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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO OUR PLAN

The City of Kalispell, downtown businesses and property owners, have come together to develop a plan for Historic Downtown Kalispell. The downtown area of Kalispell is truly the heart of our community. This plan is a vision for Downtown Kalispell that looks back at its historical past to allow it to have a viable future. Without a plan for the future, the Downtown risks losing the identity it has had since the city’s incorporation in 1892.

The Downtown Plan is written to provide a vision statement and desired identity for the Downtown. The vision statement created for the Downtown reflects major themes and values the residents and businesses in the Downtown conveyed in the public outreach process. The vision statement describes the future condition of the Downtown, providing the public with a big picture of how the Downtown could look and feel 20 years from now.

The plan includes a series of “key issues” that outline essential hurdles the city must overcome to make the vision reality. Goal statements and policies will be used as the building blocks that will help implement the vision. A number of goals and policies are included in this plan to provide direction to achieve the vision of the built environment and address the key issues. Other policies address the social environment which, together with the built environment, creates an area within the city that improves quality of life for its residents. Downtown Kalispell is unique and its future is vital to the city as a whole. Accordingly, a focused collection of efforts and actions will be required to make Kalispell’s Downtown vision become reality.

“By far the greatest and most admirable form of wisdom is that needed to plan and beautify cities and human communities”

- Socrates, Greek philosopher & dramatist (469-399 BC)

Kalispell’s downtown businesses are aware of the need for a healthy and vigorous downtown. Continued vitality in Kalispell’s Downtown is dependent upon acceptance of the need for corrective measures. Without a visionary plan set in place, complacency tends to take over and identity can be lost. Having a plan in place puts the Downtown in control of its future, with obtainable goals that improve the area and ultimately the quality of life for anyone within it. The health and vitality of a community should be reflected in the strength and vigor of its downtown center. Long-term benefits to the community from a strong attractive city center will be substantial. The purpose of this plan is to develop a vision to address long-term sustainability of Kalispell’s Downtown.
The 82-acre plan boundary shown to the right has been the epicenter of business and social gathering since the city was created. There are 228 lots, 163 property owners and 332 separate business/tenants in the 24 square block area. Approximately 49.2 acres is in lots and parcels and the remaining 32.8 acres is in city streets/sidewalks. The plan area is bounded by Center Street on the north and the Flathead County Courthouse on the south with Main Street extending through the middle.

Notes:
Downtown Kalispell Story:

Kalispell was founded on St. Patrick’s Day in 1891, its name coming from the Pend Oreille language for “Prairie above the lake”. Kalispell actually had its earliest beginning stemming back to Demersville, a small town built in 1887 on the Flathead River at “the head of river navigation” a few short miles southeast of present day Kalispell. By 1890, Demersville boasted 72 saloon licenses and commercial property so expensive that businessmen leased lots at $100/month instead of buying land. Demersville’s future, however, was to be short-lived. Charles Conrad, a Fort Benton, Montana banker who had accrued wealth in the trade business, was enamored by the beauty of the Flathead Valley and decided to start his next business venture here. He started the Kalispell Town Site Company in 1891 with 3 other businessmen just a few miles north of Demersville.

Using his vast knowledge in the trade industry, Charles convinced his good friend James J. Hill, CEO of Great Northern Railroad, to put the division point of the railroad within the Kalispell Town Site. The move was an overnight success, and Demersville literally packed up and moved to present day Kalispell leaving little behind to mark its existence. On January 1, 1892, the railroad came to Kalispell, the city was incorporated that fall and by 1893 there was a city wide electrical system, a city wide sewer system and a city wide water system that boasted 53 fire hydrants. In 1894 Flathead County was organized and Kalispell became the county seat. By 1900, the town had grown to 2,500 people. The railroad dream in Kalispell was to be short-lived. The Great Northern Railroad rerouted the main line up to Whitefish in 1904 relegating Kalispell to a spur line. Even with this setback, Kalispell had firmly planted itself as the professional, governmental and retail center of the Flathead Valley and by 1910 the population had grown to 5,549 people. The 1910 Sanborn Map, next page, shows the City of Kalispell’s layout at that time. It is interesting to note that the downtown area depicted in the center of the map still encompasses the current downtown commercial center today.
Kalispell grew very slowly in the intervening years. The 1980’s saw a brief renaissance in the Downtown with development of the Kalispell Center Mall and attached hotel as well as a host of other businesses, grocery stores and restaurants. The 1990’s, however, saw a shift in commercial development patterns as new commercial development such as Walmart, Shopko, Office Max, Staples and other box store retailers moved next door to the unincorporated community of Evergreen. This too changed by 2000 as Kalispell entered a building boom growing 40% by 2010 to 19,927 people. As with the population growth in Kalispell, new commercial development boomed. This time new commercial development moved away from Evergreen heading to the north side of Kalispell and once again firmly establishing Kalispell as a regional shopping center.

In spite of new development and changing commercial trends, the Downtown has continued to remain a viable location for business. People are drawn to Downtown Kalispell because of the historic and social elements that a suburban strip mall can’t provide. Downtown Kalispell provides a unique setting, unlike the large scale commercial development, which is mostly comprised of national commercial chains and franchise architecture. Downtown Kalispell has been remarkably successful over its lifetime. Unlike many other rural cities’ downtown areas, Kalispell’s downtown has never become a “ghost town”, requiring extensive redevelopment efforts to establish a new identity. To this day, despite being threatened numerous times, the Downtown continues to function. Greater Kalispell serves as a regional trade area for over 150,000 people. This creates great opportunity for Downtown Kalispell to draw clientele from throughout northwest Montana, continuing its historical role with potential for expansion.
CHAPTER 2 – DOWNTOWN VISION AND VALUES

“The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has problems which cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them.”

- Albert Einstein, scientist (1879-1955)

The Vision

Downtown Kalispell will be a vibrant place to live, work, shop, dine and visit amongst beautiful historic buildings and landscaped streets. A well-maintained municipal infrastructure will provide essential services to business and residents while allowing for the redevelopment of existing buildings and shape the location and density of future development. Planning policies and effective leadership will protect downtown’s heritage while accommodating new development that creates a thriving economy, which harmonizes with its surroundings.
The Values

Why is Downtown Kalispell valuable and in need of special consideration? Because Downtown Kalispell is the heart of the city and having a healthy heart is essential to having a strong city. The following is a list of reasons why Downtown Kalispell is valuable and worthy of special consideration:

1) **Downtown provides a sense of community and place** – It draws people to downtown, i.e. - restaurants, events, Main Street, historic buildings, employment, art, etc.

2) **Downtown reflects how the community sees itself** – Is it healthy and viable, or does it represent local disinterest and failure?

3) **Downtown is the historic core of the community** – Historic buildings highlight the community’s heritage and are a physical representation of its culture.

4) **Downtown is a prominent employment center** – Downtown is a major employment area within the city.

5) **Downtown includes many independently owned businesses** – There are many family-owned businesses that support one another and the community adding strength to the fabric of the community as a whole.

6) **Downtown is a significant portion of the city’s tax base** – Downtown generates more tax revenue per acre than any area of the city.

7) **Downtown is an indispensable shopping and service center** – Many unique retail and service opportunities are available.

8) **Downtown is a major tourist draw** – Travelers want to see unique places and local treasures such as the historic downtown.

9) **Downtown is the government center** – City Hall, City Police and Fire, County Administration, County Courthouse and U.S. Post Office are all located within the downtown boundary.

Hockaday Museum of Art
Vision and Values Coming Together

American downtowns from all areas and of all different sizes have been experiencing a revival. More people are seeking an active, exciting environment with abundant retail and cultural opportunities that downtowns can provide. Successful downtowns have an urban landscape that includes historic population centers that demonstrate an urban development pattern of grid streets and alleys. These places serve as centers for commerce, civic, and cultural activities for the surrounding area. They have pedestrian-oriented sidewalk systems. Fortunately, Downtown Kalispell contains all of the common features associated with a successful downtown. The goal of this plan is to enhance those features so that Downtown Kalispell can achieve its full potential by year 2035.

- **BY THE YEAR 2035, DOWNTOWN KALISPELL WILL BE MORE VIBRANT THAN IT IS TODAY THANKS TO A GREATER VARIETY AND NUMBER OF RESTAURANTS, NICHE RETAIL STORES, HOUSING, AND PERFORMING ARTS VENUE GIVING PEOPLE REASONS TO COME TO DOWNTOWN.**

- **MAIN STREET WILL BE MADE MORE PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY BY INCORPORATING WIDER SIDEWALKS, OUTDOOR GATHERING SPACES, PUBLIC ART, STREET LANDSCAPING AND STREET TREES, NARROWED PEDESTRIAN STREET CROSSINGS, REDUCED DRIVING LANES AND CONVENIENT ANGULAR PARKING. BLOCK FACES WILL BE VOID OF EMPTY SPACES AND PARKING LOTS. A MIX OF ACTIVITY WILL BE OUT ON THE PUBLIC WAY SUCH AS MERCHANDISE DISPLAY AND SIDEWALK CAFÉ ACTIVITY INCLUDING SUCH FEATURES AS PARKLETS POCKET PARKS AND THE LIKE.**

- **DOWNTOWN WILL BE A DESTINATION THAT ATTRACTS AND APPEALS TO LOCALS AND TOURISTS RATHER THAN A DRIVE-THROUGH TOWN.**

- **DOWNTOWN WILL ANCHOR THE CORE AREA TO THE NORTH. THERE WILL BE A FLOW OF PEOPLE USING THE EAST-WEST TRAIL SYSTEM IN THE CORE AREA TO ENTER THE DOWNTOWN AND ENJOY ITS UNIQUENESS.**

- **A CONSISTENT THEME/CHARACTER OF THE DOWNTOWN REFLECTING ITS UNIQUE HISTORIC QUALITIES WILL PREVAIL. THERE WILL BE NO VACANT LOTS ALONG MAINSTREET AND ALL OF THE BUILDINGS WILL BE FULLY UTILIZED.**

- **DOWNTOWN’S PARKING WILL BE SEEN AS CONVENIENT AND AVAILABLE. DOWNTOWN MERCHANTS AND EMPLOYEES WOULD NOT PARK IN SPACES THAT ARE MOST CONVENIENT TO CUSTOMERS. THERE WILL BE ADEQUATE PARKING TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF BUSINESS, RESTAURANTS, EMPLOYEES AND RESIDENTS.**
Downtown Kalispell in 2035 Will Be

- Anchored by Main Street that is vibrant with local people and attractive to tourists, enjoyed day and evening because businesses are regularly open into the evening hours.

- A pedestrian-friendly environment that encourages visitors and residents to utilize downtown business.

- A bike-friendly environment with safe routes for bikes and available bike racks to encourage bicyclists to stay downtown.

- A safe and clean downtown that has been made beautiful with flowers, trees, color, and art.

- A historic, quaint, charming, and individualistic downtown that is busy, convenient, and prosperous.

- A downtown having a clear personality and mix of retail, food, office, art, housing and entertainment.

- A downtown that has a variety of business, is the cultural hub of Flathead County, and that serves the entire Flathead Valley.
CHAPTER 3 – KEY ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

Over the last two years staff has conducted 102 interviews with businesses, residents and property owners within the Downtown Plan boundary. Seven key issues were brought to light in the public outreach process of the plan development. They are specific in nature and affect the future of the Downtown. Addressing the key issues will be essential to making downtown Kalispell’s vision reality. The following is the list of key issues followed by a summary of each of the issues and associated strategies:

1) Main Street character;
2) Parking supply and management;
3) Downtown historic character;
4) Private property upgrades to attract new tenants;
5) Public infrastructure improvements;
6) Development of an entertainment district; and
7) Financing tools to achieve plan goals.

Main Street Issues:

Surveys and general public comment indicated that traffic volumes and commercial trucks in particular, speed, and the associated noise and dust from traffic on Main Street are primary issues of concern. Main Street is designated as U.S. Highway 93 by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and they have managed this 4-lane thoroughfare that way for decades. The community calls it Main Street and views it as the business, cultural, governmental and entertainment heart of Kalispell. The merchants and property owners are caught in the middle and have shouldered the impacts of the traffic. MDT points out that U.S. Highway 93 is a major north-south highway that runs from Phoenix to Canada and that the segment
running through the Downtown is controlled by them. The City maintains that the future of the Downtown and its very viability are tied to a Main Street that is unique, welcoming, exciting and inviting. The City of Kalispell and MDT clearly have two different goals when it comes to how Main Street functions. MDT identifies Highway 93 as an efficient route to move vehicles; while the City of Kalispell views Main Street as the social and economic hub of the city that it is trying to protect and grow.

Main Street is currently experiencing high levels of through car and truck traffic, much of which has no specific reason for being within the downtown area. According to MDT traffic data, between Idaho (U.S. 2) and 3rd Street, Main Street experienced an average of 18,660 AADT (Annual Average Daily Traffic trips) in 2014. In order to move this high level of traffic, MDT has designed Main Street’s right-of-way to move traffic as efficiently as possible by using the following methods:

1. Four driving lanes – Each driving lane measures 12 feet wide. Lanes are intended to accommodate large trucks as well as passenger cars quickly and efficiently through the downtown. Speed and volume are emphasized over local commerce.

2. Two parallel parking lanes – Narrow ten-foot-wide parking lanes flank the driving lanes and provide a minimal amount of parking. These spaces prove to be difficult to access because of speed and volume of adjacent traffic.

3. Narrow sidewalks – With the 1983 re-construction of Main Street, sidewalks were reduced to 10 feet in width. This provides minimal area to accommodate street lighting, street trees, pedestrian amenities such as benches and normal pedestrian traffic. There is no room for outdoor life such as eating, sales, street vendors, extra landscaping, bike parking and business displays.

4. No left turns – Left turns are prohibited or limited in order to move traffic efficiently through the downtown with the minimum number of stops. This frustrates drivers seeking local access to the downtown.

5. Lengthy pedestrian crossings – There are no pedestrian bulb outs or accommodations in street design to aid pedestrians. Pedestrians must walk the full width of Main Street exposed to 6-lanes of traffic.

6. Main Street illumination – MDT uses high angle cobra head lighting at intersections which lack any special character and detract from the original historical character of the downtown.
In an effort to move traffic efficiently, the cohesiveness and strong cultural center of Downtown Kalispell has gradually eroded. There is currently a 90’ wide sea of asphalt and concrete providing little in the way of culture, charm, or aesthetics, placing emphasis upon vehicles and detracting from the perspective or experience of the pedestrian. Four-lane roads with narrow sidewalks significantly discourage mobility of pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users. The current design of Main Street’s right-of-way is not conducive to fostering or enhancing a true main street community.
Main Street Strategies:

1. **Main Street Redesign:**

Photographic images of Kalispell in the 1940’s and 1950’s, shows a bustling, pedestrian friendly downtown. This plan seeks to restore Kalispell’s downtown to its roots as a place people want to stay and enjoy, rather than pass through at near highway speeds. The purpose of Main Street needs to be restored. Main Street is the social and cultural lifeline of the city. It provides a window into the heart of the community; it is not solely a piece of infrastructure designed to move people through. Main Street needs to go on a “road diet” converting it back to three lanes. The focus needs to be on restoring an attractive destination for people, with a place to park their car and walk to its store fronts and restaurants. An example of a design that could restore Main Street within the existing confines of the current 90-foot right-of-way is illustrated on this page, which includes the following improvements:

1. Widen sidewalks by 6 feet to a total width of 16 feet – Wider sidewalks create opportunities for vibrant outdoor eating areas and merchant displays, greater room for trees/landscape features and room for benches, bike racks, and other public space amenities.
2. Provide intersection corner bump-outs – Makes pedestrian street crossings safer and more inviting by shortening the travel distance and providing a more protected route, it slows vehicle traffic patterns and offers corner-landscaping opportunities.

3. Reduce Main Street travel lanes to one traffic lane each direction – Slows traffic and dis-incentivizes truck thoroughfare use, reducing noise, dust and congestion.

4. Incorporate a center turn lane – The center turn lane will make a more driver friendly street by giving drivers the ability to make left turns downtown during the day, which will increase traffic flow and allow for access to desired locations along Main Street.

5. Install a center landscaped median from 8th Street to 6th Street and then judiciously used from 6th Street to Center Street – Allows more opportunities for landscaping, pedestrian lighting, community art and trees where there is currently only concrete.

6. Maintain parallel parking – Provide larger parking isles on both sides separating the pedestrians from the traffic.

7. Install pedestrian scaled lighting – Adds simplicity, safety, charm and human scale to downtown.
Street conversions are an essential component for success within cities seeking to provide higher levels of service. Conversion of four-lane highways to three lanes by using two lanes plus a center turning lane have been highly successful throughout the nation. Main Street Kalispell is an ideal candidate for a road conversion.

A three-lane conversion will create a safer, more efficient means to providing access to downtown by automobile and pedestrians. The design changes needed for a downtown full of life are not possible with the current four-lane main street configuration. Road conversions have shown to set the stage for new investment in new commercial and residential development, which in turn will help accomplish Downtown Kalispell’s goals of being an exciting place with a high quality of life. The illustration on the previous page clearly illustrates how Main Street looking south from Second Street to the historic Flathead County Courthouse could look and feel if a street conversion were implemented.

2. Highway 93 Alternant Bypass Route:

Traffic, particularly large truck traffic, in Kalispell is not a new issue. The city has worked tirelessly with local, state and federal officials on the U.S. 93 Bypass Route project since 1991 in an effort to reduce both truck traffic and excess through traffic along the Main Street/U.S. 93 corridor. Understanding the implications of the bypass and its positive effects, the City lobbied continuously to get this projected funded and constructed. The bypass is now in place. The south section still functions as an interim design with 2-lanes and roundabouts. As traffic increases, this phase will gradually become 4-lane and roundabouts will be replaced with interchanges. The north half from U.S. 2 north to West Reserve is fully complete with a 4-lane design and interchanges.

The evolution of Main Street over the years into a high volume, 4-lane highway has undermined the local character of downtown’s built environment, impacting the community’s quality of life. Now that the bypass is fully operational, commercial truck traffic and other through traffic will be able to “bypass” the city relieving the traffic along Main Street and the Downtown. MDT traffic projections show that by the year 2035, the bypass could be carrying upwards of 17,250 vehicles per day greatly relieving congestion on Main Street. Many of these re-routed trips will be trucks that no longer have to pass through Main Street. The community must stay ever vigilant to ensure that the south half of the by-pass is properly completed as traffic demands increase.
3. **Courthouse Couplet:**

The “courthouse couplet” (pair of roads encircling the courthouse) is an iconic feature that has served as the primary entrance into the city for over 100 years. Historically, the courthouse couplet functioned as a roundabout and included a landscaped median from 8th Street to 6th Street along Main Street. The canon at Woodland Park and Doughboy statue now placed at the Veterans Home in Columbia Falls once graced this landscaped median augmenting the entrance into the downtown and signaling the importance of the area.

Time passed and the automobile become more prominent. The courthouse couplet has been modified to allow for more traffic. Accordingly, the roundabout, landscaped boulevard, doughboy and canon no longer form an iconic entrance into the downtown. Instead, the iconic entrance to downtown has slowly succumbed to more asphalt ensuring that more and more traffic can continue to move faster and faster. This trend continues as MDT ponders future traffic upgrades to the courthouse couplet. Guiding MDT in their analysis of improvements to the courthouse couplet is their 1993 Environmental Impact Study (EIS), which supports a 4-lane upgrade. In that EIS, the fundamental purpose of this highway project was to more efficiently move people by reducing congestion and improve safety. The courthouse couplet is the last piece of highway between Somers and Whitefish that has not been upgraded. Thus, any improvements to the courthouse couplet are still bound by those original 1993 terms. The internal inconsistency in this EIS lies in the fact that this same 1993 EIS supported the construction of the U.S. 93 Bypass, whose primary function was to reduce truck traffic and congestion on Main Street. Additionally, the 1993 EIS did not adequately address the social, economic and historic impacts of 4-lanes being constructed around the courthouse and downtown historic district. Below is an early conceptual design showing how the historical courthouse couplet would be realigned for speed and efficiency.
The final design of the courthouse couplet will ultimately define Kalispell’s Main Street. The courthouse forms the southern entrance and gateway into downtown. Flathead County has invested over $5 million this past decade to restore both the Courthouse and the historic county jail facility creating projects that truly show case local heritage and serve as the focal point for the southern end of Main Street.

MDT will not undertake a highway improvement project such as the courthouse couplet unless it can be shown that the design is effective for at least 20 years. There is consensus that in the short-term, the U.S. 93 Bypass will reduce traffic along Main Street to a level that would warrant reduced traffic lanes. However, traffic numbers are expected to increase over the next 24 years as general traffic volumes increase in the Kalispell area.

The 2016 courthouse couplet study undertaken by Robert Peccia & Associates shows that using Alternative 8 of their study, which calls for upgrading Willow Glen on the east side of Kalispell, will effectively provide a long-term fix for traffic in Downtown Kalispell. The Willow Glen upgrades would include a three-lane road design that connects the Four Corners area (Lower Valley/Cemetery Road) in South Kalispell with the intersection of MT 35 and U.S. 2. The Willow Glen upgrade will also serve to balance traffic east – west in the greater Kalispell Area providing other benefits throughout the community. It is imperative that this traffic route be nominated for funding in an expeditious manner to ensure long-term relief to the Kalispell Downtown.

2) **Parking Supply and Management:**

Parking plays a role in every aspect of downtown. Surveys indicate that there is a perception in the community that parking downtown is lacking or inconvenient. If the community believes parking downtown is inconvenient, then they will be deterred from visiting downtown business. Recent survey work has indicated that current parking may not be as limited as it is perceived to be, and that the issue is as much a case of management as it is supply. Finding a way to bridge the perceived parking problem is essential for downtown success. Cooperative efforts should be made to maintain the availability of convenient public parking for customers, employees, and visitors throughout Downtown Kalispell.

**Strategies:**

1. **Parking Administration:**

The Kalispell Parking Advisory Board currently is tasked with managing the public downtown parking program. To organize and better manage parking in Downtown Kalispell, a closer tie should be given to the Kalispell Business Improvement District (BID) to assist downtown parking matters. A key benefit to
this approach is a direct link between the BID goals for downtown vitality and the associated parking strategies. The BID could have influence on or responsibility for a wide range of parking management decisions such as advertising, wayfinding, and signage recommendations, business employee parking management, enforcement (except for citations which can only be issued by a peace officer), priority locations for additional supply and shared parking agreements. A quick drive around downtown shows that there are hundreds of both private and public parking spaces that are not being efficiently used; coordination and management can bridge the gap so that those spaces are fully utilized. With the BID, the Parking Advisory Board would have responsibility for management of parking matters in the downtown area.

The Kalispell Parking Advisory Board, in coordination with the BID, should:

a. Conduct regular parking studies to determine and track the inventory of on and off street parking spaces, usage patterns and trends.

b. Periodically, consult with business and property owners to discuss anticipated future parking demand and parking management strategies.

c. Work together to foster greater public-private parking relationships in the downtown.

2. Maximum Public Parking Use:

It is common practice for local jurisdictions to oversell permits for their city-owned lots by as much as 40% to make sure they are being fully utilized. Currently, the parking lots are being oversold by about 10% depending upon the location. Staff has monitored the City lots and have found a significant number of vacancies throughout the day. It would be advisable to oversell lots by 20% and monitor them to make sure they are being fully utilized. The percentage of oversell may need to be increased or reduced depending on the location. The goal would be for all the parking lots to be fully utilized on a daily basis.

3. Two-Hour Parking:

Most of the on-street parking located within the downtown boundary has 2-hour parking limits with 30-minute parking at the corners. Currently, the City enforces parking limits by chalking tires. The surveys found that some employees of downtown business are using the 2-hour parking spaces all day by moving cars (rocking and rolling) regularly. This system is taking parking spaces that are intended to
be used for customers, not employees. The parking utilization study recommends changing some 2-hour parking zones, located further from Main Street, to open parking. This would then provide more opportunities for both downtown employees and customers. Parking studies have shown that 12% of the block faces within the downtown boundary were less than 30% occupied at peak hours. If the 2-hour parking limit were removed in those areas, employees of downtown businesses could park in those locations without fear of getting a parking ticket. Additionally, more spaces would be freed up for customers of downtown business (currently being occupied by employees) in the areas where parking is a premium.

The 2-hour parking model also needs to be reassessed in other areas. Longer parking hours should be incorporated into the Downtown to encourage dining and shopping without threat of a parking violation.

4. Metered Parking:

The parking utilization studies indicated that the metered parking spaces were being utilized only 25% of the time. These parking spots are in prime locations and would be better served as either permit parking for adjacent business or 2-hour customer parking.

5. Angled Parking:

In addition to adding parking supply, angled parking is a very effective form of traffic calming that is popular among motorists and pedestrians alike. The pedestrian friendly environment created by angled parking often brings about more investment from private business. Studies have shown that each parking space near a retail business is worth $1,500 per year for that business.

Currently, there are a number of public right-of-ways within the downtown boundary where angled parking should be considered. Block faces on the streets downtown supply a maximum of 10 parking spaces when parallel parking is used. If angled parking spaces are used instead of parallel, 22 parking spaces can fit on a block face, an average increase of 12 spaces. Initial studies show this is a feasible concept in multiple locations. The construction of a multi-story parking structure can cost between $20,000 - $40,000 per parking space. The cost of angled parking is the paint on existing pavement.
6. **Monitor Curb Cuts:**

Curb cuts on block faces significantly reduce on-street parking due to the driveway approach itself and line-of-sight setbacks required for ingress and egress. For new construction the primary access should be gained from the alley when possible. This also creates a more appropriate built environment and improves pedestrian mobility.

Initial studies show that as many as 20 parking spaces could be added within the downtown boundary by simply right-sizing excessively long or undefined curb cuts or by removing curb cuts that are no longer serving a purpose. As previously mentioned, a parking space within a parking structure will cost between $20,000 to $40,000. Saving 20 spaces on existing streets would equate to a savings of $400,000 to $800,000 with the limited cost of replacing short stretches of curb and gutter.

7. **Parking Structure:**

The parking study (see Appendix) indicated that, for the most part, there are generally on-street parking options available throughout the day in the Downtown. However, the study did identify at least two current hot-spots or areas of parking congestion. One is in the KM Building-Library area (east side of Downtown). The other is in the Western Outdoor-Kalispell Grand Hotel area.

There are many management tools available to the City to address parking; however, the continued reliance on surface parking will continue to inhibit growth in the downtown. A parking structure, whether free standing or integrated in new mixed-use construction, needs to be part of the long-term planning for downtown as “hot spots” become more common and surface parking lots become more full. From a practical standpoint, if the city continues to rely on surface parking, future development downtown is effectively capped.

The city does not have mandatory parking requirements downtown. They are left up to the individual to determine their own need for parking. As an example, if one assumes a reasonable figure of just one parking space per 300 square feet of floor area, a new 30,000 square foot, three-story building (10,000 square foot per floor) somewhere in the downtown would require approximately 30,000 square feet of lot area to construct a surface parking lot to meet those needs. It is apparent that if we, as a community, continue to foster surface parking as the only parking option for every new building, existing buildings would have to come down to make...
way for new construction and we defeat the very purpose we are trying to achieve in the downtown. Today there is approximately 140,000 square feet of underutilized space in basements, second floors and vacant or underutilized buildings (see Appendix). As this space comes on the market and is re-used, there will be additional parking demands. If there aren’t new parking options available, we will either see the re-use of existing structures stifled or we will see other structures taken down further eroding our building inventory. Development of a parking structure would allow for future development/reuse of properties without the need of demolishing existing structures.

Parking structures can be beneficial as they allow for increased densities in the core, where it is most economical for the city to provide services. The city owns 3.8 acres of surface parking lots in the Downtown. Parking structures allow for surface parking lots to be replaced with new commercial construction, providing substantial new tax revenue. Existing properties close enough in proximity to enjoy the benefits of more all-day parking (employee) will be able to demand higher rents which can bring higher appraisal value to those properties and increased tax revenue to the city.

Limiting factors for a parking structure are the associated costs. A parking structure will cost $20,000-$40,000 per parking space. Although the cost is high, as with any development, the longer it is delayed the more expensive it becomes. Costs of a parking structure can be partially offset through lease of the parking spaces and through the lease of retail space that should be integrated into the ground level.

a. Potential Parking Structure Design Concepts:

1) A new parking structure should be designed with a greater vision in mind. It should not solely be a utilitarian structure. It must be architecturally designed and sited properly to fit into, augment and enhance the downtown.

2) The structure should incorporate retail on the ground floor to avoid dead spots in our downtown (stretches of street frontage which are dark, offer no goods or services or that offer nothing to the walking public).

3) The structure could be publically financed or be a private/public partnership.
4) The City could donate an existing public surface parking lot to an entity in exchange for an agreement from that entity to construct a multi-story building within a reasonable period and provide at least as much parking as the existing surface parking lot was providing.

5) Potential parking structure sites include:

- The Valley Bank surface parking lot on Main and Fourth. The City could undertake a development concept as spelled out in (4) above.

- The west side of 1st Avenue East and 3rd Street East – The structure could replace the privately owned KM parking lot and the city owned lot to the south. Ground-floor commercial storefronts could be located along 1st Avenue East frontage. The structure should be constructed to straddle 3rd Street East, using the air space above 3rd Street for second and third floor development. The parking structure rendering shown to the right illustrates that the following parking design and tabulations are possible at this location:

- **Parking Structure Concept**
  
  **(1st Ave. E. and 3rd)**

  **First Floor:**
  - 25 surface stalls (approx.)
  - 10,000sf retail/commercial (approx.)

  **Second - Fourth Floors:**
  - 72 stalls/floor x 3 floors = 216 stalls (approx.)

  **Fifth Floor and above**
  - OPTION 1 - 8,000sf Residential/Floor (7 - 8 Units); private parking, green roof terraces
  - OPTION 2 - 20,700sf Office or Residential/Floor; parking within ramp, green roofs
3) Downtown Historic Character:

Kalispell is the only Flathead Valley community with a significant stock of historic commercial structures, and is classified as a historic district. These historic buildings should be protected, enhanced and modeled after. Historic significance is evaluated in terms of the building and its components, the type of construction, the unique materials used in construction, the place the building occupies, or by the significance of the building's past occupants. Care and consideration should be afforded any effort to enhance the structure and protect the unique circumstances surrounding the structure.

Historic Preservation Strategy:

Numerous buildings within the downtown plan boundary have historical significance and are on the National Register of Historic Places. However, in terms of redevelopment and restoration efforts, all downtown structures should be viewed as contributing to the historic theme. Any redevelopment of buildings in downtown Kalispell should reflect the style and theme within the area. Architecture is encouraged to complement the existing historic architecture of Downtown Kalispell through the use of appropriate material, scale and character. At the same time, architecture within the downtown should not be dictated to the point where it results in a forced character that feels sterile. However, a specific set of architectural design standards and a palate of preferred materials need to be developed for the Downtown. The Kalispell Architectural Review Committee should be tasked with developing these standards and accordingly enforcing them.
4) Private Property Upgrades:

There are many different opportunities for the restoration or adaptive reuse of Downtown Kalispell space, whether it is for the expansion of an existing business, a new retail venture, residential space, or other use. Regardless, care must be given to not only meet existing regulations, but also ensure development preserves Downtown Kalispell’s historic identity. Many business and property owners have incorporated available space into business, retail or residential use; however, a significant amount of space remains underutilized. Limitations to re-use include handicap accessibility, updated electrical service, cabling, network installations, and meeting fire codes.

Many downtown buildings have vacant basement and second floor space that is ripe for adaptive reuse (see Appendix). Adaptive reuse, while most often associated with the preservation of historic or architecturally significant buildings, can provide renewed vitality to buildings that may be underused, abandoned, vacant, dilapidated or functionally obsolete. Reuse brings buildings including empty warehouses, vacated offices, abandoned department stores, large historic homes and commercial buildings back to life. These structures can become senior housing, apartments, performing arts venues, offices, banks, municipal buildings, clothing stores, restaurants or lofts to name a few.

Property Restoration Strategy:

Building and fire codes are potential hurdles in the redevelopment of some unused areas in Downtown Kalispell. Often times trying to convert an older building into a new use causes the project to fall under more stringent codes than when the building was originally constructed. The high cost of renovation to meet new codes is often times the sole reason buildings remain undeveloped. The City and affected building owners should actively work together to identify alternatives, that allow for creative redevelopment of existing and underutilized space while remaining within existing building code regulations.
5) Public Infrastructure Improvements:

Public infrastructure can be an incentive or an inhibitor to future growth. Infrastructure that supports new technology, i.e. – WIFI, Fiber-optic, etc. in the historic area has been identified as an issue; however, the single greatest issue in downtown Kalispell is ready access to water along Main Street. A municipal water main runs down the east side of Main Street (U.S. 93) approximately 8 feet from the curb. The cost to tap into this line is extremely expensive for east side properties due to the cost of traffic control and cutting into U.S. 93. For properties on the west side it is prohibitive. This issue comes into play as basements and second floor uses are contemplated but lack adequate volumes to meet fire codes. Other uses such as a brewery need increased water supply just to operate.

Public Infrastructure Strategy:

Assist prospective Main Street business owners to connect to the existing water main or install alternative water lines that would be more easily accessible. Provide infrastructure improvements for technology to make the historic downtown more competitive with newer commercial developments. Taking these steps would allow for the development/redevelopment of space in downtown buildings that at this time may be cost prohibitive.

6) Development of an Entertainment District:

The City of Kalispell is focused on creating an exciting downtown and the stakeholder surveys reinforce that narrative. Downtown Kalispell is home to a variety of retail shops and restaurants, many of which are key attractions to downtown. However, there is an overwhelming desire for an improved entertainment experience for locals. The establishment of unique clusters of retail and restaurants downtown, with the addition of a performance venue, would lead to the critical mass necessary for downtown to thrive.

Entertainment Strategies:

1. Create a performing Arts Venue:

Kalispell has a long history of performing arts. The McIntosh Opera House located in Downtown Kalispell above the West Outdoor Store was constructed in 1896 and served the Flathead Valley for decades. It is now closed and in need of repairs but at one time, it was the center of activity hosting a crowd of over 1,100 people with the showing of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”. Downtowns have long been the chosen location for performance venues, housing cultural activities for both locals and
visitors to enjoy. Not only is a performing arts venue within downtown a cultural asset, but it also puts “feet on the street”, especially at night. The Playhouse in Bigfork and the O’Shaughnessy Center in Whitefish are examples of this. Anytime a play is performed, the downtown fills with residents and visitors who may also choose to have dinner and shop at the local downtown businesses.

2. **Broaden the Retail and Restaurant Base:**

Downtown Kalispell is poised for growth and must focus on creating an environment to attract investment. Survey responses indicate that dining and shopping are the top two primary motivators for getting people downtown. The downtown market is not envisioned to support large commercial or box store operations. The focus instead is for local entrepreneurs providing unique and independent establishments thus offering a clear, inviting and authentic distinction to other commercial centers in Kalispell.

3. **Liquor Licenses:**

The current State liquor laws are directly limiting restaurant and entertainment activity in Downtown Kalispell. The State of Montana has historically established a quota system for liquor licenses for each community in Montana, which in Kalispell’s case has caused a shortage of available licenses. In addition, gaming is attached to any liquor license thus making them even more desirable. These two forces have created a market of scarcity. Any restaurants coming into the Kalispell market who would like to offer alcoholic beverages to their customers faces a daunting task. They must first locate a license being held by a current user and then negotiate a private transfer price in a skyrocketing market. The City of Kalispell needs to look closely into new state laws that would allow a significant increase in restaurant-directed liquor
licenses so that the Downtown has the opportunity to foster an entertainment culture within its boundaries.

4. Downtown Street Amenities:

Implement Main Street improvements that welcome visitors. Sidewalks should be widened from the existing 10 feet upwards to at least 16 feet for businesses to create:

a. Vibrant outdoor eating areas;
b. Pedestrian access that is unhindered by the current mix of public signage, fire hydrants, and standard street furniture;
c. Provide ample room for trees and landscaping to grow;
d. Emphasize pedestrian scale lighting;
e. Provide room for benches, bike racks and other amenities; and
f. Install corner bump-outs at intersections, which allow for a shorter, more protected travel distance for pedestrian crossing the street, while offering corner-landscaping opportunities.

7) Financing Strategies to Achieve Plan Goals:

Many of the aforementioned solutions will require a significant funding source. In order to create a long-term sustainable strategy for an economically healthy Downtown Kalispell, new funding mechanisms need to be implemented. Currently the Downtown does have the Kalispell BID, which accomplishes unique functions, as outlined in the Appendix. However, the Kalispell BID’s funding is limited and additional funding is needed to spur the development needed for Downtown Kalispell to thrive.

Financing Strategies:

1. Montana Department of Transportation (MDT):

U.S. 93 (Main Street) is designated a federal highway and management and maintenance of the entire 90’ right-of-way is administered by MDT. Accordingly, improvements to Main Street could be funded as part of a larger project by state and federal transportation money through the Federal Aid System. For example, re-construction of the courthouse couplet could accommodate many of the desired community changes in the immediate vicinity of the couplet as long as these modifications are fully vetted through the federal review process and further the goals of
the Environmental Record of Decision (ROD). MDT also has access to funds through the Transportation Alternatives Program to address pedestrian and bicycle facilities and improvements.

2. **Tax Increment Finance District (TIF):**

A TIF District is a re-development tool that allows municipalities to “capture” increased tax value. As a TIF District increases in property valuation due to new development and re-development, the incremental increase in taxes normally distributed to the city, county and school district, is instead funneled directly back into the TIF District to fund pre-determined projects intended to encourage more development. A TIF for Downtown Kalispell could be part of an effort (in tandem with other sources of funds) to finance the necessary improvements discussed in this plan. Expenditures of TIF-generated revenues are subject to certain restrictions and must be spent within the district to benefit the district. The funds generated from a new TIF district could be used to finance a variety of improvement projects including:

- Infrastructure – Streets, sidewalks, water/sewer lines, & utilities;
- Public parking;
- Park improvements;
- Elevators (to meet ADA requirements) in privately owned buildings;
- Business loans for expansions or façade improvements;
- Business grants (façade improvements);
- Property acquisition for redevelopment;
- Demolition and removal of structures;
- Property Rehabilitation; and
- Historic preservation loans or grants.

**City TIF Potential/Example:**

The Valley Bank lot on the NW corner of 4th St. and Main Street is a City owned parking lot, in generally blighted condition on a highly visible downtown corner location. The Valley Bank lot provides surface parking but is also a City liability that requires maintenance and does not generate any taxes due to its tax-exempt status. If this lot were to be developed by a private party into a mixed use project, this tax liability would become a tax generator. This example is worked out below.

The Downtown is valued, for taxation purposes, at approximately $76 per square foot. Modestly, the Valley Bank lot could be developed with a 3-story
45,000 square foot building. Using the average value of the downtown buildings, a new 45,000 square foot building would be worth $3.42 million. Based on the current mill levy assessed on comparable buildings, a developed Valley Bank lot would generate approximately $55,000 in city, county and school district tax dollars per year. Because the property is currently tax-exempt, 100% of those new tax dollars would be directed into the TIF every year for the life of the TIF. This money would then be available to be reinvested for projects within the TIF. This example shows the impact one property can have within a TIF district. Not only would the lot generate money for the TIF, but development of the site would create a built environment along Main Street that a surface parking lot cannot provide.

3. Consider alternative uses for City owned lots:

There are 3.8 acres of City owned surface parking lots within the downtown boundary. The example above illustrates the impact of developing a single surface parking lot into a higher use. Several alternatives could be pursued to encourage re-development of these lots into more beneficial uses.

- Existing surface parking lots could be sold to private developers for re-development for a beneficial project such as described above.
- Surface parking lots could be granted or gifted to a private developer who enters into an agreement that stipulates development will occur on the lot within a certain time frame, the development will incorporate into the design the same number of existing parking spaces lost and that the development would be a mixed use, multi-story project.
- There could be a land swap with a property owner who desires a more beneficial location in exchange for property they own in a less visible area.

The request for proposals would include stipulations that any parking being lost due to construction be replaced either in the design of a new structure on the property, in another property nearby, or as part of a designated parking structure program in the greater downtown.

4. Special Improvement District (SID):

An SID is a financing tool that could be used to construct public infrastructure such as a parking garage, water mains, sidewalk improvements, etc. If an
SID was a financing tool that the Downtown property owners and City Council wanted to pursue, a feasibility study would need to be conducted. The feasibility study would analyze the costs of the particular project and how the costs would be distributed throughout the proposed SID. State law provides for several different assessment methods. Depending on the project, properties to be assessed first have to be shown to benefit from the project.

Assessment methods typically include either a lot frontage foot basis, a square footage of developed land basis or distance from the actual project. The assessment can also exempt certain land uses if there is a finding of no benefit.

The feasibility study is an essential step vetting proposed improvements to both City Council and affected property owners. If the feasibility study determines that the SID is feasible, property owners to be assessed would have an opportunity to support or protest the creation of an SID District. If approved, the city would sell bonds that are repaid over a period of up to 20 years. The city would then in turn assess the parcels in the district to generate the money needed to pay off the bonds. The assessment would appear on the property owner’s yearly property tax bill.

5. Brownfields Program – Assessment & Revolving Loan Fund Cleanup:

The City of Kalispell operates a Brownfield Program that offers voluntary financial assistance to public or private property owners. Eligible property owners can use grant funds to undertake phase I and phase II studies to ascertain whether their properties are environmentally blighted by current or historical actions on the property which may cloud a title at time of sale or which may presently cause operational limitations. Such impacts include the presence of asbestos, petroleum or other chemical contamination on-site, etc. The assessments are completed at no cost to the property owner, and information about the presence/absence of contamination is provided to the owner upon completion of the work. In addition, sites assessed by the city are potentially eligible for cleanup loan funds from the Environmental Protection Agency through the City of Kalispell.

6. Revolving Loan Fund – Low Interest Microloans for Businesses:

The City of Kalispell manages a Redevelopment Loan Program that is intended to provide a financing mechanism for businesses located within city limits of Kalispell. This program is designed to assist businesses by making low interest, long term fixed rate financing for general improvements to the property or business expansion.
7. Kalispell Business Improvement District – Façade Improvement Grant Program (FIG):

The Kalispell Business Improvement District (BID) has developed a program to provide an incentive for private sector improvement of commercial buildings in the Kalispell BID. Through the Montana Main Street program, the BID provides matching grant opportunities to encourage private investment in exterior (façade) building improvements that will help preserve, enhance and restore the historical and architectural significance of many of Kalispell’s downtown buildings.

8. State and Federal historic preservation tax credits:

The Federal Historic Preservation Tax incentives program encourages private sector investment in the rehabilitation and re-use of historic buildings by giving up to a 20% tax credit for income-producing properties.

9. The Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund

This program provides state funds to promote long-term stable economic growth in Montana with financial assistance for economic job creation projects and planning projects. Application for both categories are accepted on an open-cycle basis until all available funds are committed to approved projects.

10. Other:

Other funding mechanisms will continue to become available, i.e. – New market tax credits, housing tax credits, grants, etc. An essential component to many alternative funding options is having “shovel ready” projects when the funding becomes available. The city needs to be prepared to apply for new funding that may be beneficial for the downtown as they become available.

Notes:
CHAPTER 4 – IMPLEMENTATION

"Communities can be shaped by choice, or they can be shaped by chance.

We can keep on accepting the kind of communities we get or we can start creating the kind of communities we want.”

– Richard Moe

Goals/Guiding Principles:

1. Restore the U.S. 93 highway corridor in Downtown Kalispell to “Main Street”:

Downtown stakeholders realize that U.S. 93, which once brought life to the city has now evolved to the point where it is inhibiting business and the community’s quality of life. Accordingly, U.S. 93 through Downtown Kalispell needs to be restored to Main Street making it more conducive to business and pedestrian activity.

   a) Maintain the courthouse couplet as a two-lane traffic circle (one lane north, one lane south) which will be designed to both serve as and enhance the south entrance to the new downtown.

   b) Re-establish the historic center lane landscape median north of the Flathead County Courthouse extending from 8th Street to 6th Street.
- Design features would include landscaping (ground cover and trees)
- Pedestrian scale lighting
- A signature art piece to replace the former WWI Doughboy now housed at the Veterans Home in Columbia Falls.

c) Work with MDT to carry the two lane courthouse couplet design north through the entire downtown all the way to the BN Railroad/Core Area Corridor.

d) Key features of the Main Street re-design would include:
   - Creating a two lane traffic flow with a center turn lane.
   - Including mid-block, center lane landscape islands where the center turn lanes are not needed.
   - Allow left turns at all intersections.
   - Install angled parking where possible.
   - Widen sidewalks to accommodate a mix of activity out in the public way such as merchandise display, sidewalk café activity and landscaping.
   - Incorporate bulb outs at intersections to decrease the width of Main Street and side streets for pedestrian crossing.

- Increase the amount of landscaping and street trees downtown and incorporate necessary irrigation for watering.
- Incorporate pedestrian scaled street-lighting conducive to a pedestrian environment downtown versus highway standard lighting.

e) Develop wayfinding signage that directs through traffic (especially large truck) around downtown and on the bypass.

f) Continue to lobby for the completion of the southern half of the bypass.

g) Designate Willow Glen as the city’s next urban road improvement project to create an east side route that will complement Main Street and the west side U.S. 93 Bypass Route in order to provide a long-term solution to the efficient movement of north-south traffic through the Greater Kalispell Area.

h) Work to incorporate bicycle lanes, bike routes and bicycle facilities into the main street corridor.
2. Convenient parking for the business community and visitors:

Downtown stakeholders revealed that one of the biggest issues with operating a business downtown was the lack of convenient parking. Parking studies have shown that it is more of a perceived problem today than reality. However, as long as there is a perception within the community that parking downtown is an issue, future growth will be limited. Therefore, it is an issue that must be overcome for Downtown Kalispell to grow.

a) Work with business owners, BID and the Parking Advisory Board to develop a parking management plan.

b) Continue to oversell permits within city-owned lots until they are fully utilized.

c) Work with owners of private parking lots to increase the number of parking permits being sold for employees within the downtown.

d) Limit driveway approaches onto streets, encourage parking access onto alleys and remove or limit existing driveway approaches that are not being used to increase the available on-street parking.

e) Develop a free, downtown R.V. parking lot close to the downtown for summer day use.

f) Develop signage downtown that better identifies public parking lots.

g) Identify areas in downtown where employee parking is available and distribute to business owners within the downtown in order to reduce the amount of rocking and rolling.

h) Replace parallel on-street parking with angled parking spaces where feasible in order to increase the amount of on-street parking.

i) Allow city surface parking lots to be leveraged for more appropriate uses. This could involve:

- Selling surface parking lots to a private developer for re-development;
- Granting or gifting a surface lot to a private developer who enters into an agreement that stipulates development will occur on the lot within a certain time frame, the development will incorporate the same number of existing parking spaces lost and that the development would be a mixed use, multi-story project;
• A land swap with a property owner who desires a more beneficial location in exchange for property they own in a less visible area.

j) Begin planning the location and funding for a new parking garage within the Downtown Plan Boundary.

k) Monitor parking “hot spots” to stay abreast of the issues and prepare for future needs.

3. Provide for business development and redevelopment options within the downtown:

Downtown Kalispell has been the social and economic hub of the city since its inception. Even with the significant wave of new commercial development to the north, Downtown Kalispell has remained a viable place for business of varying types. A commitment by both public and private sectors is necessary to secure and build upon the businesses that make their home within the Downtown.

a) Creation of a downtown Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District to assist with implementation of this plan.

b) Develop an analysis tool to review each public surface parking lot. This tool should include a determination of the following:

• Is this the best location for downtown parking?
• Is the lot attractively landscaped and accessible?
• Does it meet the minimum city landscape standards?
• Is the surface in good repair or is it in need of repair?
• Is the lot leased out to at least 110-120% of capacity?
• Would the lot be better utilized if it were sold and converted into new retail, office or residential use?

c) Investigate alternative funding mechanisms to reduce impact fees in the downtown.

d) Offer incentives to encourage historic façade and exterior amenity improvements.

e) Upgrade inadequate infrastructure including city water mains for fire flows to accommodate the full use of historic buildings downtown.
f) Develop a revolving loan/grant program using TIF or other funding resources to help business fund necessary infrastructure or property reinvestment.

g) Continue promoting the Brownfields programs in order to prepare environmentally degraded properties for redevelopment.

h) Provide infrastructure that supports new technology, i.e. – WIFI, Fiber-optic, etc.

i) Work with state lawmakers to develop laws that would allow for the downtown to have unlimited, non-transferable, alcohol licenses.

j) Create easy-to-use zoning and building codes.
   - BID, property owners and business owners should be actively engaged with city staff in the efforts to review and possibly amend building codes when feasible.
   - Develop cost effective options for meeting existing fire codes.

4. **Create an enhanced transportation network:**

Downtown Kalispell stakeholders recognize a vibrant environment must offer its visitors and residents a variety of transportation options. This plan develops appealing, consistently maintained gateways into the downtown boundary accommodating safe multi-modal travel.

   a) Incorporate traffic calming techniques into design and improvements of the local street network to enhance pedestrian safety.

   b) Identify major gathering or destination points (Core Area, public buildings, parks, commercial areas) in need of pedestrian access and connection.

   c) Improve pedestrian and bike access throughout the plan area to improve safety and mobility.

   d) Strengthen linkages between Main Street, the Core Area and county buildings to the south.

   e) Work with Eagle Transit to integrate bus stops into street design in the appropriate locations.
5. Create a unique and identifiable image for Downtown Kalispell:

Main Street Kalispell is the gateway to Glacier National Park. Downtown Kalispell will expand upon its existing aesthetics to draw and welcome travelers, signaling that they have arrived somewhere special.

a) Craft architectural design standards that are downtown specific that encourage renovations and new construction to blend in with and enhance the current historic flavor of the Downtown.

b) Clearly identify Downtown Kalispell entrance features, specifically, north and south historic Main Street gateways.

c) Historic preservation to maintain the cultural and visual fabric of Downtown Kalispell.

d) Establish a standard for high quality design for new buildings and parking.

e) Encourage public/private partnerships to fund the creation and display of public art.

f) Incorporate amenities into new or redevelopment projects such as pocket parks, activity nodes and gathering places.

g) Increase landscaping to soften the area and create a more appealing location.

h) New parking lots should be located to the side or rear of buildings away from primary street frontages.

i) Parking lots should be enhanced with pedestrian scale lighting, way finding signage, and aesthetic elements such as screening and landscaping.

j) Sidewalks should be installed and sized to accommodate seating and eating within the right-of-way.

k) Work with MDT to allow for banners to be strung across Main Street during special events.
6. Become the epicenter for arts, culture and historic preservation within the Flathead Valley:

Downtown Kalispell is rich in cultural and natural history. Downtown Kalispell was initially developed in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. Many of the historical buildings that were constructed during that time still remain and play an important role in defining the rich historical and cultural character of the community.

a) Support preservation, conservation and adaptable reuse of historic buildings.

b) Support the creation of a performing arts venue.

c) Promote design standards in keeping with the styles and materials of historic buildings in the neighborhood.

d) Work with the Montana Historical Society for the purpose of supporting historic preservation in the downtown area.

e) Expand the location and frequency of cultural events in the downtown area.

f) Encourage public/private partnerships to fund the creation and display of art.

g) Discourage the demolition of historically or culturally significant structures and sites.

h) Return the Farmer’s Market to the downtown.

i) Encourage the temporary closure of side streets off Main Street for special events for the benefit of the community.

“A hundred years after we are gone and forgotten, those who never heard of us will be living with the results of our actions.”

Oliver Wendell Homes, U.S. Supreme Court Justice
I. PLAN DEVELOPMENT – Surveys and Interviews:

Ultimately, maintaining a vibrant downtown is a cooperative effort between the city, its residents, and its business community. The development of a plan requires a clear understanding of what is going on in the downtown. Over the last two years city staff has conducted 102 interviews with business, resident and property owners within The Downtown Plan boundary. The interviews conducted included a survey that was seeking clarity on the issues facing businesses and residents. Key topics that were discussed at length during the interviews included:

- How long have you operated here?
- Strengths and weaknesses of downtown?
- What things are holding you back?
- Ideas for improvements or changes?
- Why did you choose to invest in downtown?
- Are you satisfied with downtown and is it working?
- Is traffic downtown an issue, specifically along Main Street?
- Is there adequate parking downtown?

Staff has also attended multiple community meetings and prepared newsletters that were mailed out to the downtown stakeholders. The newsletters included updates of the plan’s progress and requested additional input from those interested in the plan. Lastly, staff met with the Kalispell Business Improvement District multiple times and regularly attended the Kalispell Parking Advisory Board meetings keeping them apprised of the plans progress and contents.

What Did We Learn?:

It was apparent that the downtown stakeholders had inherent loyalty and pride in the downtown. It was not difficult for them to address a number of issues that the downtown was facing. The survey results and inventory collected throughout the public outreach process brought to light valuable information.
A. Survey Results:

The survey results from the downtown stakeholders were broken into three different categories: “The Good,” “The Bad,” and “Suggestions.” Amongst those three categories the top three responses for each of the categories are the following:

➢ The Good:

1) Central location and business visibility.
2) Historic authenticity & cultural attractiveness.
3) Good investment, affordable leases.

➢ The Bad:

1) Main Street generates too much noise, dust and congestion from truck and car traffic and is limited by no left turns.
2) There is a perceived lack of parking and inconvenient parking time limits which inhibits foot traffic.
3) Downtown lacks pedestrian/bike facilities – a general lack of inviting street crossings, bike racks, benches and greenery. It is not walkable or safe for pedestrians and bikes.

➢ Suggestions:

1) Slow downtown Main Street traffic (three lanes, angled parking, maintain couplet as two-lane, get rid of one-ways, finish bypass).
2) Maintain and enhance community character (pedestrian facilities, historical preservation, landscaping, etc.)
3) More diversity and tenant mix (entertainment, food, drink, night life, liquor/cabaret licenses).
B. Land Use Inventory:

In addition to the survey questions regarding the issues facing downtown residents and businesses, we set out to inventory the downtown’s built environment. We needed to know how the buildings were being used. By compiling all this information, a complete picture of Downtown Kalispell and its most pressing issues could be identified.

Downtown Kalispell is comprised of a multitude of uses within its 24 block boundary. The Downtown Plan area general land use chart and map are shown on this page.

It is important to note that the highest percentage of land use in the downtown is parking areas. Parking areas comprise 23.5% of the general land uses within the downtown boundary.
The figure shown below breaks down the downtown building square footage into main floor, basement, second floor and third floor space. In total there are 1,558,062 square feet of building space within the downtown boundary. Density within the downtown boundary comes out to approximately 19,000 square feet per acre (including public right-of-way). Comparatively, the Hutton Ranch development to the north has a density of approximately 10,800 square feet per acre.
The figure shown below breaks down the first floor building use within the downtown boundary:

First level building use is important because it is at street level and is what patrons of downtown see first. Survey results indicated that there was a need for more diversity downtown (retail, food, drink, etc.), and that it was heavy in offices. The chart correlates with that message since only 35% of first floor space is used for retail; whereas 39% is of first floor space is office space. Although not shown in the figure above, only 7% of the street level is used for food & beverage. First floor space would be best utilized as retail or food and beverage because it creates “feet on the street,” making downtown a more lively place to be.
Second floor space would best be used for either residential, office space, or similar. The breakdown of the land uses on the second floor shows a lack of residential space. Although 23% is not a bad number, increasing the number of residential units downtown is an essential component to a thriving downtown. Residents of a downtown tend to work in the vicinity and use the adjacent services which create more activity in the surrounding area. It is also important to note the percentage of storage and vacant space on the second level. 7% (or approximately 24,000 square feet) of second level building space is being underutilized. Improving second floor space so that it is better utilized is difficult due to the cost of complying with building and fire codes.
The figure shown below breaks down the basement level building use within the downtown boundary:

Basement level space can be used for any use, although residential use in the basement is not preferable due to lack of natural light. 28% (or approximately 95,000 square feet) of basement level building space is vacant, or being used as storage/support area. This space also has the potential to be better utilized. Like second floor space, improving basement level space is difficult due to the cost of complying with building and fire codes.
C. Economics:

Tax Exempt Properties:

The figure to the right illustrates the properties (excluding streets) within the Downtown Plan boundary that are taxable (red) and tax-exempt (blue). The amount of tax-exempt property is most notable with 13.8 of the 49.2 acres (28%) of the properties within the downtown boundary being tax-exempt. Over half of this tax-exempt acreage (56%) is owned by the City of Kalispell. The high percentage of properties within the downtown boundary that are tax-exempt creates challenges in a community that relies on property tax as the primary means of revenue to pay for government services. For a clearer picture of what this ownership pattern looks like it is important to analyze the specific types of uses. City owned properties include certain essential functions such a city hall, the public safety building, the Museum at Central School and the Hockaday Museum of Art. However, the largest single category of city land includes public surface parking facilities.
Surface Parking Lots:

Surface parking lots are not the highest and best use of land; however, make up 36% of the parcel space in Downtown Kalispell. Private surface parking lots within the downtown boundary are valued at approximately $15 per square foot of land, whereas, buildings within the downtown boundary are valued at approximately $62 dollars per square foot. Between surface parking lots and tax-exempt properties a large proportion of the downtown is generating limited to no tax revenue. Additionally, surface parking lots create an uninviting built environment, degrade the natural environment (e.g., by polluting storm water runoff into areas waterways) and are often provided at the expense of more productive investments.
Value of Downtown:

The plan boundary is 82 acres (49.2 in blocks and 32.8 in public right-of-way). Downtown Kalispell brings significant value compared to other developments within the city. Properties within The Downtown Plan boundary are valued at a higher dollar amount per square foot than that of other developments within the city. Downtown is valued at approximately $50 per square foot (including surface parking lots and tax-exempt properties). If the tax-exempt properties (13.8 acres) are removed the value of downtown property rises to approximately $76 per square foot. Comparatively, the big-box store development of Hutton Ranch to the north is valued at approximately $36 per square foot. Accordingly, downtown is providing a private tax value of approximately $3.3 million per acre, whereas, Hutton Ranch is providing a tax base of approximately $1.6 million per acre. The figure to the right shows the price per square foot of Hutton Ranch. The value per acre of Downtown Kalispell is representative of the value, and that it is worthy of special consideration because the city generates its revenue through property taxes. Additionally, it is less costly to provide services in a concentrated area such as downtown, then developments on the fringes of the city.
D. Parking Study:

Surveys indicate that there is a perception in the community that parking downtown is lacking or inconvenient. If the community believes parking downtown is inconvenient, then they will be deterred from visiting downtown business. Recent survey work has indicated that current parking may not be as limited as it is perceived to be. Finding a way to bridge the perceived parking problem is essential for downtown success.

There are currently 2,410 parking spaces (1 space per 650 square feet of building area) available within the downtown boundary. The spaces consist of both on-street and off-street parking areas. Most on-street spaces have a two-hour parking restriction. The remainder is 30-minute parking, usually on corners with a few 15-minute and handicap spaces. None of the on-street parking within the study area is metered. The following is a breakdown of the current parking areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Parking Spaces</th>
<th>Kalispell Downtown Plan Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-Street spaces</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private, monthly lease</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City owned monthly/employee</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City owned metered</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City owned free</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Lots</td>
<td>1,735</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**  

2,410
The inventory determined that there are 675 on-street parking spaces and 1,735 in lots (private and public) that are utilized by the public, customers and employees. City owned lots are either metered, require a permit, or have a ticket machine. The Skyline lot, which is owned by the city, provides 50 free public parking spaces.

**Parking Utilization:**

A parking utilization study was completed by staff. The parking study included all of the on-street parking spaces located within parking study boundary. Additionally, the study included the three city owned lots consisting of the Valley Bank Lot, Eagles Lot and Skyline Lot. Not all of the parking lots were inventoried, as some are not available for public use. The study was conducted hourly in the months of August and December, 2014-2015 and coincides with the study done by Robert Peccia and Associates in 1999. The study evaluated an area bound by Center Street to the north, 2nd Avenue West to the west, 2nd Avenue East to the east and 5th Street to the south, shown by the figure to the right. The study was conducted to better understand parking utilization of the on-street parking spaces and public parking lots downtown as well as the duration that parking spaces are being occupied.
The maximum utilization of on-street parking was acknowledged as the point which spaces within a block face were 85% utilized. The parking utilization figure shown on the previous page illustrates the downtown peak hour (12-1 P.M.) parking demand in August, 2015. August is shown because it is the busiest month downtown and the best representation of downtown peak parking demand. Block faces that experienced 85% utilization were highlighted as fully utilized. The study determined that only 12% of the block faces downtown are at capacity during the peak hour in August.Comparatively, in the peak hour in August of 1999 14% of the block faces were fully utilized, see figure shown to the right. This reinforces the notion that the city is at a status quo as far as development and parking. Parking demand has shifted around, but as a whole has not got worse over the last 18 years.

The Eagles Lot, one of the three public parking lots surveyed, showed highest usage at only 68% usage during the peak hour in August. This is in spite of the fact that all city downtown lots are technically sold out. During peak hour the Valley Bank lot was utilized at 39% (including the metered parking) and the Skyline lot was utilized at 51%. Comparatively, in 1999 the Eagles lot was utilized at 56%, the Valley Bank lot at 72% and Skyline lot at 62%.
Parking Summary:

The results of the parking utilization study in downtown revealed that the current amount of parking accommodates the parking for the majority of downtown. There are “hot spots” near the Kalispell Grand Hotel/Western Outdoor and KM Building/Imagine If Library where the parking utilization is full during parts of the day. The parking study indicates that adding more parking in the downtown is not an essential component of the proposed downtown plan. The study also shows that in areas of high demand (“hot spots”) parking is becoming an inhibiting factor. As the downtown becomes more successful, there will be a point where too many “hot spots” creates the need for additional parking supply, i.e. – a parking structure, or other creative alternatives. There are opportunities in Downtown Kalispell to address concerns about parking supply. However, increase in parking supply should be coupled with parking management strategies to help maintain the character of the downtown. In fact, it is preferable that parking management precede increase in parking supply to ensure that the existing parking supply is being used as efficiently as possible. Excessive surface parking supply could actually be counterproductive as it reduces the supply of buildable land needed for new development.

E. Kalispell Business Improvement District (KBID):

One of the leading ways the public/private process is implemented is through various non-profits, particularly BID’s. Kalispell has a strong downtown advocate in the Kalispell Business Improvement District. BID’s act as a quasi-government for a downtown, providing services city government cannot provide. Downtown’s future success will require the continued support of the Kalispell BID. To date the Kalispell BID has accomplished a great deal to create a welcoming atmosphere enjoyed by residents and visitors:

- Hosting events – Thursday fest, Chocolate Affair, Run Through History, First Fridays, Art Walk.
- Creating a façade improvement program.
- Installing wayfinding signage.
- Providing a Downtown Ambassador who provides sidewalk cleanup, flower watering and friendly visitor information
- Undertaking park bench restoration.
- Developing a walking tour brochure of historical points of interest.
- Promoting online, print, television and radio marketing campaigns.
- The placement of flowers, planters and trees.
The Kalispell BID is downtown’s management team, ensuring its many complex elements work together to create a safe, attractive unique, and well-functioning place. Successful implementation of this plan will involve continued involvement of the Kalispell BID, and other civic-minded non-profits that are tasked with issues that affect the downtown. The figure to the left shows the Kalispell BID boundary and Downtown Plan area boundary. The Kalispell BID boundary is outlined by the red boundary and the Downtown Plan in yellow.
F. Courthouse Couplet Study

By way of background, in 1993, MDT undertook the re-construction of U.S. 93 from Somers to Whitefish utilizing a 4-lane design. Part of that design process involved a request by Kalispell, with congressional intervention, to develop a Highway 93 bypass around Kalispell for the primary purpose of relieving truck traffic in downtown Kalispell. Now, after 23 years, the Kalispell Bypass has been completed. In addition, the entire U.S. 93 corridor from Somers to Whitefish has also been reconstructed except for the 5 block stretch of roadway around the Flathead County Courthouse. Design issues have plagued MDT, as they have tried to develop a 4-lane design that would both accommodate large trucks by current design standards and not totally disrupt the neighborhood around the courthouse. The MDT initial design options necessitated acquiring several properties around the courthouse to accommodate a design large enough to allow a 4 lane design capable of handling large trucks. Adjacent property owners were resistant to sell property to MDT for this project and the project went dormant for many years. MDT has again raised the issue of re-constructing this piece of infrastructure as the roadway itself is quickly deteriorating. Note that MDT will not invest in road improvements where the design does not meet current highway standards.

MDT recently engaged the engineering firm of Robert Peccia and Associates to undertake a new analysis of this issue. They have completed a traffic study for the courthouse couplet. The intent of the traffic study was to identify the following:

- Project the possible number of lanes needed.
- Review vehicle/pedestrian operational and safety issues.
- Project future conditions.
- Analyze the impact of the full bypass on main street.

The traffic study provided a current traffic baseline for the community, that is a picture of where we are today. The study then looked at projected traffic levels out to year 2040. The study identified eight (8) alternative scenarios for the courthouse couplet. All scenarios included the projected impacts of the newly completed by-pass. The alternative scenarios included the following scenarios:

1. Baseline
   - Full bypass with no additional changes in the community
2. Main Street with two travel lanes and center (left turn) lane
   o Between 13th Street East and Center Street

3. Main Street with four travel lanes and center (left turn) lane
   o Between 13th Street East and Center Street

4. One-way couplet (A)
   o Main Street two travel lanes with center (left turn) lane
   o 1st Avenue East one-way northbound
   o 1st Avenue West one way southbound
   o Additional improvements to Center Street and 12 Street East

5. One-way couplet (B)
   o Main Street one-way southbound
   o 1st Avenue East one way northbound
   o Improvements to Center Street

6. One-way couplet (C)
   o Main Street one way northbound
   o 1st Avenue West one way southbound
   o Improvements to Center Street and 12th Street East.

7. Willow Glen upgrade to three lane road
   o Connecting at US 2-Hwy 35 intersection (Snappy’s)
   o 2-lane with center (left turn) lane

8. Willow Glen upgrade and Main Street with center (left turn) lane
   o Combined alternative scenario numbers 2 and 7.
Alternative 2 is the traffic configuration that would most closely identify with the design concepts embraced in this plan. The Peccia study shows that Main Street can function as a 2-lane road with center turn lane (Alternative 2) now and into the near future. The study also shows the significant negative impacts that would come if the Courthouse Couplet and Main Street were committed to a long term four lane design (Alternative 3). If Alternative 3 were the final configuration of Main Street, traffic is projected to increase by 40% compared to if Alternative 2 were implemented. Alternative 3 would provide for nearly 30,000 cars on Main Street, this is an astronomical number considering Main Street is already experiencing too much traffic. Considering stakeholders of downtown feel that there is already too much traffic on Main Street, Alternative 3 is not a viable option. What is the priority? Improving traffic and pedestrian safety while maintaining acceptable traffic flow, or moving traffic with minimum amount of delay and accepting higher safety risks that come with efficiently moving traffic? The study also does not identify how nearly 30,000 cars would function at Main Street’s intersection with Idaho, or how that amount of traffic would work with the Core Area trail. Additionally, Alternative 3 would further impact space for improvements needed to improve the pedestrian environment along Main Street.

Alternatives 4, 5 and 6 include variations of one-ways in the downtown. One-ways are good at moving traffic but would have negative implications on the downtown. Retailers, especially those dependent on pass-by traffic, prefer a location on a two-way street than a one-way street because of the accessibility benefits that a two-way street location provides. In addition, one-way streets also affect the visibility of businesses along their cross streets. A successful downtown area should support activities of residents, employees, and visitors. By car, occasional visitors to downtown are often confused and disoriented as they circulate through one-way street networks. By requiring less out-of-direction travel, a two-street network is better for unfamiliar drivers and benefits all the users of downtown. Easy circulation and plenty of pass-by visibility would make downtown more conducive to visitors.