



DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP
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Downtown Great Falls Safety Plan 2021

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Downtown Safety Alliance will mobilize and engage the community and Downtown stakeholders as we work together to make a Downtown that is safe, vibrant and livable.

INTRODUCTION

Residents, businesses and stakeholders have all worked hard to address perceptions of crime in the Downtown area. In 2009, the Downtown Action Alliance formed to take actionable steps to address those and other related issues. Together with the City and others, in 2011, the City Commissioners approved a Downtown Master Plan to work on revitalizing the area from 5th Avenue North to 5th Avenue South, from River Drive to 15th Street. Crime and safety were clear goals of the Master Plan. In order to implement the crime and safety goals, a diverse committee began to write a Downtown Safety Plan. Completed in 2013, the newly-formed Downtown Development Partnership approved the Plan and the Plan was endorsed by the Great Falls Police Department.

The goals, taken from the 2011 Downtown Master Plan, included the following:

- Identify and support an organization to lead and champion Downtown revitalization;
ACTION: The Downtown Development Partnership formed in 2012 and the Downtown Safety Alliance became a subcommittee of that organization.
- Establish a Downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to fund Downtown projects;
ACTION: The City Commission created Downtown Urban Renewal District in 2013. This District establishes a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) Downtown.
- Encourage partnerships that ensure a clean and safe Downtown;
ACTION: The Business Improvement District (BID), NeighborWorks Great Falls (NWGF), and many others have supported multiple crime and safety efforts since 2013.
- Establish a Downtown Ambassador Program;
ACTION: The Business Improvement District has summer employees that serve as Downtown Ambassadors. The Great Falls Police Department's well-established volunteer program created a specific program in 2018 for Seasonal Downtown Volunteers to serve as additional eyes and ears on the street from April to October. As of March 2021, there are about 25 such volunteers.
- Expand the Downtown Area Business and Neighborhood Watch Programs;

ACTION: From 2010 to 2018, the BID and NWGF hosted approximately five free Business Watch training programs a year at NeighborWorks, with dinner provided with funding from sponsors and restaurants. During this time period, over 700 community members attended Business Watch meetings.

Neighborhood Watch, spearheaded by Carol Bronson of NWGF, was also promoted through the City's Neighborhood Councils.

- Support updates and upgrades for home and business security efforts;
ACTION: The Great Falls Police Department programs have included a dedicated downtown officer, SCRAM, where businesses and residents can register their outside cameras, and other GFPD programs.
- Educate people about panhandling;
ACTION: The BID and NWGF created the Coins for a Cause donation program, where people could make donations to help fund direct service providers that work with panhandlers and the homeless and discourage panhandling. From 2013 to 2021, the program has given out donations totaling \$4,194.47 to the Great Falls Rescue Mission, YWCA, Opportunities, Inc., GFPD Volunteer Program, Family Promise, St Vincent de Paul, and the Center for Mental Health. Coins for a Cause is an ongoing program.
- Educate and encourage Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design;
ACTION: This national best practice program in crime prevention was a frequent Business Watch training topic and was used in helping analyze issues downtown.
- Create and maintain Public Nuisance Logs;
ACTION: Discussion of code enforcement issues and how to resolve them were also frequent topics during Business Watch training, including use of the Neighborhood Watch Nuisance Log. The Neighborhood Guide to the City Codes, originally written by NWGF, was updated and approved by GFPD and the City's Legal Department. It was distributed by GFPD, City Code Enforcement Department, the Neighborhood Councils and at events hosted by Downtown Development Partnership members. The City is working on an updated version for publication in mid-2021.

In this revision of the Downtown Safety Plan 2021, we want to acknowledge the past accomplishments, emphasize ongoing efforts in the Downtown area, and outline new objectives for the coming years, including specific goals, responsible parties, accomplishment timelines, funding, and, lastly, but most importantly, who benefits from the ideas presented in the Safety Plan. "Who benefits" helps to create a priority structure and a sense of urgency. We also need to address who may be injured through the implementation of the Plan.

ACRONYMS

BID	Business improvement District
BRIC	Business Residential Involving Community officer
CFM	Center for Mental Health
CPTED	Crime Prevention Through Environment Design
DDACTS	Data Driven Approach to Crime and Traffic Safety
DDP	Downtown Development Partnership
DGFA	Downtown Great Falls Association
DSA	Downtown Safety Alliance
FUSE	Frequent User Program
GFDA	Great Falls Development Authority
GFFR	Great Falls Fire Rescue
GFPD	Great Falls Police Department
NC	Neighborhood Council
NWGF	NeighborWorks Great Falls
RSVP	Retired Senior and Volunteer Program
SCRAM	Security Camera Registration and Mapping
TIF	Tax Increment Financing

SAFETY PLAN VISION 2021 STATEMENT

WHAT IS OUR WHY?

- We are working toward creating a Downtown that is vibrant, livable and safe.

WHAT ARE WE HERE TO DO?

- We want to acknowledge the past accomplishments, emphasize ongoing efforts in the Downtown area, and outline new objectives for the coming years, including specific goals, responsible parties, accomplishment timelines, and funding, while working within the parameters of the Downtown Master Plan.

WE BELIEVE . . .

- That we can make a positive difference in Downtown Great Falls;
- That we can enhance the historic value of Downtown Great Falls;
- That we can improve the safety of Downtown Great Falls;
- That we can help others to take pride in Downtown Great Falls;
- In the revitalization of the commercial center of Great Falls;
- In passionately promoting and servicing Downtown Great Falls;
- That Downtown Great Falls is built from businesses and residents with diverse values, strengths and needs. Education and dialogue can ease tension and encourage constructive problem-solving.

GOALS

- Implement a task-oriented priority list of needs,
- Mobilize the community to participate in making Downtown a safer place in both practice and perception,
- Build a Downtown social infrastructure to increase the social capital of Downtown residents and businesses,
- Coordinate with public/private partnerships, including the Downtown Development Partnership, the Great Falls Police Department, the City Code Enforcement Office, and others.

WHY A DOWNTOWN SAFETY PLAN?

Safety is a shared, critical responsibility for all those committed to revitalizing Downtown Great Falls. A safe and vibrant Downtown is essential to maintain and enhance Downtown's appeal. The success of our Downtown revitalization efforts is fundamentally tied to both increasing the perception of safety, as well as tangible improvements which increase actual safety. The Downtown Safety Plan describes the Downtown Safety Alliance's current programs and recommends future strategies that will help make Downtown both be and be perceived as a safe and vibrant part of the community.

The Downtown Safety Plan works within the Downtown Master Plan established in 2011. These boundaries are north/south from 5th Avenue North to 5th Avenue South, east/west from 15th Street to the Missouri River.

The Lead Agency for the Downtown Safety Alliance and, therefore, for the Downtown Safety Plan, is the Downtown Development Partnership. The DDP works to revitalize and promote Downtown Great Falls. It has earned the designation as a fully accredited National Main Street Program. Partners work together to implement the Downtown Master Plan.

The Partners of the DDP include the Great Falls Business Improvement District, The Downtown Great Falls Association, NeighborWorks Great Falls, Great Falls Development Authority, Neighborhood Council #7, City of Great Falls, Cascade County, Great Falls Public School District, City-County Historic Preservation, Great Falls Parking Commission and the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce. The DDP provides the central focus for Downtown development.

SAFETY PLAN FRAMEWORK

The Downtown Master Plan identifies several safety related goals and strategies:

Connected: Objective/ Strategy: Improve pedestrian connectivity & safety Downtown by developing public/private partnerships to ensure Downtown is safe for all users.

Flourishing: Objective/ Strategy: Support the Downtown Development Partnership in leading & championing Downtown revitalization. Improve the public realm *to provide a safe, attractive & welcoming environment*. Encourage a partnership between Downtown organizations and stakeholders and the City Police Department to ensure a clean and safe environment. Establish a volunteer-based Downtown clean-up day and/or program.

Living: Objective/ Strategy: *Ensure existing housing is safe & attractive* by developing a volunteer-based residential improvement plan to ensure Downtown neighborhoods are clean and safe.

From those goals, then, the Coalition developed the following Mission Statement: *The Downtown Safety Alliance will mobilize and engage the community and Downtown stakeholders as we work together to make a Downtown that is safe, vibrant and livable.*

The several entities that are committed to Downtown safety and livability are Business Improvement District (BID), Downtown Great Falls Association (DFGA), NeighborWorks Great Falls (NWGF), Downtown Development Partnership (DDP), Neighborhood Council #7, the Great Falls Public Library, and the Great Falls Police Department (GFPD). These organizations play a leadership role in developing a coordinated community response to safety concerns in the Downtown area.

LOOK HOW FAR WE HAVE COME

These ideas were implemented in the 2013 Downtown Safety Plan and continue to operate. There has been a lot accomplished since 2013! The Safety Alliance has met monthly (with the exception of several months during COVID) to create and update a detailed matrix of action steps, to monitor progress, and to assure that we were meeting our anticipated goals.

Law enforcement cannot be on every corner. Business owners, employees, customers, and Downtown residents are the ones who really know what is happening. Cooperation can help fight crime Downtown in the most effective way possible – before it begins. The Business and Neighborhood Watch programs were implemented to this end.

The Cascade County Business and Neighborhood Watch Programs offered training multiple times a year from 2010 to 2018. Its purpose was to educate and mobilize Downtown businesses and residents throughout the community to create a more vibrant Downtown. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) program and then NeighborWorks Great Falls managed the countywide Neighborhood Watch Program until 2019. Many of the City's Neighborhood Councils built and supported active Neighborhood Watch programs. Although the program is not managed by any one entity at the present time, there are individual Watches throughout the community and new signs are being erected.

Downtown Seasonal Volunteers are trained and managed by the GFPD. The program has grown each year and it is anticipated that the growth will continue. Volunteers report directly to the GFPD. They focus on hospitality, service, and extra support for Downtown events, but address suspicious activity by calling the GFPD. With their bright blue shirts, they are the eyes and ears of a comfortable Downtown.

The Coins for a Cause program was launched in 2013 by the Safety Alliance and has proven to be successful. Coins for a Cause asks generous people to NOT give money to panhandlers, which only encourages panhandling, but to put coins in provided receptacles in Downtown businesses and in the eight Coins for a Cause street boxes attached to poles in the 400 and 500 blocks of Central Avenue.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is a successful program which educates property owners on how to prevent crime through various security measures including landscaping, surveillance cameras, access control, and maintenance. This program encourages property owners to register any outside cameras with the GFPD Security Camera Registry And Mapping (SCRAM) program.

Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Planning workshops have been presented through the Business Watch program. Learning about the proper actions that should be taken before, during and after an event as well as developing and customizing specific plans for the Downtown area will help our community reduce the impact of a disaster situation.

The GFPD has a BRIC (Business/Residential Involving Community) officer that does community policing in the Master Plan Area. The GFPD Directed Enforcement Team has developed good coverage for the Downtown areas, and the DDACTS (Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety) model has proven to be a successful data analysis/hotspot identification program in Great Falls. The BRIC Officer works closely with Patrol officers, the Detective Bureau, and Support Service personnel to address identified problem areas and act as a liaison with the BID, the Downtown Safety Alliance, Neighborhood Council #7 and other established community groups.

A goal of the Safety Plan was to urge the City to develop a video surveillance network and to encourage participation among business owners and residents in the Downtown area. The GFPD Security Camera Registry And Mapping (SCRAM) program was implemented in January, 2020, and is city-wide, not just in the Downtown area. Capturing surveillance video of a crime, or components of a crime, is one of the best methods for solving almost any incident. Community members are not always aware a crime has occurred nearby or that their exterior cameras may have captured valuable

information about that crime. In turn, police officers are not always able to easily identify where exterior cameras are posted. The SCRAM registry can help GFPD to solve crimes.

- GFPD is only seeking registrations of exterior surveillance systems
- Only systems within the City limits of Great Falls may be registered
- The camera registry is kept confidential
- The GFPD does not have the capability of accessing a private surveillance system, footage may only be captured by the system owner
- A registrant may “opt out” of the program at any time
- Registration is free

OTHER PROGRAMS CREATED TO ENCOURAGE A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN INCLUDE:

Downtown Crosswalks: The Building Active Communities Initiative paints colorful crosswalks in the Downtown every summer. Funding for the paint and supplies has come from NWGF, BID, and other donations.

Murals: Our colorful murals on the exterior building and alleys bring people Downtown and tell stories about our community. The murals in the Downtown have been funded by the City of Great Falls, The Library Foundation, NWGF, the BID and others. Internationally acclaimed mural artist Cameron Moberg was engaged to paint the murals in 2018. Cameron also provided training for local artists on how to create their own murals and how to make it a profitable business. More murals were created in 2019 in an ongoing program to enhance beautiful Downtown.

Urban Art: The Great Falls Urban Art Project, created by artist Jean Price In 2005, brings free, public site-specific art installations to the City’s 11 windows of the South Parking Garage. The exhibits change three times a year. The program is currently coordinated by Cortni Harant, art teacher at Great Falls High School and President of the Board for the Paris Gibson Museum of Art. It is anticipated that the Great Falls Urban Art Project will soon be approved as a 501(c)3 program.

Wayfinding: As it may be difficult to identify and find some key points of interest in the Great Falls area, the installation of a coordinated and planned wayfinding system is essential. The BID is spearheading a city-wide Wayfinding project to help direct visitors to Great Falls toward the wonderful opportunities in Great Falls. The signs and direction kiosks should be in place by summer, 2021. This project has been on the drawing boards for a very long time, with a lot of effort and time devoted, especially by Joan Redeen of the BID, to making it happen. DDP has agreed to manage all the signs in and near Great Falls.

Art for the Traffic Signal Boxes: The BID has installed art on nearly all of the traffic Signal Boxes within the Downtown Master Plan area. Future repair maintenance of damaged boxes is the only concern now. The BID has taken on this responsibility.

Clean Downtown: The BID is the lead agency ensuring the Downtown is clean, from emptying the trash receptacles, taking care of the trees, and putting out and maintaining the summer flower baskets. NeighborWorks Great Falls has a community cleanup each spring, in conjunction with Malmstrom AFB, The Neighborhood Councils, and many other organizations, to clean the parks. Private residences of elderly or disabled residents are also cleaned up by volunteer teams. Alley cleanup is done on a volunteer basis by David Saenz, the pastor of the Cascade County Calvary Chapel and volunteers from his congregation. All of these efforts need and deserve the support of the DDP and the Downtown Safety Alliance.

Outdoor Dining: Working with the City, the BID implemented a pedlet program in 2017 to provide space for outdoor dining Downtown. The BID provides supplies for the initial build of a pedlet, which allows the restaurant to encroach on the sidewalk with a pedestrian walkway around the pedlet. As of 2021, there are seven outdoor dining locations, including one on the balcony of Elevation 3330.

Outdoor dining is generally allowed from May 1 to October 31 and has been a huge success for Downtown restaurants.

Homeless Services: The Great Falls Continuum of Care is a consortium of many health care providers, government agencies, housing organizations and others working with the homeless and the near homeless, with the objective of finding permanent housing for this population. The FUSE (frequent user) program is specifically directed toward people who fall into the intersection of criminal activity and health/mental care. In 2018, a FUSE survey by the GFPD found 12 people so identified: about half of those chose to be housed and provided with services.

Low-Cost Alcohol: Working with the Cascade County Tavern Owners and the GFPD, an on-going effort to address the sale of expired beer and low-cost alcohol is a continuing effort of the DDP.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF): The Montana Legislature allows cities to designate certain areas as needing revitalization. The TIF program operated by first establishing a base year taxable value for all properties within the appropriate district. All increases in property taxes in the district above this base valuation, due to new development or reappraisals, are assigned to the City to be used to finance eligible activities within the district. The Downton Urban Renewal District was designated as a TIF District in May, 2013. Applications for TIF assistance are subject to program eligibility analysis and project review criteria. While TIF funds have not been utilized by the Safety Alliance, these funds have helped with the livability of Downtown Great Falls.