

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES



DOWNTOWN
MASTER PLAN



5-YEAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGIC PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



2024



BACKGROUND

Ronan is included in the existing Mission West Community Development Partners' 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). While this plan has been useful, community leaders determined a more localized plan would also be helpful. In conjunction with the Downtown Master Plan, the Ronan CEDS prioritizes community development and strategies that meet community needs and aspirations for future development. The CEDS and the Downtown Master Plan is a "living document." To be as effective as possible, it should be reviewed and updated frequently, ensuring the community tracks progress toward goals and maintains flexibility as needs and community aspirations change.

Ronan contracted with KLJ Engineering in August of 2023 for the purpose of creating the CEDS and the Downtown Master Plan. Public engagement began in October of 2023 and included a community survey, a series of pop-up meetings, and multiple scheduled meetings with community and Tribal leaders, and elected officials. In addition to public outreach, a thorough review of regional/community level background information and current economic/downtown revitalization trends was also completed. Existing plans from other agencies and surrounding communities were also reviewed, assisting in problem and goal identification, and ensuring the CEDS and Downtown Master Plan were collaborative and supported community efforts.

Community leaders and the public at large identified challenges related to recruitment and retention of qualified/skilled workers and new businesses including concern over aging housing and the general lack of housing.

The impacts of COVID resulted in parts of the state like Ronan that are still recovering from a moderate decrease in seasonal tourism and supply chain/freight issues that heavily affected the agriculture and retail sectors. Additionally, while Ronan generally has adequate public infrastructure, there is a desire for expansion and enhancement of infrastructure that supports overall community economic growth and revitalization of the downtown and Main Street corridor. This includes potential water and sewer extensions, additional infrastructure that supports non-motorized transportation and related place-making that increases community engagement and tourism (such as walking paths, sidewalks, and wayfinding), and additional projects that rejuvenate and rehabilitate downtown.

In response to these concerns, Ronan has outlined goals and strategies that focus on economic diversification, building economic resilience, retaining, developing, and recruiting workforce. Revitalizing the Main Street/Downtown corridor, attracting new business and tourism and increasing connectivity from residents. Goals and objectives address infrastructure development, policies, and collaborations that will help the community grow in strategic and meaningful ways.

Project Approach

A scope of work was established in the project proposal and included several of the tenants of the Montana Main Street (MMS) program. These include a desire to preserve historic and cultural resources, promote long-term planning, collaborate within Montana communities, support economic and tourism development, and enable small business owners to succeed as part of a vibrant and healthy downtown district.

Ronan's Strategic Direction

Vision, Goals & Objectives

Strategic goals and objectives include those that deal specifically with Economic Development as well as those that address the Downtown Master Plan. While there is overlap between the two plans, there are details and projects that are specific to the downtown master plan. Based on existing conditions data, public input, and previously outlined goals not yet fully achieved, the dual-plan goals and objectives center around themes of:

- Growth in Agriculture & Food Production Industries
- Workforce/Resident Retention & Community Development
- Community/Tribal Collaborations and Access to Financial Resources
- Tourism and Supporting the Visitor Economy
- Transportation and Community Infrastructure

Public Engagement

A total of 15 first round Stakeholder and “pop-up” meetings were scheduled and conducted between Tuesday, Oct. 10 and Friday, Oct. 13, 2023.

A second round of Stakeholder engagement was held on May 21, 2024. KLJ presented the draft plan at Mission West to representatives from the Ronan Chamber, Ronan Police Department, residents, and business community members. The presentation was followed by an open house event at the Ronan Cooperative Brewery. A detailed public engagement report is available in **Appendix A** of the full report.

5-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

CEDS goals and objectives address economic resilience, seek to balance continued growth and development that also reflect the unique culture and historic economy of Ronan. With quality of life identified as the greatest community asset, it is important to balance development and growth with tradition and local culture. In addition to assuring that Ronan can access EDA resources for future projects, development of economic strategies ensure that Ronan is prepared to invest both capital and human resources in meeting the needs of their community. Goals and objectives are intended to:

1. Foster Economic Development and Opportunity
2. Increase the size and quality of the workforce
3. Create a welcoming community that supports small business and encourages an entrepreneurial environment.

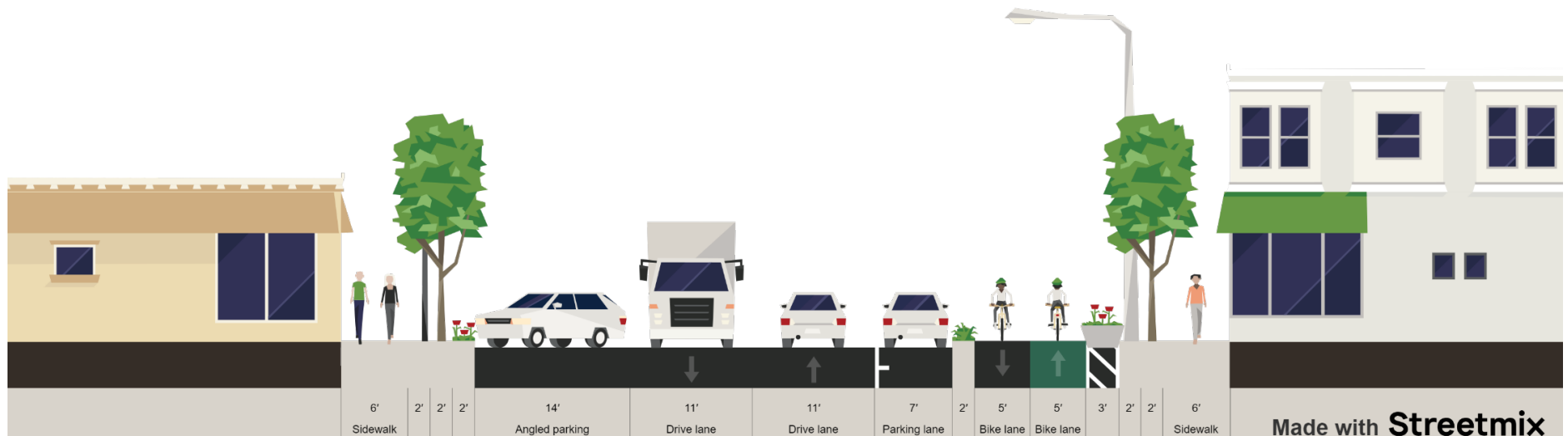
Downtown Master Plan

The Downtown Master Plan explores the uses of Main Street and vicinity properties, existing and future land use plans, landscape / streetscape planning and design guidelines, and how each relates to the future physical (and economic) growth of Ronan.

Recommended Complete Streets Alternative

The **Preferred Alternative** typical section (**Figure 1**) represents the primary recommendation for Main Street redesign. It's based on the existing 80-foot width of Main Street. **Appendix B** of the full report details four (4) other *Main Street Complete Streets Alternative* typical sections. The alternatives visualize options for complete streets implementation.

FIGURE 1 –MAIN STREET PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE TYPICAL SECTION – BI-DIRECTIONAL BIKE LANES, ANGLED AND PARALLEL PARKING



Alternatives are based on the existing conditions analysis, stakeholder input, stated goals and needs, and adherence to Montana Main Street Program guidance. It is recommended that the community weigh alternatives based on further analysis of overall project cost and specific needs. Additional conceptual plans and renderings can be found in the full report, **Appendix C**, as "Street Level Perspective Visualizations."

Project Prioritization / Recommended Improvements

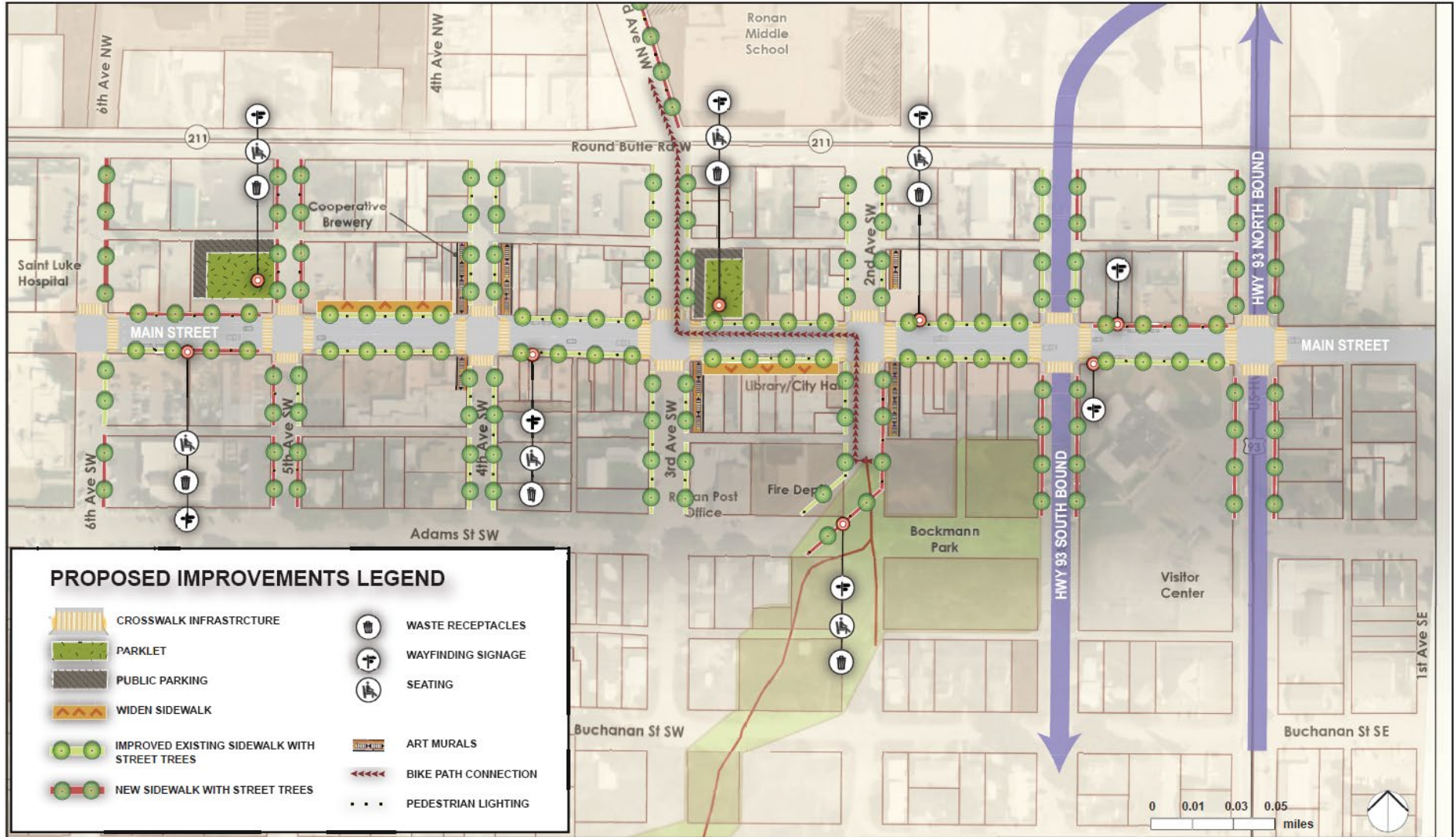
The following list is a prioritized project list based upon stakeholder input, vision, goals, and objectives developed throughout the public engagement and existing conditions analysis. **Figure 2** and **Figure 3** provide conceptual renderings incorporating the following list of prioritized Main Street improvements.

1. Construction of New Sidewalk & Improvement/Widening of Existing Sidewalks
2. Development of Crosswalk Infrastructure
3. Addressing Street, Curb Side, and Public Parking
4. Creation/Connection of Bike Paths and/or dedicated bike lanes on key segments of Main Street and 3rd Street.
5. Replanting of appropriately sized street trees
6. Creation of Parklets
7. Addition of Public Seating
8. Inclusion of Signage/Wayfinding
9. Addition of Bike Racks
10. Inclusion of Public Art/Art Murals
11. Creation of Public Gathering & Event Spaces / Pocket Plaza / Outdoor Amphitheater or Band Shell
12. Increased/Improved Street Lighting (Pedestrian)
13. Addition of Waste Receptacles
14. Creation of a Raingarden Buffer
15. Improved Intersection Traffic Control

FIGURE 2 – PROPOSED MAINSTREET IMPROVEMENTS LOOKING EAST ACROSS 1ST AVE SW



FIGURE 3 –MAIN STREET SITE PLAN W/ PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS (CONCEPTUAL)





Community Economic Resilience

Economic prosperity is linked to the ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions to the economic base, inclusive of three primary attributes: The ability to Recover, Withstand and Avoid the disruption.

Establishing economic resilience in Ronan requires the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how the risk can impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity (EDA, Economic Resilience, 2020).

Grant Opportunities

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides significant federal money to address economic development/resilience and transportation infrastructure. There are typically several state and federal grants available to assist communities with economic development and community revitalization. The full list of state and federal grant resources which Ronan may consider applying for are detailed in the full report.

Action Plan Workbook (Implementation Plan)

To ensure that the CEDS and the Downtown Master Plan were as functional and flexible as possible, Ronan adhered to the following in completion of the planning efforts. The complete Action Workbook Plan document is attached in **Appendix D** of the full report.

- Robust and Inclusive community participation.
- Data gathering and analysis of local trends in economy, workforce, economic development tools, and economic resilience opportunities.
- Completion of a SWOT analysis and summary.
- Development of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely) goals, objectives, and activities.
- Comparative analysis of economic growth scenarios that will be used to determine key physical infrastructure improvements and help identify available revitalization incentives and funding opportunities for Ronan .
- Inclusion of an implementation “workbook” that outlines performance measures and means by which to measure success, anticipated dates for completion, possible financial and human resources to assist in completing goals/objectives, and who in the community (or outside of it) is responsible for ensuring plan/goal implementation.
- Final maps and Illustrative design concept visualizations.
- Infrastructure development concepts and development alternatives guided by the MMS approach.
- Future Land Use plan, community/streetscape design recommendations and standards to guide implementation of projects.

Adoption

A public meeting and presentation of this plan was held with Ronan public boards on July 24th, 2024. The plan is intended to serve the City of Ronan as guidance for executing actionable items as outlined in the *Action Workbook Plan* (Implementation Plan).



FIGURE 4 - PROPOSED: THIRD AVE AT MAIN ST (VIEW LOOKING NORTH ACROSS MAIN STREET)

