

Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park Interpretive Media Implementation Plan

Prepared for



Submitted by:
Historical Research Associates, Inc.

Missoula, Montana

Adopted by Missoula Parks & Recreation Board
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HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
ASSOCIATES, INC.



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Nestled in a valley shaped by glacial ice dams and floods, Missoula is a place rich in natural history and human history. The Séliš (Salish) and Qlispé (upper Kalispel) have considered the valley their home since time immemorial, gathering bitterroot and camas on the riverbanks and fishing long before Caras Park and Bess Reed Park received their names. Missoula's industries also grew along the river, from sawmills and railroads to farmers' markets and guided river trips. The stories told in Missoula's parks should be the stories of the many events, enterprises, and people who have shaped these spaces into centers of the community.

Park spaces are at the heart of our community. They should be welcome and inclusive places for all.

Introduction

Overview

Caras Park is the common name for a chain of three parks in downtown Missoula that are undergoing an extraordinary transformation. Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park are being reshaped by the community. This period of transition offers an important opportunity to prioritize interpretation as a cornerstone of the visitor experience in this revitalized space. The Missoula community is invested in these parks as important gathering places for expression, recreation, and celebration. This interpretive media implementation plan is a product of community collaboration among the people who experience and care for these special places. Shaping a vision for the future of the parks should be a community collaboration. This plan describes the stakeholder outreach process used to identify important interpretive stories and messages to deliver in Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park.



Photo courtesy of Historical Research Associates.

The result is a holistic plan for unifying interpretation across the three park units.

This project recognizes Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park as centerpieces of Missoula’s North Riverside Parks and Trails system. The consultation process and interpretive media guidance acknowledges these three parks as part of a broader network of Missoula heritage interpretation. The plan assesses existing interpretation in the three parks and in other area parks to develop a long-term vision for the North Riverside Parks and Trails system.

The plan complements the significant investment stakeholders and community members have already made in the Missoula Downtown Heritage Interpretive Plan, the North Riverside Parks and Trails Master Plan, and other planning and wayfinding documents. This effort is not meant to replace the robust analysis offered by the other documents; it instead applies the results of those studies in a focused way to Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. The resulting recommendations should be placed in conversation, rather than in competition, with the larger guiding documents.

Site Management

Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park are all managed and maintained by Missoula Parks & Recreation. Through an agreement with the City of Missoula, the Downtown Missoula Partnership manages Caras Park facilities for events. A wide variety of public and private partnerships have helped to develop the facilities. The North Riverside Parks and Trails Master Plan and recent improvements to Caras Park represent an awareness of the importance of these riverside parks and have led to ongoing support and commitment to re-invest in the downtown riverside park and trail system.

The North Riverside Parks and Trails Master Plan identifies five key priorities for North Riverside Parks, including Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. The priorities aim to:

1. Create a park for everyone and all seasons;
2. Enhance ecological functions, improve views and access;
3. Update materials, elements, and landscaping;
4. Improve gateways and circulation; and
5. Support existing uses and design multi-functional spaces.

The Planning Process

This plan weaves together multiple planning efforts to create a dedicated, focused guiding document for interpretive media in Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. This plan builds upon other recently conducted planning efforts. The City of Missoula updated and adopted the Downtown Missoula Master Plan in 2019. The following year, the City of Missoula adopted the Missoula Downtown Heritage Interpretive Plan to guide and shape the stories we share in our public spaces. The North Riverside Parks and Trails Master Plan, also adopted in 2020, is the product of public outreach, stakeholder meetings, survey, and design work.

Building on the strong foundation set by these other planning efforts, Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA), conducted additional outreach and stakeholder meetings to focus feedback on the public spaces of Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. These efforts included:

- Hosting an open house during First Friday (a longstanding community event) to gather feedback and ideas on interpretation at the parks.
- Conducting a workshop with high school students to explore the process and engage a distinct age group of park users.
- Participating in media interviews with local print and television journalists to build public awareness of the planning effort.
- Developing an online survey that generated over 100 individual responses via the Engage Missoula platform, with crucial support from the Missoula Redevelopment Agency.
 - Completing a follow up survey via the Engage Missoula platform based on the initial findings, which generated an additional 61 results.

- Meeting with Parks & Recreation staff members, particularly the landscape architects, to ensure that the plan meets the needs of the physical space.

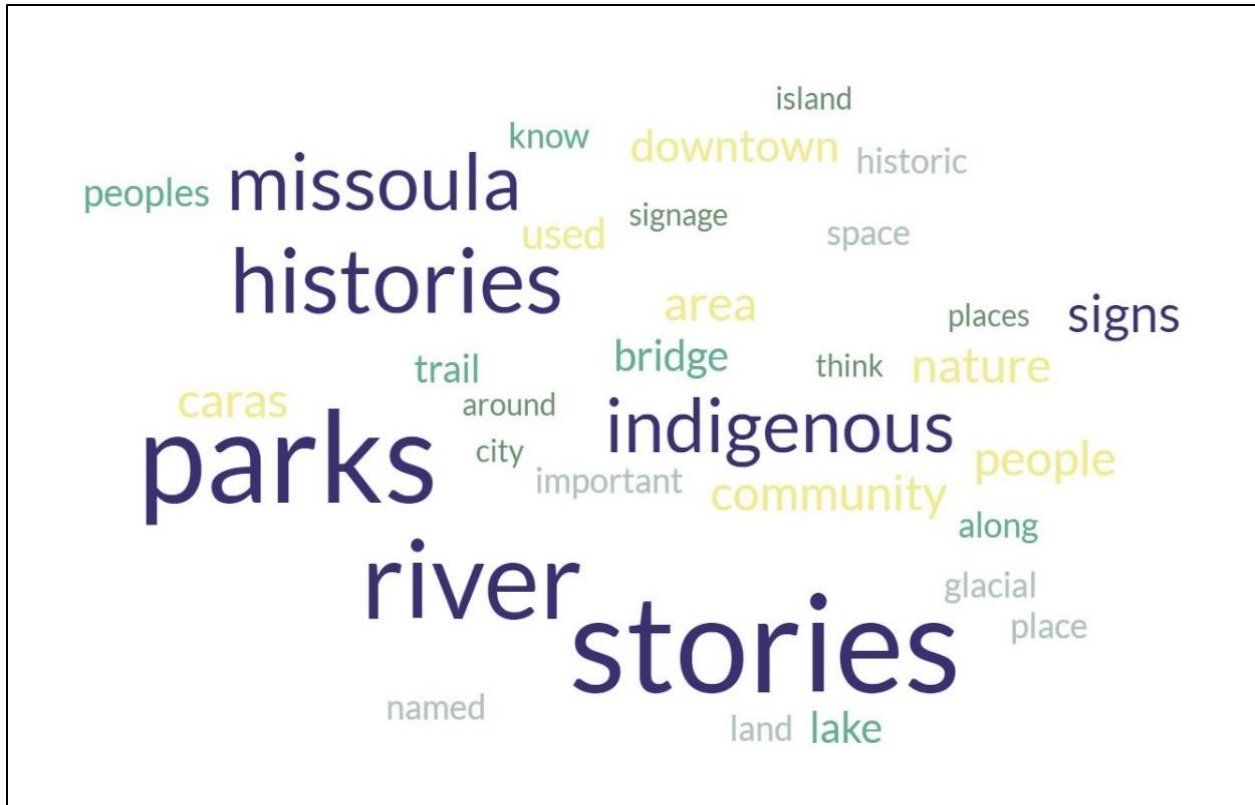
Public Feedback

Overall, the community conveyed a remarkably unified vision for the park spaces. Expressing a deep appreciation for the green spaces and for the entertainment facilities available, the community nevertheless expressed a strong desire for interpretive signage that explores Missoula's history in these spaces. The public expressed that interpretive media should:

- Prioritize Indigenous history, particularly the history of the Séliš and Q̓lispé people.
- Include important stories but minimize physical signage.
- Explore and explain key place-based resources.

Initial Survey Feedback

- Over 80 percent of survey respondents visit Caras Park, East Caras Park, and/or Bess Reed Park more than once or twice per month, indicating a high percentage of repeat park visitors.
- In total, 75 percent of survey respondents agreed that signage and interpretation should be a priority when developing and updating parks.
- Most survey respondents selected more than one reason for visiting.
 - 90 respondents visit the parks to shop.
 - 81 respondents visit the parks to see entertainment.
 - 81 respondents visit the parks to commute through the parks.
 - 33 respondents visit the parks to recreate.
 - 29 respondents visit the parks to play.
 - 25 respondents visit the parks for reasons other than those listed above.
- Survey recipients prioritized the natural features such as trees, river, and lawn spaces as the defining features of the three parks.
 - Entertainment and recreation spaces were ranked below these defining features. Art installations ranked a distant fourth.
- Survey recipients prioritized stories about nature and about people when asked what types of stories should be told in the park spaces.



Word cloud created from 106 responses to the initial digital survey and from material gathered at community workshops.

Second Survey Feedback

- Respondents reiterated a need for signage that focused on the history of the river and its change over time. Respondents expressed an interest in natural history, but less interest in cultural history subjects related to industry and Missoula people.
- Respondents indicated wayfinding and interpretive content as their highest priority for signs. Community postings, safety messaging, and connections to digital content were less of a priority.
- While 50 of the 61 respondents indicated they would read signage along the river trail, 42 respondents indicated that minimizing signage remains a priority. This stresses an overall need to selectively identify content and not encourage over-use of signage.

Open Comments

- Respondents underscored the need to diversify the stories told in the park spaces and specifically mentioned the following as topics of interest:
 - Historical Chinese community;
 - Indigenous history (especially of the Séliš and Q̓lispé communities); and

- Black history (e.g., Buffalo soldiers).
- Several respondents specifically mentioned the history they **did not** want to see and encouraged content development to avoid “founding White men” and the tendency of gratitude signs to laud “wealthy people and businesses that could afford the largest donations.”
- One respondent recommended that Parks & Recreation “consider establishing an Interpretive Division that consolidates control of the location, type and message of these kinds of signs so that there is some consistency in the use and maintenance of interpretive signs throughout the City.” This response could indicate support for other, similar planning processes and for increasing interpretive efforts.

Purpose and Guiding Principles

The purpose of this media implementation plan is to:

- Shape the visitor experience at the site to ensure its ongoing relevance.
- Provide guidance for interpretive practitioners and content developers.
- Provide diverse and meaningful opportunities for locals and visitors to engage with the site and the many stories there.
- Encourage site stewardship and respectful behavior among visitors.
- Develop a vision for the overall visitor experience at the site that is accessible to audiences with varying abilities and many different interests.

Themes

Themes provide the framework for all aspects of interpretive planning, programming, and media development. They connect site resources to relevant concepts, ideas, meanings, and values in a way that leads to greater understanding and appreciation of the site itself.

The themes identified in this Plan correlate directly to the Missoula Downtown Heritage Interpretive Plan. This strategy acknowledges that Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park are part of the broader Missoula downtown interpretation. It also rightfully centers these spaces as a primary visitor experience and ideal place to introduce visitors and locals alike to downtown heritage.

Overarching Theme

Downtown Missoula is a Gathering Place

Caras Park is likely the main gathering place that Missoulians and visitors identify when considering where to congregate downtown. Because it is home to so many events and entertainment options, it often serves as a jumping off point to other downtown amenities such as shopping and dining establishments. Food trucks, farmers’ markets, and artists’ fairs connect Caras Park and the nearby parks to a broader ecosystem of commerce. The Clark Fork River also brings people together, with pedestrians and cyclists utilizing the river trails and kayakers, river surfers, and paddle boarders enjoying the natural and created waves.

Subthemes

The following subthemes help to identify experiential points for visitors to connect with on a more specific level.

Interpretive Theme	Connections to Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park
<p>Landscape and Homelands</p> <p>Missoula is a community shaped by its unique mountain landscape. This theme focuses on Downtown Missoula’s relationship with its natural setting and speaks to its place within traditional Séliš and Q̓ispé territory. Downtown Missoula is defined by the Hellgate Canyon and is an entryway to the mountains and the forests. It is the intersection of eastern and western prairies, once frozen beneath sea and ice. It is the site of human history that spans millennia. It is a hub of river valleys, a source of camas and bitterroot, and a trout filled thoroughfare.</p>	<p>These green spaces reflect Missoula’s profound commitment to parks and stewardship. They also offer unique opportunities to explore human impacts on nature and the deliberate creation of parks as community gathering spaces.</p> <p><i>Potential Topics:</i></p> <p>Climate history, Clark Fork River ecology, plants, fish and wildlife, traditional uses of space by Native peoples such as the Séliš and Q̓ispé, environmental thought and leadership, stewardship and conservation</p>
<p>Create and Exchange</p> <p>Downtown Missoula is a place where people come together to create and exchange both goods and ideas. This theme focuses on Missoula’s commercial foundations, connections to industry, and legacy as a center of creativity.</p>	<p>These parks host arts festivals, craft festivals, and food festivals (and events that combine all three). Public art and entertainment spaces define both visitor and local experiences. The three parks are inextricably linked to Missoula’s broader downtown and to the story of its economic development, and to the vibrant and continuing creative exchange of ideas and goods.</p> <p><i>Potential Topics:</i></p> <p>Public art, Missoula mill history, Saturday markets, music, transportation, architecture, Indigenous enterprise and economy</p>
<p>Community Life</p> <p>Downtown Missoula is a community with a rich and diverse history. This theme relates to the stories of people who have converged here, the places and events that have happened here, and ordinary and extraordinary things that distinguish it. It also connects Missoula to larger national and international trends, experiences, and events.</p>	<p>These parks host unique events and share a history as community gathering places; they are sites of protest and celebration, solitary experiences, and family gatherings.</p> <p><i>Potential Topics:</i></p> <p>Indigenous lifeways, neighborhoods, family life, entertainment venues, community organizations, ethnic groups, art, recreation, protests, celebrations</p>
<p>Memory and Experience</p> <p>Throughout its history, people have had many different experiences in Downtown Missoula. This theme acknowledges that Missoula is a place experienced and perceived differently by different people.</p>	<p>These parks are all community spaces central to many Missoulians’ personal histories and experiences, ordinary and exceptional.</p> <p><i>Potential Topics:</i></p> <p>Varied perspectives and lenses to understand our history and community, personal stories, connection through shared experiences, welcoming to visitors and locals</p>

Desired Visitor Outcomes

What kind of experiences should visitors have when they visit Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park? Interpretive media and programming should strive for all visitors to connect personally—physically, intellectually, emotionally—to the resources and values present at the site. This requires an array of interpretive offerings to facilitate engagement with audiences of diverse backgrounds and abilities, including those who may have unique mobility, visual, auditory, or cognitive needs. While themes explain what audiences will learn, experiences describe what audiences will do.

The desired outcomes are things that audiences should know, feel, and do after visiting the site. Visitors will:

- Find clear directions and wayfinding, as well as opportunities to learn.
- Feel personally connected to the site's history and resources.
- Envision what Missoula would have looked like at various points in history.
- Understand the importance of protecting natural resources and have space to contemplate how individual and community actions can shape our environment.
- Learn about the lives of individual Missoulians and how they reflect the community at large.
- Consider and contemplate the changing landscape, the people who lived here, and how this place influences people on a personal level.
- Understand that environmental degradation occurred in Missoula and recognize the work associated with restoration efforts.
- Know that Indigenous peoples traveled along this river, fished its shores, made it home, and still make it their home.
- Encounter interpretation that is both welcoming and accessible to audiences of diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities.
- Contemplate the history of these spaces and Missoulians' ongoing collective responsibility to protect and preserve them.
- Acknowledge the diverse history of the people who have lived here, recognizing that not all individuals had the same experiences.
- Center the ecological story and the importance of the watershed, emphasizing the interconnected stories of people and their impact on the environment.

Recommendations

Introduction

The following recommendations present an overall approach and specific action items for interpretation at Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. Site managers, interpretive practitioners, and partners should revisit this section of the plan as conditions change and infrastructure is developed.

Historically, Missoula Parks & Recreation and site management partners have received an overwhelming number of requests to place signage in Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. Community members understand these parks are highly trafficked, beloved public spaces and therefore an ideal place to install signs. However, physical space is limited in the parks.

This plan provides a framework for identifying appropriate interpretation in these three parks specifically. Other parks within the North Riverside Parks and Trails system should undergo similar planning processes. As of autumn 2023, additional planning efforts are anticipated in 2024. If possible, the plans should explore all options for creating a unified visual and thematic language for all interpretive signage.

Interpretive Zones

A successful visit begins with clear directions to the site, an established entrance to the area, and accessible wayfinding that offers pathways through the site's various interpretive features.

Interpretive media should be unobtrusive, but intentionally designed. These park units offer an additional challenge in that many visitors are not planning their time around the heritage interpretation; few, if any, are likely to move through all interpretive features in a single visit.

Interpretive signs need to be accessed at any point in the system. While a cohesive experience, each sign needs to be able to stand on its own.

This plan attempts to unite the three park units and create a cohesive visitor experience throughout the space, with the understanding that many visitors do not currently make clear distinctions between the park units. However, to facilitate the planning process, this interpretive strategy identifies four key interpretive zones for signage.

Some areas, like the river trail signage, may have unique infrastructure needs. Otherwise, the zones may represent ways to batch the development of content in order to implement different phases of development.

The four interpretive zones:

- Zone A: Caras Park
- Zone B: East Caras Park
- Zone C: Bess Reed Park
- Zone D: Trail Signage

Signage Strategy

- For three of the interpretive zones (Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park), this plan recommends a single, large, multi-panel anchor kiosk that could combine wayfinding, safety and community messaging, and interpretive content.
 - These kiosks may also serve as meeting spots for interpretive programming or other events.
 - Some spaces may eventually have more than one anchor point (East Caras), or find that a smaller, two-sided anchor sign is more appropriate (Bess Reed).
- Additional signage recommendations include smaller, single-panel waysides that would primarily be interpretive content. These signs *could* be designed as double-sided or visually split to accommodate wayfinding, as well as safety and community messaging, as needed.
- A third type of signage would create a visually distinctive style for signs associated with murals and artwork.
- HRA recommends limiting the use of QR codes in physical panels. If QR codes are implemented, they should be used at the anchor kiosks and installed in a way that they can be easily changed without removing or replacing the full panels.
- The parks experience high-use traffic in an outdoor setting. All signage needs to be resilient to both weather and vandalism.
- **Areas to Avoid Interpretation:** The long-term plan identifies the opportunity for a major parking structure in Caras Park. Interpretation should, if possible, focus on public rights of way such as sidewalks and trail systems and avoid areas already identified for potential redevelopment. Signage should also avoid congestion points, especially where vehicles, pedestrians, and bikes all use the same spaces.



Example of a multi-panel kiosk style from the North Riverside Parks & Trails Design Plan Report that might be appropriate for the anchor kiosks recommended in this plan. Additional considerations might include lighting and other design elements to promote safety and discourage vandalism.

Site-wide Guidelines

Toward A More Inclusive History

Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park should actively promote inclusivity and develop spaces that are safe for all community members. This includes historically marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer), Indigenous peoples, and all racial and ethnic groups.

Such inclusivity also includes community members with mobility needs, visual impairment, different learning styles, and other circumstances that thoughtful design can help to mitigate. All signage and interpretive elements should be developed in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and with the principles of universal design (see Sign Development Guidelines) in mind.

Wherever possible, signage should strive to include multiple perspectives. Signs might:

- Have Séliš language components, including place names.
- Feature photos with non-White or historically marginalized groups.
- Use the present tense when describing Indigenous community members.
- Find ways to elevate historically marginalized or excluded stories, such as those centering the experiences of people of color, women, and children.
- Highlight voices of marginalized community members through oral history interviews or other community storytelling programs.
- Use gender neutral language.

All content development should follow the guidelines and expectations of the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Policies established by the City of Missoula.

Tribal Collaboration

The Missoula Valley has been home to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Séliš and Q̓lispé fished, traded, and built vibrant communities in this place. When the U.S. government forcibly displaced those communities to enable non-Native settlement of the area, Missoula became a site of conflict and resistance. These stories deserve to be told in Indigenous voices and from their perspective. Missoula is still their homelands. Wherever possible, interpretation should:

- Solicit feedback and input from the Séliš-Q̓lispé Culture Committee.
- Invite Indigenous community members to design content or create public art.
- Invite Indigenous voices into the development process for supplementary interpretation such as audio tours and/or digital media.
- Interpret Indigenous peoples in the present tense whenever possible, to show that they are part of a living and vibrant community.

- Build additional time into review processes, and be mindful that timelines may need to be flexible in order for stakeholders to offer meaningful review, contributions, and expertise.
- Recognize that in addition to the Séliš and Q̓ispé, Montana is home to numerous other Native individuals representing many sovereign nations, and that many of them moved through Missoula’s historic landscape and currently call the city home.

Community Partnerships

Building and maintaining partnerships presents opportunities to both strengthen the site’s interpretive media and programming and enhance visitor experience. Partnerships should include educational institutions, museums, and regional historic sites. They should also include organizations that have a stewardship interest in the watershed and Missoula ecosystems, such as natural history and recreation advocacy groups.

Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park are located near several cultural institutions. Any interpretation media developed for the parks should consider existing interpretation offered at these institutions. Sometimes it may be useful to echo messaging between locations. In many cases, however, it is more powerful to interpret unique, site-based information in the three parks and to direct visitors to other area attractions based on interest. The following organizations may be able to provide important support for interpretation efforts in the form of subject matter expertise and/or professional training in interpretation.

- Missoula Art Museum
- Missoula Public Library
- Missoula Historic Preservation Officer and Historic Preservation Commission
- Wilma Theater
- The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula
- Rocky Mountain Museum of Military History
- Montana Natural History Center
- Montana Museum of Art and Culture
- The National Museum of Forest Service History
- Museum of Mountain Flying
- Three Chiefs Culture Center
- The Montana Historical Society

Public Art

The parks along the river are home to some of Missoula’s most iconic public art installations. In Caras Park, the most notable examples are the Brennan’s Wave statue, A Carousel for Missoula, and fish statues known as *Returnings*. Interpreting existing art and preparing for future art will contribute to a robust visitor experience.

- If possible, art projects should be selected that elevate unheard stories and explore human experiences.
- Engaging and understanding the role of the City of Missoula Public Arts Program will be important to the success of this effort.

Sign Development and Approval Process

Signs will be developed in collaboration with community stakeholders and staff at Parks & Recreation. Missoula organizations, individuals, or other entities may sponsor or recommend a sign for consideration. All signage must be approved by the Parks & Recreation Board, including any memorial signs or naming plaques.

Parks & Recreation reserves the right to deny a sign installation request or suggest an alternative type of interpretation.

Because public comment has identified minimizing signage as a priority in Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed, Parks & Recreation will prioritize signage that:

- Meets the interpretive needs identified in this plan (thematically and with content specificity).
- Follows the guidelines for visual and textual content development as identified in this plan.
- Addresses ongoing changes to the physical space as needed.

When considering other signage requests, Parks & Recreation reserves the right to ask the following questions and make recommendations accordingly:

- Does the proposed sign fit the thematic guidelines established for Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park?
- Does the sign belong specifically in one of these park spaces, or could it be placed in a different park unit or at another location?
- Can the proposed sign take another format (e.g., an audio tour, digital content, pop up event, other complementary interpretation)?

Stories Told Elsewhere

The goal of this plan is to promote the most relevant, accessible interpretation at the most appropriate sites possible. Although Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park are important, developing strong signage for the other park units across Missoula should also be a priority.

Missoula's history is expansive. Listing all the possible stories that can be told about this valley and its residents would be impossible. However, the following stories were considered for inclusion in this plan. They may be appropriate for park units nearby or for supplementary materials such as digital content or guided tours in Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. Whenever possible, interpretive concepts should be tied to the tangible places and things that they represent.

The visual style recommendations made in this plan may also apply to signage elsewhere. Additional stakeholder outreach may confirm whether these locations are appropriate or whether others might be better suited.

Heritage Resource or Story	Potential Location
Glacial Lake Missoula	At Waterworks trailheads or Dean Stone Mountain (to better see the ripple lines)
Sports history	At Sawmill District Parks (to connect to modern sports facilities like Currents and the baseball field)
Sawmill history	At Sawmill District Parks
Railroad history	Milwaukee Depot (south of river) or at the intersection of the Milwaukee and Bitterroot Trails
Lewis and Clark Expedition history	Clark Fork Natural Park (south of river) <i>or</i> at a site north of the river but appropriate to the historic path taken by Lewis through the valley
History of theaters	On the Hip Strip (south Higgins) in closer proximity to the Roxy and to make connections across the river
Native plants	At the Clark Fork Native Prairie Garden (south side of river)
Drinking water history	At Kiwanis Park (to better relate to Rattlesnake Creek)
Superfund sites / environmental cleanup	At Sawmill District Parks

Sign Recommendations

Caras Park

Caras Park includes the green space and community areas roughly between Higgins Avenue and Orange Street and is flanked by Ron's River Trail and Front Street. Caras Park includes some of Missoula's most highly trafficked and recognizable community spaces such as Dragon's Hollow, A Carousel for Missoula, the Pavilion, and Brennan's Wave.

Since time immemorial, the Séliš and Q̄ispé have considered the Missoula Valley their homelands. They fished and gathered plants along the Clark Fork River and continue to do so today. Beartracks Bridge is named for a Séliš leader, Sx̄w̄úytis Sm̄xe.

For decades, much of the space now known as Caras Park was underwater until the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built levees along the river. Civic and community leaders advocated for cleaning up the infilled areas and using them as park spaces. In the 1980s and 1990s, Missoula built permanent community gathering structures such as the amphitheater, Pavilion, and Carousel.

Historically, the space had a large hill that was recently leveled to improve visitor experience and allow for installation of crucial stormwater management facilities. Future development plans include improved restroom facilities, activation of the space under Beartracks Bridge, and redesigned infrastructure at the river access near Brennan's Wave.

Existing Resources

- Lewis and Clark Expedition signage: Removed during Caras Park renovations in 2022. **Recommendation:** In partnership with stakeholders, find a location in another park unit outside of Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park to re-install signage. Printed panels already exist and should be used if it is prudent to do so. If installed elsewhere, an additional sign focusing on interrelated Indigenous history should be developed and installed at the new location.
- Brennan's Wave Statue: Moved during Caras Park renovations in 2022. **Recommendation:** Interpret the statue on a nearby interpretive panel (at or near river access point or viewing point).
- Ron's River Trail Stone: Located near the current bathrooms near the Pavilion. This spot has been identified as Mile 0 for wayfinding and 911 dispatch services. **Recommendation:** No change.
- Caras Park history sign: Temporarily installed at the Beartracks Bridge staircase during 2022. **Recommendation:** Install permanently in East Caras Park, preferably near the anchor kiosk. If possible, style should be updated to meet guidelines established by this plan. While more thematically appropriate to content recommended for East Caras Park, the sign could also be installed in Caras Park (perhaps as part of the Gratitude installation).
- A Carousel for Missoula, interpretive plaque. **Recommendation:** No change.
- Dedicated benches. **Recommendation:** No change. As they deteriorate, remove from park units.

- Donor plaques at Pavilion. **Recommendation:** No change. Any additional donor plaques should be styled to match the artists' panels described in this plan.
-

Anchor Kiosk - Pavilion Area

A history of Caras Park as "Missoula's living room," a gathering place and venue for entertainment. This sign fulfills a priority noted in the Missoula Downtown Heritage Interpretation Plan of having an anchor kiosk in Caras Park.

- Overall interpretive theme: Community Life
- Location: Near the Pavilion and staircases from Beartracks Bridge into Caras **or** near the Pavilion and parking lots, near the current restroom structure
- Potential stories:
 - Pavilion (evolution from a circus tent to a permanent structure)
 - Festivals (Irish Festival, Roots Festival, Pray for Snow, Brewfests, Pride)
 - Symphony in the Park
 - Out to Lunch/Downtown Tonight
 - Political protests/gatherings
 - Dedication of Beartracks Bridge

Sign Type: Multi-Panel Kiosk

- Wayfinding
- Safety messaging
- Community posting
- Heritage interpretation

Heritage Trail opportunity: Caras Park is identified as one of the four anchors for the downtown Heritage Trail. Trail sites and anchors are marked with medallions in the pavement. This pavilion would be an excellent opportunity to connect visitors to the broader trail and fulfill a goal of the Missoula Downtown Heritage Interpretive Plan.

Sign - Protecting Our Waters

An explanation of the new stormwater filtering system and historic impacts of city development on water resources.

- Overall interpretive theme: Landscape and Homelands
- Location: At or near the site of the open lawn (flattened hill)/stormwater filtering system
- Potential stories:
 - History of stormwater management and the use of riverbanks for dumping, rivers for sewage removal

- Missoula’s investment in protecting the community and river
- Stewardship message to encourage protection of the aquifer
- Séliš and Q̓lispé language and description of water, their use and stewardship of area resources

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Heritage interpretation
- Ecological interpretation

As of 2023, a sign is installed along the Trail and on the open lawn that meets many (but not all) of the story points identified above. The current sign also does not match the overall visual style identified in this plan. If an opportunity arises, the sign could and should be updated to meet the specifications of this plan.

Sign - A Carousel for Missoula and Dragon’s Hollow

An exploration of parks as family spaces and spaces dedicated to play. Also, a celebration of the community artistry and vision to create both Dragon’s Hollow and the Carousel.

- Overall interpretive theme: Community Life
- Location: At or near the Carousel and Dragon’s Hollow
- Potential stories:
 - History of creating the Carousel and Dragon’s Hollow, focused on community involvement (being careful not to duplicate existing signage at the Carousel)
 - History of playgrounds and parks as family spaces
 - History of play as universal, opportunity to include Séliš and Q̓lispé language and description of traditional games

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Heritage interpretation

Future Sign - Community Gratitude (Restroom Facility)

If the new restroom facility can accommodate signage, it might be an excellent location for a centralized panel with donor or supporter acknowledgments.

If prudent, this sign may incorporate the existing panel on the Caras family’s contributions to creating the original Caras Park space, thanking them for the contribution and interweaving an element of historical interpretation.

Sign Type: Single or Multi Panel (to be determined)

- Heritage interpretation
- Safety messaging

Future Art Sign - Water Feature

If a water feature is installed, it should have a dedicated art panel designed to meet the standards described in this media implementation plan. Alternatively, if interpretive content matches the water feature, it could be a single sided interpretive panel. An interpretive panel could explore clean water ecosystems.

Sign Type: Single Panel

- Artist statement or information
- Heritage interpretation

Future Art Sign - Murals

If murals are installed, each should have a dedicated art panel designed to meet the standards described in this media implementation plan. Alternatively, if interpretive content matches mural or the art feature, a single sided heritage interpretation panel may be appropriate.

Sign Type: Single Panel

- Artist statement or information
- Heritage interpretation

East Caras Park

East Caras Park includes the green space and community areas roughly between Higgins Avenue and Pattee Street. The Beartracks Bridge divides this space from Caras Park to the west. This space includes the bronze statues known as *Returns*, as well as historical resources in the form of the original Missoula millstones. Ron's River Trail moves through the space and connects East Caras to both Bess Reed Park to the east and Caras Park to the west. A large Northwestern Energy substation is at the north end of the park on Pattee Street. In 2024, the substation will be wrapped in large murals with content from Indigenous artists.

Historically, this space has been home to the Farmers' Market, which in recent years has moved to Caras Park. Future development plans for the space include improved river access near Bess Reed Park, new public art at the electrical substation, and public art at a new ADA accessible ramp connecting the street level at Beartracks Bridge to the park below.

Community members indicated the most common reason for visiting this space was to shop at the Farmers' Market.

Existing Resources

- **Returns** bronze fish sculpture. **Recommendation:** Interpretation needed and sign recommended.
- Historic millstones. **Recommendation:** Interpretation needed and sign recommended.

- Memorial benches. **Recommendation:** None. Any additional memorial benches or plaques will be subject to Parks & Recreation Board policies.
-

Anchor Kiosk - S. End of Pattee Street

A history of the park units in relation to agriculture, particularly focusing on Missoula's history as the Garden City, its role in regional agriculture, and the use of these park spaces for events such as the Farmers' Market. If the Farmers' Market returns to East Caras Park, this would remain a key access point and provides an opportunity to explore historic uses of the space.

- Overall interpretive theme: Create and Exchange
- Location: At or near the current entrance to the Riverside Lot near the Holiday Inn
- Potential stories:
 - Farmers' Market
 - Area as a regional agricultural hub (connect to the Bitterroot area and to national markets)
 - Missoula's moniker as the Garden City
 - The way Parks are shaped and maintained (Parks & Recreation, City arborists)

Sign Type: Multi-Panel Kiosk

- Wayfinding
 - Safety messaging
 - Community posting
 - Heritage interpretation
-

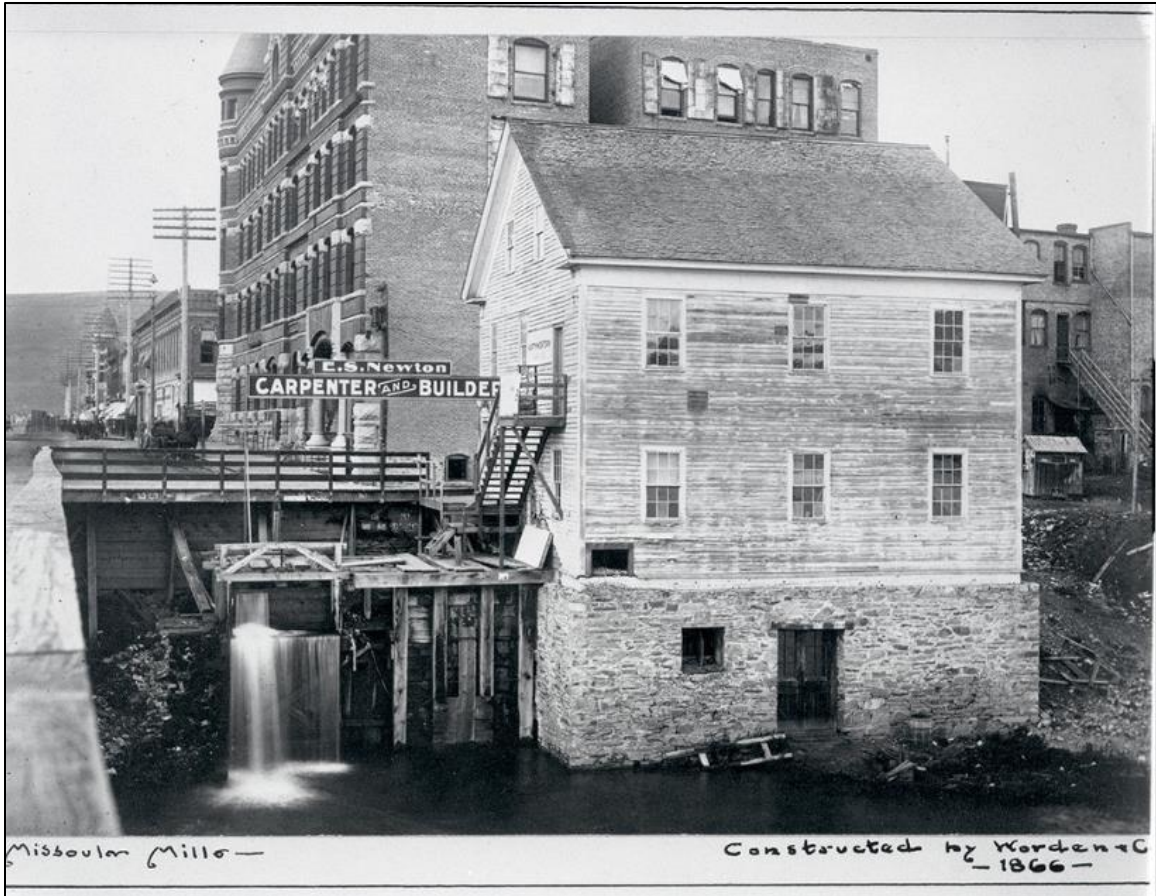
Sign - The Missoula Mills

A history of early Missoula industries, interpreting the physical millstones and connecting them to the broader story of regional industries based on resource extraction.

- Overall interpretive theme: Create and Exchange
- Location: At or near the historic millstones
- Potential stories:
 - History of Missoula Mills
 - History of extractive/resource-based industries
 - Contribution of these industries to the growth and development of downtown

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Heritage interpretation



The old flour mill and First National Bank building in what is now East Caras Park. Constructed in 1866 and pictured circa 1890. Joseph Dixon Papers, University of Montana Archives, Photo Number 76.0219.

Sign - Bull Trout and Returnings

A panel exploring the ecology of trout in the Missoula watershed and exploring the connections between people and fish. This panel could also be turned into a larger kiosk type installation if the ADA ramp installation and foot traffic allows. This may also have the potential to become an anchor kiosk modeled on the three-panel access points found elsewhere.

- Overall interpretive theme: Landscape and Homelands
- Location: At or near the bronze fish statues
- Potential stories:
 - Ecological history of fish in the Missoula watershed, particularly focusing on trout
 - Artist information about Returnings
 - Stewardship message to encourage protection of the watershed
 - Séliš and Q̓lispé language and description of fish and fishing

- Exploration of how this area turned from a dump into a park, exploring the impacts of humans on our shared environment

*Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail **or** Multi-Panel Kiosk*

- Heritage interpretation
 - Ecological interpretation
 - Artist information/art sign
-

Future Sign - Substation Murals

The substation murals will wrap around all external sides of the wall. Visitors will be able to see at least one wall from the location of this sign, but the sign should explore all the murals.

- Overall interpretive theme: Memory and Experience
- Location: At or near the low seating walls in East Caras Park, built to allow visitors to face the substation
- Potential stories:
 - Descriptions of the artists
 - Descriptions of the work, explanations of the content (e.g., explaining the historic origins of ledger art)

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Artist statement or information
 - Heritage interpretation
-

Future Art Sign - Substation Murals

Each mural should have a dedicated art panel designed to meet the standards described in this media implementation plan.

Sign Type: Single Panel

- Artist statement or information
-

Bess Reed Park

Bess Reed Park includes the green space and community areas roughly between Pattee Street and Clay Street. Ron's River Trail moves through the space and connects to nearby Kiwanis Park. The Holiday Inn hotel is on the north side of the park. A set of untitled murals runs along the concrete wall at the south of the park, and there is an unimproved river access point.

The park unit is named for state legislator Bess Reed, an advocate for improved education, water pollution control, and community organizing.

Community members indicated they spend time on the green spaces in this park, but less so than in Caras Park and East Caras Park. The river access point seemed to be the largest area of interest for community participants.

Existing Resources

- Park name signage at western end of park, near parking lot. **Recommendation:** As possible, update to match visual guidelines established by Wayfinding Plan.
-

Lavasseur and Clay Street Entrance

A history of Bess Reed Park through the lens of Missoula’s major civic park supporters. Could include the story of Caras and Lavasseur families—focusing on community desire to create parks as gathering and civic spaces. Rather than an anchor kiosk, this sign might be a two-sided wayfinding sign modeled on similar signage in downtown.

- Overall interpretive theme: Community Life
- Location: At or near the entrance on Levasseur Street
- Potential stories:
 - Bess Reed
 - Lavasseur family (paving stones with footprints)
 - Caras family (careful not to duplicate material in Caras Park)
 - History of Bess Reed Park
 - Focus on women’s role in park development

Sign Type: Double-Sided Panel

- Wayfinding
 - Heritage interpretation
-

Sign - Séliš Stories

This sign should be focused on Séliš and Q̓lispé experiences in the Missoula Valley and surrounding area. It should be designed in close collaboration with tribal members and advisors. The space offers a view of Beartracks Bridge and could complement the interpretation installed at the south end of the span. It could be designed to complement the eventual installation of a rain garden by focusing on resource restoration, if agreeable to stakeholders.

- Overall interpretive theme: Landscape and Homelands
- Location: Bess Reed Park, at or near the site of eventual boardwalk in the center of the park unit
- Potential stories:

- Séliš and Q̓lispé language and description of Missoula, both historic and modern
- Water conservation, focusing on natural resources adapted to Montana environments

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Heritage interpretation
- Ecological interpretation

Art Sign - Untitled Murals

An art sign identifying the murals and describing their creation in 1997 by volunteers and Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

Sign Type: Single Panel

- Artist statement or information

Ron’s River Trail

The trail links a wide variety of parks in the downtown area, snaking along the Clark Fork River on its north banks. In 2017, Parks & Recreation rededicated the trail named after Ron MacDonald, a long-time advocate for parks and trails. In 2022, the trail along Caras Park was widened to accommodate the significant traffic it experiences from both pedestrians and cyclists. Additional plans to widen and further connect the trail segments are ongoing.

Unlike the other interpretive zones, the signage along Ron’s River Trail would not include an anchor pavilion. Instead, all signage recommendations are for one- or two-sided panels that combine ecological history and safety messaging. Furthermore, signage along the river trail should be designed to minimally impact river views; consider horizontal reader rails where possible. The horizontal design of these signs may also lend well to tactile elements such as raised trail maps or castings of animals.

Community members indicated via the survey and in meetings that they were unfamiliar with the name of the river trail, although many use it on a regular basis. Plans exist to continue the use of bollards and badges, similar to the Milwaukee Trail on the south bank, as wayfinding along the trail.

Existing Resources

- Safety signage at river access near the end of Pattee Street. **Recommendation:** Update if possible, allowing for space to include interpretive content or, at the very least, to match the style guidelines established in this plan.

Sign - Plants and People

A history of ecological resources in the park units, with a focus on human use and stewardship.

Note: The Clark Fork Native Prairie Garden is on the south side of the river. Interpretation here should be designed to complement, not duplicate that content.

- Overall interpretive theme: Landscapes and Homelands
- Location: Along the river trail in Bess Reed Park
- Potential stories:
 - Memorial trees
 - City arborists, Parks & Recreation management
 - Deliberate inclusion/exclusion of certain plants
 - Séliš and Qłispé language and description of plants
- Potential tactile: plaster or bronze casts of plants

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Safety messaging
- Heritage interpretation

Sign - Missoula's Trails and Travel Ways

Uniqueness of Missoula's trail systems, from their origins as Indigenous travel corridors, to their use by Lewis and Clark, to the current community use and stewardship.

- Overall interpretive theme: Community Life
- Location: At or near the entrance to Bess Reed Park, near the water access point along the river trail
- Potential stories:
 - History of trails through the Missoula Valley
 - Séliš and Qłispé place names and landmarks, their longstanding trails through the area, many of which became the foundation of current trails and roadways
 - Lewis and Clark Expedition
 - History of Ron MacDonald, trail name (briefly—this is also covered elsewhere on the trail, and with a large rock and trail map in Caras Park)
- Potential tactile: raised map of area trails

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Heritage interpretation
- Wayfinding (trail system map)

Sign - Brennan's Wave

An explanation of Brennan's Wave, both the river feature and the nearby statue.

- Overall interpretive theme: Community Life
- Location: At or near a viewing point for Brennan's Wave
- Potential stories:
 - History of Brennan's Wave, including the story of its construction, a description of its namesake; consider inspirational and enduring message(s) related to recreation on water
 - Explanation of the Wave as it relates to river hazards, safe recreation, and irrigation, as well as community involvement in creating a unique public recreation infrastructure
 - History of river travel and recreation, by both modern and historic communities including the Séliš and Q̓lispé



Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reader Rail

- Heritage interpretation
- Ecological interpretation
- Safety messaging

Sign - Change and Restoration

An exploration of how humans have impacted the Clark Fork River and created Caras Park. This sign could be designed to directly complement the Parker's Island sign, with both installed as reader rails at the river overlook. This sign should also be designed to meet State Historic Preservation Office requirements for interpreting the levee along the river.

- Overall interpretive theme: Landscapes and Homelands
- Location: At or near one of the river overlooks. This sign pairs particularly well with the Parker's Island sign, and if possible, they should be installed near one another.
- Potential stories:
 - Use of area by Indigenous communities, including the Séliš and Q̓lispé

- Rerouting of the river and building levees by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, building of the levee
- Maintaining the levees and implementing flood control projects
- Creation of Caras Park on the infilled ground, explanation that river used to run next to the Wilma
- Stories of key contributors to Caras Park efforts, such as Mayors John Toole and Juliet Gregory
- Efforts to restore and protect watershed, including establishing designated river accesses to protect from erosion
- Potential tactile: raised map of river area showing changes over time

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Heritage interpretation
- Ecological interpretation

Sign - Parker's Island

Parker's Island was a small piece of land in the middle of the Clark Fork River. For hundreds of years and well into the twentieth century, Séliš and Qlispé used the island as a camping site while gathering camas in the Missoula Valley and fishing in the rivers. Early residents, including sex workers and Chinese community members, also lived on the island due to its proximity to Front Street businesses. The island was removed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during river re-shaping and flood control efforts. This sign could be designed to directly complement the "Change and Restoration" sign, with both installed as reader rails at the river overlook.

- Overall interpretive theme: Landscape and Homelands
- Location: At or near one of the river overlooks. This sign pairs particularly well with the Change and Restoration sign, and if possible, they should be installed near one another.
- Potential stories:
 - Séliš and Qlispé use of the river islands since time immemorial
 - Settlements on the islands, focusing on marginalized communities such as the Chinese business owners and the sex workers, many of whom had strong links to businesses on Front Street
 - Use of the river area to dispose of garbage, sewage, and other waste materials
 - Removal of islands
- Potential tactile: raised image featuring the historic riverbed and lines indicating how it has been changed over time (by floods and by human intervention)

Sign Type: Single-Panel Horizontal Reading Rail

- Heritage interpretation

- Ecological interpretation
- Wayfinding



Cars and teepees on an island in the Clark Fork River in Missoula, Montana, circa 1950s. Stan Healy Collection, University of Montana Archives, 90.1299.

Sign Development Guidelines

Best Practices for Interpretive Signage

Successful interpretive media considers the visitor's entire experience, from their first interest in the site to their post-visit reflections and memories. Visitors with diverse personal values, beliefs, interests, and memories will find opportunities to consider ideas, concepts, and perspectives that may seem unfamiliar to them. Interpretation at the site should make these concepts accessible and offer opportunities for audiences to consider things in new ways.

Finding Home

Contested Homelands

Kalapuya peoples have lived here since time immemorial. Non-Natives began exploring and establishing homes at a time when Kalapuyan populations were decimated by European-introduced diseases. As non-Native populations grew, so did tensions between Native and non-Native peoples. The federal government looked to treaties and the creation of reservations to resolve conflicts. Meanwhile, through the Donation Land Claim Act, the government allowed non-Natives to "claim" lands in Kalapuya territories. In 1857, just after the Kalapuya treaty was ratified, Salem incorporated, becoming a center of commerce and emerging as the Oregon state capital in 1864.



Local residents Otto and Maggie Muelhaupt. Otto's father, Reverend Jacob Muelhaupt, led the German Lutheran Reformed Church, one of Salem's German-speaking congregations. Courtesy of Willamette Heritage Center, 2008.03.000.

Shared Languages, Shared Identities

Many newcomers to Salem shared common cultural identities. German-speaking immigrants arrived from Poland, Russia, and other areas of Europe. In Salem they formed German-language clubs, established businesses, and founded churches. By 1893, German-language sermons could be heard at the First German Baptist Church, the German Lutheran Reformed Church, the German Methodist Episcopal Church, and the German Methodist Episcopal Church.



Salem residents gathered on Commercial and Court Streets to participate in Fourth of July festivities, 1894. Courtesy of the Ben Maxwell Collection, Salem Public Library Historic Photograph Collection, Salem Public Library, Oregon.

Salem Ore. den 20 Aug 1865
Liebe Leona!
Mein Kind, bewahre die Gebote deines Vaters, und lass nicht fahren das best deiner Mutter. Apr. 6, 20.
Was der Himmelsferne Worte Englein sind - schauet Gott so gerne hier auf jedes Kind!
Der Herr segne Dich!
G. W. Rutich

Note from First German Baptist Church pastor G. W. Rutich to community member Leona Fast, undergoing medical treatment. German was the first language of Rutich and many early Salem residents. Courtesy of Willamette Heritage Center, 2005.05.000

Example sign from a historic site in Oregon. This wayside was part of a set of three discussing a German-speaking church. Note the layered content: larger headlines, subheadings, and captions. The sign also features a historic letter in German from a member of the congregation. Photo courtesy of Historical Research Associates.

Example Sign – Single Interpretive Panel

Heading [3–5 words]

Subheading [5–10 words]

Body Content [150–200 words, keeping paragraphs approximately 50 words]

Captions [25 words]

Historic and Modern Images

- Consider a mix of photographs; one historic and one recent, for instance.

- Ensure you have the right to use the image. Museums and libraries can help secure permissions. Otherwise, seek images that are in the public domain.

Community Voices

- Connect visitors to the past by including quotes from historic community members using resources such as:
 - Oral history interviews
 - Area newspapers
 - Archival materials such as letters or postcards

Example Sign Types

Artists Panel

Size: Variable, but generally these should be relatively small

Colors: Black background, with a raised text in yellow metallic.

This example sign is located at the stairs to East Caras Park near the First Interstate Bank building.



Horizontal Reading Rail

Size: 36" x 24"

Colors: Black stanchion, with a vinyl or other weather resistant panel that can be changed out as necessary. The panel should meet content development guidelines for images, font, and other graphic elements.

This example sign is located near the stormwater facilities in Caras Park. Installed prior to this plan adoption, it should be updated to meet the visual style guidelines when it is prudent to do so.

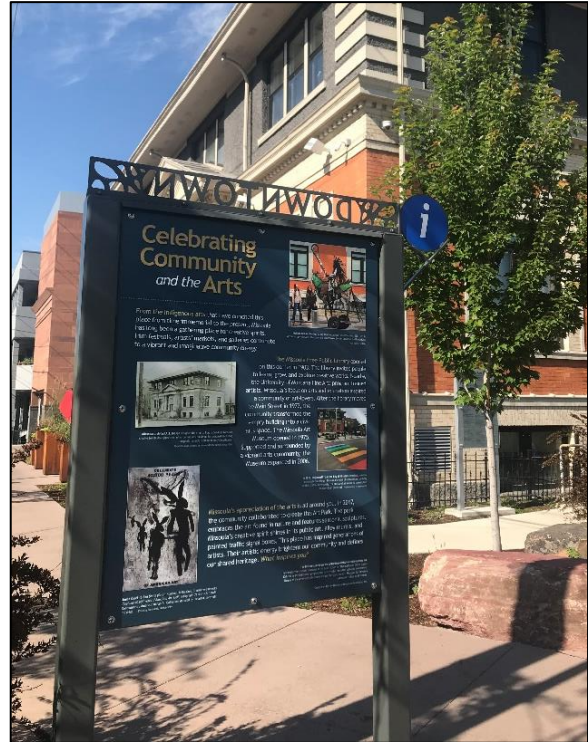


Double-Sided Kiosk

Size: Interpretive panels should be approximately 48” x 36”

Colors: Structure to be matched to other downtown kiosks. The first side should be devoted to a wayfinding map. The second side should be made of vinyl or another weather resistant material. They should be designed to easily switch out the signage. The panels should meet content development guidelines for images, font, and other graphic elements. If wayfinding elements are included, they should meet the needs identified in that plan.

Example of a double-sided kiosk installed at the Missoula Art Museum.



Multi-Panel Kiosk

Size: Structure to be determined; interpretive panels should be approximately 48” x 36”

Colors: Structure to be determined. If possible, a roof or other design element should offer visitors and signage with weather protection. Lighting may also help prevent vandalism. The three panels should be made of weather and vandalism resistant materials. They should be designed to easily switch out the signage. The panels should meet content development guidelines for images, font, and other graphic elements. If wayfinding elements are included, they should meet the needs identified in that plan.

Example of a multi-panel kiosk style from the North Riverside Parks & Trails Design Plan Report. Kiosk is located at the Orange Street Trailhead.



Physical Sign Types

- National Park Service units typically feature two types of interpretive signs/panels, also known as waysides: low-profile waysides, which give site-specific interpretation about features that visitors can see, and upright waysides, which provide information about an area or trail.¹
- Low-profile waysides are a graphic medium, in which one main image should tell the story of the site being featured.²
- Waysides are different from book or magazine layouts, which rely heavily on text. These types of interpretive media should, instead, rely primarily on bold visuals, that when paired with a landscape, enhance the visitor experience.³
- For signs along Ron’s River Trail, consider using horizontal, short height reader rails to maintain a clear view of the river and natural environment.
 - These signs often represent unique opportunities to include easily accessible tactile elements such as raised maps or artifact imprints.
- For interpreting public art, consider a small panel with artist information, year of installation, and a short statement either from the artist or a description of the art.
 - This strategy could also be applied to the naming of benches and other infrastructure.
- All signs should be designed to meet standards set by the ADA. All signage should be ADA compliant, with appropriate heights for easy reading, sign text designed with consideration for visual impairments, and ample space for maneuvering to and around the signs.
 - Universal Design advocates for equitable “Size and Space for Approach and Use,” which means that users should have appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of user’s body size, posture, or mobility.

Sign Design Guidelines

- All signs should be thematically driven rather than information driven, with an effort to help visitors connect their personal experiences to the space.
 - The themes and messages should fit into the framework established by the Missoula Downtown Heritage Interpretive Plan, which would help connect the stories of these three parks to the broader heritage interpretation across Downtown.
- Signs should be cohesive in style, both in the written content and physical design.

¹ National Park Service, *Wayside Exhibits: A Guide to Developing Outdoor Interpretive Exhibits* (n.p.: National Park Service, 2009), 7, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/hfc/upload/Wayside-Guide-First-Edition.pdf>.

² National Park Service, *Wayside Exhibits*, 12.

³ National Park Service, *Wayside Exhibits*, 12.

- The tone and tense of the signs should be consistent throughout; rather than advocate for a single content developer with a singular voice, it may be helpful to have a review team help standardize tone, tense, reading grade level, etc.
- Continuity in colors, font styles, and layout help to create a cohesive visitor experience throughout the parks.
 - Using the colors and fonts from the Wayfinding Plan ensures that Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park all fit into the broader downtown system of wayfinding and provide a cohesive heritage experience.

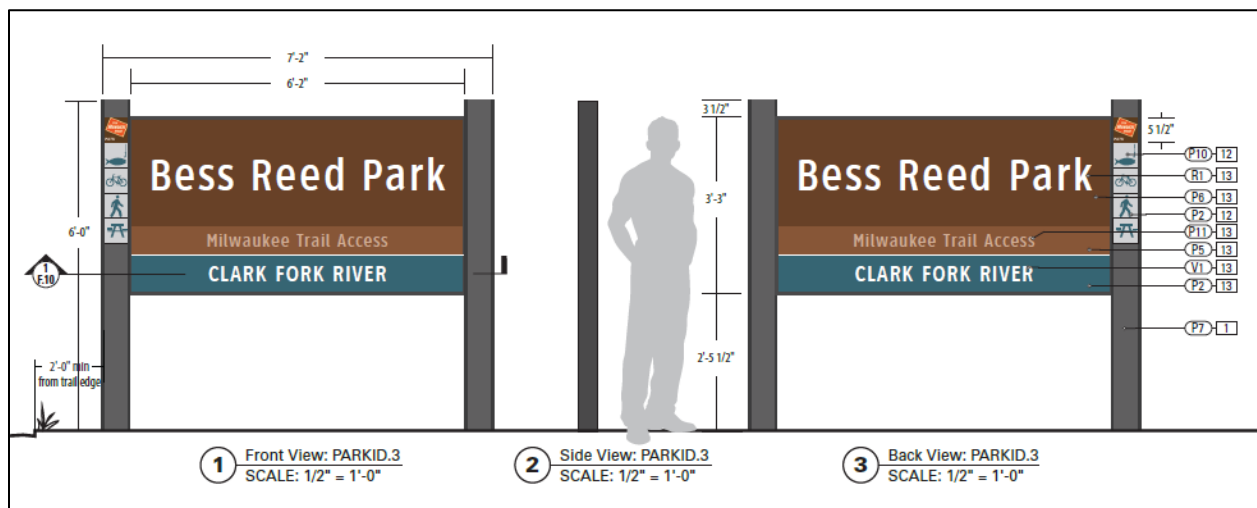
Wayfinding

In 2013, the City of Missoula adopted the Wayfinding Plan. The Plan established design guidelines for signage, indicated how and where signage should be located, and provided detailed design specifications.

The plan was designed primarily for signage that helps visitors and locals orient themselves in physical space. The signage examples include light post signage and maps.

Although interpretive signage is different, many interpretive signs can be effectively combined with wayfinding signage. A two-sided panel, for instance, might have a map on the back and interpretive content on the front.

Wherever possible, all signage developed in Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park should match the visual styles identified by the Wayfinding Plan.



Graphic from the 2013 Wayfinding Plan. Photo courtesy of Merje Design.

Crafting Good Interpretive Media

- Our job is to develop interpretation that attracts and holds a visitor’s attention.
- Visitors can only process three to four blocks of information at a time.
- Thirty to sixty seconds is the average time someone spends at an interpretive panel.
- Visitors are more likely to read multiple signs with less text than one sign with significant text.
- Our job is not to extensively cover a subject, but to spark an interest in it.
- Different audiences have different attention spans. Layering content by using subheadings, headings, body text, and captions allows for different audiences to spend the time they want to spend.
- Signs should be engaging, relatable, and relevant to the audience. Good interpretation sparks audience interest and encourages them to learn more.
- All signs must be designed with accessibility in mind, meeting or exceeding ADA guidelines.

Writing Style

- All signs should follow the same set of editorial guidelines. Chicago Manual of Style is one appropriate choice.
- Write in the active voice as much as possible.
- Write in an approachable tone that can appeal to a range of visitors and learning styles.
- Write engaging headings and subheadings.
- Write content that answers the question “So what?”
- Tell stories with visuals as much as with text.
- Consider including bulleted lists for lengthy or complex information.
- Minimal text and visual clarity are important for visitors with low vision, as well as those visitors with cognitive and learning disabilities.
- Universal Design advocates for “Simple and Intuitive Use,” which allows visitors to easily understand content, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- An interpretive panel should include between 25 and 150 words, in blocks of no more than 50 words each.
- While many opinions exist about effective interpretive writing, research has shown that shorter content works better for more people. Longer content often pleases curators, donors, funders, and stakeholders, but these individuals must keep in mind that they are not the primary visitors to an interpretive experience.

- The National Park Service recommends the following word count for common wayside panel sizes:⁴
 - 42" x 24": 100 words
 - 36" x 24": 75–100 words
 - 24" x 24": 75 words
 - 6" x 12": 25 words

⁴ National Park Service, *Wayside Exhibits*, 14.

Community Resources

- Missoula Parks & Recreation
- Missoula Public Art Committee
- Missoula Historic Preservation Commission
- Missoula Historic Preservation Officer (HPO)
- State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- Missoula Public Library
- Mike and Maureen Mansfield Library at the University of Montana
- Destination Missoula
- Downtown Missoula Partnership
- Heritage Missoula Committee
- Clark Fork Coalition
- Adventure Cycling and area recreation shops
- Trout Unlimited
- Boone and Crockett Club
- Montana Natural History Center
- Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

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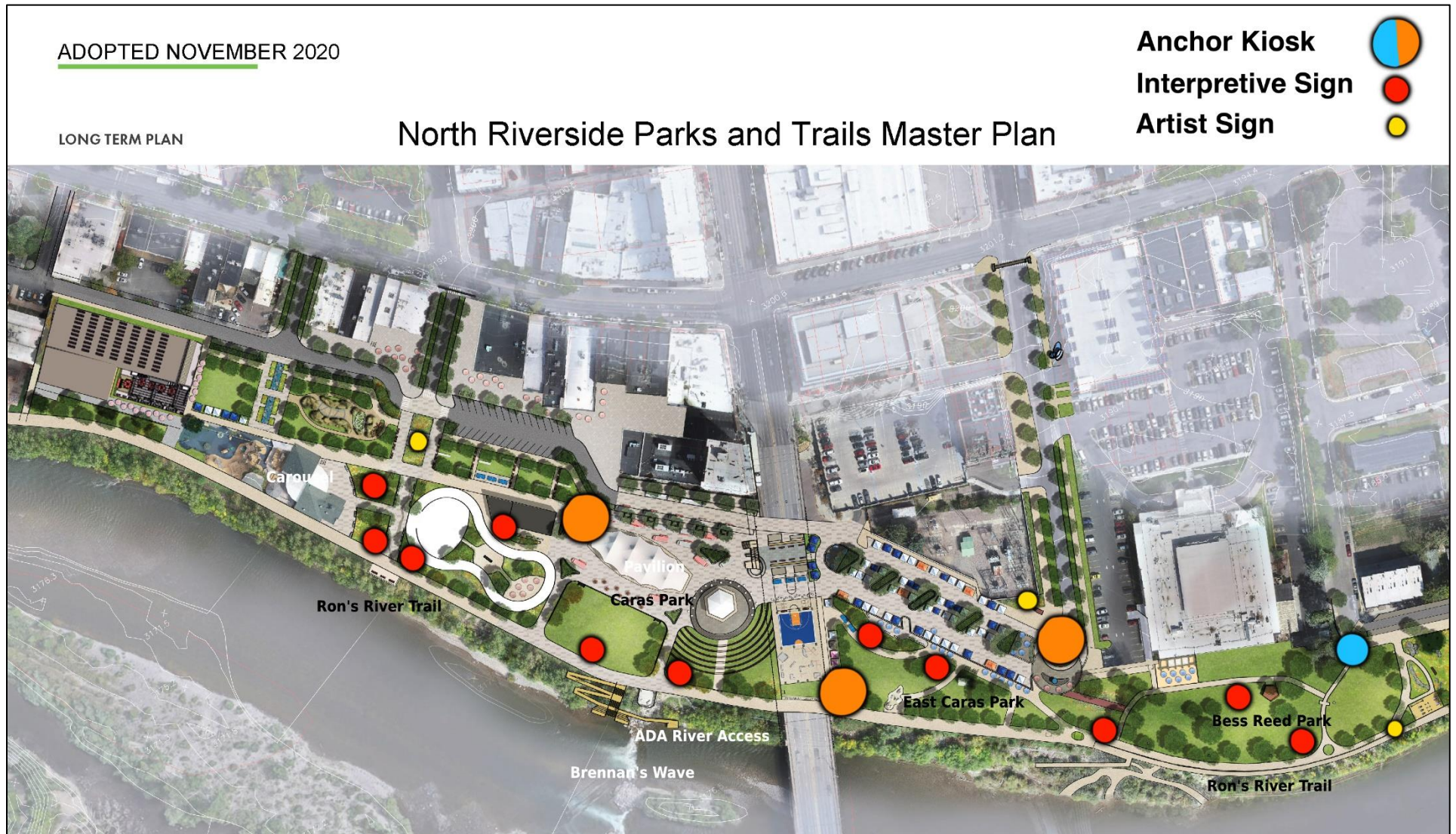
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. "Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Missoula Downtown Historic District." 2009.

Select Historical Images and Resources

- Montana History Portal, <https://www.mtmemory.org/>
- University of Montana Archives & Special Collections
- Historical Museum at Fort Missoula
- Missoula Public Library
- Oral History Collections at the University of Montana Archives & Special Collections
- Montana Newspapers Project, <http://montananewspapers.org/>

Appendix A. Potential Sign Map

The following maps represent a potential plan for sign placement. Sign placement may change due to ongoing construction in the park units, guidance from landscape designers, and other unanticipated factors.



Proposed Sign Locations - Caras Park and Ron's River Trail

1. Future Art Sign – Water Feature
2. Reader Rail – A Carousel for Missoula
3. Reader Rail – Parker's Island
4. Reader Rail – Change and Restoration
5. Future Sign – Community Gratitude
6. Anchor Kiosk – Pavilion Area – Festival & Event History
7. Reader Rail – Protecting Our Waters
8. Reader Rail – Brennan's Wave



Some signage may serve multiple purposes. A reader rail might, for instance, include safety messaging or wayfinding. The anchor kiosks will include heritage interpretation and wayfinding. If placed near a piece of public art, the heritage sign may include the smaller art sign.

Proposed Sign Locations - East Caras Park, Bess Reed Park, and Ron's River Trail

9. Anchor Pavilion – East Caras (Pattee) – Agriculture
10. Reader Rail – The Missoula Mills
11. Reader Rail – Substation Murals
12. Art Sign – Substation Murals
13. Anchor Pavilion – East Caras (ADA Ramp) – Trout
14. Reader Rail – People and Plants
15. Reader Rail – Séliš Stories
16. Reader Rail – Brennan's Wave
17. Two-sided Sign – Lavasseur and Clay Street – Family Life
18. Art Sign – Untitled Murals



Some signage may serve multiple purposes. A reader rail might, for instance, include safety messaging or wayfinding. The anchor kiosks will include heritage interpretation and wayfinding. If placed near a piece of public art, the heritage sign may include the smaller art sign.

Appendix B. Complementary Interpretation

The primary objective of this plan is to offer recommendations for physical signage in Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. Because the physical space for signage is limited, community partners and stakeholders could collaborate on non-physical interpretation. Caras Park is uniquely situated to take advantage of existing interpretive media and programming and provide space for those programs to grow.

All complementary interpretation should be developed to meet the interpretive goals and guidelines set by this plan.

Tours

The Downtown Missoula Partnership currently offers guided tours via the Unseen Missoula program. Although most tours focus on the built landscape of downtown north of the river, most include a discussion of area industry and the Clark Fork River. Some dedicated tours have focused specifically on ecological history or targeted park users such as cyclists.

If possible, visitors to the Parks should find informational ways to connect with these resources. A community posting board may be able to serve this purpose, allowing for flexible content that can be updated as needed.

Numerous entities have crafted and distributed self-guided walking tours that include sites in Caras Park, East Caras Park, and Bess Reed Park. For example:

- Downtown Missoula Partnership, Walking Tour, <https://www.missouladowntown.com/tours/downtown-historic-walking-tour/>
- Destination Missoula, Walking Tour, <https://destinationmissoula.org/assets/files/mda-downtown-walking-tour.pdf>
- Parks & Recreation, Missoula Riverfront Bike Tour, <https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/6747/Riverfront-Trail-Self-Guided-Tour?bidId=>

Digital Media

Visitors should find information about the site and its history on a variety of digital platforms.

They should find easily accessible and engaging information through websites and social media.

- Update digital media regularly to introduce site themes and messaging.
- Ensure site themes and heritage interpretation have a place on websites.
- Interview subject matter experts, site staff, and volunteers as a regular feature on social media.

HRA recommends limiting the use of QR codes in physical panels. If QR codes are implemented, they should be used at the anchor kiosks and installed in a way that they can be easily changed without removing or replacing the full panels.