Historic District along Montana Avenue and over the railroad tracks into the South Side. In West Downtown, 3rd Avenue is a connection between the Core and the neighborhoods along Division Street, and

2nd Avenue is a major pedestrian place. In North Downtown, Broadway connects the Medical Corridor and Montana State University - Billings back to the Core. Heading east, a zig-zag path connects the Courthouse and the Historic District's Depot. The connection to Metra is an important link for future study.

The Steering Committee identified Downtown's Assets which should be enhanced and never diminished as changes take place. And finally, they stated the Values that had been part of the ongoing discussions. The Values and the other Framework Elements are measuring sticks to evaluate future projects.

Plan Components

Next, the Committee examined the elements and actions necessary to achieve their common vision. These Plan Components focused on establishing leadership, addressing access, designing Downtown streets and open spaces, defining an open space network, and housing.

Leadership is set through the Downtown Billings Partnership, the organization that is a cooperative venture between the Downtown Billings Association, a development corporation, a property owner advisory group and the Parking Advisory Board. Its Board includes representatives from the Montana Tradeport Authority, the City and an at-large member. There is room for growth and expansion of the organization through affiliations with other organizations with an interest in Downtown. As part of this Plan effort, two such groups emerged: the Downtown Faith-Community Leaders, representing

churches and social service providers, and the Billings Cultural Partners, representing cultural facilities. The Partnership has room to grow as other groups emerge and want to affiliate.

The Partnership will become the steward of this Plan and seek to develop the ideas in it. This organization will foster cooperation and coordination among the many interests in Downtown to work towards common goals, economic stability, project implementation, and communication. As time goes on, it will undoubtedly tackle issues and seize opportunities which we cannot now even anticipate and lead Downtown with a plan for the future.

The Plan calls for easier access in moving about Downtown. The east-west streets will remain one-way, but with traffic-calming measures including angled parking, reduced number of lanes, and increased pedestrian comfort. The north-south streets in the Downtown Core that are currently one-way will be converted to two-way to allow for easier access. The heavily traveled corridors - 27th Street, 1st Avenue North, Montana Avenue, 4th Avenue North and 6th Avenue North - will be examined for methods to slow traffic down and make it more compatible with the Downtown environment. The balance between pedestrian comfort and vehicular access will adjust not only with these street conversions, but also with sidewalk and street furniture improvements.

Kit of Parts

The streetscape elements, lights, benches, kiosks, etc., are called the Kit of Parts. Local designers and the consultant team created the concepts at a day-long workshop. The main challenge was to marry the ideas of Downtown as an urban environment and Billings as a western community of extraordinary natural beauty. The Kit of Parts consists of a cohesive set of street furniture that captures both of these ideas. It includes a series of light fixtures that establish a pattern for other streetscape elements. Kiosks and a windmill clock tower become the signature pieces that recall local agricultural roots. Trees, boulders, and indigenous grasses recall the natural beauty of the area.

The intersection of Broadway and 2nd and perhaps Broadway and 3rd will receive special treatment with patterns and raised walkways making pedestrian passage easier as well as more interesting. The streetscape improvements and the Kit of Parts will be applied throughout all the Downtown districts over time as budgets allow and opportunities occur. The result will be the creation of a cohesive image for Downtown that calms, delights, and augments the urban center while recalling the natural environment.

When there are events Downtown, a special Kit of Parts with tents, barricades, flags, and other pieces will create a temporary Downtown village. The pieces will provide a consistent theme for special events and can be easily assembled and stored.

The Open Space Framework is a defined network consisting of sidewalks, parks, plazas, pedestrian areas, and greenways. This Framework consists of improvements including the addition of trees and landscape to the Pedestrian Core along 2nd Avenue, 3rd Avenue, and Broadway; enhancements to the Courthouse Lawn; a new park in West Downtown; preservation and development of the 5th Avenue North corridor and the



rail lines in East Downtown; further improvements along Montana Avenue; and the preservation and landscaping of the triangles along Division Street.

Housing

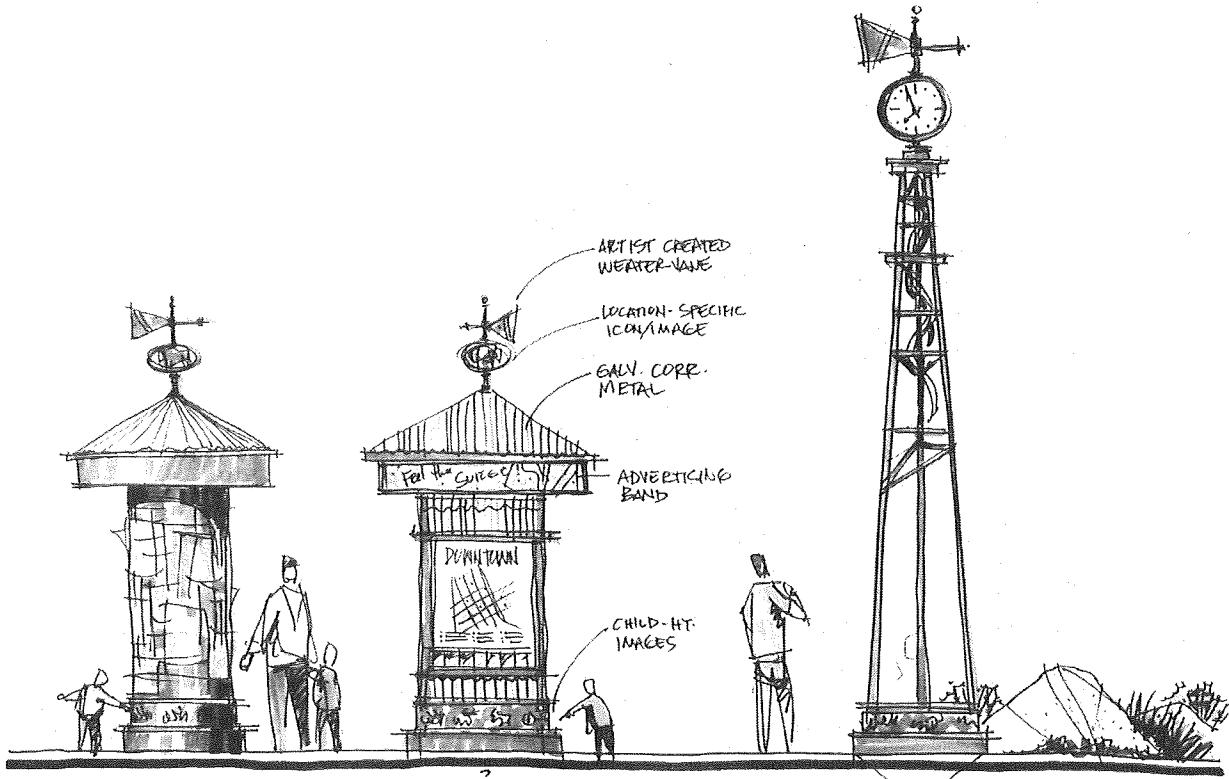
To make Downtown live beyond the 8-to-5 office hours, housing is a priority. There should be a variety of housing types including lofts, townhouses, and luxury housing. Housing will be implemented as opportunities arise. To encourage this, the Partnership in cooperation with local government, financial institutions, developers, realtors, and MSU-Billings will work to promote and build housing Downtown. The Steering Committee embraced the concept that Downtown will not truly live until many people live in Downtown.

Action Plan

This Action Plan is deeply rooted in pragmatism and represents the collective wisdom of many,

many people and will be implemented over several years. The combination of public and private funds when effectively leveraged will stimulate business investment. The Partnership will provide the forum for coordinating the implementation efforts. Funding sources are many and varied ranging from federal, state, and local funding, to revenues from Downtown parking, to individual developers and property owners, to private foundations. Each project will require a financial plan and undoubtedly no two will be alike.

Over time, the dreams of the Steering Committee and the Billings community will become reality. Downtown Billings will emerge according to the Vision as a place that is economically strong, bustling with activity, and the heart and soul of the community. The Steering Committee and the many people who helped create this Plan will enjoy the fruits of their labor as well as leave a rich legacy for generations to come.



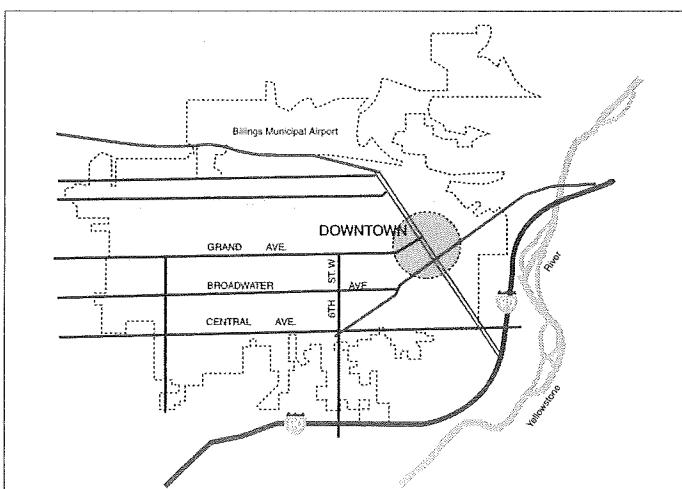
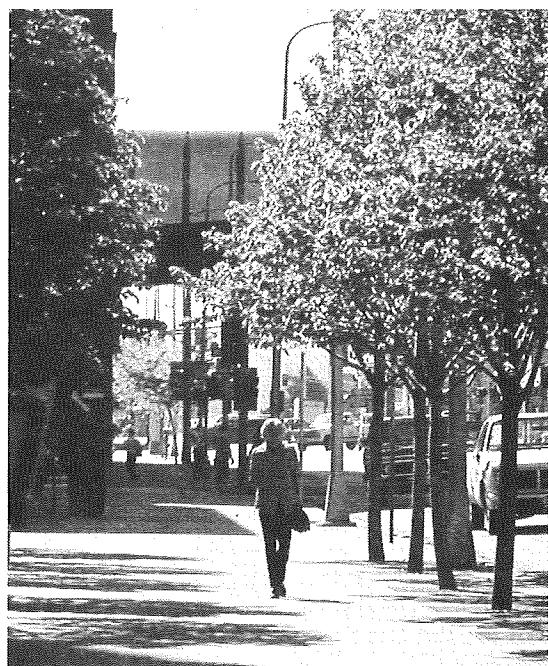
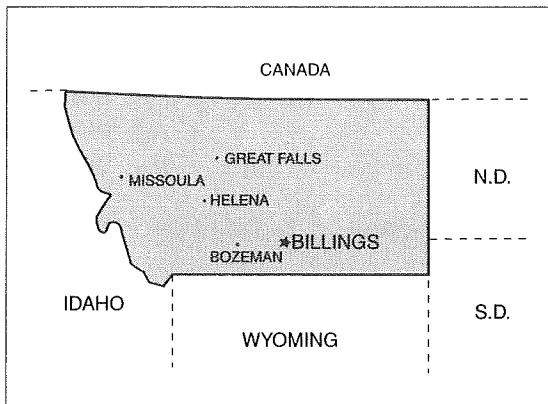
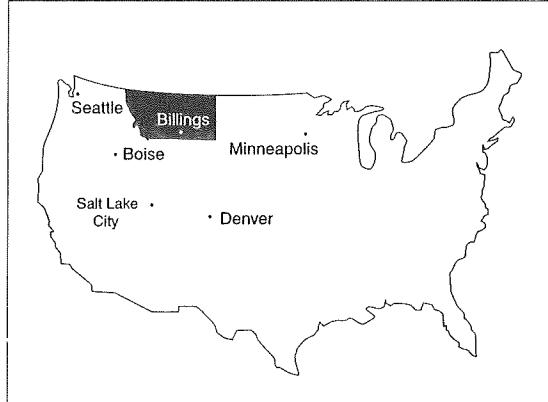
Context: The Setting

Billings is the largest city in Montana with a population of approximately 90,000 within the City limits, and another 40,000 in surrounding Yellowstone County. As the largest city in the region, Billings' market area stretches to include 250,000 people in Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, and North Dakota.

Billings is located in eastern Montana, a High Plains area with dramatic Rims, the Yellowstone River, and the nearby mountain ranges such as the Pryor and the Beartooth.

Numerous major attractions are located near Billings including the Little Bighorn National Battlefield, Yellowstone National Park, and several national forests. Over two million people pass through Billings annually to visit these and the numerous local attractions.

Billings is a community of neighborhoods with Downtown located centrally among them. Downtown is the traditional heart and soul of the community. The close-in neighborhoods were included in this planning effort as a means of connecting with the planning that each adjacent neighborhood had already done on its own. The Framework Plan, while it concentrates on Downtown Billings, does so in consideration of the larger context: its close-in neighborhoods, the larger Billings community, and the region.





The Place . . . The Story of Billings

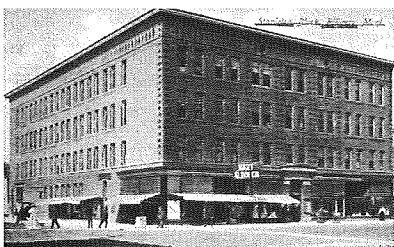
The Story of Billings sets it apart from any other place. Its land and its people are different.

Powerful natural forces shaped this land. Sandstone and soil carried away by the Yellowstone River formed the Yellowstone Valley, creating a spectacular setting for what would become the largest city in Montana. Billings' fortunes are based on the land, and everyday, the Rims and the River that surround Billings remind us of our geographical heritage.

The local populations, starting with the Native Americans, and later those who were drawn here to seek their fortune, find a new life, farm the land, build the railroads, or start a new business, all share characteristics that give the community a distinct personality: independent, yet community-minded and friendly. To live and prosper in this remote and beautiful place, people had to be self-reliant. To create a thriving community, people had to work together. Today, Billings' residents are not struggling to live, but working together to live the good life. Even those who live elsewhere for a while often return to raise their families. There is something about Billings and the types of people that it draws that make it a place where people feel privileged to live.

Before the city was named Billings, the Native Americans called it Ammalapashkuua, "the place where we cut wood." Sacrifice Cliff, Pompeys Pillar, and stories of leadership exemplified by Chief Plenty Coups and Sweet Medicine, a Sioux prophet, remind us of these early inhabitants. In 1806, William Clark, returning from his expedition with Meriwether Lewis, passed through here with his guide Sacajawea. Clark carved his name in the stone at Pompeys Pillar where he viewed horses and bison in the valley below.

The Yellowstone River valley later attracted fur trappers and traders. The Town of Coulson was established as a trade post before Billings was a town. It was the urban center for five years until 1882, when the Northern Pacific Railroad decided to bypass it. Instead, the railroad made its way across the alkali flats to the infant community of Billings, forever connecting it to the nation and the world beyond.



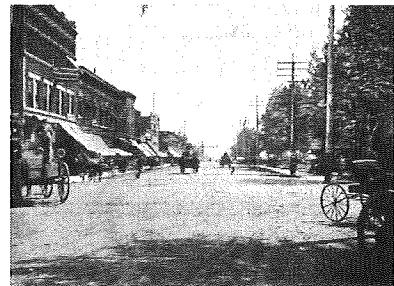
The railroads provided jobs, moved people and goods, and established Billings' character. The grid layout of the railroad town simplified land purchases; early speculation led to Billings' nickname as the "Magic City" where fortunes could be made quickly. Today, aspects of "the Magic City" can still be seen in the Victorian architecture, cast-iron lamps, and industrial buildings. In addition, the sounds of the trains and the smells of the processing plants remind us of this period.



Diverse groups of people came to Billings in the hopes of a better life. They built homes, shops, and businesses. Some became cattle barons, large land owners, or entrepreneurs. Others were clerks, teachers, cowboys. The early settlers of Billings left their mark on the city, and there are many places that still carry their names: the Alberta Bair Theater, the Moss Mansion, Zimmerman Trail, the Parmly Billings Library building, the Fratt School, and the Peter Yegen, Jr. Museum.

The people of Billings are proud of their diversity. This diversity is demonstrated by the many families whose names are not as well-known, who have stayed in Billings and contributed to the community over several generations. They are evidence of Billings' quality as a place to live and raise a family, "a place to come home to."

The Billings area has grown to include over 100,000 people, and has a regional draw of over 250,000. It is the largest city for nearly 500 miles in any direction, and is the host city for regional, national and international visitors. The people of Billings have worked together to build an extensive medical campus, a university and a college, a theater and symphony, museums, and a stable business community.



The roots of Billings' economy are still in the land. Oil refineries and sugar beet processing continue to supplement the area's farm and ranch production. The beauty of the natural surroundings attracts tourists and visitors. Downtown provides a home for the services and businesses that support these enterprises. It is the seat of the City and County government, the regional center for finance, trade, culture, medicine, education, and industry. Downtown, where Billings began, is still where people gather, the heart of the community - Downtown is "*Everyone's Neighborhood*."



"Cities that are fortunate enough to have a downtown would certainly love to have our challenges . . . They are few relative to the great potential that exists."

-- Harry Gottwals

Why Have a Plan?

In 1994, discussions about the condition of Downtown Billings started to crystallize for the first time since the planning efforts of the 1980s. That Plan resulted in many improvements, but the centerpiece of the entire effort, a pedestrian plaza that provided a diagonal link between the Downtown Core and the Transwestern Center, never came to be. Further, the Plan never became the rallying point for community decisions nor did it provide the forum to evaluate development actions.

In 1995, Downtown Billings was in relatively good shape. Among other projects, new property owners and tenants were intent on renovating and restoring buildings in the Historic District on Montana Avenue. Yet, as the evidence from tax assessment records showed, the underlying economic conditions of the Downtown were beginning to decline. The community could no longer ignore declining activity and vacancies in key locations.

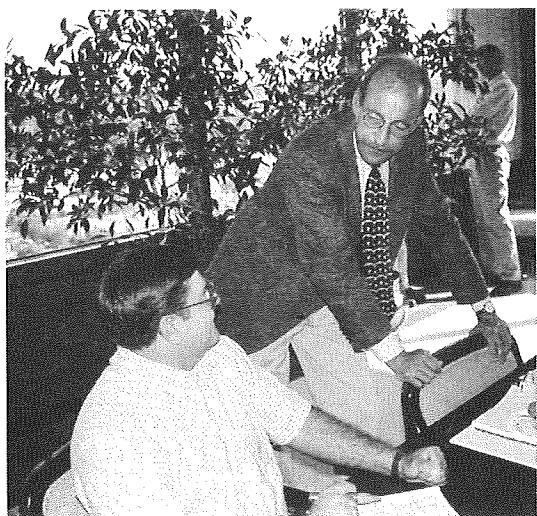
Residents realized that Downtown Billings was in danger of losing its position as the Community Center. Questions surfaced about the role of the Downtown in Billings' future: What do we want for Downtown Billings? What's in the way of achieving that? And, how do we make the most of Downtown as the heart of the community?

Community Participation

In February 1995 approximately 50 people met at the Northern Radisson Hotel to discuss the future of the Downtown. They agreed nearly unanimously that Downtown Billings could be better and that it was time to create a new plan. In May 1995, three months later, 120 interested citizens gathered at MetraPark for a two-day workshop during which they began to set the course for action. To begin the planning process, the Billings community rallied to raise the funds from both public and private sources.

The key to the Downtown Billings Framework Plan is that the citizens of Billings created a Plan based on local wants, needs and desires. A Steering Committee of 34 individuals representing the community met monthly to guide the creation of the Plan. The Committee made their decisions by consensus.

In addition to the Steering Committee process, others contributed their ideas through a series of public meetings; Advisory Committee, small group, and individual meetings; and informal discussions. The Advisory Committees met as needed throughout the planning process and their meetings were open to all.



"For myself, honored by having the town named after me, you can be sure that I shall always be its friend in the future as I have been in the past. As a business man I can see no reason why this town, taking all the circumstances into consideration, is not really destined to be the center of great interests, and if you all here will keep pace in your moral and intellectual growth with the growth in material prosperity, you will gratify the man after whom the place is named and every man who is a lover of good things."

-- Frederick Billings, 1883

Planning Process

The first monthly meeting of the Steering Committee took place in July 1996. At each meeting, the Committee built upon their previous work. They devoted hours to the formal sessions, and additional time to learning about Downtown and sharing this information with their constituencies. By the completion of the planning process, the Steering Committee was probably the best-educated citizens group in Billings regarding the workings of Downtown.

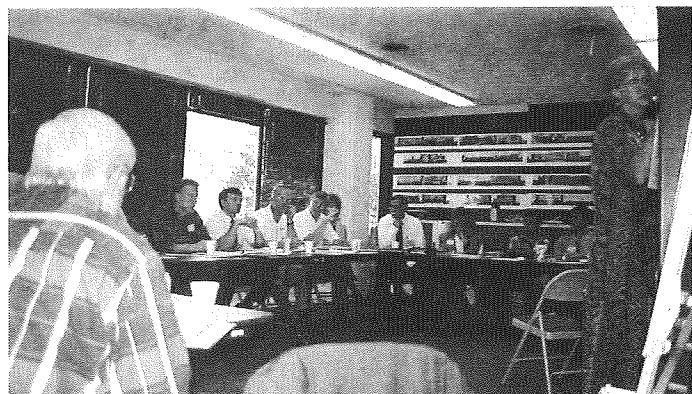
The process resulted in the **Framework Elements**: the definition of Downtown Billings. The process also formed the foundation for the **Plan Components**: the future actions to strengthen **Downtown as the Community's Center**, the place for cultural activities, thriving businesses, and housing.

The **Framework Elements** include:

- **Vision Map** - what we want Downtown Billings to be in twenty years
- **Education Sessions** - what Billings is like today; a "snap shot in time" of current conditions
- **Issues** - what the gap is between the current conditions and the Vision; precise definition of the problems
- **Values** - what we hold dear as a community; the underlying principles to guide the Plan
- **Assets** - Billings' current strengths that the Plan must support and not weaken
- **Framework Diagram** - the physical skeleton for growth and future development
- **Districts** - the Downtown Core and surrounding areas; how they should develop internally, and connect to each other and to the surrounding neighborhoods

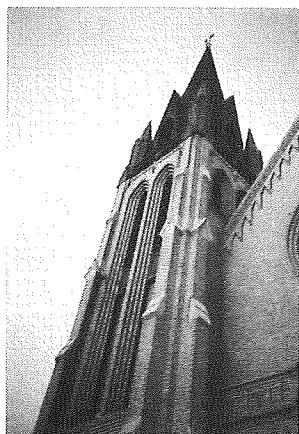
The **Plan Components** set the course for public and private actions for Downtown Billings. They include the following areas:

- **Organization** - leadership through the creation of a Downtown Billings Partnership
- **Moving About** - means for travelling to, through, and within Downtown, and where to leave your car once you get there
- **Kit of Parts** - the street furniture and elements that create a unified image
- **Gathering Spaces** - inviting comfortable parks, and other indoor and outdoor gathering spaces
- **Housing** - the residential base that makes Downtown Billings truly a neighborhood



"I have enjoyed the inclusive process that has been followed. 'Everyone's Neighborhood' is truly how we have gone about restructuring our 'home' Downtown. I have learned a great amount about Billings, our neighbors, and visioning. I look forward to adding the South Side to future plans."

-- Lynn Davis, City Council



Concurrent Activities

During any planning process, the public and private sectors will continue to implement plans and projects throughout the community. It is not possible nor desirable to stop all important activities while planning for the future. The excitement of changes and improvements adds a sense of urgency to the completion of the Plan.

In Billings, an abundance of concurrent activity within the Downtown added inspiration to the Framework Plan effort. The question many people asked was how to take advantage of each of these projects to capture the synergy among projects so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Steering Committee maintained awareness of these ongoing and upcoming projects that were occurring during the planning process:

- Yellowstone Art Museum expansion
- Depot renovation
- Montana Avenue streetscape
- Western Heritage Center/Heritage Corridor
- The Rex Hotel expansion
- Continuing improvements to the Medical Corridor
- Continuing projects at MSU-Billings
- BikeNet implementation
- Economic development workshops with property owners, City officials, lenders and developers
- Social service providers acquiring properties and improving their facilities: Montana Rescue Mission, Alternatives, Inc., Youth Activity Center, Head Start
- St. Patrick's Co-Cathedral renovation
- Mayor's Task Force on Parking and creation of the Parking Advisory Board
- Montana Tradeport Authority agreement to provide management of Downtown Tax Increment funds
- Billings Cultural Partners formalizing and increasing their cooperation

"I have been very pleased and impressed with the effort made to provide all interested parties with an opportunity to provide input into the planning process, and the ability of the Steering Committee to reach consensus on so many issues given the volume and diversity of the input."

-- John Walsh

Education Sessions

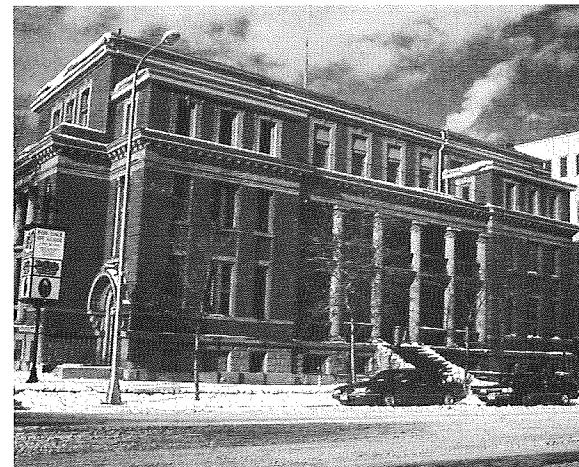
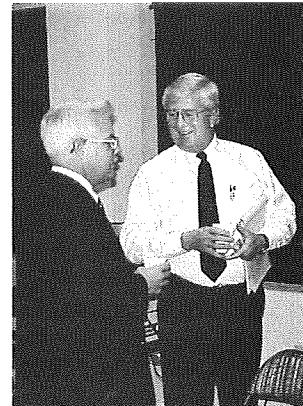
Before deciding what Downtown should become, the Committee needed to understand the existing conditions Downtown: How is it working today? Is the infrastructure - the roads, water lines, sewer lines, etc. - in good shape? How is the economy? Is Downtown safe?

During these meetings, the Steering Committee heard from local and national experts about:

- Retailing
- The Economics of Downtown
- Parking
- Transportation and Access
- Cultural Facilities
- Infrastructure and Utilities
- Architecture and the Downtown Building Stock
- Tourism
- Safety and Security

The Committee learned that the infrastructure and utilities were in good shape. While there is adequate parking, it may not be conveniently located and there clearly is a need to address parking issues. The street system is not congested, but the one-way streets are confusing to some people. While there are some strong retailers Downtown, there are many who have left. The Downtown retail trade is changing to a specialty service-oriented stores while department and chain stores are locating mainly in the West End area. There are several cultural organizations Downtown including the Yellowstone Art Museum, the Alberta Bair Theater, the Moss Mansion, the Billings Symphony, the Western Heritage Museum, and the Parmly Billings Library. These are of a high quality with potential for even more of them if there were common promotion and support. Downtown is relatively safe compared to other areas, but sometimes people feel insecure because of panhandlers and street people. The Downtown buildings are concentrated and in reasonable shape. Some have been restored, some neglected, and some are obsolete. However, they represent an asset as a whole because the Downtown is not beleaguered by a sea of empty parking lots. Economically, Downtown is not in terrible shape, but property values Downtown are declining.

With this as background, the Committee looked toward what the issues were: What exactly are the problems that need to be fixed? An integral part of creating solutions was to make sure that assets were preserved and enhanced.



Framework Elements

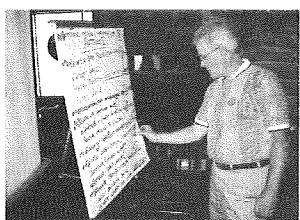
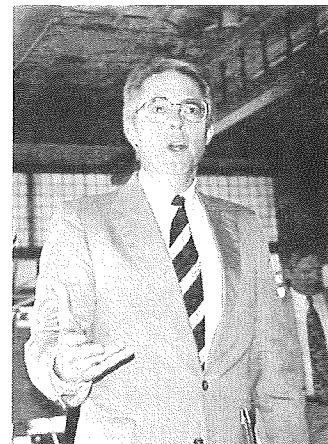
- *Vision Map*
- *Values*
- *Assets*
- *Issues*
- *Framework Diagram*
- *Districts*



The Framework has six elements. Combined, they provide the comprehensive logic for making wise decisions about the future of Downtown, and a planning base within which the Downtown can thrive in all its complexities. The Framework is a call to action and is flexible enough to incorporate opportunities that we cannot now even imagine. Its elements include:

- The Vision Map: A drawing that reflects Committee discussion about what people would like Downtown to be
- Values: A description of the important values against which all projects are measured
- Assets: The important elements of Downtown that should be preserved and enhanced
- Issues: Concerns to be addressed in order to reach the Vision and enhance the Assets while being true to the Values of the community
- Framework Diagram: A map of Downtown's districts, connections, landmarks, and other features on a graphic that:
 - 1.) illustrates the overall system for connecting Downtown and directing its growth and development;
 - 2.) focuses the discussion of how individual ideas and projects fit into that overall system; and
 - 3.) creates a common understanding, logic, and a language for the discussion of the future of Downtown.
- Districts: The sub-areas that combine to make Downtown, that differ in character and use, and that complement each other within the whole structure

The Framework Elements are the basis for individual and collective decisions about growth and development. They are the underlying structure upon which the Plan Components are built. Actions taken to implement housing, transportation, or any other project should be carefully measured against these Framework Elements.

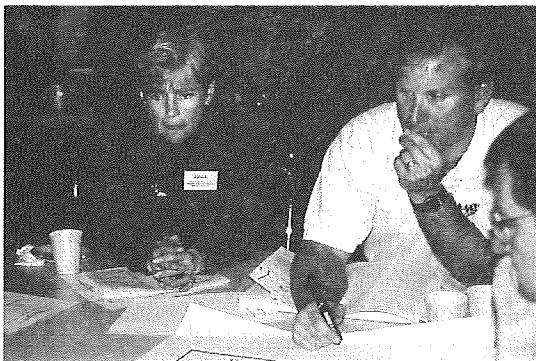


"The Framework Plan begins to define a Vision for Downtown Billings that works toward a balance between property owner interests and community-wide interests. Ideally, it will place local government in the role of facilitator vs. regulator while meeting the goals of sustainable growth and public health, safety, and welfare."

The Vision Map

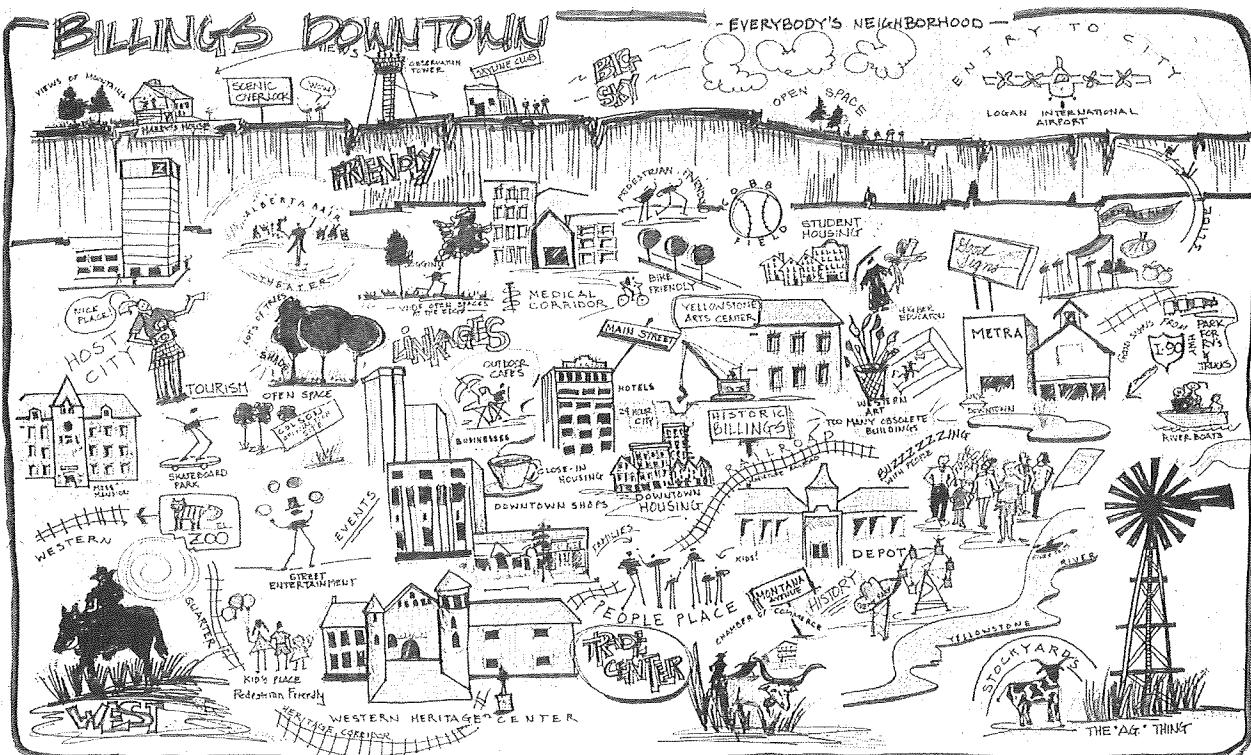
The Steering Committee created the Vision Map at the beginning of the planning process. The drawing represents what people would like Downtown to be. It was the product of the Committee's answers to basic questions:

If you came back in 10 or 20 years and everything you wanted for Downtown was in place, what would it be like? What would still be here? What would be added? What would be gone? How would it be different than it is today?



During the ensuing discussion, the Vision Map was created. It stands as a reminder of the collective Vision for Downtown - what we are aiming for. It captures the important assets, describes the nature of Billings, and in a simple manner conveys our hopes for the future.

*The Vision Map is the
Steering Committee's
response to the question,
"What do you want
Downtown Billings to be in
twenty years?"*



"It seemed an improbable goal . . . bringing this diverse community together to chart a new course to preserve, enhance and enliven the heart of our town. But it has been achieved and an exciting future for Downtown seems assured."

-- Kay Foster

Values

During the 16 months of Committee discussions, the underlying community values emerged. The Committee made decisions based upon concepts that they held dear but had not explicitly stated. Many times, the thought process during the planning is lost to future decision-makers because the plan is presented as a series of projects. And yet, the essence of these discussions is in fact the basis for many other decisions.

Presented below are the Committee's stated Values which will bring understanding to the recommendations of this Plan as well as provide a backdrop for ongoing planning discussions.

Downtown is Everyone's Neighborhood

- Downtown Billings should be a safe and inviting place for everyone to live, work, and play.
- Our sense of community is friendly, caring and independent.
- Downtown Billings is unique in its natural beauty and surroundings.
- Institutions and activities that are important to the community belong Downtown:
 - civic, educational and medical institutions
 - arts, culture and recreation
 - churches and gathering places
 - civic activities, entertainment, and community celebrations
- Billings' citizens value the opportunity to experience the outdoors in Downtown: sidewalk cafes, events, bicycling, pedestrian environment, etc.
- Ease of access is critical to Downtown's livelihood.
- Downtown draws from its historic past as its leaders shape its future character.
- Downtown Billings believes in its strong economic future.
- The future of Downtown will be shaped by forward-thinking leadership and public/private collaboration.
- Downtown is entrepreneurial and nurtures specialty retail and home-grown businesses offering personalized services.

Assets

Billings is fortunate. Its problems are fixable and there are many assets to work with to create the kind of Downtown we want. The Plan is designed to preserve and enhance these assets as growth and development occur.

These assets include:

- Unique collection of buildings: two- and three-story heights, grouping of buildings different than what is found in a typical Montana town with a single long Main Street
- Cultural facilities: Yellowstone Art Museum, Alberta Bair Theater, Western Heritage Center, Moss Mansion
- Montana Avenue Historic District: Railroad Depot, trolley garage, old hotels
- Specialty retail
- Medical Corridor: Deaconess, St. Vincent
- Education campuses: MSU - Billings, Rocky Mountain College, Billings Business College
- MetraPark
- 27th Street connection from Downtown to the airport and I-90
- Financial office market
- Government presence: federal, state, county, city
- Nature of the people: sense of community, open, friendly
- Proximity to scenic beauty: Rims, Yellowstone River, Big Sky, Fertile Valley
- Friendly, helpful local service providers: sales clerks, food servers, etc.
- Multiple generations, Billings' citizens "come home"
- Numerous churches of all faiths

- *The Community Center*
- *Forward Thinking*
- *Moving About*
- *Downtown Business*
- *Image*

Issues

The Issues identify the obstacles that stand between the existing Downtown and the Vision of what we want Downtown to become. The Committee concisely stated these five Issues so that as Committee members discussed proposals and projects, they understood which problem they were trying to solve. All of the actions outlined in the Plan Components were designed to directly respond to these Issues.

THE COMMUNITY CENTER

Entertainment, Retail, Culture and Image

- The discontinuity of land uses and activity levels creates gaps and a **lack of connection** between the core of Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods.
 - Downtown has no apparent **center, edges or entryways**.
 - Downtown's **districts are poorly defined** (geographically and internally), unconnected; there is no program to reinforce their function; and there is poor directional signage, maps, or brochures.
 - The richness of the Billings community - its **culture, personality, and spirit** - is present but not apparent in Downtown.
 - Downtown is not perceived as the **nucleus of the community**, nor does it take advantage of its potential to be the social, cultural, and business center of the region. Billings' citizens come to a number of Downtown destinations, but Downtown as a whole is not in and of itself a **destination**.
- Downtown does not have a **residential population** that makes it alive after office hours; Downtown does not reach its potential as a neighborhood or an amenity for the close-in neighborhoods. Because there is no residential population, there is a lack of excitement and vibrancy in the Downtown.



- The public places - parks, streets, sidewalks - do little to provide beauty and comfort. The center lacks **public meeting space** - both indoor and outdoor - where Billings citizens find a sense of community.

"Downtowns are always the center of governmental, cultural and business activities. They should remind us of our cultural roots and where we are going in the future as a community. Successful communities will always ensure the vibrancy of Downtown as a place to live, work and play."

-- Mark Watson,
City Administrator

FORWARD THINKING

Leadership, Organization and Planning

- Downtown is **not poised to take advantage** of potential growth and development; the private sector does not actively promote economic growth and development, and the public sector's taxing methods don't inspire the entrepreneurial spirit. Thus the economic base of Downtown is weak.
 - Downtown property values are declining, property owners are not realizing investment potential, and the City's revenues are declining.
- Downtown **leadership is not comprehensively organized** to manage, promote, maintain, or advocate for the benefit of the greater community or those with a stake in Downtown's future. There is no marketing or promotion mindset. Existing legislation does not allow certain methods (local options/sales tax, etc.) of achieving these goals.
 - Downtown lacks the advantage of a **collaborative retail effort** focused on business recruitment, retention, and support systems.
 - There is no systematic or logical way to **evaluate the benefit** of a development opportunity, locate development sites, or coordinate multiple activities.
 - There is no deliberate method for **locating land uses** that are complementary but not competitive with the Downtown. Development activity is isolated; thus concurrent projects, historic patterns, or future opportunities do not realize their potential.
 - There is no effort to creatively incorporate **large projects** into Downtown's existing urban pattern; therefore, the asset of a compact core seems to prohibit that type of development.
- Existing **regulations and requirements** discourage the very type of development that is desirable (housing, building renovations, food and beverage establishments, night spots, etc.). Building codes and liquor licenses are two examples of this.



*"The economic well-being
of any community is
reflected by the healthiness
of its Downtown."*

-- Butch Ott,
President/CEO,
Billings Chamber of
Commerce

MOVING ABOUT

Access To, Through, and Within Downtown

- In Downtown, the amount of space dedicated to the automobile suggests that pedestrian activity is less important than car movement. The **balance between vehicle movement and pedestrian comfort** is currently skewed toward moving vehicles. Trade-offs have not been clearly defined or discussed.
- Because psychological distances are great, walking a few blocks seems inconvenient and unpleasant. The result of an **uninviting pedestrian environment** is that people drive from one destination to another, thus depriving downtown the liveliness and interest of people on the move: the human zoo. People are unwilling to walk to many destinations once they have parked their cars.
- People are **easily disoriented** Downtown and there are few landmarks to provide orientation. The one-way street system Downtown exacerbates this and is confusing for motorists. Both pedestrian and vehicular orientation is difficult: driving through Downtown is easy, but there is no apparent logic to moving about within the Downtown.

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS

Offices, Government, Medical and Education

- The economics of Downtown make it more difficult to locate there than on undeveloped lots away from the center. This is compounded by the lack of advantage to a Downtown location. There is not a "**level playing field**."
 - While individual business may be thriving, business in **Downtown is declining** as it continues to lose its competitive edge and market share.
 - While there are many successful businesses Downtown, there are also weak tenants, attracted by the lower lease rates of poorly maintained buildings. This **undermines the stability** of the economic base.
 - Buildings with first-floor uses often have **empty upper floors**, representing a lost resource to the City and the property owners. Currently, the economics of using this space does not make sense because of declining values, building regulations, market values, and reconstruction costs.
- Because businesses' hours and activities are not consistent **beyond the eight-to-five office hours**, citizens may not patronize the Downtown, which discourages after-hours activities. This lack of activity detracts from the sense of safety and security, and leads to less activity.
 - Downtown businesses do not target Downtown employees as a major market, and workers are not pursued as a client base for Downtown.

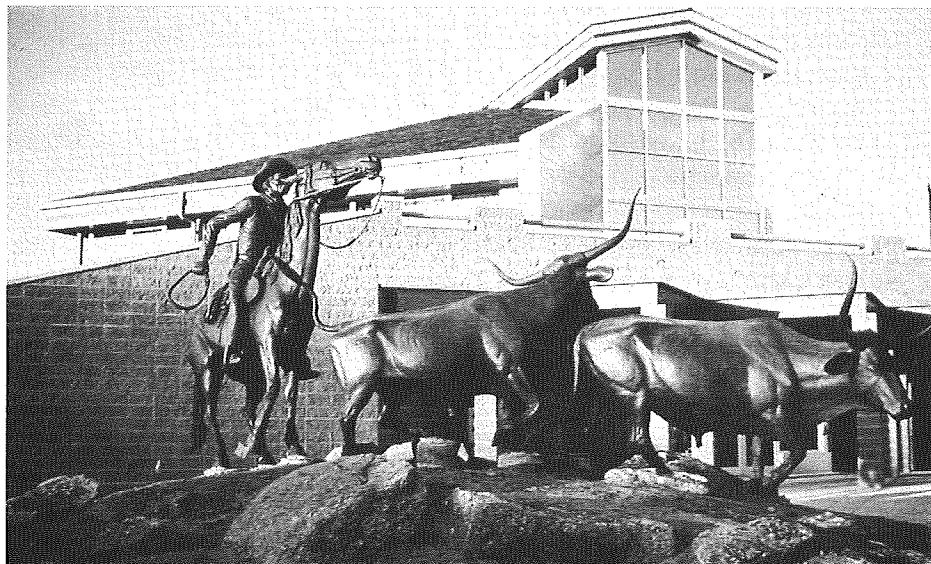
"The 'Everyone's Neighborhood' planning process has been invigorating, creative and thought-provoking, and has created a cohesive group of individuals prepared to shepherd the future of Downtown. The process has created a 'touchstone' for Downtown development - a guide well past the millennium and into the next century."

-- Sandra Hawke

IMAGE

Landscape, Natural Setting and the Montana Mystique

- The **western themes** of many of Downtown's land uses, architecture, and businesses are not highlighted for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.
 - Because Downtown Billings has a business orientation, it doesn't strive to be a tourist town. However, there is a large **untapped market** consisting of convention-goers, business travelers, people passing through on their way to other destinations, and the friends and family of Billings' citizens.
 - There is no coordinated signage or system to orient and direct visitors:
 - one-ways are disorienting
 - maps, signage, and information are not well thought out or consistent
- As the only truly urban center for hundreds of miles, Downtown **lacks an irresistible magnetism** that could draw thousands of people to enjoy this unique asset.
- Downtown does not draw on the **images of the beauty** that surround it: the River, Rims, agricultural lands, and distant mountains.
- The examples of **historic preservation and renovation** have tended to be isolated and don't add up to create a sense of historic permanence. The combination of current market conditions and building codes does not encourage extensive renovations. Therefore the Downtown's historic resources do not combine to "tell the story" of Billings.



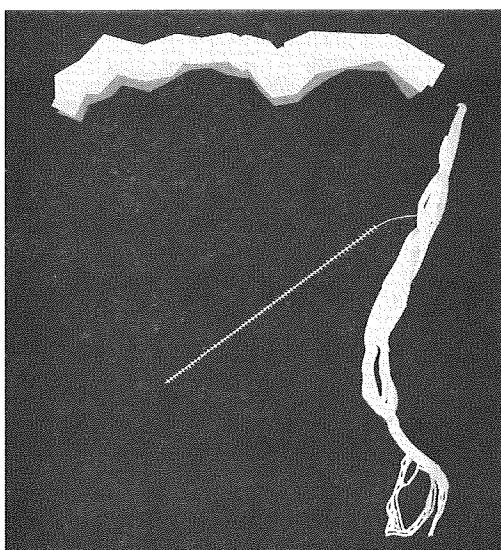
Framework Diagram

The Framework Diagram is the underlying structure for the physical elements of the plan. It is a geographic representation of the important features of Downtown Billings and their relations one to another. The Framework Diagram is a key component of the Plan along with the list of Issues, Assets, and Values. The Framework Diagram serves as a guide for development and provides an orderly basis for major investments, both public and private. It forms the basis for in-depth discussions on how to guide the future of Billings' Downtown toward a vision of a lively, vibrant, community center . . . Everyone's Neighborhood.

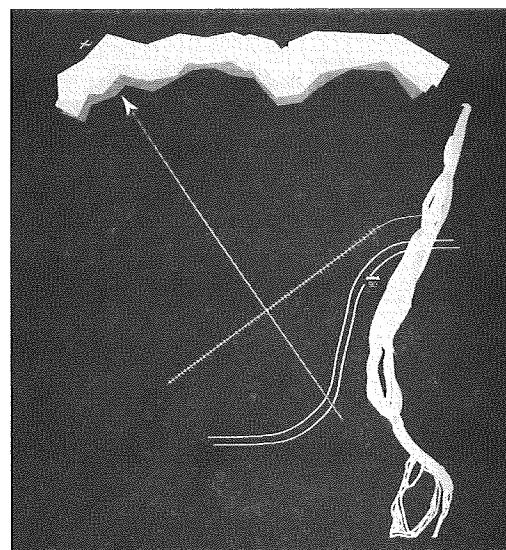
The Framework Diagram identifies a Pedestrian Core for Downtown Billings, important buildings, major vehicular corridors, and areas for improved pedestrian atmosphere. The Framework Diagram indicates where and how to connect the various districts in Downtown, and identifies transition zones to bridge the distance between the close-in neighborhoods and the Downtown core.



1. Downtown Billings is located between the Yellowstone River and the Rims. The Railroad runs through Downtown and is a major historical reason Billings is located where it is.

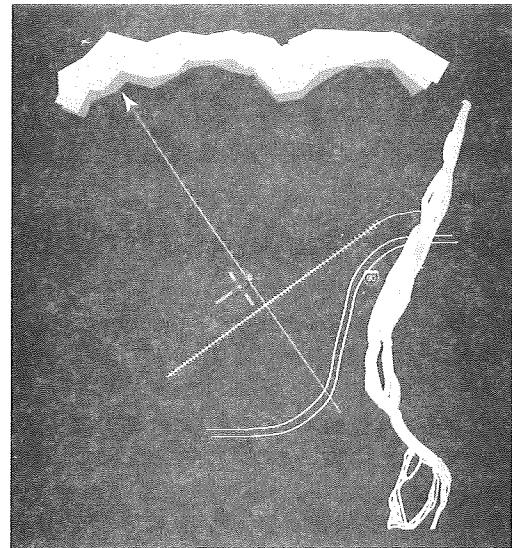


2. Coming from the east, Interstate 90 runs along the Yellowstone River and turns to the west as it passes south of Downtown. Twenty-seventh Street is the main entrance to Downtown from the Interstate running northwest to the airport on the Rims.



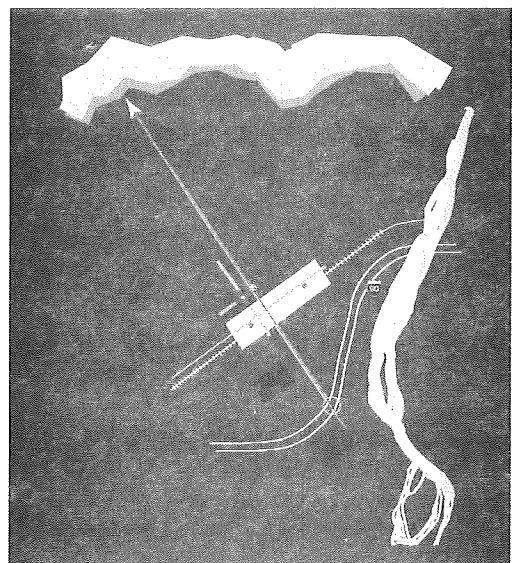
3. Running parallel to 27th St. is Broadway (28th St.). Broadway provides a good opportunity for a pedestrian oriented street. Second Avenue where it crosses Broadway is the heart of the Downtown Pedestrian Core. This is where community events are traditionally held and where many feel the center of Downtown is located.

Between 2nd and 3rd at 27th is the County Courthouse. The Courthouse Lawn is a well-located outdoor space and green area for public gatherings, and a respite from the surrounding urban environment.

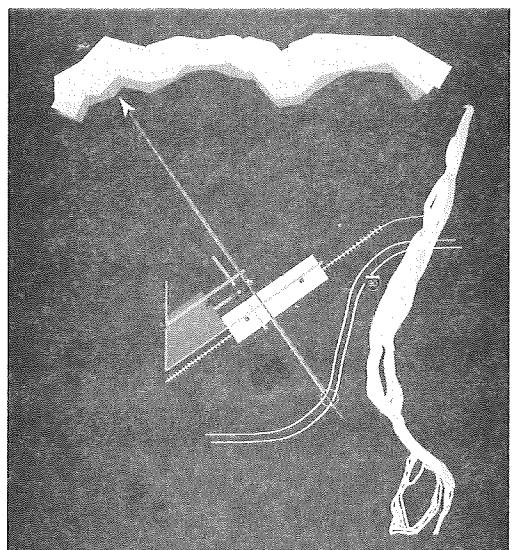


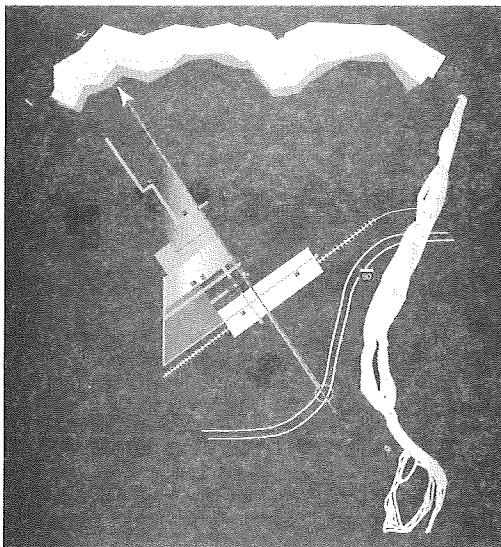
4. The Historic District on Montana Avenue, Old Town Billings, connects along Broadway to the Pedestrian Core. The Western Heritage Center and the Depot are among the landmarks. The property owners on Montana Avenue recently established a Special Improvement District (SID) for streetscape improvements.

The Depot, the older buildings, and railroad tracks are the key elements that combine to create the character of this district. As the South Side develops, the tracks should become less of a barrier and more of a zipper bringing the two sides together.

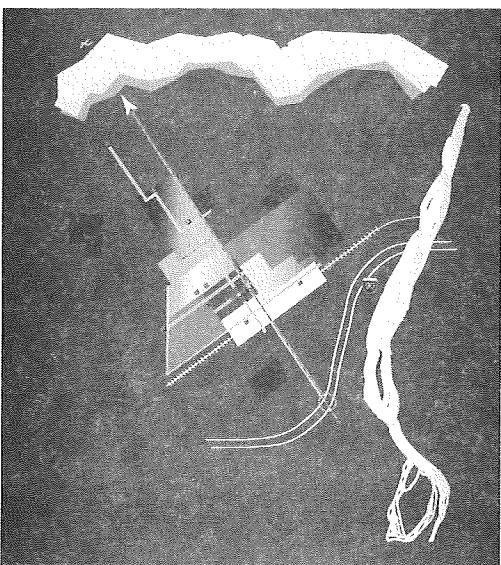


5. Third Avenue connects the east and west areas of Downtown from the Courthouse through West Downtown to the Moss Mansion. Along the way, 3rd Avenue passes by the Alberta Bair Theater and St. Patrick's Co-Cathedral, and within one block of the Yellowstone Art Museum, Lincoln Center, and the Transwestern Complex on 4th Avenue.



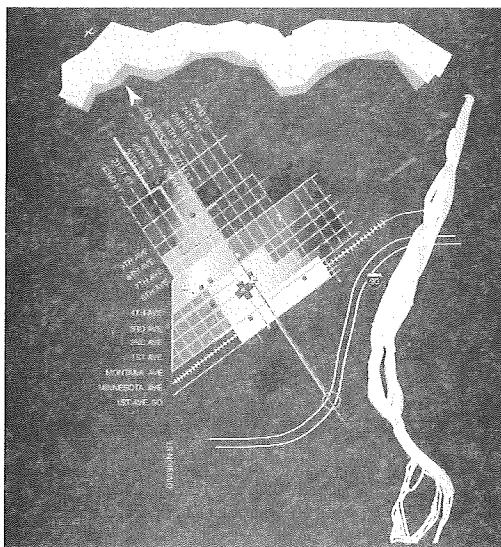


6. Broadway provides a pedestrian connection through North Downtown to the Medical Corridor and on to the MSU-B campus. Athletic Park and Cobb Field connect to the Medical Corridor along 9th Avenue. The pedestrian barriers on 4th Avenue should be lessened between West Downtown and North Downtown.



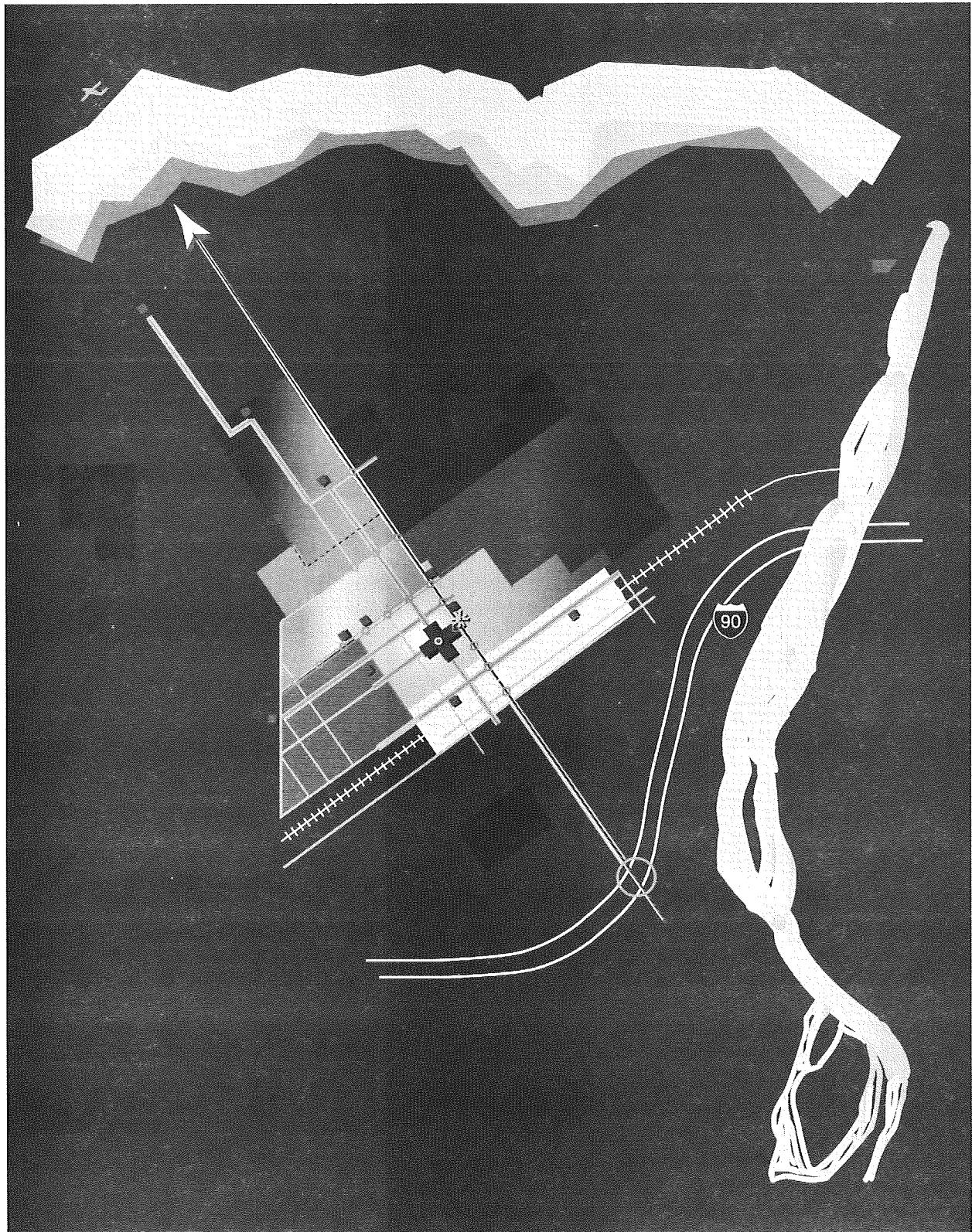
7. The East Transition Zone completes the Framework Diagram. A “zig-zag” pedestrian path through the East Transition Zone from the Courthouse and Art Center to the Depot will connect the Historic District to the Pedestrian Core. This connection is a priority within this Zone.

North Park along 6th provides an anchor for the residential neighborhood to the north. MetraPark lies 1.5 miles east of the Pedestrian Core. There may be an opportunity along the 5th Avenue right-of-way for transportation and other supporting uses.



8. The Central Downtown District is thus defined by the edges of its surrounding districts. The Central District, which includes the Pedestrian Core, houses the traditional Downtown retail and office uses.

Residential uses are encouraged throughout all of the districts.



The Downtown Billings Framework Plan

- *Central District*
- *Historic District*
- *West Downtown*
- *North Downtown*
- *East Transition Zone*

Districts

Each of the Districts has a different character. The land uses, architectural style, density of buildings, and ambience of each district makes it distinct from the others. As with people, in some cases the characteristics of these Districts are obvious; in others, they are more subtle.

The Framework Diagram describes the boundaries of these Districts. As people walk around Downtown, these boundaries do not feel, nor should they necessarily feel, like hard edges. Existing development blurs the line from one district to another.

However, there is an advantage to making distinct places within Downtown. The smaller sub-areas help us feel oriented, provide direction for development and land use, and help shape future plans so that each development builds on the next. In this way, the pattern of the District emerges and its character is strengthened.

This section contains a description of each District, with its goal identified, its character described, and its relation to the Framework Plan outlined in terms of its connections. These descriptions will guide individual property owners, developers, and public entities to implement projects that are in keeping with a common theme. The benefit of each individual project is extended and the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.



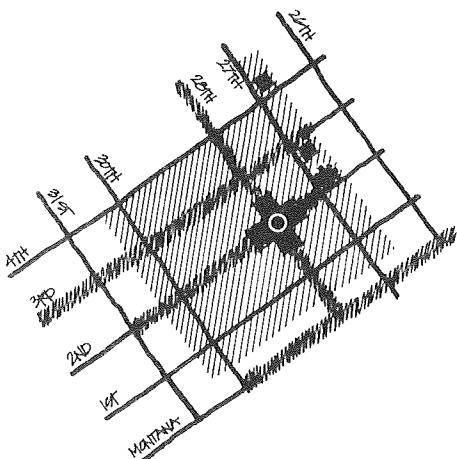
"I am particularly pleased with the process of the Plan; although it has been long and seemingly slow, the method and the format have obviously proven successful, evidenced by a lot of support from different facets of the community. We are fortunate to have all the parties (government and private) 'holding hands' instead of wearing boxing gloves. For the first time in over a quarter of a century I feel a workable, viable economical plan has been formed; there is no question that improvements and developments will evolve out of this plan that will enhance the community, and Downtown in particular."

-- Don Alweis

Central District

The Central District is the community's center and the location of government, business, specialty retail, restaurants, and cultural facilities; the place where the parades are; the place where we gather to celebrate.

GOAL: To identify the Central District as the Community's Center, shape the District to reflect who we are, promote a strong economic climate to nurture our businesses, and provide a comfortable place for the community to live, to work, and to gather.



CHARACTER: The Central District has the highest density of buildings, the most public uses, and the greatest mix of land uses in the City. The mix includes offices, retail shops, restaurants, coffeehouses, hotels, housing, churches, cultural facilities, and government buildings. As such, this is the place where the community sees itself in a mirror, and where visitors gather their impressions of Billings. This is the place where the citizens of Billings can meet to celebrate, relax, conduct business, and take in the character of the city.

The Central District contains the Pedestrian Core. The heart of the Pedestrian Core is where 2nd Avenue crosses Broadway. Broadway, running parallel to 27th St., has traditionally been the street with a pedestrian environment. Second Avenue has also maintained a pedestrian flavor in contrast to some of the other east/west one-way streets. The four block area between 27th and 29th from 1st to 3rd is the location of the greatest intensity of pedestrian activity. There is a sense in this area that one has arrived at the center. Although this is not obvious to the outsider, there is a cultural memory that highlights this intersection.

CONNECTIONS: Broadway is the connection from the Medical Corridor through the Pedestrian Core to the Montana Avenue Historic District. Second Avenue provides the east/west connection from the East Transition Zone to West Downtown. Streetscape improvements on Broadway and 2nd Avenue will reinforce the pedestrian friendliness, reduce the levels of motorized traffic, and increase the number of on-street parking spaces.

Rather than attempt to tie the Historic District or the Transwestern Complex to the Central District with specific urban design solutions, efforts should be focused on making the Pedestrian Core strong and magnetic. When this District is reinforced as a strong attraction, it may be time to look at expanding the Core.

Historic District

The Historic District is the physical remainder of Billings' birthplace; the connection to the railroad heritage; the reason that Billings is where it is today.

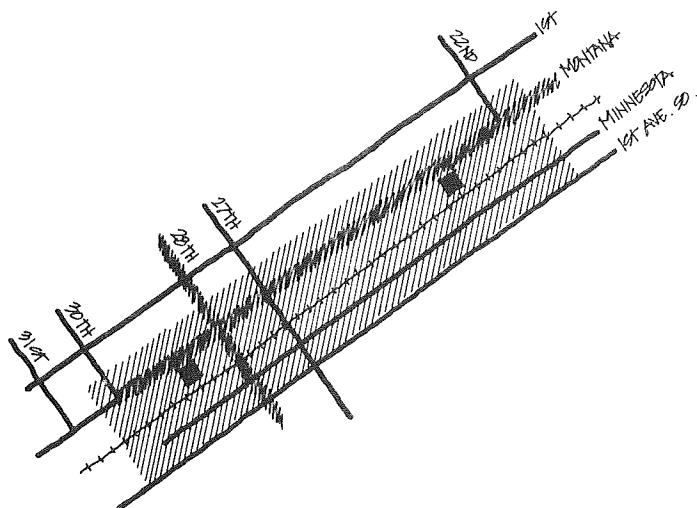
GOAL: To preserve and complement this heritage, create an active business, residential, and pedestrian environment, connect the Historic District with the other Downtown districts and the South Side neighborhood, and encourage property development in a manner appropriate to the district's historic character.

CHARACTER: The Western Heritage Center and the Depot are landmarks in this district. The railroad tracks in this District contribute to the romance of the rails as a key element. As the South Side develops, that district also should include the railroad tracks so that they bring the two neighborhoods together, reclaiming the importance of the railroads as the reason for Billings' geographic location.

This district is the one place in Billings that because of its historic character cannot be replaced. The building stock in this area is cohesive and of a quality that is the envy of many other cities that have lost their historic sections, either through neglect or purposeful urban renewal. Rehabilitation and renovation of historical structures is giving new life to this Downtown district.

CONNECTIONS: The Historic District along Montana Avenue should connect to the Pedestrian Core along Broadway. Recently the property owners on Montana Avenue established a Special Improvement District (SID) for streetscape improvements, which may help strengthen this connection.

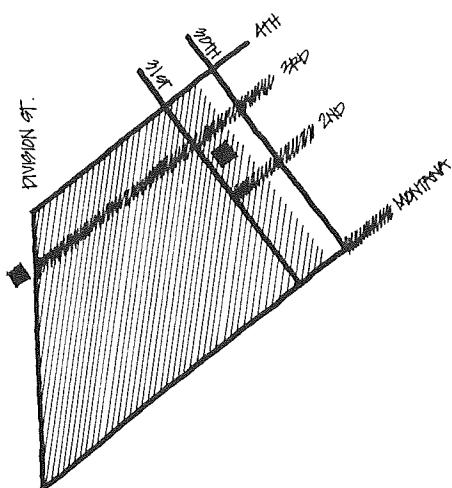
Pedestrian paths zigzagging through the Downtown grid will provide additional connections through the East Transition Zone.



West Downtown

West Downtown connects the Central District with the neighborhoods to the west and south. It is the area of greatest opportunity for development and for becoming a real neighborhood - the location of housing that is denser and larger in scale that fits in the neighborhood and of businesses smaller than in the Central District.

GOAL: To promote infill development of housing and support businesses, connect the Central District to the neighborhood beyond, and make this zone a "place" rather than a barrier.



CHARACTER: This district has great potential for development as a strong connection between the Downtown Core and the close-in neighborhoods. There are a number of single and multi-family dwellings within the district near Division Street. Institutional uses such as St. Patrick's Co-Cathedral and the school provide anchors for future development. Expansion of the existing green space within the district could lead to the creation of a neighborhood park as an anchor for residential development.

The surface parking lots do little to encourage the connections that make a district come alive. At the same time, the contiguous undeveloped parcels of land offer opportunities for new construction of a scale that is not possible in other districts.

CONNECTIONS: Looking down 3rd Avenue, the Moss Mansion is a focal point and a landmark of cultural and historical significance to the Billings community. Third Avenue is a critical pedestrian path, guiding people across Division Street to the historic Central Terry neighborhood. With improvements to the 3rd Avenue corridor, Downtown is better connected with the neighborhood and is situated to become the local shopping district.

Third Avenue is a spine connecting the Alberta Bair Theater, St. Patrick's Co-Cathedral, the Granite Tower, and the Moss Mansion. It shortens the psychological distance from the Pedestrian Core to the neighborhood, and provides a focus for development. The district then becomes a transition zone, containing larger residential development than is appropriate in the neighborhood and smaller businesses than those in the Downtown Core.

North Downtown

North Downtown connects the Central District with the Medical Corridor and North Park, and contains a combination of professional and medical businesses, services, and housing that supports these uses.

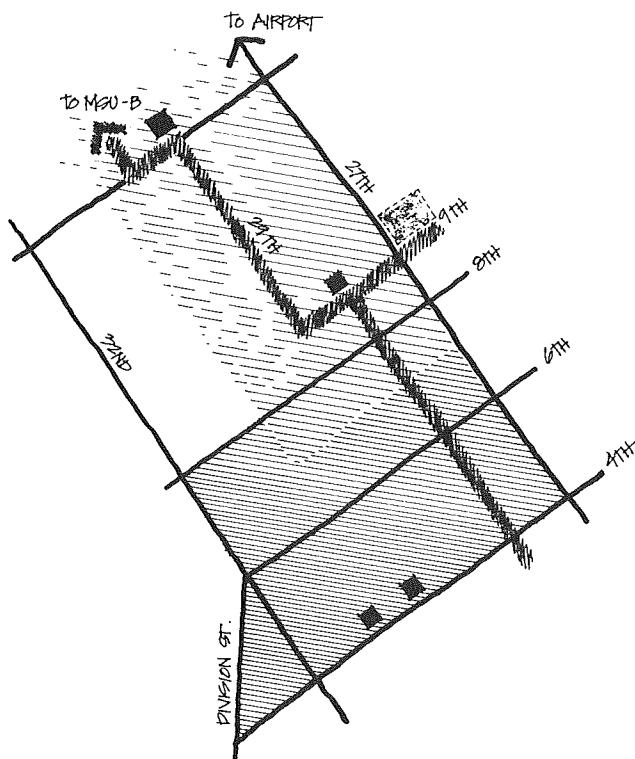
GOAL: To reduce the barriers of 4th and 6th, establish the area as both a discrete district and a recognized extension of the Central District, and connect the Medical Corridor and the University to Downtown's Central District.

CHARACTER: The Medical Corridor and Montana State University at Billings (MSU-B) are activity centers that bring thousands of people daily to North Downtown. Between the Medical Corridor and the Pedestrian Core are several blocks that do not encourage pedestrian activity because of parking lots. The perceived barriers of the one-way traffic on 4th and 6th Avenues also contribute to the sense of separation between these two districts.

North Downtown is well-located to be an inviting residential neighborhood that provides housing for the Downtown and for the Medical Corridor. The density of this housing should be higher than is found in the neighborhoods near Pioneer Park, and the scale should gradually step up as it moves eastward. Between 6th and 7th Avenues, the Community Commercial zoning may need adjustment to allow the district to develop to its potential. Between 31st and 30th Streets north of 7th, the Medical Corridor zoning supports medically-oriented land uses.

CONNECTION: Broadway provides the connection from the Pedestrian Core to the Medical Corridor. Streetscape improvements along this connection can reinforce the pedestrian atmosphere, as will supportive land uses and new developments to replace the parking lots. In the near-term, railing or other urban design features can provide a defined edge between the parking lots and the sidewalk.

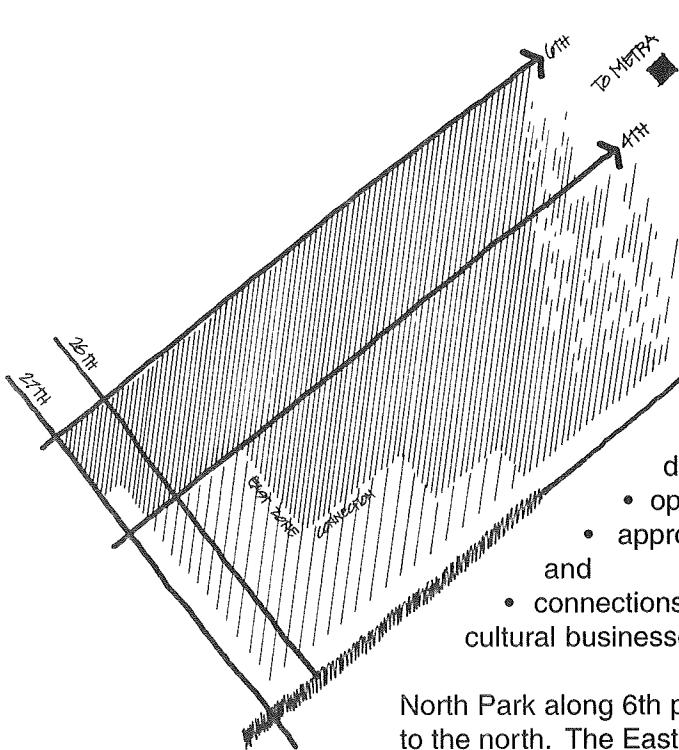
The pedestrian connection should also extend to the MSU-B campus, zig-zagging along 28th, 29th and 30th Streets.



East Transition Zone

The East Transition Zone encompasses a large area that connects the Central District, the Historic District, and MetraPark, with transitional uses that over time will strengthen the connections.

GOAL: To encourage the western edge of this district to develop so that it connects the Central District to the Depot area, and identify the ideas discussed to date so they can become a starting point for a future effort that concentrates on this zone. The long-term goal is to improve the connection from the Pedestrian Core to MetraPark.



CHARACTER: The East Transition Zone covers a large area. The distance between 27th Street and MetraPark is over one-and-a-half miles. Many people would like to see this district develop into something more than it is today. Because of its immense size, this district requires a separate planning effort. When this occurs, the East Transition Zone Plan should address:

- improved connections between the Core and MetraPark, including signage, transportation, and mapping connections;
- the 5th Avenue rail corridor and additional rail corridors with potential as open space corridors;
- opportunities for a new park;
- appropriate land uses near MetraPark including lodging; and
- connections between the Historic District and the nearby agricultural businesses.

North Park along 6th provides an anchor for the residential neighborhood to the north. The East Transition Zone should highlight its agricultural and ranching roots and draw from the character of the stockyards. This zone should also contain hotels and services for the MetraPark complex.

CONNECTIONS As the Plan for the Eastern Transition Zone is developed, the pedestrian connections along 2nd and 3rd Avenues should be examined to determine whether to extend them to the east. If not, other connections should be developed that logically align with the Downtown Framework. This should include internal connections as well as connections to the Central District, the Historic District, and the North Park neighborhood.

MetraPark lies 1.5 miles east of the Pedestrian Core; a better connection is needed between the two. In the long-term, land use changes are necessary. That effort will require planning beyond this project. Meanwhile, a shuttle system, public relations materials, signage, and maps could improve the connection. There may be an opportunity along the 5th Avenue right-of-way for transportation and other supporting uses.

Downtown as the Community's Center

As noted before, Billings is fortunate, endowed by nature with a sublime setting between the Rims and the Yellowstone River. Until recently, Billings has not needed to look beyond the Downtown as the Community Center because Downtown is located in the geographic center, between the Heights and the West End. But as the city has grown, all of the functions that used to always occur within the Downtown no longer do.

Development trends in Billings are similar to those in other cities across the country. As the city grows, residences, retail centers, businesses, and institutions tend to distribute themselves on undeveloped parcels, farther and farther from the Downtown, the traditional center. And in Billings, as in other cities across the country, as the city changes and grows, the role of the Downtown changes with it. Fundamentally, the impetus for this planning effort has been to understand how Downtown can respond to these changes and retain its position as the heart and soul of the city.

Strengthening Downtown's position as the community center makes economic sense. A healthy Downtown has a positive economic impact on the entire city. Economically, Downtown has the highest investment per square foot of any area in the city. When this investment does well, the City benefits in the form of tax revenues, and the community benefits from the multiplier effect of that money.

The citizens of Billings expressed a vision of Downtown as the Community's Center. The title carries greater significance than being the regional center for finance, business, education, cultural facilities, and medical care. The Community Center is the place that conveys the intangible, unquantifiable sense of community that the citizens of Billings value.

Downtown provides a compact place for people to gather and feel the sense of community that distinguishes Billings from other cities. Downtown is where the city of Billings presents its best face to the public; local residents, regional visitors, and the national and international tourists base their impressions of Billings on what they see in the Downtown.

"The health of a community is directly connected to the soul of Downtown. We all want Downtown Billings to be alive and vital; a place where people want to congregate. Thankfully we now have a framework to get us to our vision of a healthy, vibrant community center where pedestrians, children, families, shoppers, worshippers - everyone will be here."

-- Sandra Merwin



"It has been a privilege to work on this plan with such a committed dedicated group of people.

For the first time, leaders from local government, business, cultural and faith entities, property owners and concerned citizens, all of whom have their own vested interest in Downtown Billings, have put aside individual agendas and come together to produce a vision of what Downtown can become. Working together, this plan truly represents the future of Downtown Billings as Everyone's Neighborhood."

-- Dan Berry

The Downtown Billings Framework Plan provides the pieces to enrich Downtown as the center of the Billings community. The Framework Elements are the measuring sticks for action. As the people of Billings implement the Plan Components, they should look back to the Vision Map, the lists of Issues, Values and Assets, the Framework Diagram, and the District descriptions to ensure that projects fulfill community expectations and desires.

The Plan Components in the next section are the actions that apply to all of the Downtown, although they may apply differently in each District.

As the implementation goes forward, these are the objectives to accomplish:

- **Provide greater pedestrian comfort.**
- **Improve the physical connections between and within districts.**
- **Balance access to, through, and within the Downtown.**
- **Strengthen the economic base and vitality of Downtown.**
- **Take an entrepreneurial viewpoint to manage the Downtown.**
- **Create Downtown as a place where people want to live.**
- **Reveal the character and soul of Billings.**
- **Align City regulations and policies to support the objectives of the Downtown Billings Framework Plan.**
- **Bring active uses to the "correct" location in Downtown.**



Plan Components

Each of the five Plan Components is based on the Framework Elements (page 16), the foundation of this Plan. The Plan Components represent the set of actions that will go forward to implement the Vision, preserve and enhance the Assets and address the Issues, while preserving the Values identified by the Steering Committee. Thus, the Framework for Downtown will be strengthened and its Districts will emerge.

PLAN COMPONENTS

- *Organization*
- *Moving About*
- *Kit of Parts*
- *Gathering Spaces*
- *Housing*

The Plan Components are:

- Organization: The private sector leadership group that represents property owners, businesses, retailers, and those committed to the Downtown. The Downtown Organization is inclusive by design and works with public agencies on a common agenda for Downtown growth and development that benefits the community including such activities as business retention, historic preservation, etc.
- Moving About: The street system, parking, and shuttle opportunities
- Kit of Parts: The streetscape and public space elements (lights, benches, etc.) throughout the Downtown
- Gathering Spaces: The system of public spaces downtown
- Housing: A strategy for providing a range of housing options for Downtown

These Plan Components are a call to action and set the course for initial actions, mid- and long-term projects, and ongoing monitor-and-review activity. They prescribe the design character and style of public spaces, transportation initiatives, and an implementing organization. They are the agenda for action.

However, a critical aspect of this Plan is that it is designed to be flexible and incorporate upcoming opportunities. The priority projects represent a series of incremental improvements that will combine to make Downtown what the community wants it to be: the community's center - vibrant, thriving, full of people and activity.

During their Education Sessions, the Committee learned that most Downtown success stories share a similar characteristic: they start out with a series of successful "base hits" - important projects of a smaller scale that set up the "home runs" - the big projects. The priority projects form the solid base for Downtown. The Committee felt that these Plan Components outline projects that can and will be accomplished and which will set the tone for the growth and development of Downtown for the next twenty years.

The Plan Components respond to the list of Issues that the Steering Committee created with the Framework Elements.

ISSUE

The Community Center

Forward Thinking
Moving About

Downtown Business
Image

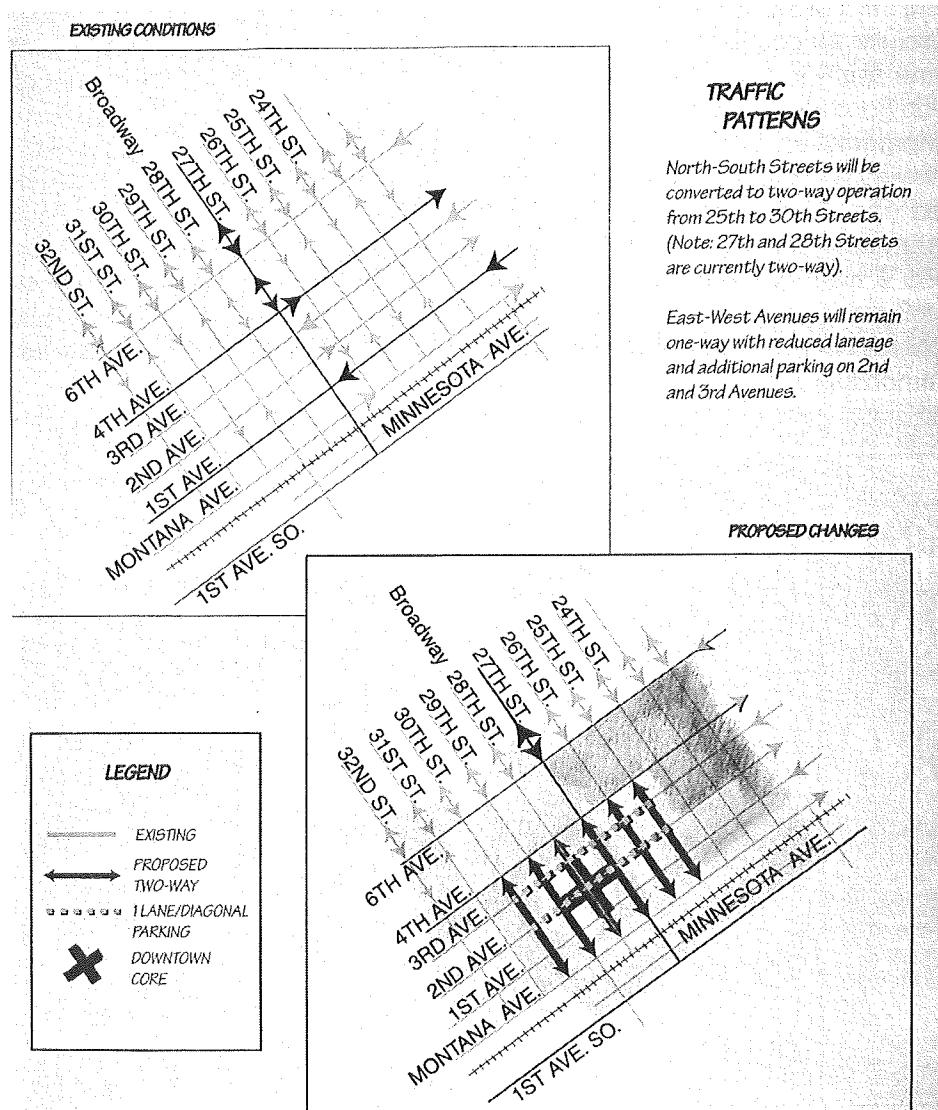
PLAN COMPONENT

- Kit of Parts,
- Gathering Spaces,
- Housing
- Organization
- Moving About,
- Kit of Parts
- Organization
- Kit of Parts

One-Way to Two-Way Conversions

Except on the "sacred" streets mentioned above, City engineers are open to the possibility of converting existing one-way streets to two-way operations. They need additional traffic engineering analysis before making a final decision. This analysis should include looking at ease of movement through intersections and adjustments to traffic flow patterns.

The recommendations for Downtown streets should be implemented in an incremental manner. The driving public of Billings will have time to adjust their driving habits before City Traffic Engineering monitors impacts to ensure that the Downtown street system meets traffic needs now and in the future.



The Action Plan for Downtown streets may include the following options:

Near-term

- Increase the number of on-street parking spaces with angled parking on selected streets. Decrease the number of through-lanes on these streets. In combination, these two approaches can slow traffic on Downtown streets and make them more pedestrian-friendly.
- Retain one-way operations on Fourth and Sixth Avenues North. Add pedestrian amenities at the intersections to make crossing easier and to lessen the sense that Fourth and Sixth are barriers between the Central District, the other districts and the close-in neighborhoods.
- For the north/south streets, one-way operations may be unnecessary on most streets. Implement incremental changes to the one-way/two-way system, and monitor the impacts. Traffic flow and levels of service at intersections where one-ways are converted to two-way operations need to be at an acceptable traffic engineering level.
- The first set of streets to be converted from one-way to two-way operations should be North 29th/30th. At the same time, North 25th/26th could also be converted to two-way. These conclusions are subject to further analysis.

Mid-term

- Widen the sidewalks on 2nd Avenue North between North 28th and North 29th. This is the core block.
- Widen the sidewalks on other streets or increase the amount of on-street parking. Further details and implementation priorities will be decided as Downtown grows.

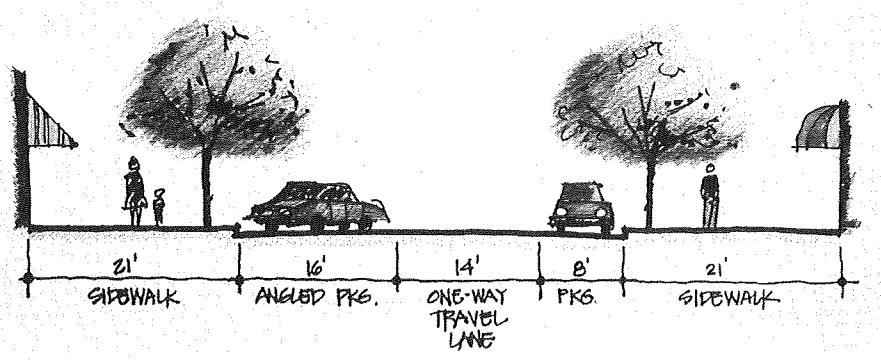
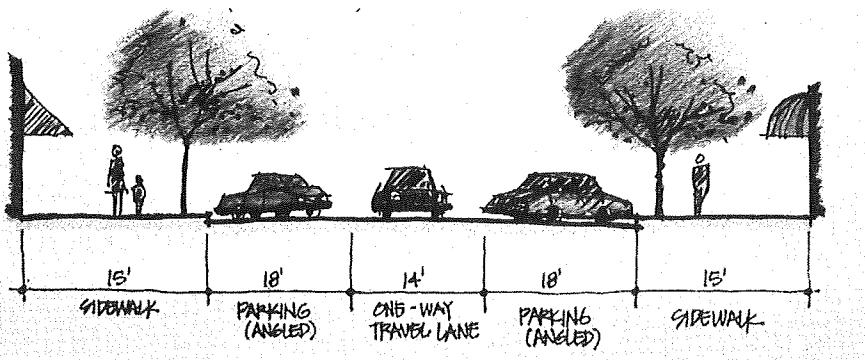
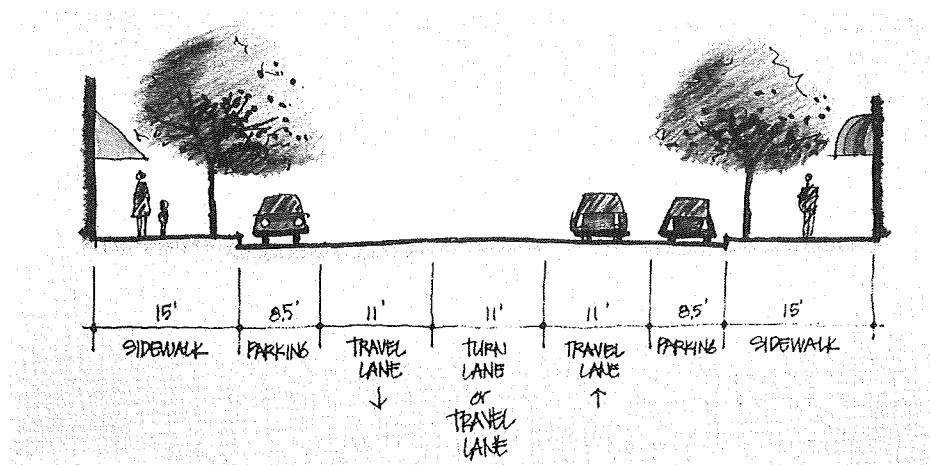
Long-term

- First Ave. South should become an alternative route for through-traffic currently using First Ave. North/Montana Ave.
- Monitor and take appropriate steps to avoid unacceptable railroad traffic and switching activity in Downtown.

Parking

The existing street profile for most Downtown streets has three moving traffic lanes with one lane of parallel parking on each side of the street. The proposed changes would reduce the through lanes to one or two and increase the parking by providing angled parking on at least one side of the street. Where emergency vehicle access issues can be satisfactorily addressed, diagonal parking on both sides is recommended.

Currently, an "ideal" one-block section (no bus-stops, fire hydrants, etc.) of the east/west Downtown streets holds 20 parking spaces. Naturally, few blocks are ideal. With the proposed changes, a typical block would provide as many as 34 parking spaces. On any individual block, the number of

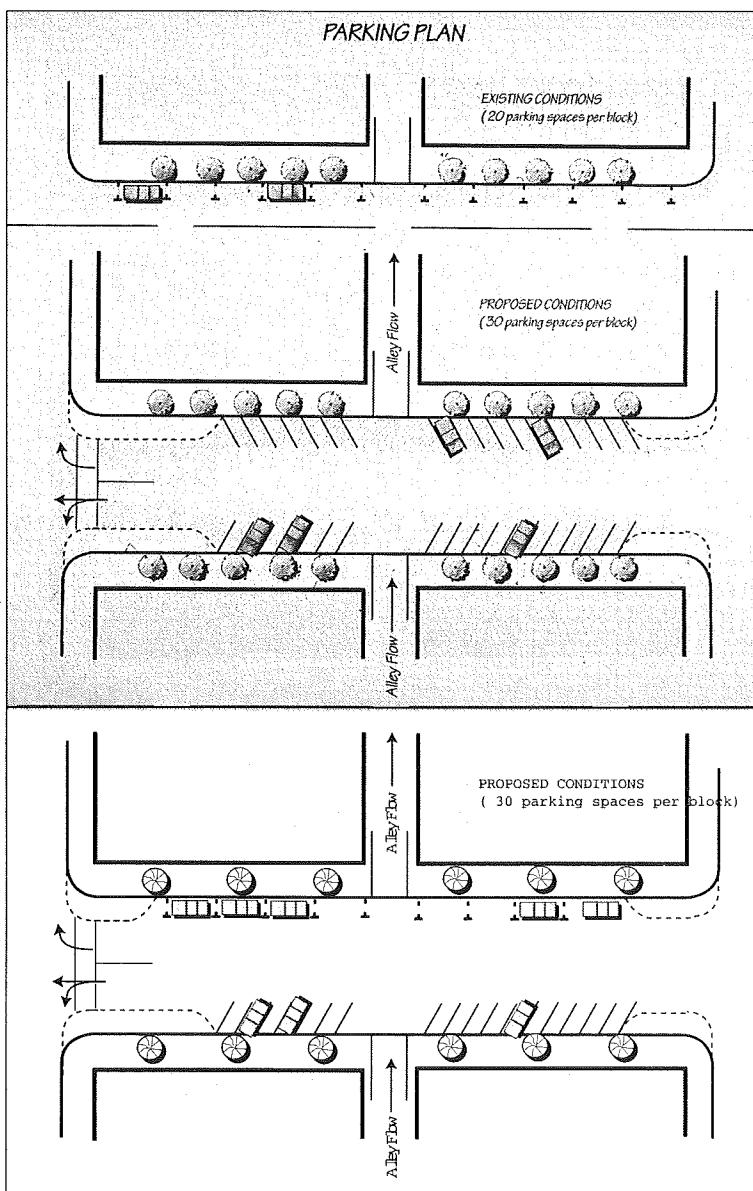


The Parking Plan shows the existing parking configuration, and options for adding to the number of on-street parking spaces.

Where angled parking is implemented, emergency vehicle access must be maintained.

parking spaces, both for parallel and angled parking, is reduced because of fire hydrants, bus stops, etc. The overall effect of converting the on-street parking on 2nd Avenue North and 3rd Avenue North between North 25th St. and North 30th St. from parallel to angled parking on one or both sides of the street is an increase of 20-50% more parking spaces, depending on the final design details.

These changes to Downtown street configurations respond to concerns citizens have expressed since the beginning of this project. This approach works well with recommendations from the Mayor's Task Force on Parking.



Converting the on-street parking on 2nd Avenue North and 3rd Avenue North between North 25th St. and North 30th St. from parallel to angled parking on one or both sides of the street is an increase of 20-50% more parking spaces, depending on the final design details.

Large Vehicle Parking

The drivers of RVs and large vehicles need places to park when they come Downtown during the day. Discussions with Montana RailLink revealed that there is land available for this purpose adjacent to the tracks and also along the 5th Avenue North Corridor.

Large vehicle parking and RV parking could be accommodated in areas adjacent to the tracks and near South 27th St. This could be associated with the main gateway from the south. To enhance the gateway image, the parking area should be well-landscaped and integrated into the gateway design concept.

This type of facility could serve different needs at different times of day: employee parking during the day, large vehicles at other times, and possibly a Farmers Market on weekends. One of the two major Downtown hotels has suggested they would be willing to participate in development and management of a parking lot on South 28th St. near the railroad tracks as long as they could use it for parking tour buses, performers' buses, etc.

Alternative Modes: Bicycling and Shuttles

Not all streets are appropriate for all levels of bicycling ability. Experienced bicyclists are accustomed to riding on streets that are heavily traveled. Downtown streets do not pose a significant problem for them. On the other hand, inexperienced bicyclists should not be encouraged to ride on busy Downtown streets. Route designations are not appropriate on Downtown streets with high levels of automobile traffic because the designation may cause inexperienced riders to assume a false expectation of safety.



Any changes to the street system should include consideration of bicyclists. The BikeNet Plan proposes a trail along the tracks behind Montana Avenue and the Depot to bring people into Downtown. Additional routes to Downtown are outlined in that Plan. Bicycle racks for parking should be conveniently provided throughout the Downtown.

Many citizens suggested that a Downtown shuttle would be helpful to businesses and strengthen Downtown. The Steering Committee explored this idea with a shuttle design expert. The conditions for a successful shuttle include:

- Compact and identifiable origins and destinations
- A strong pedestrian environment
- Major private sector support
- A reliable convenient service with unique vehicles and a strong marketing campaign

The Committee felt that Downtown did not meet enough of these conditions to support a shuttle at this time. The cost of operations, vehicle purchase and maintenance constitutes a significant investment that should be made when the time is right. As the Downtown develops and the pedestrian environment improves, a shuttle should be reconsidered.

Kit of Parts

In any urban environment, there is a collection of street lights, trees, benches, public art and other elements that are placed along the street to provide pedestrian comfort. More often than not, these elements are of varying style, quality, and age. Further, they often detract from the pedestrian environment instead of adding to it.

Many cities have taken great pains to either preserve their streetscape style or create a new one that portrays a specific character. The pedestrian environment of these cities is often more comfortable. Rather than a jumble of leftover elements, the streetscape and other outdoor amenities, such as those found in parks and plazas, are an important part of the city's image.

These elements – benches, kiosks, lights, etc. – when designed as a series to specifically create an image are called a "Kit of Parts." The Kit is a collection of typical street elements that creates a cohesive urban design. When placed in a logical geometric pattern, it provides a sense of pedestrian comfort, identity, and consistency to the Downtown.

As part of this Plan effort, local designers and the project team members participated in a workshop to develop a Kit of Parts for Downtown Billings. They melded three elements that form Billings' character: railroad and light industrial heritage, agricultural roots, and Billings' position as an urban center. The elements they designed form the basis for streetscape improvements, park design, and the installation of amenities that combine to portray Downtown's image.

KIT OF PARTS: (kit • of • parts), *n.* 1. *The collection of streetscape elements and public amenities specified for a downtown to create a cohesive urban design. The arrangement and placement of these elements into a geometry that creates order.* 2. *An assemblage of street elements which portray the character of an urban environment.* 3. *A collection of elements, i.e. benches, street lights, trash receptacles, etc. used by designers to create an image, provide comfort, and coordinate utilities and street amenities.*



"Billings' Downtown is already clean and attractive. As a long time resident I want it to be more-- bustling with workers and shoppers (and not just from 8-5). I want it to be the hub of community activity and cultural offerings. I want it to sizzle! It was exciting to be part of the Volunteer Planning effort. Because of the effort of many, the best is yet to come!"

-- Judy Johnson

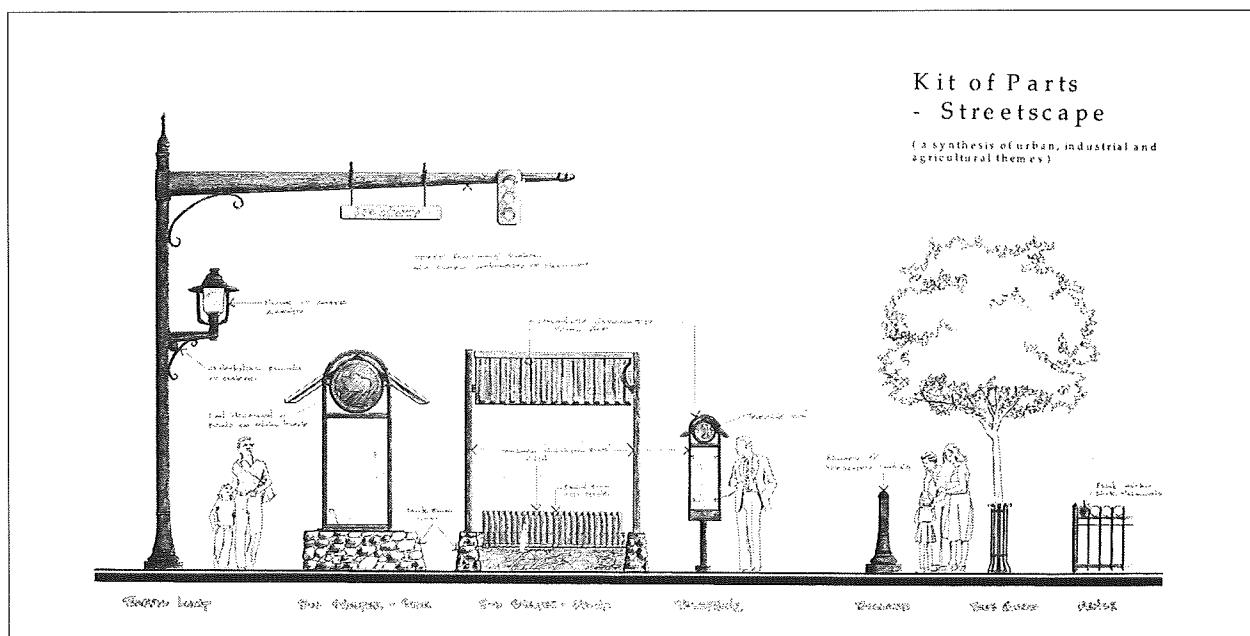
Streetscape

The Kit of Parts will guide the creation of a streetscape that provides comfort and orientation throughout the Downtown. It portrays a strong sense of Billings' character and sets it apart from other cities. The highest concentration of streetscape elements will be in the Central District at the Pedestrian Core. Radiating out from the Core, the scale, color or shape of the elements may change. The placement of elements may vary depending on changes in land use; for example, in a residential area there may be fewer kiosks and vending carts but more bus shelters and trees.

The Kit of Parts should be used in simple geometric patterns: lights should be placed the same distance apart, trees should form an edge, benches should be logically placed facing toward an inviting view, etc. Artwork, fountains, and other features should be used sparingly to avoid a cluttered look. The placement of the Kit of Parts provides stability and a design rhythm that calms the busy urban environment

Pedestrians often wait at the corner. Corners should be designed to make that wait comfortable and interesting. At intersections, the placement of Kit of Parts elements on each of the four corners should work together to make the intersection appear as a single place. In this way, the intersections themselves become memorable places in Downtown.

To further enhance the pedestrian experience and to slow traffic, selected intersections such as 2nd and Broadway may have a raised section. That



"A goal of mine since I moved back to Billings has been to help Downtown be a more desirable place to be. This plan will facilitate what it takes to make Downtown Billings not only a great place for the people of Billings to live, work and play but also make Billings a city tourists will remember and want to visit again and again."

-- Chuck Barthuly

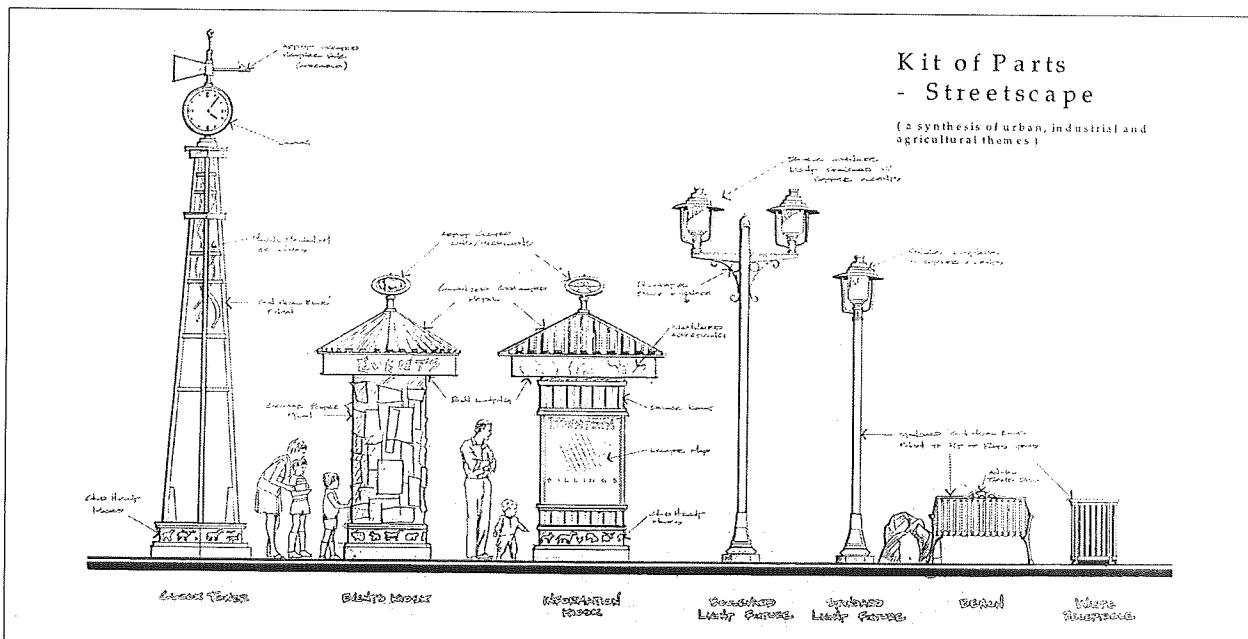
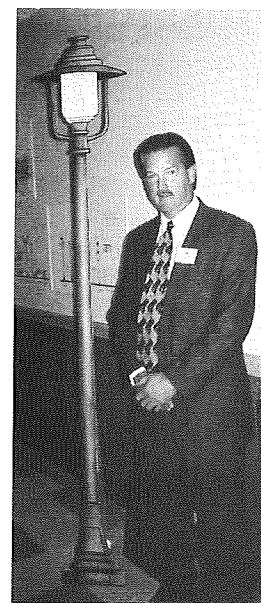
is, the street will rise to the level of the curb as a car approaches the intersection. This eliminates the need for pedestrian ramps and makes street crossing easier. This also tends to slow traffic, further enhancing pedestrian safety. The pedestrian areas, such as the crosswalks, corners and intersections, need to be kept clear of obstructions.

The term "streetscape element" includes not only the lights and benches, but also awnings, signs, lighting, or sidewalk cafe features. The streetscape elements may vary from district to district, yet still maintain cohesion and continuity.

The Kit of Parts drawings show the synthesis of the urban, industrial, and agricultural themes. The streetlights, benches and additional street furniture are painted gunmetal blue. The design incorporates natural elements such as stones, granite paving, plants, wild grasses and trees.

The Kit of Parts is based on the idea that all of Downtown Billings has a unifying identity within which there are identifiable places. Each district has its own character and contributes to the overall identity of Downtown. The elements of the streetscape have the following characteristics:

- simple
- consistent
- comfortable
- drawn from the natural environment and surrounding elements (Rims, River, land, sky)



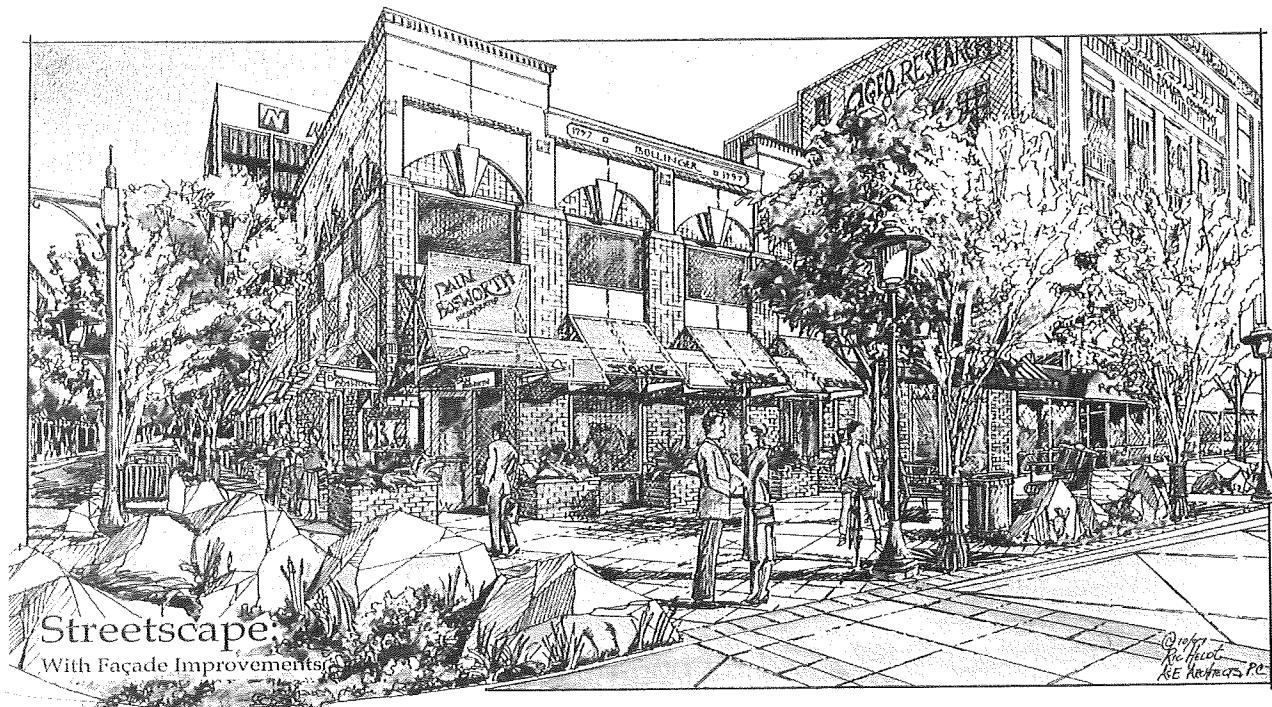
The intersection of 3rd and Broadway could be greatly enhanced not only with streetscape, but also with trees to soften the hard surfaces of the streets and buildings.

A demonstration project in the near future could serve as an example of the Kit of Parts and set the tone for a strong design. The illustration below shows the corner of 2nd and Broadway with the Streetscape Kit of Parts in place.



All the elements in combination will provide a neutral backdrop against which many things can happen. They will create a stage for the activities of the Downtown urban center.

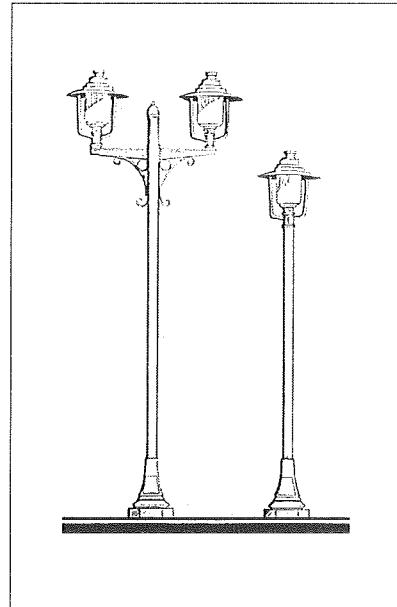
The Kit of Parts will be implemented throughout the Downtown over time. The Committee recommends an initial demonstration project in the near future to show an example of the Kit of Parts and to set the tone for a strong design. As future development occurs in any part of Downtown, the Kit of Parts can be applied. In this way, the Downtown will begin to have a cohesive look with a strong Billings identity – a place that people are proud to call home.



Lighting

The quality of Downtown lighting greatly effects the night-time atmosphere. The Steering Committee discussed lighting options with an expert whose presentation was funded in part by the U.S. Department of Environmental Quality. The discussion centered on how most cities have street lighting designed for traffic, not pedestrians. With new technologies, cities can now be lit for both vehicular safety and pedestrian comfort. These types of lights are energy efficient and can replace the need for the overhead "cobra" lights. The Committee recommends that this type of lighting fixture be explored when the first streetscape project is initiated.

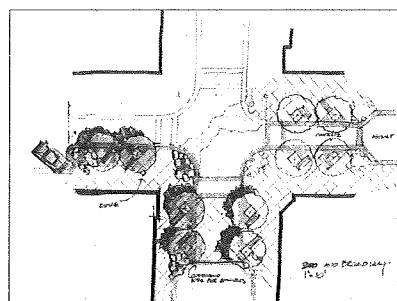
Further, uplighting historic buildings and features like the steeple at St. Patrick's Co-Cathedral is encouraged. St. Patrick's is considering using this technique and the Committee encourages others to do the same. The collective image of thoughtfully lighted Downtown buildings can be both beautiful and dramatic.



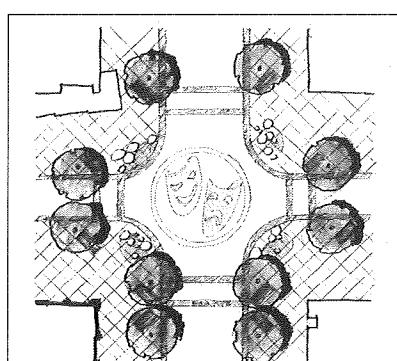
Gateways, Entryways and Intersections

Gateways and entryways in an urban setting serve as an invitation to the city, or denote a district. They may also serve as landmarks providing orientation and direction, or may serve as a meeting place.

Visually, they should provide interest and be consistent with the character and style of the district in which they are located. Gateways and entryways improve the access points to parks and or districts.



Gateways work most effectively at the intersection of a street rather than mid-block, and are excellent for the denotation of parks and plazas. In addition, they may add scale to a backdrop of large buildings.



Gateways and intersection design can be quite simple and often incorporate elements of the Kit of Parts. Some are simply landscaping; others may have a column, kiosk, special lighting, or other distinctive feature. Intersections themselves may have paving designs that add identity and indicate pedestrian activity.

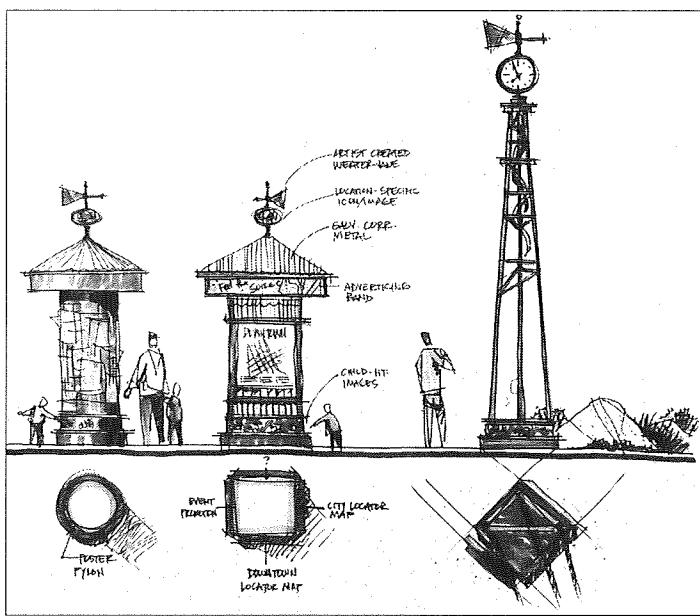
Signage

Directional Signage: There are three major types of directional signage that are needed for Downtown Billings:

- to Downtown
- in a car within Downtown to parking
- on foot within Downtown

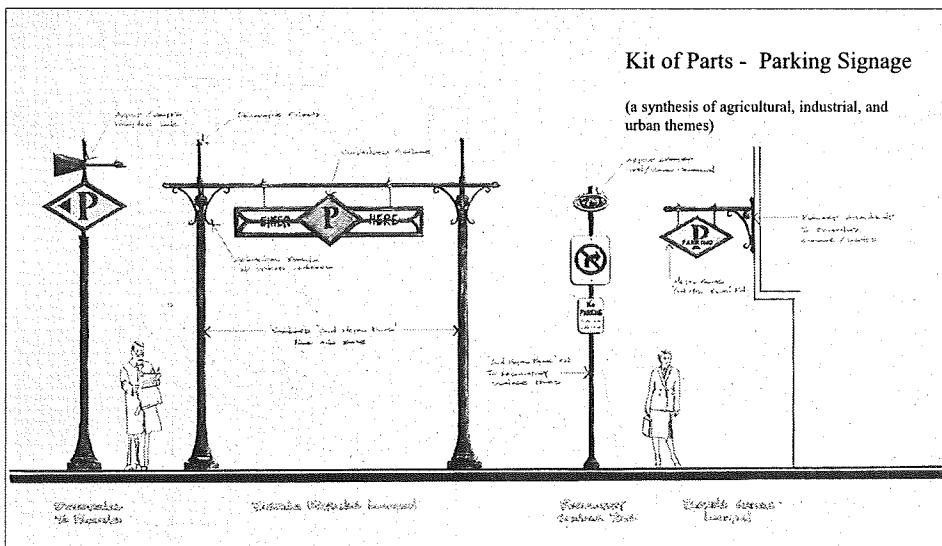
There are plans in place to change the Center City directional signage along Interstate 90 to direct motorists to 27th St. Signage from the airport should be improved.

Within Downtown, the Kit of Parts provides directory kiosks to help orient pedestrians. Beyond giving specific information on streets, landmarks, and destinations, the kiosk itself helps orient people. Additionally, the windmill art-piece will act as a landmark and guidepost.



Regulatory Signs: Signs should be kept to a minimum while fulfilling their function. They should be orderly, and thoughtfully placed. Signs should not interfere with the other street furnishings and pedestrian movement. The number of poles should be kept to a minimum. Attaching more than one sign to a pole is preferable to adding poles if it can be done without appearing cluttered.

Commercial Signs: The primary purpose of shop signs is to identify particular stores. Beyond that, they should be visible without overpowering the facades and streets. The streetscape is made up of the cumulative effect of all the store signs and other elements together. If one is competing with the next, there is an overall negative effect which devalues the shopping area.



It may be desirable in the future to address City regulations and/or pursue voluntary guidelines to influence the size and placement of private signs. Perhaps the regulations in their attempt to prohibit unattractive or inappropriate signage are preventing clever, artistic signage that could add to the character of Downtown.

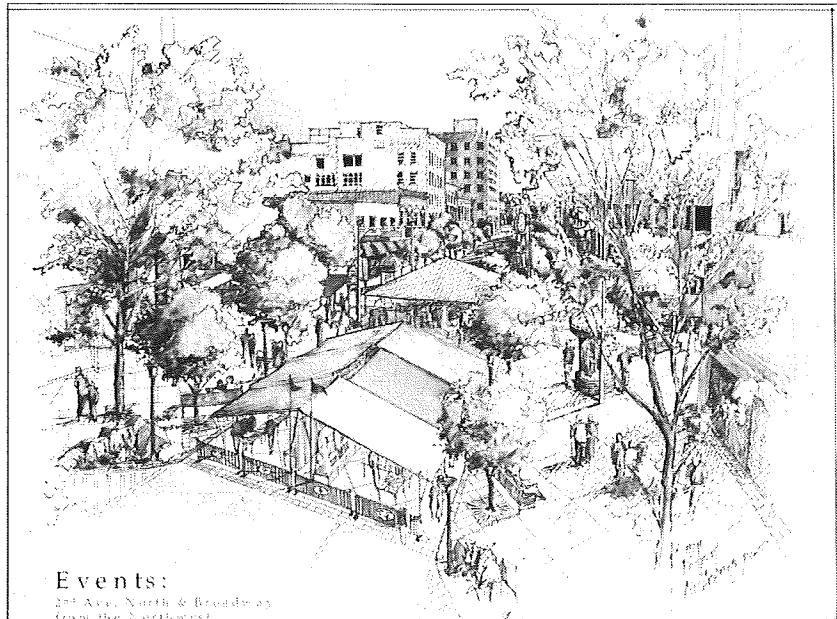
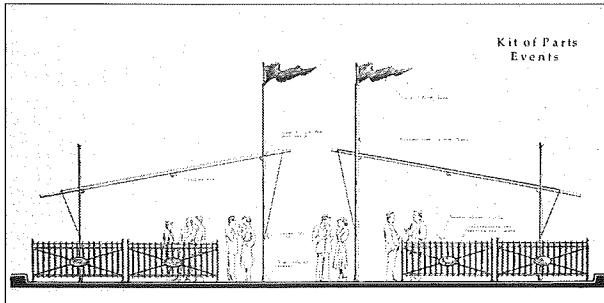
Kit of Parts: Events

From time to time, people want to gather Downtown at special events. The heart of the Pedestrian Core at 2nd Avenue and Broadway is the traditional place for events to occur. To change those streets for the duration of the event into an urban plaza, at once friendly, inviting and fun, the local designers and project team included a special package of elements that consists of tents, barriers, and flags.

These elements have been sized and designed so that they can easily be assembled, taken down, and stored. They fit the dimensions of the street and provide shade and protection to vendors and event participants. Further, the Event Kit of Parts is of the same design type as the streetscape elements and thus it fits comfortably within its environment. It enhances the image and comfort of

Downtown events.

People passing by will begin to recognize the assembly activity as a sign that the community is about to gather in Downtown. The Event Kit of Parts will be the signal that a good time is just around the corner, with lots of people and fun.



The Pedestrian Core at 2nd Avenue and Broadway is the traditional place for special events. To change those streets for the duration of the event into an urban plaza, at once friendly, inviting and fun, the Event Kit of Parts contains a special package of tents, barriers, and flags.

They provide shade and protection to vendors and event participants. Further, the Event Kit of Parts enhances the image and comfort of Downtown events.

Gathering Spaces

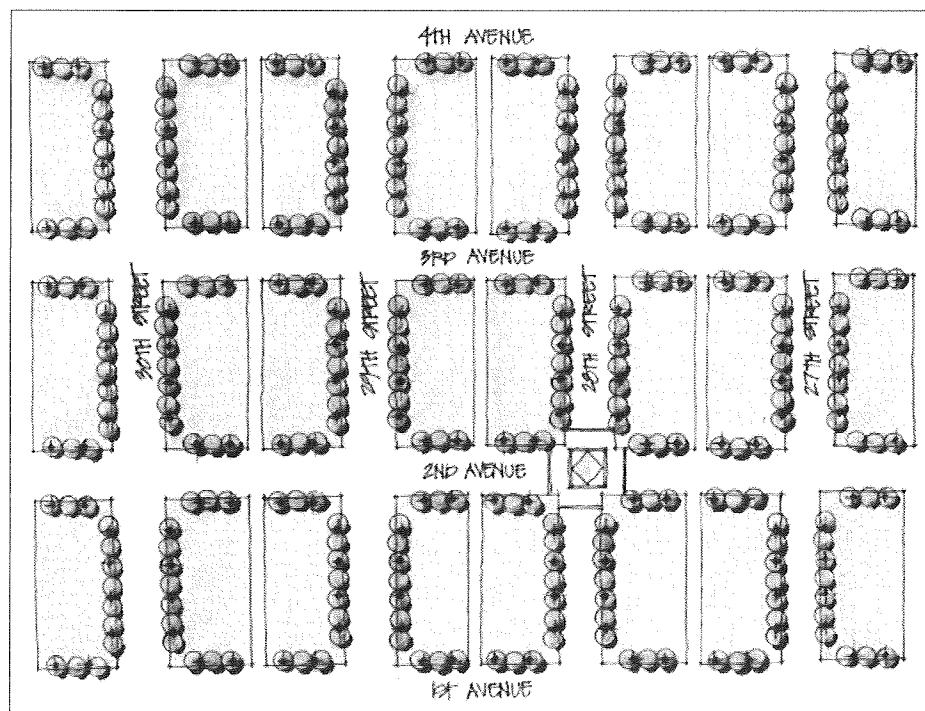
Parks, plazas and open space serve many functions. They are a welcome relief from the hectic pace of urban life. They can be contemplative and provide a place of nature within the city. They are a place for monumental grandeur and a place to be among people. They can provide urban respite - a place for quiet conversation and friendship. The open spaces provide a common ground and create places of privilege - places that individuals can not reasonably provide for themselves but that the larger community can.

Across the country, many Downtowns claim their sidewalks for open space. In Billings, rather than tear down buildings for open space, the Steering Committee recommends concentrating resources to make the sidewalks work as open space. It may be advantageous to widen some sidewalks in the core. When there is an event, closing off streets creates a pedestrian crossing. In this way, Downtown Billings can have good traffic flow and occasionally use the street as an urban plaza.

In the dense urban environment, parks and open space soften the effect of the buildings, sidewalks and streets. Connecting these spaces with trees along a sidewalk or by making use of an unused space makes them work as a system that complements the Framework.

The Street Tree Plan shows the suggested rhythm and spacing for street trees in the Pedestrian Core. Intersections and corners should be clear of obstructions to facilitate pedestrian crossing.

Street trees should be appropriate for the urban setting. The selected trees should be durable in harsh conditions and require minimal maintenance.



Parks and Plazas

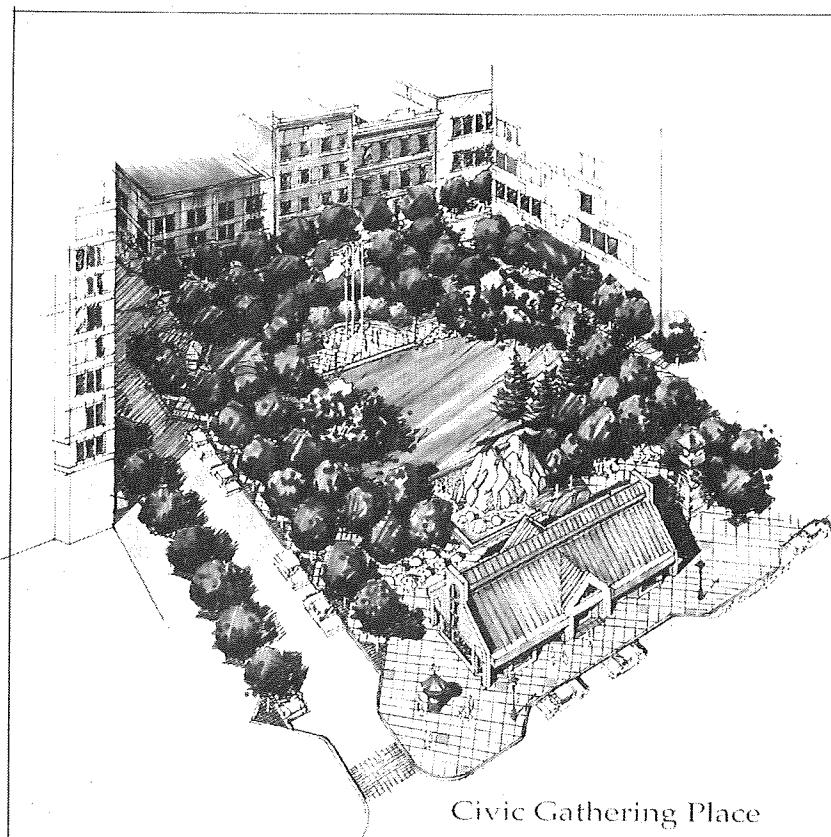
Green space and open space contribute to the character of the district. They can give identity to an area and serve as landmarks. The illustrations show three types of Downtown parks: a civic gathering space, a Downtown neighborhood park, and smaller pockets in neighborhoods. The sketches incorporate elements from the Kit of Parts to show how the parks might look.



The civic gathering space should provide open space close to the Core that is designed for important civic events, and yet doesn't feel empty when no one is present. The Steering Committee was excited about the opportunities for a multi-purpose outdoor activity center. The park could also contain indoor facilities to complement the outdoor activity center.

The neighborhood park should be a respite that provides a place for children to play away from traffic. This type of park is appropriate for the districts surrounding the Core, particularly the West Downtown district, where mixed use and residential development will overlap.

Where space and resources allow, pockets of smaller green spaces may be appropriate in the residential districts.



"There are certainly ample reasons for redoing Downtown -- falling retail sales, tax bases in jeopardy, stagnant real estate values, impossible traffic and parking conditions, . . . But with no intent to minimize these serious matters, it is more to the point to consider . . . What makes a city center magnetic, what can inject gaiety, the wonder, the cheerful hurly-burly that makes people want to linger there? For magnetism is the crux of the problem . . . To create in Downtown an atmosphere of urbanity and exuberance is not a frivolous aim."
-- Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

"A warm, friendly and inviting Downtown that welcomes visitors and works toward increasing their length of stay is vital to the economy of any city. The numerous Billings tourism partners who have come together on a regular basis and envisioned a revitalization of Downtown are confident this plan will achieve goals of increased visitation."

-- John Brewer, Director, Billings Area Chamber Convention & Visitors Council

Open Space Framework

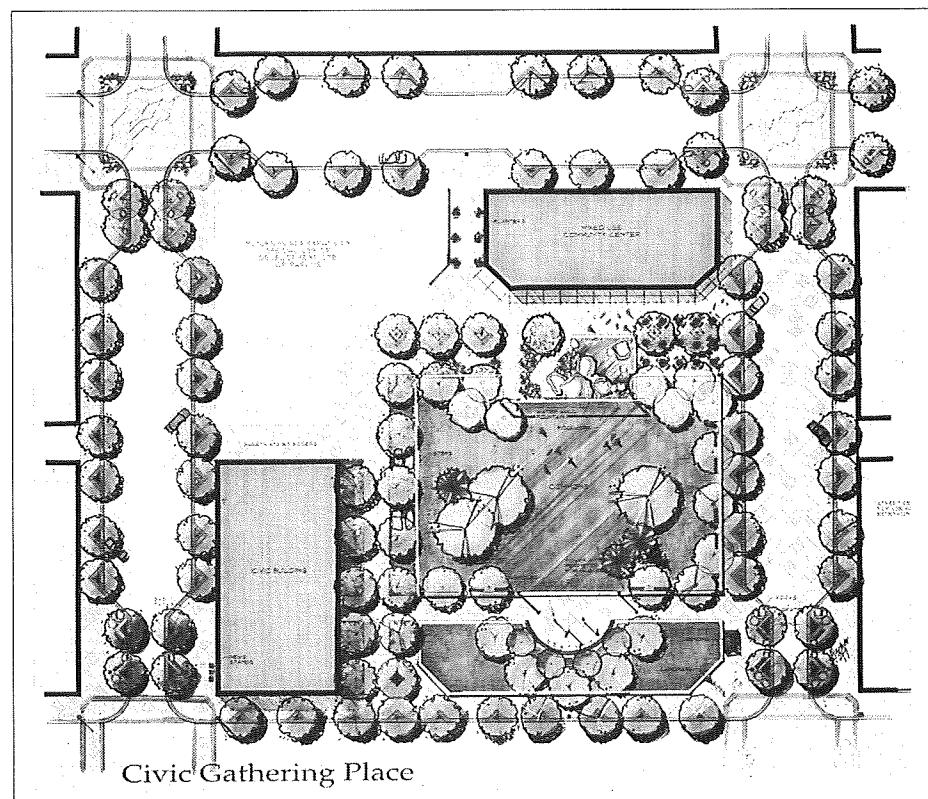
The proposed open space network for Downtown Billings includes the 5th Avenue North corridor, 2nd Avenue North as a connection between the Courthouse Lawn and a park in West Downtown, and the Montana Avenue corridor. Broadway serves as a pedestrian connection to all three corridors, with Division St. and the rail corridor along 21st St. as outer connections.

The parks and open space in Downtown Billings as they exist today can be the basis of an open space system. These elements are already in place:

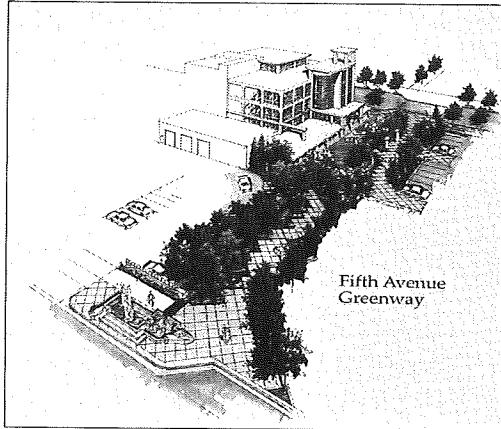
- The Court House Lawn
- The Park in front of St. Patrick's Co-Cathedral
- The Fifth Avenue Corridor from the Transwestern Center, by the Library and east
- The Montana Avenue and the rail corridor
- The abandoned rail line along 21st Street north of Montana Division Street with its green triangles and trees

Using these as the initial components of an Open Space Framework, the system can be completed and thus, made more effective. Enhancement of the Courthouse Lawn is critical because it provides a centerpiece to the

In the Downtown, a Civic Gathering Place has formal elements and acts as "the community living room."

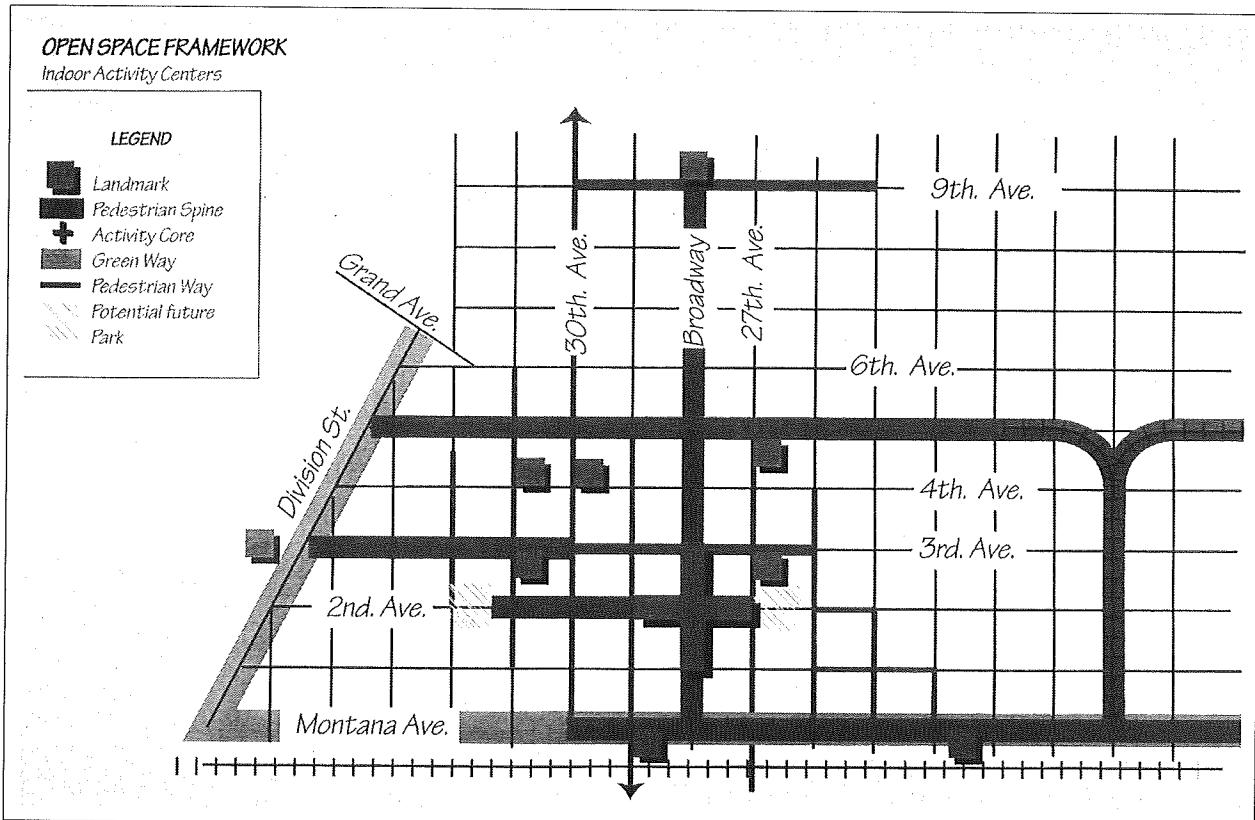


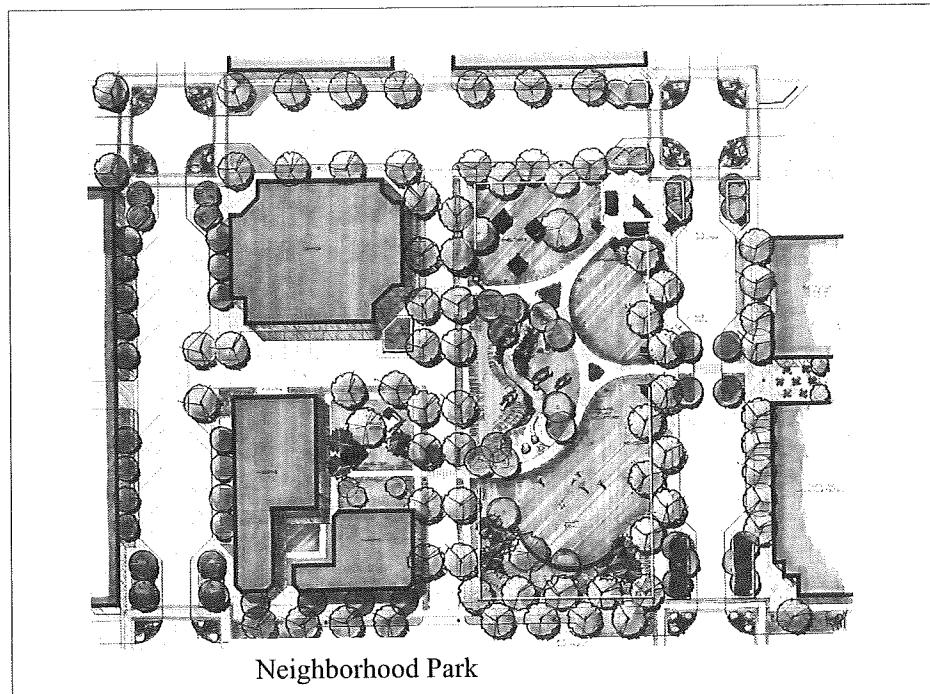
entire system. Preservation and redesign of the Fifth Avenue Corridor is important now so that it can be developed as an open space link in the future. The West Downtown District needs an open space along 2nd Avenue as a centerpiece for that neighborhood. This could be an augmentation of the existing park, or a new location that makes sense with emerging development.



Preservation and redesign of the Fifth Avenue North Corridor is important now so that it can be developed as an open space link in the future.

The Open Space Framework takes advantage of existing parks and open space to create a logic and order for adding space and creating a system.

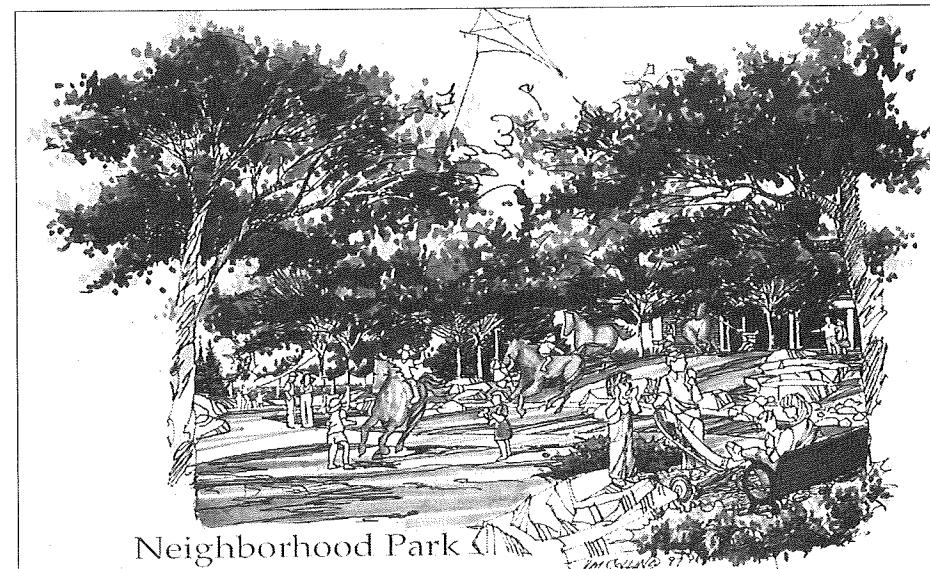




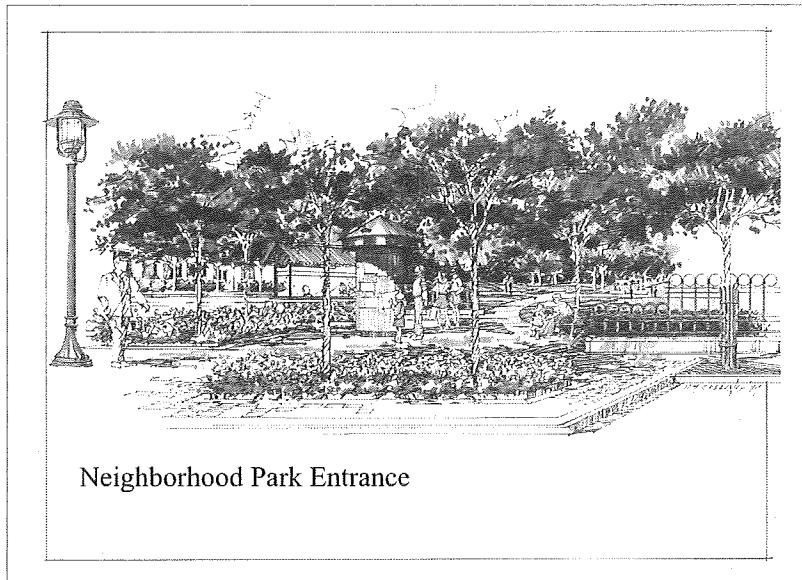
Neighborhood Park

Building setbacks and landscaping changes from the Core outward toward the neighborhoods. Generally in Downtown, most buildings are built to the lot line, connected directly to the sidewalk. Outside of the Core, buildings tend to be set back from the lot line, and there is more landscaping in the front as well as along the street curb line. This creates a pleasant transition to the neighborhoods

Besides outdoor gathering spaces, indoor spaces are also desirable. Gathering spaces are where people can meet for formal meetings or informal conversations. Formal gathering spaces include the Alberta Bair Theater, the Parmly Billings Library, Downtown churches and the Lincoln Center. Informal gathering spaces include coffeehouses, restaurants, retail establishments and building lobbies.

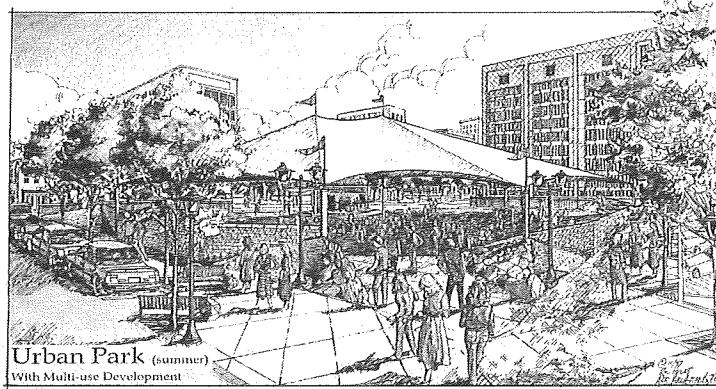


A Neighborhood Park in West Downtown would serve the needs of local residents and provide a respite from the urban conditions. The park could have art pieces, such as the horse sculptures shown here.

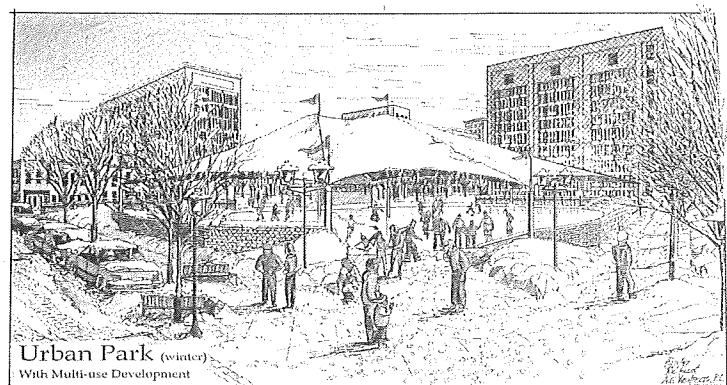


There are several indoor spaces with potential to be part of a greater system of gathering spaces. In the future, there are opportunities for indoor/outdoor spaces near St. Patrick's, the Depot, the Herberger's Building, and the Courthouse Lawn.

Parks, open space and indoor gathering spaces will be acquired, enhanced, or created over time. The Open Space Framework and the images provided here form the basis for the character of these spaces. The citizens of Billings value their community as a place to raise families, and as Downtown grows, those places must be an integral part of both individual developments and development patterns.



Because of Billings' changing weather patterns, the design for open space should accommodate different uses at different times of year.



Housing



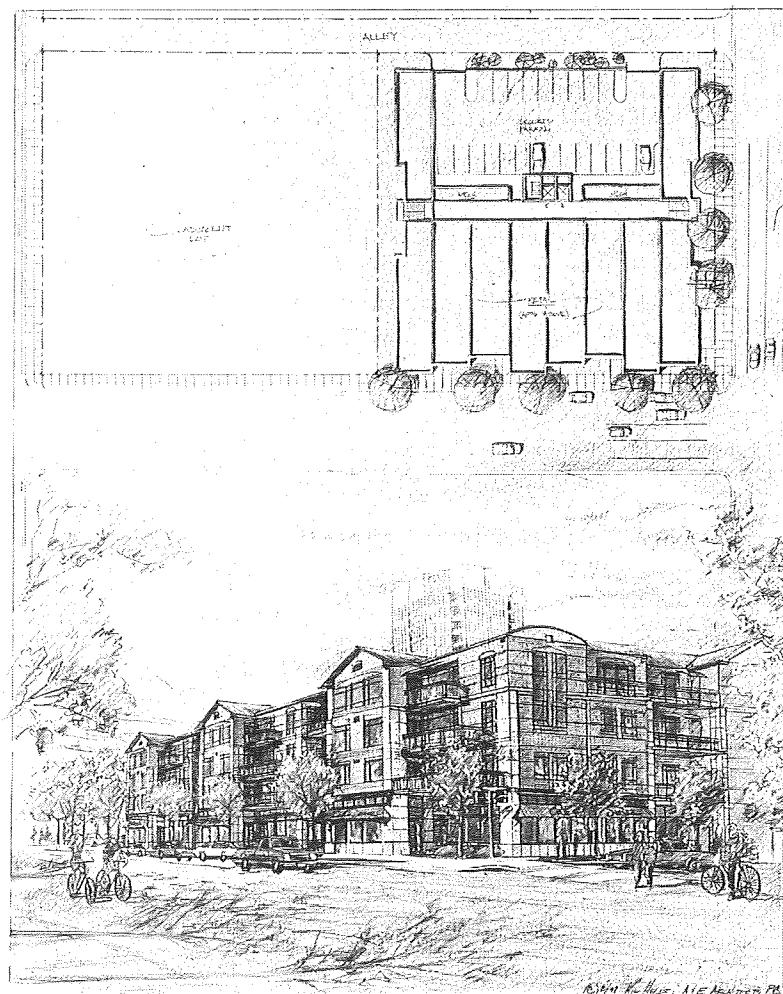
Downtown housing is emerging as a primary desire for many in the community. Real estate and downtown experts who have visited Downtown Billings as part of this planning process have all agreed that Downtown is an obvious location for housing. The common wisdom is that housing is the most logical first step of rehabilitation if the Downtown is to be attractive and livable. The housing in turn would stimulate growth and development. Housing brings in people who support the businesses, add vitality, and provide activity in the Downtown beyond the eight-to-five office hours. Inherently, this makes Downtown more interesting. An interesting Downtown attracts people and businesses and thus it builds on its own success.

The Project Team produced sketches of two potential types of Downtown housing: new construction of multi-family units, and lofts units within existing

buildings. The drawings provide a strong visual image of what could develop in the Downtown and surrounding districts.

High-rise housing may be appropriate in the East Transition Zone and portions of North Downtown. Low- to mid-rise housing is best-suited for the North and West Downtown Districts. Loft housing is suited for the Central and Historic Districts where the existing architectural stock can be rehabilitated.

The Steering Committee recommends that Housing be a top priority and that the Billings Partnership pursue its implementation. The City should continue to work with builders and developers to make its codes user-friendly. The Partnership and the City should collaborate to encourage Downtown housing through loan



In Downtown Billings, new construction of low- to mid-rise housing is best-suited for the North and West Downtown Districts.

Downtown will not truly live beyond the 8-to-5 office hours until people live in Downtown.

programs, home ownership programs for existing but underutilized housing, and other means to be identified as an initial task of the Partnership.

The Committee identified desirable housing types including:

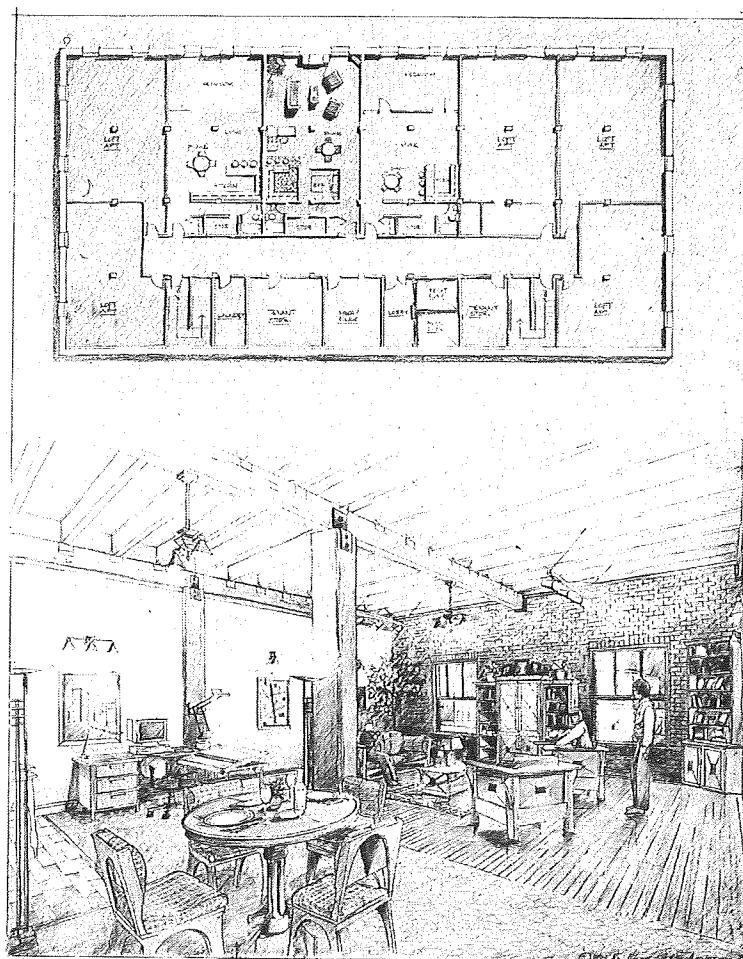
- loft housing in rehabilitated buildings
- new townhomes
- new small projects of three or four units
- student housing
- luxury housing

Local and national experts have identified potential markets for housing. They include young professionals, "empty nesters," students from MSU-B and Rocky Mountain College, and those who work at locations such as the Medical Corridor, the Transwestern Center, or Downtown offices. Housing in West Downtown where a neighborhood will be created could attract families as well as those earlier mentioned groups.

The range of housing stock is important to attract a broad spectrum of the community to Downtown living. The Partnership in cooperation with the City will follow-up with those who have shown an interest in developing Downtown housing and initiate some demonstration projects as a priority of this Plan.



Renovation of older buildings provides opportunities for Downtown housing. Loft housing is suited for the Central and Historic Districts where the existing architectural stock can be rehabilitated.



"Downtown Billings is one of our most valuable assets. This asset needs the care and nurturing of all its citizens. The Framework Plan, this reflection of citizen thought, ideas and visions will serve as a valuable guide to restoring this asset to its rightful prominence, serving as 'Everyone's Neighborhood.'"

-- Jerry S. Thomas

Implementation Priorities

Strategy

Organization of the Downtown Billings Partnership and formation of the Parking Advisory Board and Downtown Development Corporation emerged as immediate actions to be completed by January 1, 1998. These actions are already in progress, along with clarification of the Downtown Billings Association's focus on Downtown image, marketing and promotion.

By creating and empowering the various components of the organization structure, the assurance is greater that there will be individuals actively working on projects, events and other related activities necessary to revitalize our Downtown. The organization will provide a forum for coordination and cooperation among these activities and individuals.

To be an *ACTION* plan, it must be a *pragmatic* plan. The Vision became the Plan; the Plan will become a reality because it is grounded in the physical and fiscal realities of Billings. The funding for a plan of this magnitude, which will be implemented over many years, will come from a collection of sources.

Because the Plan is not intended to be implemented all at once, it is neither practical nor useful to estimate all of the costs at once. Nor is it realistic to assume that City funds will pay all of the project costs. Several funding sources have been identified. They represent a combination of public and private funds that when effectively leveraged will create the incentive to stimulate business investment.

Some identified funding sources include:

- Federal allocations for transportation improvements/enhancements (CTEP)
- Federal urban and local renewal allocations (application limited to urban renewal areas)
- Federal housing assistance (HUD)
- Local gas tax
- Revenues from the Downtown parking activities
- Private foundation grants
- Donations from individuals and groups
- Tax increment financing
- State Historical Grant Fund
- Special Improvement Districts
- Business Improvement Districts
- Local community development block grant funds
- Future local option taxes
- Bond financing
- Various revolving loan fund
- Board of Investments Loan participation and Intercap Financing
- Home Funds



Priorities

The priority projects for 1998, to be pursued as opportunities present themselves include:

- Development Incentives, including business retention and recruitment
- Housing - demonstration projects*
- Streetscape Kit of Parts - Pedestrian Core
- Events Kit of Parts
- Parking configuration adjustments
- 5th Avenue North corridor preservation

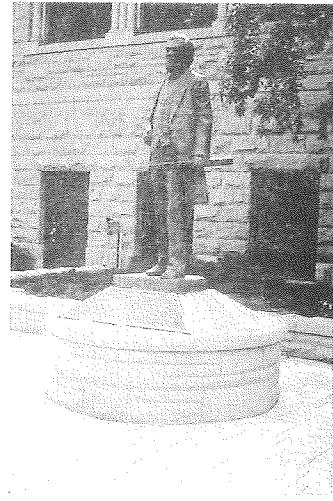
Other priority projects are categorized as follows:

Concurrent implementation with other tasks

- Property Owner Advisory Board
- Billings Cultural Partners
- Downtown Faith-Community Leaders
- One-way/Two-way street changes
- Kit of Parts - Other areas
- Large vehicle parking
- Revolving loan fund restructuring

"People have said that they hope the Plan will be implemented and make reference to past plans that continue to 'sit on the shelf.' I know that this Plan will be implemented and our Vision for the future will become a reality. Downtown will truly be a great place to shop, live, work, play and do business."

-- Mechelle Schultz



Important long-term projects

- Historic preservation actions
- Open Space Framework
- Courthouse Lawn improvements
- Indoor/outdoor gathering space

3-5 years priorities

- Land use guidelines
- Design guidelines
- Directional signage and sign code review
- Shuttle feasibility
- Gateways/entryways

Monitor and Review

- Liquor license actions
- Building Code (older buildings)
- City ordinance adjustments
- Procedural changes - City

Opportunistic priorities

- Specific property owner initiatives
- Specific public project initiatives
 - BLM project - Downtown
 - Major repair projects
 - Major capital projects
 - Library rehabilitation
 - Recreation and Parks projects

* Several housing projects are under consideration that will increase the range of Downtown housing stock:

- MSU-B student housing
- Rehabilitation of older buildings for upper end housing
- Rehabilitation of older buildings for moderate-income housing and lofts
- New multi-family housing

AFTERWORD

This document sets forth an interpretation of what Downtown is today, and a vision for what we want it to be: the heart and soul of the community. The Downtown Billings Framework Plan is at once both visionary and practical; it is deeply rooted in the history, traditions, and community of Billings. The Plan did not come from outside; rather it grew from the collective wisdom of many many people who believe in the future of Downtown. Those who have been a part of this Plan, have worked on Advisory Committees or attended public meetings have almost to a person been caught up in the enthusiasm for what could be. The ideas presented here fit comfortably into the Billings community and feel right for Downtown. And now we come to the real test of our convictions – implementation.

Tenacity and perseverance will surely be tested. But just as surely, those who have created this Plan will not be idle. As Father John of St. Patrick's Co-Cathedral impressed upon us at our final public meeting: "You and I are standing on the threshold of the Downtown that will be here for future generations. Respond to the challenge. Respond with courage to new beginnings."

