



Downtown Great Falls Targeted Block Redevelopment Visioning

Main Street Grant Proposal

We propose to select three of the blocks or intersections in the core of our downtown that have a high amount of underutilized property and create redevelopment visions for each block or intersection. The redevelopment visions, which will include conceptual development concepts, financial feasibility and architectural conceptual renderings, will be created using development and architectural consultants and an exciting, participatory charrette process that builds interest in redevelopment of the properties. The results will be presented at our next Downtown Opportunity Showcase, attracting developers and entrepreneurs to experience the opportunities.

Project Need & Benefit

The City and the Downtown Development Partnership (DDP), as well as our many partners, have long worked to implement the City's Downtown Master Plan, adopted in 2011. In May, 2012, the City created a TIF in the area, declaring the area blighted. As reported in our quarterly reports to Montana Main Street, we have created a great deal of momentum in the downtown to overcome that blight.

Despite our considerable progress, there remain a number of blocks and intersections in the core of our downtown that have not attracted redevelopment and new entrepreneurial ventures. These blocks and intersections lack the vitality and dynamism so important for a successful downtown yet offer substantial opportunity for highly valued private investment. These blocks and intersections have a large amount of long vacant space, some ground floor and much upper floor, and/or have vacant parcels of land.

We have demonstrated great success in attracting redevelopment and new business creation through two earlier rounds of individual building façade rendering projects, which spurred notable projects such as the Arvon Block. Based on our learning through the National Main Street network, and given our discussions with property owners and developers about the potential to more cost-effectively develop multiple properties together, we believe there is great potential in doing this at the expanded scale of targeted blocks and intersections.

This project will use the expertise of consultant developers and architects, joined through a participatory engaging process with the expertise, ideas and enthusiasm of entrepreneurs, developers, residents and the Downtown Development Partners, to develop visions for what these blocks and intersections could be. The visions will be grounded in reality with both development and architectural feasibility and conceptual renderings – the numbers and the eye

candy – that will attract the interest of developers and entrepreneurs to invest in the heart of our downtown.

Project Relationship to Larger Planning Efforts

We have preliminarily targeted four blocks and intersections based on their high proportion of underutilized space and their importance to our downtown revitalization efforts within the context of our Downtown Master Plan. We have decided to focus on the first six-block core area, targeting blocks and intersections that create gaps in the dynamic environment needed for a thriving downtown. Final selection of three blocks and intersections will be made based on the willingness of property owners to either consider selling their properties or participating in redevelopment.

Three of our four preliminary targets lie within our new downtown Opportunity Zone. Our preliminary selections include:

100 Block of Central Avenue, North Side

This block stands in between our Civic Center and D.A. Davidson Companies headquarters. Longtime downtown mainstay Tracy's Restaurant closed this year on this block. A local couple has purchased the former community theatre building on this block with plans for redevelopment. The block suffers from underutilized space and a vacant lot.

200 Block of 1st Avenue South, South Side

This block stands between a mostly renovated block that include the Arvon Hotel and Celtic Cowboy, and the block anchored by Bert and Ernie's (which has been purchased to be re-opened). It is entirely comprised of vacant land currently used as parking which abuts a historic building that has stood vacant for many years. This building recently attracted a new entrepreneur to open Studio Barre on the ground floor, but the upper floors remain vacant.

500 Block of Central Avenue, North Side

This block has enjoyed long-time anchor ground floor businesses including DragonFly Drygoods, but the upper floors have been vacant for years. The block offers some interesting possibilities of upper floor housing across multiple buildings.

Intersection of 6th Street and Central Avenue

This has been a problem intersection for our downtown for quite some time, yet offers solid properties with redevelopment potential.

Our downtown is an Accredited Montana Main Street Community, with the DDP having adopted the Main Street Four Point Approach™. This project meets the Montana Main Street goals, especially those that support economic, community, and tourism development to facilitate a comprehensive sense of place. Our proposed project embodies the spirit of the Main Street Four Point Approach™ including that of Organization – through multiple partnerships working together throughout the process; Promotion – through the continued promotion of Downtown Great Falls and the promotion of the visioning process and the final results, including the Visioning Charrette and the Downtown Showcase; Design – by creating architectural visions of these important blocks and intersections that enhance our downtown's historic and unique environment; and Economic Restructuring – by creating development concepts targeting types of businesses and housing missing from our downtown and/or complementing what we already have.

Matching Funds

The Downtown Development Partnership is committing up to \$5,000 cash as needed to support the project. The Great Falls Development Authority has committed \$5,000 of in-kind staff time to manage the project and staff the Visioning Charrette Event and Downtown Opportunity Showcase. GFDA will also cover the costs of these events so that 100% of the Main Street grant can go towards consultant fees. We have numerous commitments of engagement from skilled volunteers, residents and downtown supporters who have regularly donated thousands of hours each quarter toward our revitalization efforts.

We have budgeted \$7,500 in consulting fees for each of three targeted blocks or intersections. DDP funds will cover associated expenses such as travel and the like. We will issue an RFP for consulting services, seeking a firm or team that includes redevelopment expertise and architectural experience, emphasizing the importance of architectural experience in the historic context of our downtown. We would like to offer the potential for firm(s) to bid on the entire project or a particular block or intersection. We realize that this could increase the management work of the project, but it would be exciting to have multiple teams working on different blocks and intersections, and we are willing to cover the additional management time this would require. Our goal is to build as much engagement and excitement as possible about the potential for these targeted areas.

Local Support & Ability to Complete Project

The City of Great Falls and the Downtown Development Partnership have demonstrated our capability to work together to effectively manage downtown revitalization projects and attract private investment. The key to our success lies in the strength and commitment of our core partners, including the downtown Business Improvement District, the Great Falls Development Authority, NeighborWorks Great Falls and the Downtown Great Falls Association, and in the enthusiastic support of numerous volunteers. Many of these volunteers bring considerable expertise in historic renovation, architecture, urban planning, real estate brokerage, marketing, development and entrepreneurial business ventures.

This project builds on the success of our earlier individual property rendering projects, and our three earlier Downtown Opportunity Showcases. It will be complemented by ongoing redevelopment support work by the Business Improvement District, including the availability of grants for façade and interior renovations. The Great Falls Development Authority is in the process of launching the second round of brownfield assessment grants targeting downtown redevelopment, having won a \$300,000 assessment grant from EPA in June. This will be coupled with GFDA's existing Downtown Loan Fund (capitalized by the City), other loan funds and a \$500,000 supplemental EPA Brownfield RLF grant won this fall to provide gap and bridge financing to support redevelopment and entrepreneurial ventures. GFDA's Small Business Development Center will continue to provide training and coaching to downtown businesses and entrepreneurs.

The Downtown Great Falls Association has recently launched a number of enhanced downtown promotional efforts, including an expanded web site that the City helped fund. NeighborWorks Great Falls has spurred downtown redevelopment by conducting extensive feasibility analysis of numerous downtown properties, most recently being the catalyst for a local non-profit to

undertake redevelopment of the historic Rocky Mountain Building. NWGF also continues important community building work in the downtown.

The City of Great Falls has been supporting redevelopment efforts through property tax abatements, key infrastructure and streetscape improvements, downtown policing, and innovative land use approvals. The City's downtown tax increment financing district is reaching a point where substantial resources are available to make public infrastructure improvements to support redevelopment. All of our downtown partners are eager to take advantage of the new downtown Opportunity Zone to attract increased private investment.

Based on our prior experience with the individual building renderings, we know that our implementation schedule is realistic. We could shorten the process, but fear that this would hinder our desire to make it as participatory as possible, building excitement along the way and attracting more attention from developers and entrepreneurs to consider these targeted areas for investment.