



## **Missoula Business Improvement District's New Master Plan Paves Way for Future Development and Growth**

Established in 2005, the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) of Missoula, Montana, was created to unify the Downtown property owners in maintenance and management of Downtown's common-space area. The goals of the BID include but are not limited to serving an overall public use; promoting the health, safety, prosperity, security, and general welfare of the inhabitants of the district and the State of Montana; and aiding in the cultivation of tourism, promotion, and marketing within the district and beyond. The BID is one of three organizations within the Downtown Missoula Partnership, along with the Missoula Downtown Association and the Missoula Downtown Foundation. The BID is managed by a board of trustees, comprised of property owners appointed by the mayor, and approved by the Missoula city council.

### **Active and Vibrant Missoula**

Missoula is the second-largest city in Montana, with a population of just under 75,000, and is the county seat for Missoula County. Its location at the convergence of five mountain ranges and three rivers has long made it an important gathering place. With its array of amiable retail shops, restaurants, art galleries, museums, and family activities nestled cozily amid the bountiful nature of the Rocky Mountains, Missoula is often considered to be the center of the cultural scene in western Montana. From local festivals and regional sporting events to outdoor recreational opportunities and historic regional art, it bills itself as a place of small-town charm with urban amenities, where people of all ages and backgrounds can find something with which to connect.

Downtown Missoula is a city of neighborhoods, some established, some emerging, and others are works in progress. Missoula's downtown is broken up into nine neighborhoods including Downtown Core, Railyard District, Old Sawmill District, and more.

Missoula is also home to the University of Montana, a public research university and the flagship campus of the University of Montana system. The main campus is just walking distance from the downtown district, infusing a significant amount of commerce into the city's economy. Additionally, the Missoula International Airport, the largest airport in western Montana, is located about six miles from downtown. Local business and trade conventions and exhibitions, concerts, fairs, parades, and other sporting events make Missoula a tourist and destination spot for the greater Montana region.



## **Missoula Downtown BID**

To support this dynamic, active, and burgeoning community, the BID's mission since its creation in 2005 has been to provide clean, safe, and economic vitality of the greater Missoula area by overseeing vital downtown services, such as:

- Removal of garbage, recycling, snow, and graffiti
- Hospitality, education, and business services
- Sweeping, weeding, tree-well maintenance, and ice chipping
- Dedicated patrol on foot and on bike
- Business development retention, recruitment, data acquisition, and planning

Responsibilities and duties surrounding the downtown area include everything from plowing the alleys and hanging holiday decorations to homelessness outreach and reporting the number of bicyclists on sidewalks.

## **Years of Success and Economic Growth**

Between 2010 and 2020, nearly 190 new businesses opened in the Downtown Missoula district. With an estimated \$800 million in new development during those 10 years, Missoula's Downtown BID was renewed in 2020 for another 10-year period, with the support of approximately 700 distinct property owners who rely on the BID as the district's economic representative. Since January 2020, the Missoula Downtown Partnership reported an additional 41 business openings. These business and property owners give a combined \$350,000 annually to the BID budget, helping fund a cleaning team, an ambassador program, one dedicated police officer, maintenance, and business development to service the downtown Missoula district. This ambassador program, established in 2006, aimed to improve the safety of the area through foot patrols, employee escorts, and hospitality services for visitors. The role of that program has been expanded to make the ambassadors available to speak to civic groups and clubs to promote safety in the district, and explain the role and mission of the BID.

While the Missoula City Council supported renewal of the downtown district, it opted to exempt all residentially zoned parcels in the district from being assessed. An estimated 60 properties—zoned RM1-35 and RM1-45—will no longer be assessed. The exemption reduces the annual assessment funds by an estimated \$15,000 annually.



## Development Projects

The growth of downtown Missoula is further exemplified by the increase in business, transportation, and housing and development projects in recent years. Residential, commercial, and city infrastructure development highlights include:

- **AC Hotel by Marriott** — An upscale 105-room hotel with an 11-minute walk from Clark Fork River.
- **Mercantile Residence Inn by Marriott Hotel** — A five-story mixed-use development anchored by a 174-room hotel.
- **Clay Street Micro Apartments** — A 22-unit complex with condominiums and studio apartments in the heart of downtown.
- **ROAM Student Living** — A 468-bed student housing mixed-use project with two floors of structured parking and four floors for residential space. The accompanying retail level features restaurants and cafes.
- **Cambium Place and Polley's Square** — High-end condominiums located in the Old Sawmill District provide retail shops and a coworking space, CW Work Lounge.
- **Missoula Public Library** — Tripling its digital collection and computing services, the expanded library also provides permanent residence to the SpectrUM Science Learning Center, Missoula Community Access Television, and the Families First Learning Lab.
- **Russell Bridge** — Completed in 2020, construction replaced the existing two-lane bridge with a new five-lane structure, raised bicycle lanes, and widened sidewalks.
- **Higgins Bridge** — Estimated to be complete in the spring of 2022, bridge updates will feature a new deck and widening to add width to the sidewalks and bike lanes. In addition, there will be bridge deck replacement, repair of the steel superstructure, power coating luminaries, concrete barriers between motor vehicles and pedestrians and cyclists, and a heating system installed for the sidewalks.
- **Van Buren Street Interchange** — Completed in 2018, the new interchange incorporates roundabouts at the Van Buren Street intersections immediately north and south of Interstate 90.

## New Master Plan

The Missoula downtown master plan creates a community-driven vision and plan for the downtown district for the next 10 years and beyond. It establishes priorities for public-sector action while at the same time providing direction for complementary private-sector decisions. More than 3,000 individuals participated in developing this plan, helping to ensure that it reflects the real needs and goals of current and future residents and visitors.



There are four sectors of focus:

1. Retail and restaurant development
2. Market-rate housing
3. Commercial office space
4. Lodging and hospitality

Potential and proposed city planning spotlights new building recommendations, open space, and civic space, with a goal of creating more postcard views of the district. Suggested and possible improvements include:

**Pattee Street Plaza** – Street wall vacancies can be repaired with multi-story, mixed-use structures to help provide a more pleasant pedestrian experience.

**Two-Way Main Street** – Increase visibility of local businesses, reduce driving detours, and improve safety by expanding the current one-way Main Street.

**Front Street Promenade** – Turn Front Street back into a proper two-way urban landscape will provide a safe, comfortable, and engaging environment.

**Caras Park Gateway** – A welcome sign or gateway welcomes visitors to the heart of the city, adding a sense of arrival and pride to the community.

**City Hall Relocation** – Potential move to the North Higgins neighborhood is optimal convenience to the downtown transfer center, creating a mobility hub with expanded transit facilities, public transportation accessibility, as well as residential and commercial space.

**Underbridges and River Access Points** – Riverfront trails that run under several bridges along the Clark Fork River can be made safer and more welcoming with activated art and lighting.

**Hip Strip** – Improvements and infill development include implementation of protected bike lanes, new mixed-use buildings with residential and retail space.

**Railyard District Opportunity Site** – Redevelopment area that has the potential for single-family housing, mid-density housing, a community center or neighborhood park and recreational space.

Through the collaboration of the Downtown Missoula Partnership, the city of Missoula, and many other governmental, non-profit, and business organizations as well as private citizens, the new master plan was implemented with great success. This plan revisits the goals and opportunities available to downtown Missoula and aims to reflect the city's unique character and future potential.



U.S. Department of Transportation  
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Sources:

[Missoula Downtown](#)

[Missoula Current](#) and [Missoula Current](#)

[City of Missoula](#)

[Missoula Downtown Master Plan](#)

[Wikipedia – Missoula, Montana](#)