

RODNEY STREET AREA AMENDMENT *TO THE* HELENA DOWNTOWN URBAN RENEWAL DISTRICT



Draft for Public Review:
September 4, 2019

Prepared For:



City of Helena

Prepared By:



WGMGROUP™

Acknowledgments

This Plan was made possible with the support and commitment of the following individuals and organizations:

CITY OF HELENA

City Commission

Wilmot Collins, Mayor

Andrews Haladay

Ed Noonan

Heather O'Loughlin

Kali Wicks

Sharon Haugen, City Community Development Director

HELENA CITY-COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

CONSULTANT TEAM

Anne Cossitt, Senior Planner, WGM Group, Inc.

Brent Campbell, President, WGM Group, Inc.

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Executive Summary

The Rodney Street Area is slowly transitioning from an area perceived to be one of the most run-down and rowdy in Helena. Positive change in the Rodney Street Area has come slowly and almost imperceptibly over the past three decades. In the 1970s and '80s, area residents were adamant their neighborhood would not be subject to the tear-down mentality of the federal urban renewal programs that changed downtown Helena. As a result, transition from rough to revitalized in the Rodney neighborhood has not been swift nor entirely successful, but the area has retained a neighborhood integrity. Without a boost to stimulate major improvements, the area will continue to lag behind other areas in Helena.

The purpose of the proposed amendment into the Downtown Urban Renewal District (URD) is to provide the boost the neighborhood needs to become more vital and sustainable. Becoming part of the Downtown URD will provide the Rodney Street Area with resources for implementing the neighborhood's plan for the future. As part of the Downtown URD, funding from the District's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) can be used for projects that provide public benefit.

As a result of being considered for amendment, the Rodney Street neighborhood now has its first-ever plan for the future. The plan for the future (Chapter 3 of this report) was developed from insights gained at a focus group of approximately a dozen local residents and business owners and were presented at an open house on August 8, 2019. Residents are passionate about this neighborhood and now is the chance to ensure it grows in way that retains the neighborhood's unique character. Amendment into the URD is an opportunity to accelerate the reinvigoration of the neighborhood.

This report provides the information required by statute for amending the Downtown URD. The proposed addition of the Rodney Street Area meets all amendment criteria.

Background and Statement of Purpose

Overview

This chapter introduces basic information about the Rodney Street Area proposed to be amended into the Helena Downtown Urban Renewal District (URD). This chapter describes the purpose of the amendment, geographic setting, and background on why the amendment is proposed and how it will be realized.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this report is to include the Rodney Street Area in the Helena Downtown URD with Tax Increment Financing (TIF) provisions. This amendment document will serve as the plan for addressing conditions identified in the Statement of Blight.

This amendment is intended as a separate document to the Downtown URD Plan. Changes that need to be made to the existing text and maps in the Downtown URD Plan are identified in Chapter 4 of this report.



Figure 1.1. Residential buildings on Rodney Street.
SOURCE: WGM PHOTO

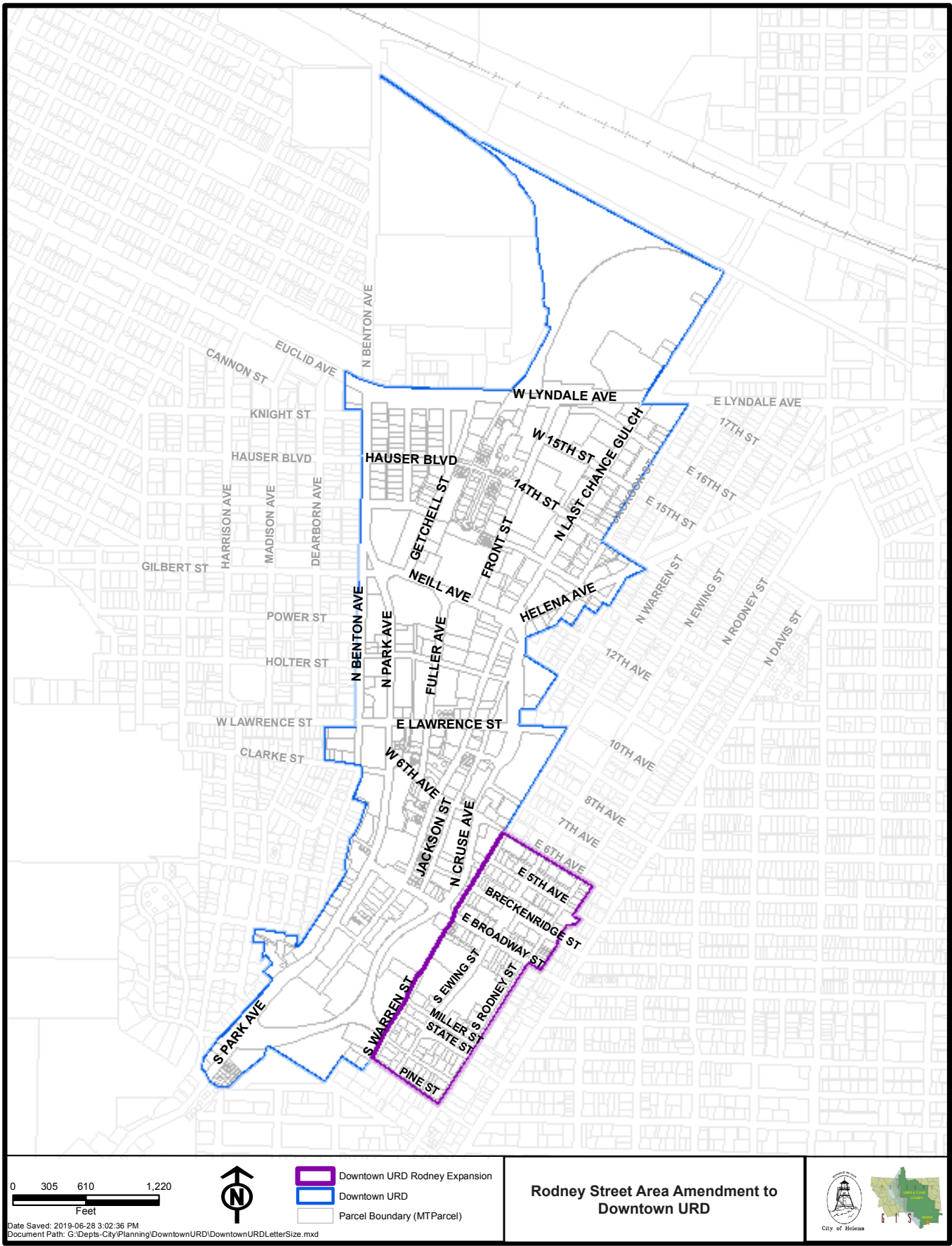


Figure 1.2. Downtown URD Area and Rodney Street Area Amendment.

Location

The Rodney Street Area lies immediately adjacent to the eastern boundary of the existing Downtown URD's south end along Warren Street. The Amendment Area runs east on 6th Street from Warren Street to Spencer Street alignment (now an alley), south on Spencer to Broadway, then west to Rodney Street, south on Rodney Street to Pine Street, then west to Warren Street and north back to the point of beginning. The boundaries extend to the edges of the street right-of-ways.

Project Background

Just prior to adopting the Helena Downtown URD at the end of 2018, the Helena City Commission raised the question of including an area surrounding Rodney Street. Doing so would result in several steps backward in the adoption process. The Helena City Commission agreed to adopt the Downtown URD as presented and to reconsider in 2019 the addition of Rodney Street as an amendment to the URD.

The Downtown URD is intended to improve economic vitality, create jobs, encourage investment, and generally improve infrastructure. The proposed Rodney Street Area is too small to do well as its own separate URD, so the City is considering adding it to the Downtown URD.

At the end of March 2019, the City of Helena contracted with WGM Group, Inc. to assist with amending the Rodney Street Area into the Downtown URD. The first step in that process was to assess if and how to move forward with including the Rodney Street Area.

Because the Rodney Street Area does not have a separate planning organization or neighborhood interest group, a list of approximately 18 key stakeholders were identified by the Helena Citizens Council, City Staff, and WGM Group, Inc. Stakeholders included local landowners, Montessori School, Myrna Loy Center, business owners, apartment owners, and residents. Most residents had lived there for a long-time; one person had been born at St. John's hospital; another grew up in the neighborhood. Eleven of the stakeholders were able to participate in a focus group on May 14, 2019 to explore local perceptions and desired future for the Rodney Street Area. The information from the focus group and subsequent public meeting on August 8, 2019 form the basis for the vision and goals presented in Chapter 3 of this report.

Amendment Process

The process for including the Rodney Street Area follows the process identified in the Downtown URD Plan and applicable provisions of Montana statute as follows.

1. Documentation of Blight (Statement of Blight report)
2. City determination that the Amendment Area is blighted (formalized as a "Resolution of Necessity")
3. Consideration by the Helena URD Advisory Committee
4. Notice to Lewis and Clark County and Helena School District and opportunity to comment at a public meeting regarding the effect of Tax Increment Financing
5. Check for conformance with the Growth Policy - Planning Board review and recommendations
6. Public Hearing by the Helena City Commission
7. Adoption by City Ordinance

Although not required by the URD Plan or Montana statute, the amendment process for the Rodney Street Area includes two separate public meetings. The first meeting was held on August 8, 2019 to introduce the project and present the statement of blight and initial vision concepts. The second meeting in September is to present and obtain comments on the draft plan for the Rodney Street Area.

The Helena City Commission desires to complete the amendment process by the end of 2019.

Description of the Rodney Street Area

Overview

This chapter provides more information on the Rodney Street Area, including its history, current land uses, zoning, growth policy direction, issues, and opportunities.

Rodney Street Area - How the Boundary was Determined

The following map provides a more detailed look at the Rodney Street Area. The boundaries were established by considering the following criteria, which are the same as those in Blight Statement for the Downtown Helena URD inclusion criteria.

Boundary Criteria:

- Must be within city limits
- Likelihood to contain areas of blight, including under-utilized property and high vacancy rates
- Boundary does not cut across existing lots
- Avoids using alleys as boundary line
- Good potential for new investment
- Advances the objectives of the Downtown Master Plan
- Area is not so big that TIF funding for projects is diffused or spread too thin to be effective

Overall Description of the Rodney Street Area

The Rodney Street Area comprises 39.53 acres, primarily on a gentle spur ridge between Davis Gulch and Last Chance Gulch. The spur ridge rises in elevation from the north to the south, becoming progressively steeper south of State Street. The Rodney Street Area's lowest points are in the vicinity of State and Miller Streets between Rodney and Warren.

Situated within walking distance of downtown Helena and the capital, the area is an eclectic mix of housing, retail, and offices. Rodney Street between 6th and Broadway Streets is a distinctive neighborhood commercial/retail area with a bank, small grocery store, laundry, hair salon, bakery, bar, and a mix of private and state government offices. Just to the west, the Myna Loy Center is a performing arts center and theater with events every day of the week. Across Ewing Street is the Justice Center, with courthouse and detention facility. Between Broadway and Miller Streets the area is dominated by the Old St. John's hospital. This facility now houses a variety of businesses and private offices, and Rocky Mountain Senior Care Center. Much of the area housing is multi-family. With the exception of the south facing block of Pine between Ewing and Rodney Streets, there is not a single block comprised solely of single family housing. Single family and multi-family types are interspersed with commercial or public uses from 6th Avenue to Miller Street. Pocha Park between Miller and State Streets is the only park in the area.

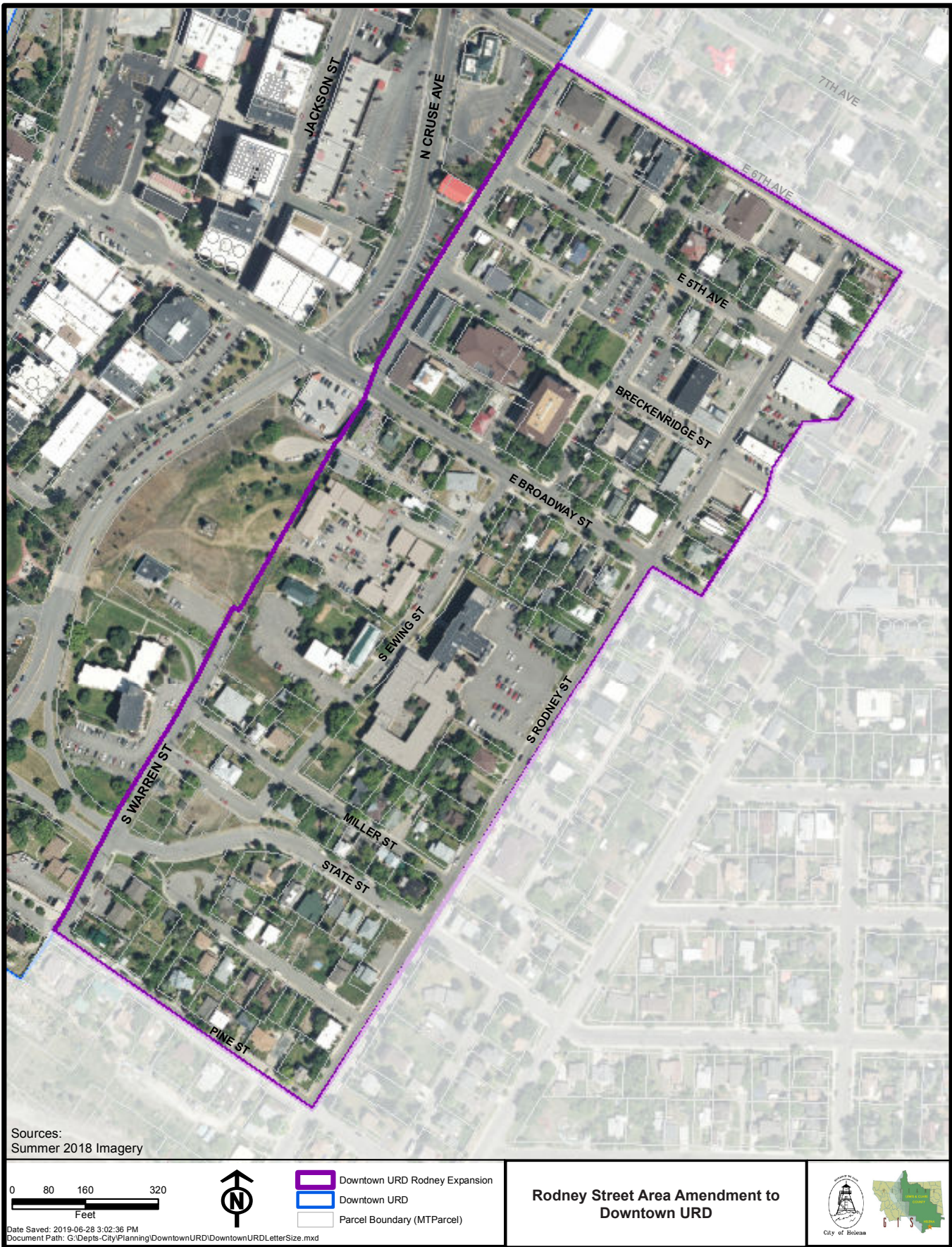


Figure 2.1. Detail of Rodney Street Area Amendment.

Rodney Street Area Quick Statistics	
Rodney Street Area Total	39.53 acres
Home-owner Residential	7.25 acres
Commercial, including residential rentals	14.91 acres
Vacant	1.81 acres
Exempt from Taxation	3.87 acres
Total number of buildings	118
Buildings built prior to 1900	67

The area is slowly transitioning from an area perceived to be one of the most run-down in Helena. The Rodney Street Area has always had a strong neighborhood feel with many life-long residents, but it has also had a history of short-term residents, a transient component and a reputation as rough. Rowdiness has dissipated over past decades with a decrease in the number of bars from several to one, the Jester. New families are moving in and making improvements to properties, along with other improvements made by commercial building owners. The neighborhood is frequented by residents and others from throughout the City and out-of-town visitors for attractions like the Myrna Loy and retail and events on Rodney Street. Close to the south hills and recreational trails, many bicyclists also frequent the area. Locals would like to see continued improvements, but want to keep the same sort of eclectic vibe and distinct neighborhood characteristic.

Change in the Rodney Street Area has come slowly and almost imperceptibly over the past three decades. In the 1970s and '80s, area residents were adamant their neighborhood would not be subject to the tear-down mentality of the federal urban renewal programs that changed downtown Helena. As a result, transition from rough to revitalized has not been swift nor entirely successful, but the area has retained a neighborhood integrity and more of Helena's oldest historic structures than anywhere else. Without a boost to stimulate major improvements, the area will continue to lag behind other areas in Helena.



Figure 2.2. Continental Divide Trail Riders at the B&B for groceries.

SOURCE: WGM PHOTO

Rodney Street Area History

The Rodney Street neighborhood began developing soon after the 1864 discovery of gold in Helena. It was the town's first permanent residential neighborhood and commercial district, built above the heavily mined and muddy gulch bottom. State Street developed as a commercial area on the slopes of the gulch and the Rodney Street commercial area developed only slightly later. The first permanent house on Rodney Hill was built in 1867.

By the late 1870s and early 1880s, the Rodney area had achieved the status of the preferred place to live, home of the town's most prominent citizens. The Catholic Diocese established an extensive complex of schools, dormitories, cathedral, and hospital by the 1880s on

Figure 2.3.
Livery
Building on
Breckenridge
Street in July
2019.

SOURCE: WGM PHOTO



what became known as “Catholic Hill.” This area was located in the area that now includes the Old St. John’s hospital building. Just down the hill, Helena’s red-light district emerged on Miller and State streets in the 1880s. The Mollie Byrnes House at 212 E. State Street is still standing, one of the few remaining structures of the red light districts in Helena.

By the early 1890s, the new and exclusive residential district on Helena’s west side attracted some of the more financially successful Rodney area residents to relocate. Owner occupancy declined and rental lodging increased. The Rodney area continued rampant growth with new multi-family housing and major public facilities including the Territorial Capitol (now the county courthouse) and new jail (now the Myrna Loy Center) until the mid-1890s. The Panic of 1893, a serious national economic depression triggered by a collapse of the silver markets, curbed the meteoric rise of Helena and other mining towns across the West. The Rodney neighborhood character changed during this time. Owner occupancy continued to decline. By 1900, construction of new buildings in the neighborhood had come to a standstill and remained in a period of stasis until 1935.

In October 1935, a series of major earthquakes struck Helena with especially severe impacts to the Rodney neighborhood. Catholic Hill was devastated with only two buildings remaining, the old hospital laundry and Immaculata Hall. Immaculata Hall is now an office building facing Ewing Street.

The inability of Helena to recover quickly from the earthquakes is a strong indicator of the shaky economy and national depression of the 1930s. The effects were magnified in the Rodney area. The area was already depressed and in decline prior to the earthquakes. Local owners, restricted by the depression’s shrinking effects on finances, were unable



Left, Figure 2.4. Housing on Ewing Street. Right, Figure 2.5. Transit stop with bench and lawn.

SOURCE: WGM PHOTOS



Figure 2.6.
Property near
Cutler and State
streets.
SOURCE: WGM PHOTO

to repair and rebuild to the same level of quality workmanship that existed prior to 1900. Of all the buildings razed on Catholic Hill after the 1935 earthquake, only the hospital and Emerson school (now school district administration offices) were eventually rebuilt on the hill. A large number of buildings remained vacant for years.

By the late 1970s and '80s, Rodney area residents were still strongly tied to the area, but the area had become a bit shabby. The Rodney Street neighborhood became known as a more sordid side of Helena, with multiple bars and prostitutes. The Rodney neighborhood was touched only slightly by the downtown urban renewal of the 1970s, most notably with the reconfiguration of Cutler Avenue and State Street.

By the 1980s and 1990s, the area began to renew on the strength of local owners and residents. The Helena South-Central Historic District was established in 1986 encompassing an area south of Broadway between Cruse Avenue and Davis Street. North of Broadway, local owners began renovating their buildings. The Weinstein building at 101 Rodney Street and the Myrna Loy Center are notable examples of the changes occurring during the 1980s and 1990s.

In the past decade, owners have built momentum, cleaning up properties and renovating buildings. Rodney Street continues as a neighborhood commercial area with a bakery, grocery, bar, bank, beauty shop, and offices.

Existing Conditions

Existence of Blight

The Statement of Blight report documented six of the 15 blight factors identified in Montana statute. This is important because an area proposed for amendment into an Urban Renewal District must first be determined to contain blight. The following provides key points about the six types of blight found in the Rodney Street Area.

- 1) The substantial physical dilapidation, deterioration, age obsolescence, or defective construction, material, and arrangement of buildings or improvements, whether residential or nonresidential

Almost 60 percent of all buildings in the Rodney Street Area were built prior to 1900. Many buildings do not have air conditioning, universal accessibility, high speed internet, open work space, updated bathrooms, and updated electrical and plumbing. A few buildings are vacant and boarded up, inviting vandalism.

Property values in the Rodney Street Area are not increasing as rapidly as the city overall.

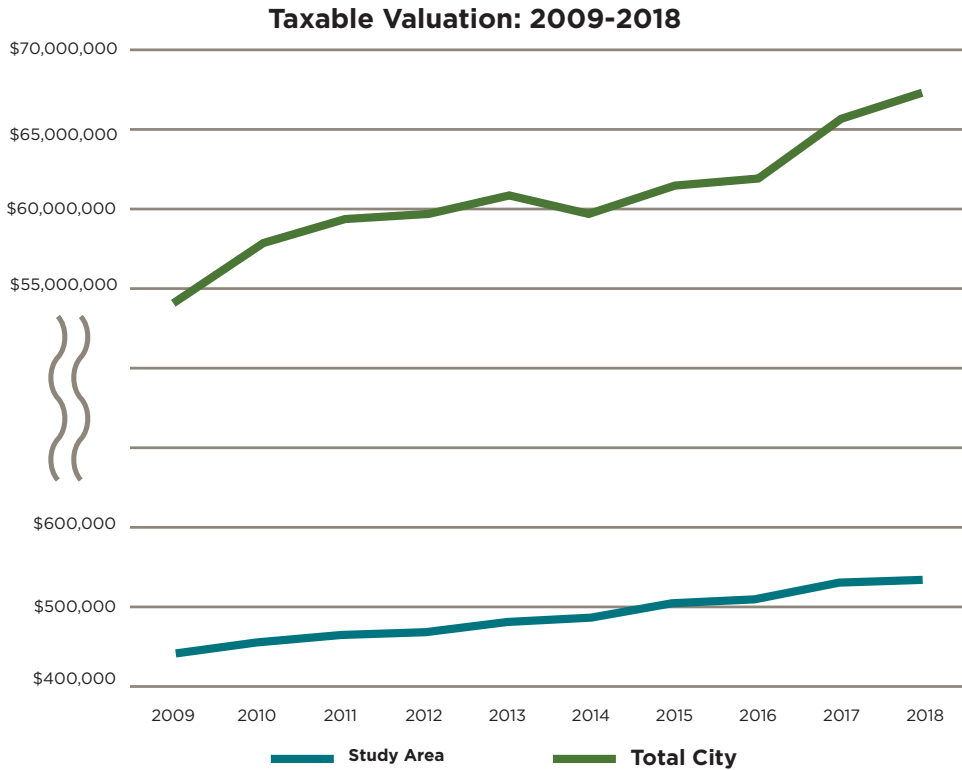


Figure 2.7. Taxable Valuation for Rodney Street Area and city-wide.
SOURCE: CITY OF HELENA FIGURES FROM THE MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

- 2) Inadequate provision for ventilation, light, proper sanitary facilities, or open spaces as determined by competent appraisers on the basis of an examination of the building standards of the municipality

Building codes are much more detailed now than when most buildings in the Rodney Street Area were constructed. When a building owner wishes to update or make changes to a building, building code requirements could require replacement of knob-and-tube electrical, installation of fire sprinklers, ADA access, asbestos remediation, and reconfiguration of interior space. Understandably, some owners may delay improvements that might trigger far more expensive building code requirements. This creates a cycle that also delays the kinds of improvements that make the building more competitive in the market. It can also result in serious deferred long-term maintenance that leads to building obsolescence.

- 3) Defective or inadequate street layout

Defective or inadequate street layout includes the following:

- The offset of Ewing Street - Ewing Street jogs to the east around the court house complex.
- Super-long blocks south of Broadway. These very long blocks make it more difficult to move around in the neighborhood and function as barriers to connections downtown.
- Alignment of Cutler, Ewing, and State streets - This is an odd street configuration

- that can be confusing to navigate by car, bike or on foot.
- Half-Streets and Dead-Ends.



Figure 2.8. Street layout issues.

- 4) Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness

The re-alignment of State Street and associated changes to Ewing, E. Cutler have resulted in loss of usefulness of lots, especially on both sides of Cutler just east of Warren Street. The right-of-way takes up only a portion of the lots and the remaining portions may have potential for development.

- 5) Unsanitary or unsafe conditions

Streets in the Rodney Street Area have heaves, potholes, crumbling curbs, and a patchwork of repairs that make it hazardous to drive, bike, or walk. Some of the repairs are linked to issues with underground utilities, including storm drainage. Poor street condition is especially noticeable on Rodney Street. The City of Helena is planning to start improvements to Rodney Street in Spring of 2020.

- 6) The existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes

The Rodney Street Area is in an area with earthquake potential. The Rodney Street Area includes conditions that can exacerbate fire spread and damage -- not all buildings have fire sprinklers or fire alarms.

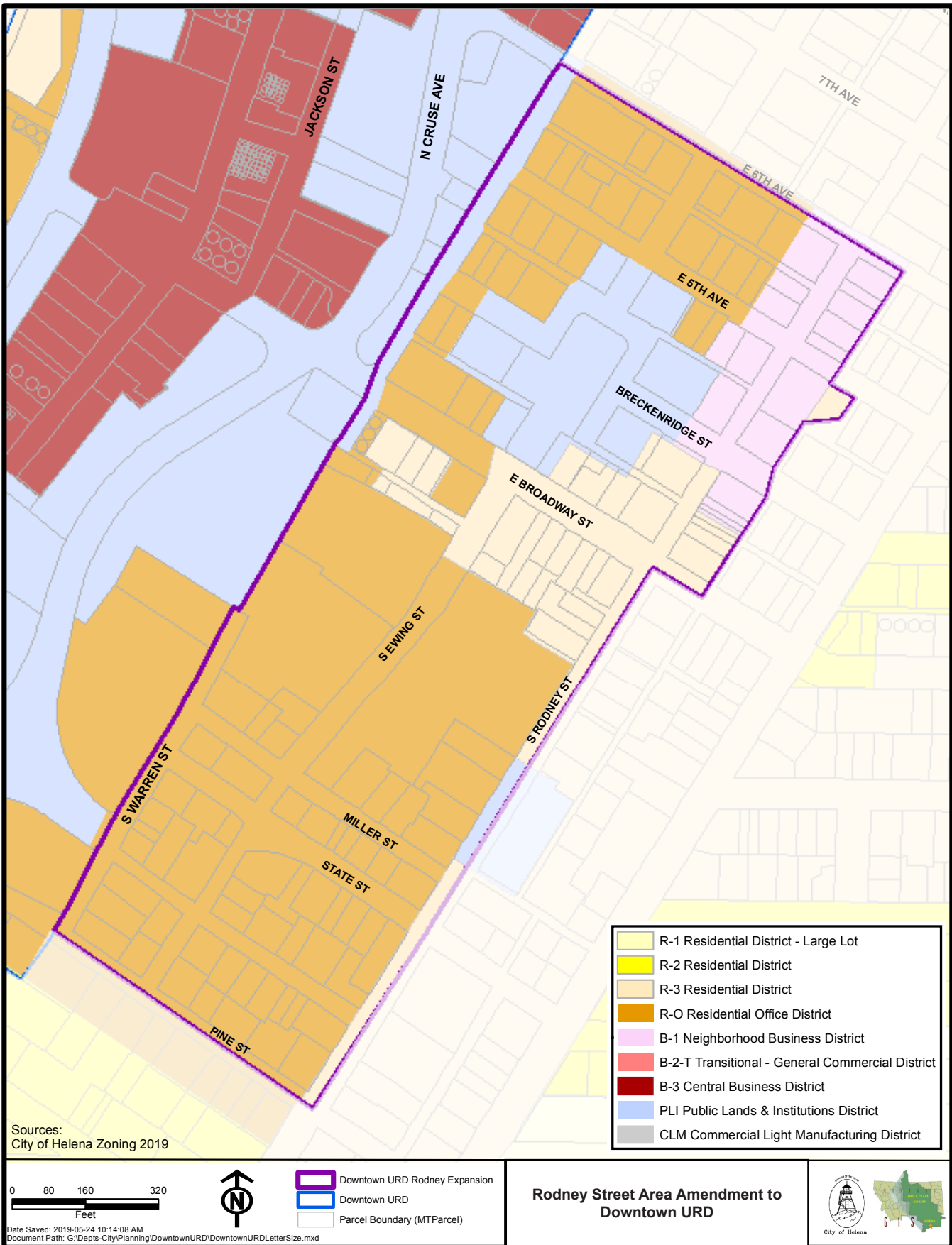


Figure 2.9. Existing zoning.

Zoning

Current zoning in the Rodney Street Area is shown on Figure 2.9.

Existing Zoning Districts in the Rodney Street Area

The following are general descriptions of the current zoning districts. The zoning code includes additional specific standard for lot sizes, maximum heights, and building setbacks.

- R-3** Residential - provides for a mixture of residential structures to serve varied housing needs and allows limited compatible nonresidential uses.

- R-O** Residential Office - provides for a compatible mix of higher density residential development with professional and business offices and associated service uses.

- B-1** Neighborhood Business - provides for a compatible mixture of residential, public, and small scale commercial uses that serve as transitions between zoning districts.

- PLI** Public Lands and Institutions

Future Land Use

The City's Growth Policy provides general direction for future land uses. The City is currently in the process of updating the 2011 Growth Policy. Until an update is adopted, the guiding document is the 2011 Growth Policy.

2011 Growth Policy Future Land Use Designations in the Rodney Street Area

The City's 2011 Growth Policy future land use designations for the Rodney Street Area are shown in Figure 10. The Rodney Street Area is comprised of Mixed Use and Urban designations. Growth Policy land use classifications are intended as a general guide and boundaries are not absolute.

The following descriptions are verbatim from the 2011 Growth Policy.

Mixed Use (Area I): This area is the cultural center of the City, which includes a mixture of the historic downtown with more recent development and redevelopment. Uses are predominantly commercial/office and educational (Carroll College) with some residential uses. It is desirable to encourage continuation of mixed use of this area; promote more residential uses particularly in and adjacent to the Great Northern Town Center; and promote more intense and higher density uses closer to Last Chance Gulch and Lyndale Avenue. Mixed use of services and low intensity commercial could be expanded into adjacent areas, including areas between Benton and Davis Street, while preserving the historic character of the district. Better connectivity with all areas should be encouraged.

Urban: Within the City this category includes predominantly moderate to high density residential uses; may include public uses such as schools, churches, and open lands such as parks; and occasional commercial uses that serve the immediate area or are relatively small and low intensity. Within the County, it includes areas closer to the City; areas with few development constraints; areas that may be currently developed or could be redeveloped at higher densities; and may include a variety of uses including commercial and light industrial.

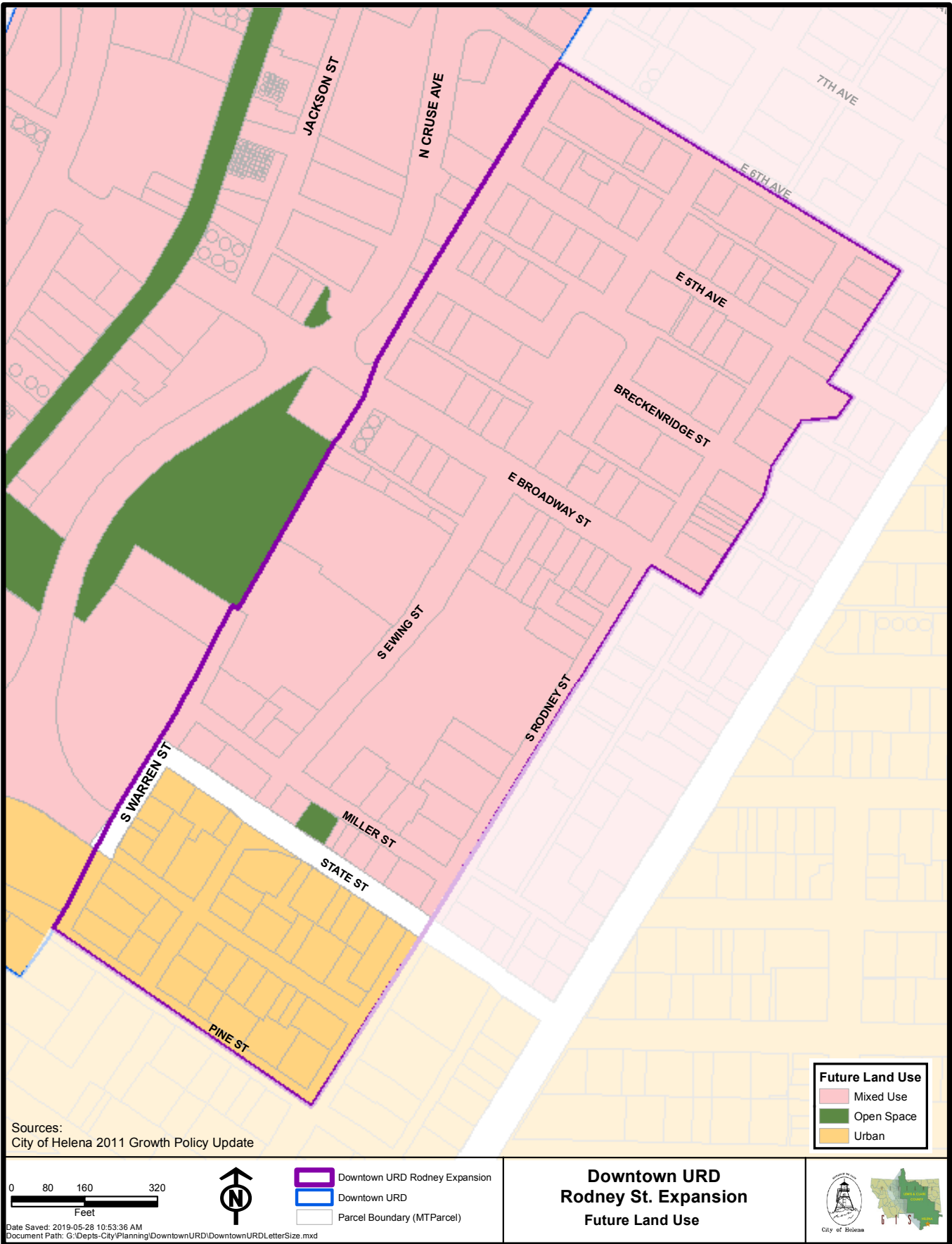
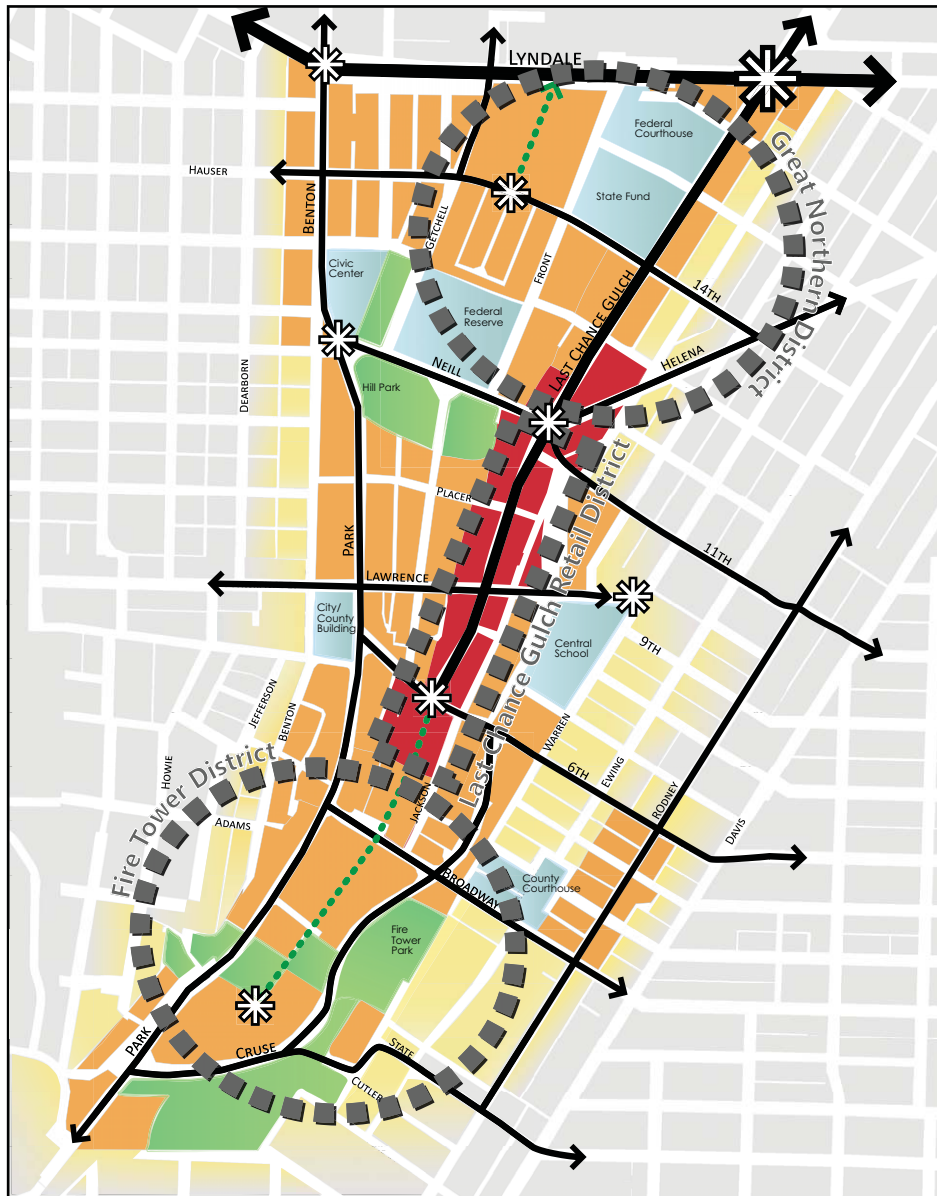


Figure 2.10. 2011 Growth Policy Future Land Use.

2016 Downtown Master Plan

The Downtown Master Plan was adopted in 2016 as an amendment to the City Growth Policy. The Rodney Street Area was peripherally included the Downtown Master Plan's "Future Land Use Framework" map. The land uses for the Rodney Street Area in the Downtown Master Plan are different from those in the 2011 Growth Policy. The Rodney Street Area, was ultimately not part of the Master Plan's goals, vision, and actions. The Rodney Street Area was not included in the downtown zoning update that resulted from recommendations in the Downtown Master Plan.



LAND USE FRAMEWORK

- Residential
- Mixed Use
- Retail
- Civic/Institutional
- Parks/Open Space
- Key Focal Points
- Primary Vehicular Circulation
- Walking Mall

0 250 500 1,000 Feet



Figure 2.11. Land use framework

Future Needs and Considerations

1. **Desire for More Commerce and a Stronger Neighborhood.** The Rodney Street Area has seen improvements over the past few decades, but could use a boost to bring more commerce and people to the neighborhood to sustain and retain the neighborhood residential character.
2. **Strong Foundation.** The Rodney commercial area is one of the few historic neighborhood centers left in Montana. It once flourished with a variety of businesses serving nearby residents, and it still retains much of the foundation of what residents need – grocery (B&B), bank, laundromat, pre-school, entertainment (Myrna Loy), bar, and hair salon. Originally designed to serve the local neighborhood, it still does that and could do it even better, and at the same time serve as a destination for others in the city and visitors from out of town.
3. **Neighborhood Plan for the Future.** This area has no neighborhood plan to guide future growth at this level. The amendment of the Rodney Street Area to the Downtown URD provides an opportunity to establish the planning foundation for the Rodney Street Area.
4. **Neighborhood Character.** Rodney Street Area is funky in a spirited, positive way, with a very diverse set of residents, where many have strong roots, and it is uniquely different from any other place in Helena. Residents are passionate about this area and want to retain its character, connected to downtown and distinctly different from downtown.
5. **History.** The Rodney Street Area history is important to residents. The area south of Broadway is part of the South-Central Historic District. The area has incredible historic resources.
6. **Central Location.** The area is central to downtown, the capital, south hills trails, churches, schools – its “walkability” is evident by the numerous people who walk to and through the area.
7. **Rodney Street Infrastructure.** The street, and water, sewer, and storm drainage facilities are in serious need of upgrades. The City plans to begin improvements in the Spring of 2020. The planning process for this Rodney Street Amendment could help shape those improvements. Consider transit stops and school bus routes in the overall plan, as both currently run along Rodney Street. Consider how the neighborhood envisions street infrastructure this neighborhood commercial center.
8. **Transit.** The bus stops on Rodney Street are well-used. The adjacent landowner has provided benches and a small green area at these stops but there is no shelter from the weather.
9. **More Residents.** You need people to make a place vibrant. Neighborhood centers thrive when local residents can walk to the coffee shop, gathering spot, entertainment, day care, etc. The Rodney Street Area has under-developed properties, including vacant lots and portions of city right-of-way, that could be used for more housing.
10. **Parking.** All off-street parking in the Rodney Street Area is either privately owned or part of the county’s court house complex. As the area grows, more parking will be needed.
11. **Appearance.** The Rodney Street Area looks a bit neglected overall, although there are clearly some properties that are well-tended. Improving aesthetics and usefulness of streets, public places, and buildings will help attract more people and businesses to the area.

Plan for the Future

Overview

This chapter provides the broad plan for the future of the Rodney Street Area. It identifies vision, goals and objectives of the area that will guide future growth and clarify the neighborhood's place within the Downtown Urban Renewal District.

Purpose of the Plan

The Rodney Street Area plan addresses two inter-related purposes:

- 1) Establish the sub-area plan necessary to integrate the Rodney Street Area into the Downtown URD. Being included in the Downtown URD District will provide access to Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and incentives for private sector investment to build the neighborhood's economic sustainability
- 2) Provide the first-ever planning framework for the Rodney neighborhood to envision what it wants to become and outline the strategic approach for achieving the vision

Vision

The Rodney Street Area is a unique neighborhood, connected to but distinctly different from Downtown. It is a quirky, fun, and spirited residential neighborhood that has remained un-gentrified, with a broad diversity of residents, housing options, and services. The neighborhood commercial area between 6th and Broadway is the "Heart of the Neighborhood" where locals can walk to attend to basic needs like groceries, dine out or take-in meals, haircuts, and where they can socialize and be entertained at pubs, coffee shops, ice cream shops restaurants, special events and the Myrna Loy Center. The neighborhood's distinctive, richly historic, eclectic, relaxed atmosphere attracts new residents and visitors who add to the area's vibrancy and economic stability.



Left, Figure 3.1. Example of wide sidewalks and street furniture.

Right, Figure 3.2. Example - food cart venue in northwest Portland.

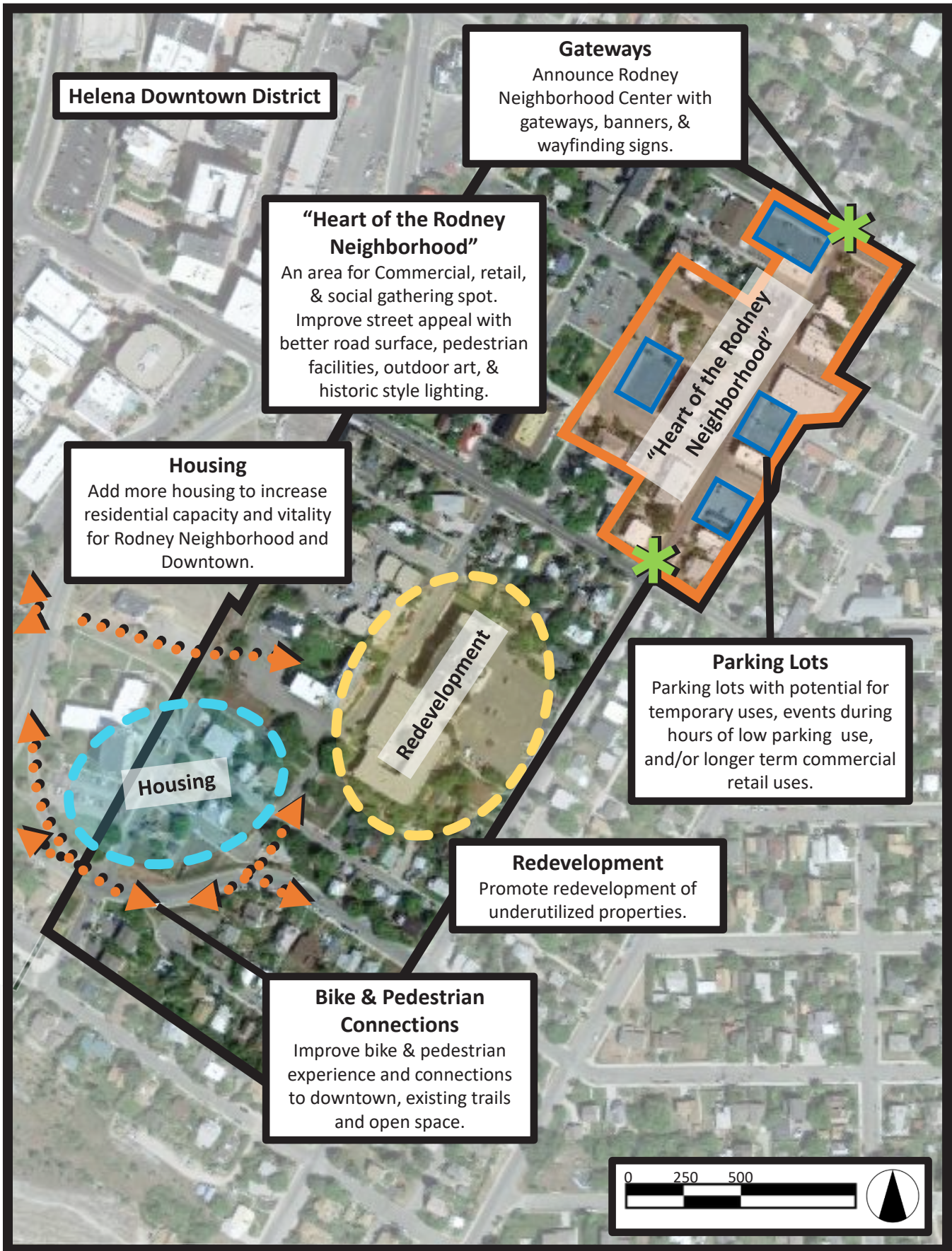


Figure 3.3. Rodney Street Area - Future Vision Concepts

Goal #1: Build Neighborhood Identity

- 1. Develop on the neighborhood’s foundation of an eclectic, bohemian, funky character with care to not become too sophisticated, urban, or gentrified.
- 2. Establish the neighborhood plan as part of the City’s Growth Policy.
- 3. Provide guidance in the Growth Policy to ensure zoning enables this plan’s vision.¹
- 4. Develop design guidelines that incorporate historic neighborhood architecture and other elements of neighborhood character.
- 5. Include Rodney neighborhood-specific branding and marketing in the Downtown’s marketing and branding efforts.

Goal #2: Stimulate Vibrancy with a Mix of Uses

- 1. Retain the neighborhood character, allowing for mixed uses, a variety of residential types, and a central commercial area. Buildings height should reflect what is already in the area, mostly limited to not more than three stories, with the possible exception of taller buildings in the commercial center.²
- 2. Keep the area primarily residential with a range of housing types intermixed with offices and local government uses.
- 3. Increase residential capacity with a focus on vacant or under-utilized lots, particularly in the area around Cutler, State and Warren, where city of right of way has more capacity than is used for existing streets.
- 4. Retain the Rodney Street Commercial Center as the primary area for retail, with potential for housing and offices on upper floors.

Goal #3: Reinvigorate the Rodney Street Commercial Center

- 1. Retain and build the Neighborhood Center as the “Heart of the Neighborhood” - the center for retail, commercial, and social gathering.

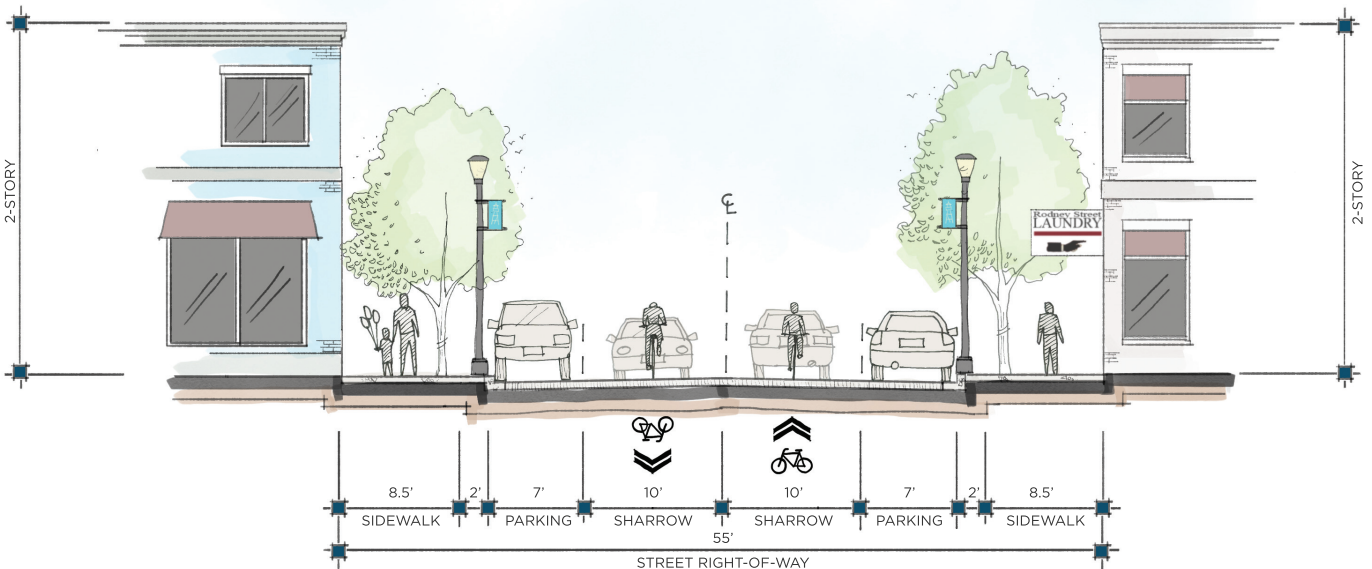


Figure 3.4. Example schematic of Rodney Street design (dimensions are illustrative, not final).
SOURCE: WGM ILLUSTRATION

¹ Growth policies are the basis for zoning. Now is the time to develop the foundation for zoning that will assist in achieving the vision. The building heights are recommended to create a distinctive break from the new downtown zoning that has no height maximums.

² The neighborhood building heights are recommended to create a distinctive break from the new downtown zoning that has no height maximums.



Figure 3.4. Artistic pedestrian crossing example from Noblesville, Indiana.
 SOURCE: ARTIST DARREN L. PETERSON

2. Improve Rodney Street functionality, infrastructure, and aesthetics between 6th and Broadway.
 - a. Two-way traffic with on-street parking
 - b. Wide sidewalks to accommodate pedestrians, street furniture, traffic signage, lighting
 - c. Signage, hardscape and landscape design that improves aesthetics and visual interest and provides visual connection to businesses
 - d. Review proposed improvements to Rodney Street between 6th and Broadway Street for compliance with this plan
3. Create gateways with signage, banners, and wayfinding signage at both ends of the Commercial Center.
4. Create better linkages between the court house complex, Myrna Loy Center and Rodney Street.
5. Incorporate public art that differentiates the area from downtown in a fun and funky interactive way.
6. Monitor parking demand and identify potential for temporary uses, like a food truck venue, events during hours of low parking use and potential longer term transition to parking structures with ground floor retail uses and parking above or below.

Goal #4: Upgrade Underperforming Properties

1. Encourage development of vacant lots.
2. Encourage redevelopment and building upgrades to buildings that lack adequate safety, access, or other issues that prevent highest and best use of the property.

Goal #5: Improve Transit, Pedestrian, and Bike Connections

1. Improve pedestrian and bike connections in the southern portion of the neighborhood, where linkages to downtown are lacking and long blocks and irregular streets lack connectivity.
2. Improve pedestrian linkages between the Neighborhood, Fire Tower Park and the pedestrian walkway/underpass at Cruse Avenue.
3. Provide shelter that fits with neighborhood character at transit stops on Rodney Street.



Figure 3.5. “Trash to Treasure” transit stop reuses soft drink bottles in Lexington, Kentucky.
SOURCE: [HTTPS://NEXTCITY.ORG/DAILY/ENTRY/PUBLIC-ART-BUS-STOPS-PHOTOS](https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/public-art-bus-stops-photos)

How this Rodney Street Area Plan Integrates with the Downtown URD Plan

With few exceptions, the goals and objectives of the Downtown District Plan apply equally to the Rodney Street Area and should be considered incorporated by reference into the Rodney Street Area Plan.

The exceptions that do not apply to the Rodney Street Area are:

Goal #2: Objective #4.

Complete process of rezoning Downtown area to encourage more mixed use and ground floor active use

Rationale: The Rodney Street Area Plan should form the basis for any zone changes.

Goal #6, Objective #3.

Emphasize the unique and historic walking mall and make improvements to attract more businesses and activities

Rationale: The walking mall is not in the Rodney Street Area District.

Implementation

Overview

This chapter identifies how the Rodney Street Area Amendment will be integrated into the implementation section of the Downtown URD Plan. The following examines each section of the Downtown URD Plan Implementation Chapter and identifies where changes are needed.

Funding Sources

There are no changes needed to this section to incorporate the Rodney Street Area amendment. Tax Increment Funding (TIF) as a primary source of funding will apply to the entire District including the Rodney Street Area. The other funding sources also apply, including the Opportunity Zone.

Timeline, Initial Implementation and Next Steps

The timeline for the District began with its approval a year ago. The initial implementation and Guiding Principles would apply to the Rodney Street Area once amended; no changes are needed.

The next steps for the Downtown URD already are underway. The organization and management of the URD has begun and the Rodney Street Area will need to be incorporated into that. The list of potential project priorities does not include Rodney Street improvements.

Revise the list of potential project priorities to include:

- Update or amend the Growth Policy to include Chapter 3 of the Rodney Street Area Amendment Plan
- Including the Rodney Street Area in any baseline inventories, branding, and marketing efforts of the Downtown
- Coordination of planned Rodney Street improvements to align with the goals and objectives of the Rodney Street Area Amendment Plan

Provisions for Displaced Residents

This section will apply to the entire Downtown District, including the Rodney Street Area, once the amendment is completed.

Administration

This section needs to be revised to indicate that at least two of the 11-member Advisory Committee will be from the Rodney Street Area.

Project Selection Process and Criteria

No change is needed to this section.

Initial Project Criteria

The project selection criteria need to be revised as follows:

1. Achieves the vision, goals, and objectives of the URD Plan or the Rodney Street Amendment Area Plan¹
2. Meets the statutory criteria for use of TIF funds
3. Conforms to the Downtown Master Plan or to the Rodney Street Area Plan (as adopted into the Helena City Growth Policy)
4. Incentivizes private investment
5. Provides a good return on investment

Annual Reports

No change to this section.

Amendment

No change to this section.

Other

The map and legal description of the entire Downtown District, including the Rodney Street Amendment Area will need to be updated.

¹The Rodney Street Area Amendment Plan is Chapter 3 of this Amendment Document.

Conclusions

Overview

This chapter reiterates the purpose of the amendment and discusses how this document meets that purpose. It also reviews how the plan meets the statutory criteria for approving the amendment.

Amending the Downtown URD Plan

The Helena City Commission wishes to amend the Downtown URD to include the Rodney Street Area. The purpose is to accelerate revitalization by incentivizing private sector development with TIF funding for projects with public benefit.

The following identifies each of the criteria for approving the amendment and how each has been met:

1. Documentation of Blight (Statement of Blight report completed in July)
2. City determination that the Amendment Area is blighted (formalized as a “Resolution of Necessity” in August)
3. Consideration by the Helena URD Advisory Committee (to occur this Fall)
4. Notice to Lewis and Clark County and Helena School District and opportunity to comment at a public meeting regarding the effect of Tax Increment Financing (notices sent to the first Open House on August 8)
5. Check for conformance with the Growth Policy – Planning Board review and recommendations (September)
6. Public Hearing by the Helena City Commission (to occur later this Fall)
7. Adoption by City Ordinance (to be adopted by end of 2019)

The Rodney Street Amendment must also satisfy statutory criteria for approval of a URD by the City Commission.

Criteria for approval

1. *A workable and feasible plan exists for making available adequate housing for the persons who may be displaced by the project.*

This is addressed in Chapter 4 of this Amendment and Chapter 4 of the Downtown URD Plan.

2. *The urban renewal plan conforms to the comprehensive plan or parts thereof for the municipality as a whole.*

This is satisfied by the intent to include Chapter 3 of this report into the Growth Policy Update, which is currently underway.

- 3. The urban renewal plan will afford maximum opportunity, consistent with the sound needs of the municipality as a whole, for the rehabilitation or redevelopment of the urban renewal area by private enterprise.*

The purpose of this amendment is to accelerate revitalization by incentivizing private sector development with TIF funding for projects with public benefit.

- 4. A sound and adequate financial program exists for the financing of said project.*

Chapter 4 of this report addresses that topic and Chapter 4 of the URD plan lists potential funding sources to fund projects. TIF revenues are anticipated to be the foundation for diversified funding by using TIF as match for private and public funding and investment. Chapter 4 of the Downtown URD also discusses responsibilities of managing the URD and TIF-funded project.

Conclusions

The Rodney Street area is in transition and could use a boost to ensure the area becomes more vigorous economically and socially. Amending the Rodney Street Area into the Downtown URD can provide that extra incentive for private sector revitalization. In the process of developing this amendment, the Rodney Street Area has its first-ever vision to guide future actions in a way that will retain the area's unique character.

Amending the Rodney Street Area as described in this document meets statutory provisions for approval by the Helena City Commission.

