

PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD ZONING COMMISSION

APRIL 10, 2011

Case Number

N/A

Applicant

N/A

Owners

N/A

Property Location

N/A

Parcel ID Number

N/A

Requested Action

Review Downtown Urban Renewal Plan and make recommendation as to conformity with Growth Policy

Recommendation

Recommend conformity with Growth Policy

Project Planner

Brant Birkeland, Planner II

Downtown Urban Renewal Plan

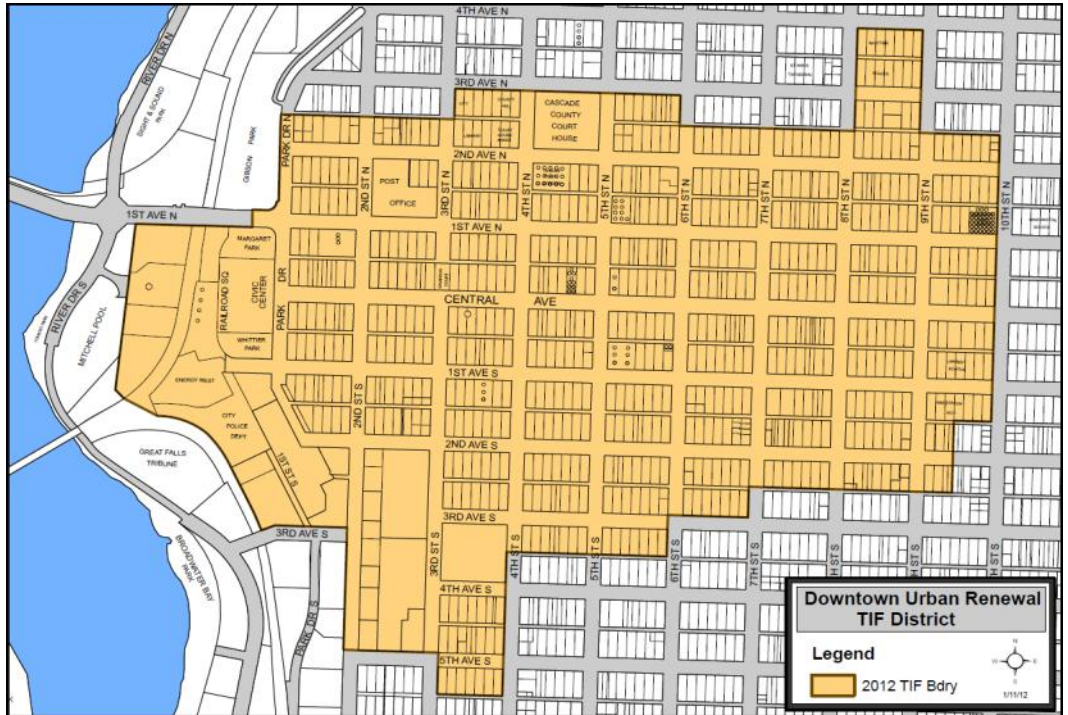


Figure 1: Downtown Urban Renewal Area

Summary

Project Description

The Great Falls City Commission adopted the Downtown Master Plan (DMP) in October 2011 as an attachment to the City’s 2005 Growth Policy. The DMP provides a goal-driven, action oriented blueprint for the redevelopment and revitalization of Downtown. In an effort to implement the vision, themes and recommendations of the DMP and revitalize Downtown, the City has elected to establish an urban renewal program for Downtown which includes a provision to utilize tax increment financing (TIF). This redevelopment of the area will involve an extensive public/private partnership among the City of Great Falls, the Downtown Development Partnership and

various public and private entities and agencies. To date, these partnerships have completed the following tasks:

1. Defined, described and mapped the boundaries of the urban renewal district;
2. Prepared a “Finding of Blight” report, as required and defined in Montana Statute;
3. Prepared a resolution of blight, as approved by the City Commission; and
4. Prepared a draft Downtown Urban Renewal Plan (DURP).

The vision, themes and recommendations of the DMP serve as the basis of the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan (DURP) along with relevant components of the Growth Policy. The TIF element of the plan will establish a “base

year” of January 1, 2012 for the purpose of segregating and calculating the incremental increase in the taxable value of the district. The funds derived through the increment program will be used for public improvements that are intended to be a catalyst for future private development. In accordance with Section 7-15-4213, MCA, prior to its approval of an urban renewal plan, the local governing body shall submit the plan to its planning board for review and recommendation as to its conformity with the local growth policy.

Analysis:

The DMP specifically recommends the establishment of a Downtown TIF district under Flourishing Objective 1.b: Establish a Downtown Tax Increment Financing District (TIFD) to fund Downtown projects, improvements and organizational changes. Additionally, the themes, goals and policies of the City’s Growth Policy are supported by recommendations contained within the DURP. The following is an analysis of strategies and actions from the Growth Policy (in bold) and the subsequent supporting recommendations of the DURP.

Encourage livable, walkable, visually and functionally cohesive neighborhoods that incorporate traditional design concepts (Land Use pg. 20).

- Downtown Living Objective 1: Promote a wide range of housing choices throughout Downtown.
- Downtown Living Objective 2: Ensure existing housing is safe and attractive.
- Downtown Aesthetics Objective 1: Preserve, restore, and reuse Downtown’s historic buildings and sites.
- Downtown Aesthetics Objective 3: Promote quality design and construction in Downtown’s built environment.

Formulate and adopt modern, flexible land development regulations in order to preserve and enhance the scale, quality, and character of existing neighborhoods (Land Use pg. 21).

- Flourishing Downtown Strategy 1.c: Update zoning and land use regulations to support recommendations of the Plan
- Downtown Living Strategy 1.b: Evaluate zoning and land use regulations to ensure policies allow for and encourage Downtown housing in the form of rehabilitation and preservation of existing buildings, infill development and new construction.

Encourage mixed land uses in new and redeveloping areas to achieve a high degree of self-containment, reduce auto dependence, and foster a strong live-work-play pattern of activity within neighborhoods (Land Use pg. 22).

- Downtown Living Strategy 4.b: Encourage mixed-use development that places residents within close proximity to commercial activities
- Connected Downtown Strategy 2.b: Ensure that bike routes link and connect neighborhoods, employment centers, amenities and destinations
- Connected Downtown Strategy 4.c: Utilize signage, pathways and striping to provide pedestrians and bicyclists with safe and efficient connections between Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods

Encourage preservation of corridors of land for non-motorized transportation routes/trails and provide public investment for non-motorized transportation facilities (Land Use pg. 22).

- Connected Downtown Strategy 2.c: Improve and expand bicycle connections to the River’s Edge Trail through signage and routes
- Connected Downtown Strategy 4.a: Improve the attractiveness and enhance the visibility of railroad crossings and underpass tunnels that connect Downtown to the Missouri River, River’s Edge Trail and Gibson Park.
- Connected Downtown Strategy 4.b: Identify locations and develop design options to develop an additional separated grade bike and pedestrian crossing of railroad tracks.

- Connected Downtown Strategy 4.c: Utilize signage, pathways and striping to provide pedestrians and bicyclists with safe and efficient connections between Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods

Review existing zoning to ensure it is consistent with neighborhood objectives, and pursue rezoning of areas where conflicts are found (Land Use pg. 23).

- Flourishing Downtown Strategy 1.c: Update zoning and land use regulations to support recommendations of the Plan
- Downtown Living Strategy 1.b: Evaluate zoning and land use regulations to ensure policies allow for and encourage Downtown housing in the form of rehabilitation and preservation of existing buildings, infill development and new construction.

Increase code enforcement activity in order to help protect neighborhoods from decay, decline and disinvestment (Land Use pg. 23).

- Downtown Living 2.a: Actively monitor the condition of existing housing and enforce the City's Property Maintenance Code

Allow for compatible, small-scale commercial uses that support existing neighborhoods and reduce dependence on automobile travel (Land Use pg. 24).

- Downtown Living Strategy 4.b: Encourage mixed-use development that places residents within close proximity to commercial activities

Encourage public investment in parks and schools that are neighborhood focal points, consistent with the Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan (Land Use pg. 25).

- Downtown Aesthetics Strategy 2.a: Actively pursue the development of an indoor/outdoor community gathering space to host activities and events and attract residents, employees and visitors throughout the year.
- Downtown Aesthetics Strategy 2.b: Encourage diversity in the form and function of Downtown parks, plazas and gathering spaces

Proactively direct development through public investment in infrastructure (Land Use pg. 28).

- Connected Downtown Objective 3.c: Prepare a one-way conversion plan to help facilitate an environment that is pedestrian and retail friendly, improves local circulation, and increase access to Downtown businesses

Recommendation:

It is recommended the Planning Advisory Board recommend in writing to the City Commission that in accordance with Section 7-15-4213, MCA, the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan has been found to be in conformance with the 2005 Great Falls Growth Policy.

Attachments:

Exhibit A: Downtown Urban Renewal Plan

Cc: