

I2 Walk Audit at 6th Ward

May 23rd 2:30pm-4:00pm

Attendees: Lucas Wallace (NMTAC member), Greg Wirth (NMTAC member), Sarah Sandau (Lewis and Clark Public Health and walk audit facilitator), Todd Verrill (Helena Schools), Janelle Mickelson (Helena Schools and 6th Ward TIF), Michael Alvarez (City of Helena Planning), Anne Pichette (City of Helena Housing)

Follow up meeting to discuss the walk audit and add in thoughts on 5/31/2023 at 11:30am with Sarah Sandau and Joel Peden (Montana Centers for Independent Living)

The Non-Motorized Travel Advisory Council to the Helena City Commission (NMTAC) requested that Lewis and Clark Public Health assist in coordinating an Inclusive Interdisciplinary Walk Audit (I2 Walk Audit) at and around the 6th Ward Area. With the new neighborhood plan coming out as well as the Railroad Urban Renewal District TIF application, NMTAC wanted to have a walk audit to see if a recommendation is needed.

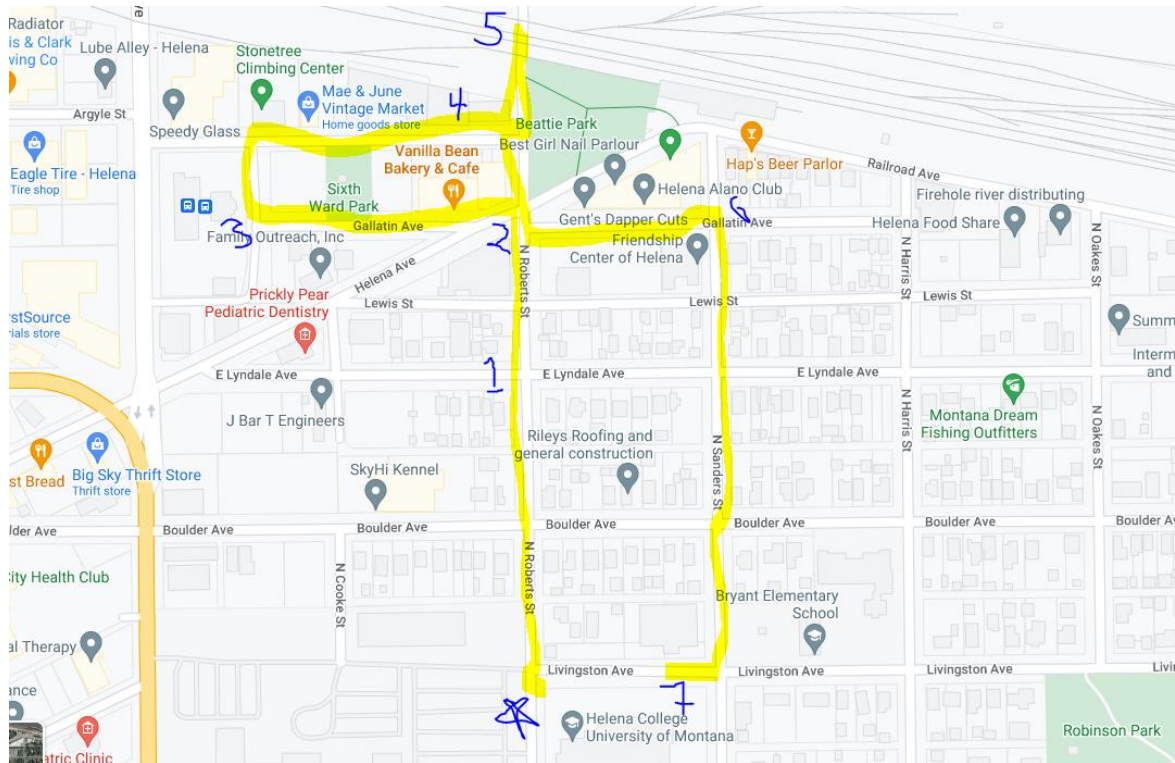
In that area of town, there are numerous housing options, non-profits, businesses, offices, parks, gardens, and schools (Bryant Elementary, Helena High School, and Helena College). North Roberts is an important corridor for non-motorized transportation for safe routes to schools and access to groceries and services for the residential neighborhoods on both sides of the tracks east of Montana avenue. Bozeman Street is a vital link in the long term-plan of completing the Centennial Trail. This route is owned by the City of Helena mixed with some owned by the Railroad and private parties.

The team scored each stop with a rating of 1-10. 1 being awful, scary, and unsafe. 10 being a perfect city design.

Route:

The Walk Audit started at the Helena College parking lot. The group walked along N Roberts Street till Gallatin Ave. They went left on Gallatin Ave till made a loop to get onto Bozeman Street. After Bozeman Street, they went back onto N Roberts Street to cross the railroad tracks. Afterwards, they reversed and went N Roberts through Beattie Park, then onto N Sanders Street back to Helena College. They made seven stops along the way.

The map of the route:



Observations, questions, and ideas from the I2 Walk Audit are as follows:

Stop #1: Intersection of N Roberts Street and E Lyndale Ave. At the first stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 5.5. Comments on the first leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: One section had a boulevard (half had trees the other half just grass), sidewalk present (although narrow and uneven), network of facilities (schools, housing, close to businesses), stop signs, busy but controlled.

Needs Improvement: No curb cuts, bushes taking over the sidewalks, uneven sidewalks, uncontrolled intersection, light pole takes up part of the sidewalk.

Ideas: People can make complaints on the bushes through the My Helena App. Maybe a potential area for the “Spirit of Service” day. Bulbouts to shorten crossing would be helpful. A wide street has room for a bike lane. Curb cuts on the sidewalks.

Stop #2: Intersection of N Roberts Street, Helena Ave, and Gallatin Ave. At the second stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 6.75. Comments on the second leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: Trees in the boulevard, sidewalk present, network of facilities, access to bus transportation, good placemaking

Needs Improvement: Can be hard to navigate (but also slows people down so also a good thing), Curb bulbouts were designed for cars not pedestrians.

Ideas: Update curb bulbouts to provide shorter pedestrian crossing and more trees. Painting the crosswalks and curbs would be a simple solution to making it more accessible.

Stop #3: Gallatin Ave near the 6th Ward Garden Park. At the third stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 6.75. Comments on the third leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: diversity of businesses, close to the bus, lilacs and other fresh smells with the Garden Park, the 6th Ward Garden Park, the overall vibe of the street, sidewalks

Needs Improvement: Wide pedestrian crossing, lack of parking

Railroad Urban Renewal District TIF application discussion: This would create a wide one-way that would be a long crossing and create underutilized space. Maybe Vanilla Bean can add a parklet to use the space better. Sidewalk on both sides would be helpful. It would be nice to have additional parking. Would like to see bike parking included. Include trees to minimize hardscape and enhance livability with diverse uses. Angle parking would impede the sidewalk and make it not usable for wheelchairs.

Stop #4: Intersection of Bozeman Street and N Roberts Street. Comments on the fourth leg of the walk are as follows:

Needs Improvement: A more accessible entrance for the 6th Ward Garden Park from the handicap parking. Trim the bushes from the 6th Ward Garden Park.

Ideas: This is a main route to continue the Centennial Trail. Making this more bike friendly would help that continuation. Also need a safe crossing at Montana Avenue.

Stop #5: Crossing the railroad tracks at N Roberts Street. At the fifth stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 2. Comments on the fifth leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: There is a crossing, network of facilities, connecting schools to housing and businesses.

Needs Improvement: Unsafe with no protected crossing.

Ideas: Create a safe pedestrian crossing of the railroad. Continue to utilize this as a main passage for transportation. Route is a safe route to school for Bryant, HMS and HHS.

Stop #6: Intersection of Gallatin Ave and N Sanders Street. At the sixth stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 8. Comments on the first leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: Access to businesses and a park, more livable design

Needs Improvement: path through park can be improved (railroad owned there), TIF plan for Helena Avenue should prioritize pedestrian connectivity and livability by minimizing pedestrian crossing distances with bulbouts and including trees. Angled parking is supported to better utilize the width of Helena Avenue.

Stop #7: Bryant Elementary. At the last stop the team assessed the area as an average score of 8. Comments on the leg of the walk are as follows:

Positive aspects: One street would have been a 10 with great design and layout. Sidewalk the whole way, lots of trees, variety of housing.

Needs Improvement: Moments of bad sidewalk.

Summary suggestions:

1. Bike racks included in the plans
2. Have a higher focus on pedestrian connectivity in the plans
3. Benches
4. Trees in boulevards and parking compliance
5. Curb cuts

Next Steps:

This summary account will be provided to all participants in addition to NMTAC. This will be discussed at the next NMTAC meeting on Tuesday, June 13th.

Community members can always make requests to the City on their own through the My Helena App.