

# Downtown Missoula Business Improvement District

# Newsletter

Promoting the Health, Safety, Prosperity, Security and General Welfare of the Inhabitants of the BID



## January 2021

- Master Plan Update
- 2020 Business Activity
- New Downtown Officer
- Heritage Interpretation Plan, Trail & Tours

## COVID Impact on Downtown Missoula

2020 was the strangest year on record, and no one saw the pandemic coming. We were not prepared. Most businesses were shut down for almost 10 weeks, then came the onslaught of visitors from out of state. Tourism season was late, but helpful, for many businesses, and then the filming of Yellowstone gave Downtown Missoula a little boost in the fall. With COVID cases ticking up, restrictions were heightened, and the food & beverage industry, as well as gyms, salons, and child care providers, have struggled the most. Office employees, including city and county workers, have been slow to return to their Downtown offices, and many of those who have returned have implemented stringent restrictions on customer traffic and capacity. A nearly 50% decline in parking revenue indicates both customers and employees are still staying at home.

A change at the White House and the quick approval and distribution of COVID vaccines gives rise for hope down the road, but many Downtown Missoula businesses are having a hard time paying their bills right now. While Downtown has seen 21 new businesses open up shop in 2020, businesses old and new are in dire need of customer spending and financial relief.

The National Retail Federation predicts 15-20% of retail businesses across the country will close their doors

before spring, but we know Missoula is oftentimes a bit insulated from the national data sets due to its uber-localized economy. Many retailers had a pretty good holiday season, thanks to the intentional support from our neighbors and friends, but the first quarter of the year is always quiet for Downtown.

Hopefully there will be more federal aid coming soon. In the meantime, our Downtown stakeholders need to stick together and support each other through the pandemic. If you haven't done so already, please check in with your tenants. Make sure they're doing okay. Do what you can to help them keep their doors open.

The Downtown Missoula Partnership will continue to provide relevant updates and resources for MDA members. If you are interested in receiving information from our team via email, please reach



*Shirstie Gaylord, Hometana, by Athena Photography*

out to John Corwin, Business Development Director, via email ([john@missouladowntown.com](mailto:john@missouladowntown.com)) or phone (406-543-4238).

Missoula is a resilient community, and we are in this together! We expect 2021 will be a better year.



Rendering of Caras Park from the North Riverside Parks & Trails Plan

## Downtown Master Plan Progress

Following adoption of the new Downtown Master Plan in late 2019, the Downtown BID contracted with Dover, Kohl & Partners for the North Riverside Parks & Trails Plan, a deeper planning and design process for the parks and trails on the north side of the river from Russell to Missoula College.

Despite the pandemic, community engagement in the planning process was robust, and more than 2,000 Missoulians shared their ideas and thoughts on the plan. A partnership with Missoula Parks & Recreation, the plan was unanimously adopted by multiple agencies and the Missoula City Council in November 2020.

With the Higgins Bridge under construction and the Missoula Stormwater Infiltration Gallery going under the green hill in Caras Park in the fall of 2021, there may be opportunities for other projects of focus for near-term implementation, if funding can be assembled.

Available for review online, the North Riverside Parks & Trails Plan is built around five big ideas:

- Enhance Ecological Functions, Improve Access to the River
- Improve Gateways & Circulation
- Parks for Everyone and for All Seasons
- Support Existing Uses and Design Multi-Functional Spaces
- Update Materials, Elements and Landscaping

With Caras, East Caras and Bess Reed Parks at the epicenter of the plan, Downtown is vested in ensuring the plan comes to fruition. However, improvements will be phased in over time.

Starting in January, Dover, Kohl & Partners will lead Missoula through another planning process for West Broadway from Russell to California. With ownership changing on a number of different parcels in the area, a strategy for redevelopment in the Opportunity Zone is needed, especially on the prime corner at Russell and Broadway. More information will be available later this year as the community engagement process rolls out.

Lastly, planning for the former site of the Missoula Public Library (301 E. Main) will be put on hold for now, as the building is providing temporary space for Missoula Parks & Recreation, as well as a number of private tech-related businesses. Parking on the block has been turned over to the Missoula Parking Commission for management, so it may be late 2021 or the following year before detailed planning commences for that parcel.

For more information, visit <https://www.missouladowntown.com/downtown-master-plan/> or contact the Downtown Missoula Partnership Office via phone (543-4238) or email ([info@missouladowntown.com](mailto:info@missouladowntown.com)).

## Holiday Decor Improvements

With significant financial support from the Downtown BID and the Missoula Downtown Foundation, Downtown Missoula's holiday décor was the highlight of the holiday season. New lights for the Christmas Tree, and new garland and lighting for 90 street lights really brought the holidays to Downtown at the end of a difficult year. New orange Downtown banners were also added in 2020.

Additional Downtown banners, additional Christmas decoration brackets, and expansion of the holiday décor electrical network to Orange Street are the next phase of improvements.

Visit [donations.missouladowntown.com](https://www.missouladowntown.com) to contribute to the Downtown street décor fund.



Holiday Decor

## 2020 Economic Investment and Business Activity Overview

Despite the pandemic, Downtown Missoula saw a 2-to-1 ratio of business openings to closings, as 21 new businesses opened their doors in 2020. Seven food and beverage businesses, four retail businesses, six service businesses, one church, one dispensary, and one private club opened their business in Downtown Missoula.

Downtown saw nine businesses close their doors, six relocations within downtown, six relocations out of Downtown, and six businesses are currently on the market.

Nearly \$10 million dollars of private dollars were invested in Downtown Missoula in the midst of the COVID crisis. Additionally, just over 300 residential units (low income and workforce housing) are currently under construction near Downtown, including the 200-unit Villagio in the Northside Neighborhood, the 46-unit Ponderosa Village at 1029 West Pine, and the 22 micro-apartments on Clay Street near Kiwanis Park.

For more information on Downtown properties available for sale or for lease, visit <https://www.missouladowntown.com/properties/>, and remember to list your vacancies when needed.



## Downtown Construction Updates

### Missoula's Long-Range Transportation Plan

For nearly a year, city and county transportation officials have been updating the Missoula Long-Range Transportation Plan. Following the establishment of agreed-upon values and goals, a comprehensive collection of proposed projects, gathering input from Missoula-area residents, and screening projects and programs, the consulting team has put forth scenarios for the community to respond to. Once feedback on the scenarios is complete, the draft plan will be published for additional review and feedback.

Priority projects for Downtown include the conversion of Front & Main from one-way to two-way streets, an analysis of Higgins Avenue from Broadway to Brooks, completion of the riverfront trail system, and the potential for a new river crossing near the Riverfront Triangle for cyclists and pedestrians.

Property owners are encouraged to review the plan and provide feedback. Visit <https://www.missoulampo.com/long-range-transportation-plan> to learn more.

While the pandemic has had a significant impact on many Downtown businesses, construction projects have continued to move forward throughout the past year, albeit at a bit of a slower pace.

Under the guidance of Sletten Construction, the Higgins Bridge renovation is moving ahead and on schedule. Crews are installing large steel support beams on the south end of the bridge and installing cantilever supports for the future sidewalk on the west side. If they stay on schedule, the west side of the bridge should be completed by June.

The project management team is hosting weekly Zoom meetings for the public on Wednesdays at 12 noon. Big Sky PR continues to share weekly updates via email and text messaging. For additional information, visit <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publicinvolve/higginsbridge/>.

The AC Hotel at 139 East Main is moving along quickly, thanks to Dick Anderson Construction. While the pandemic has slowed construction, the hotel is slated to open in March. The 6-floor, 105-room hotel will also offer three separate dining options, including a rooftop bar.

The Wren Hotel at 201 East Main is also on schedule, thanks to North Fork Builders. The 73-room hotel will be managed by Columbia Hospitality

and is slated to open in late summer. Black Coffee will open a second location and there will be three other additional spaces for new retail.

The Missoula Public Library at 455 East Main was completed in November and is slated to open to the public in January, if the pandemic allows. The beautiful new 60,000-square foot building is Downtown Missoula's new shining gem, and it will be the talk of the Pacific Northwest, once folks have a chance to experience it.

Other large-scale construction projects include the DJ&A Office building on West Broadway and expansion of Providence St. Pat's on West Spruce. The Missoula International Airport continues its massive \$70 million expansion with phase one improvements including a new south concourse with five gates and more amenities for travelers, including Black Coffee and KettleHouse Brewing.



Rendering of the AC Hotel

## Downtown Adds 2nd Police Officer and City Adds CIT

With support from the Missoula Police Department (MPD) and a community policing grant, the Downtown BID was able to acquire a second Downtown Police Officer in October. Officer Jay Gillhouse joins officer Randy Krastel in providing dedicated downtown patrol seven days a week. Gillhouse has worked for the MPD since spring of 2018, after serving the Lake County Sheriff's Office for nine years. A native of Ronan, Mont., Gillhouse served seven years in the U.S. Coast Guard.

With the addition of the second police officer, the BID Board opted to not fill the Ambassador position, vacated by Dave Chrismon in July 2020, following four years of service to the Downtown community.

Another new resource for Missoula is the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), which was funded by the city, the county and a community policing grant. The CIT includes mental health professionals, emergency medical professionals, and others. The purpose of the CIT is to provide the right response and support for those in a mental health crisis, as opposed to arresting and jailing those in need.

Downtown safety continues to be a priority for the BID. Both Officer Krastel (406-396-3188) and Officer Gillhouse (406-830-5218) are available to help property owners with safety and security issues.



Left: Officer Randy Krastel; Right: Officer Jay Gillhouse



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## Heritage Plan, Trail & Tours

The Missoula Downtown Heritage Interpretive Plan was completed in 2019 and fully adopted by January 2020. Missoula is rich with history and stories of the past and present that are relevant to who we are as a community. With significant growth and development happening in Downtown, the need to preserve Missoula’s heritage and help folks make meaningful connections to the community are more important than ever.



Downtown Information and Interpretive Kiosk

As the overall theme of the Heritage Missoula Plan, Missoula has always been a Gathering Place. Other themes of the plan include Landscape & Homelands, Create & Exchange, Community Life, and finally Memory and Experience.

One of the first projects to hit the ground is the Missoula Legacy Trail, a self-guided walking tour featuring bronze medallions, information kiosks, and the stories that make Missoula. The Missoula Public Library is the first anchor location to be completed, with the Missoula Art Park, the ZACC and Caras Park as the other three anchors. The Missoula Legacy Trail will draw residents and visitors alike to learn more about the stories of our community.

Downtown Missoula’s guided walking tours - Unseen Missoula – are offered seasonally from April through October. Available for booking online, Unseen Missoula now has four curated tours: Basements & Back Alley, Hotels & Hooligans, Pedal through the Past, and the Missoula Legacy Trail. Downtown property owners are key to the success of the program, as the interior of the buildings are oftentimes the most appealing.

For more information on the Heritage Plan, the Missoula Legacy Trail or Unseen Missoula, contact the Downtown Missoula Partnership office via phone (543-4238) or email ([info@missouladowntown.com](mailto:info@missouladowntown.com)).

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