

# **Downtown SAM Small Group Meeting Summary**

## **Small group meeting locations and times:**

- 4/21 at 10:00 am at First Interstate Bank Board Room
  - Number of attendees: 6
- 4/21 at 12:00 pm at Le Petit Outre
  - Number of attendees: 10
- 4/26 at 9:00 am at First Interstate Bank Board Room
  - Number of attendees: 5
- 5/1 at 12:00 pm at DCI Engineers
  - Number of attendees: 5
- 5/2 at 3:00 pm at the Florence 4th floor Conference Room
  - Number of attendees: 13
- 5/5 at 10:00 am at Pangea
  - Number of attendees: 12

**Total attendees: 51**

## **Main themes collected from the meetings:**

1. Parking is key to economic health and investment in Downtown. Parking needs vary by time of day and season, and location and convenience matters. Employee parking is important. Parking and loading zones can be better managed. There is an opportunity to shift perceptions surrounding parking and traffic downtown through education and signage.
2. Support for safer streets for walking, biking, driving, and public transportation. This includes safety in parking structures; Safety crossing multiple lanes with parked cars and fast-moving traffic; Safety driving or biking on the Hip Strip; and reducing conflicts between pedestrians, bikes, and cars.
3. Improved access and circulation for Downtown businesses, workers, residents, and visitors must include cars. Cars are still an important part of Downtown. Not everyone can walk, bike, or use the bus. Downtown must be easy to access by car.
4. Improved access and circulation for Downtown businesses, workers, residents, and visitors includes bikes. Not everyone can drive. Bike lanes are important, but there are mixed opinions about how to design them. The one-way bike loop on Front/Main is a compromise.
5. Support for an inviting streetscape that showcases Downtown Missoula as a destination. Investment in Downtown is good. Downtown is busy, but the cumulative effect of construction on businesses has been difficult.

## **Stated Purpose of the Meetings and Intro Statements**

- City of Missoula applied for a RAISE grant in February 2023. This \$25 million grant would bring federal money to Missoula to invest in our public downtown infrastructure.

- Staff had to move quickly to apply for the grant due to accelerated application deadlines, and we were made aware of a need to circle back with downtown business and property owners.
- The meetings' goals are to go over the plan for the projects, answer your questions, and listen to your feedback.
- This project was packaged together to address safety, sustainability, equity, access, and traffic circulation. Based on early project feedback on both Higgins and Front/Main, one additional primary goal is to minimize parking loss.
- The Downtown SAM project design details are not yet finalized, so there will be opportunities to revisit or revise those details.

## **Notes from each meeting:**

*Italicized = participant comment*

Non-italicized = staff response

Photos = Notes with ideas, questions, and concerns from participants to the meetings.

### **April 21, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. at First Interstate Board Room**

#### **Attendees:**

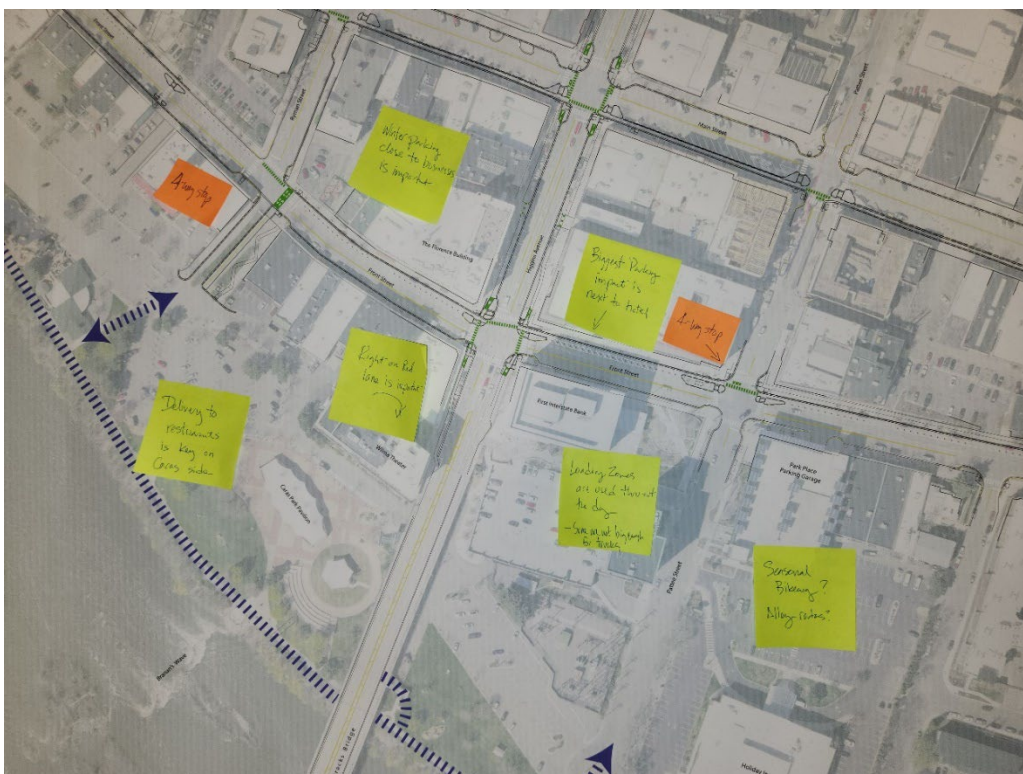
1. Tad Hilton
  2. Gwen Jones
  3. Otis McCullough
  4. Nick Checota
  5. Tom Severson
  6. Linda McCarthy
  7. Spider McKnight
  8. Philip Schaefer
- Staff:
    - Jeremy Keene
    - Aaron Wilson
    - Maci MacPherson
    - Ian Ortilieb

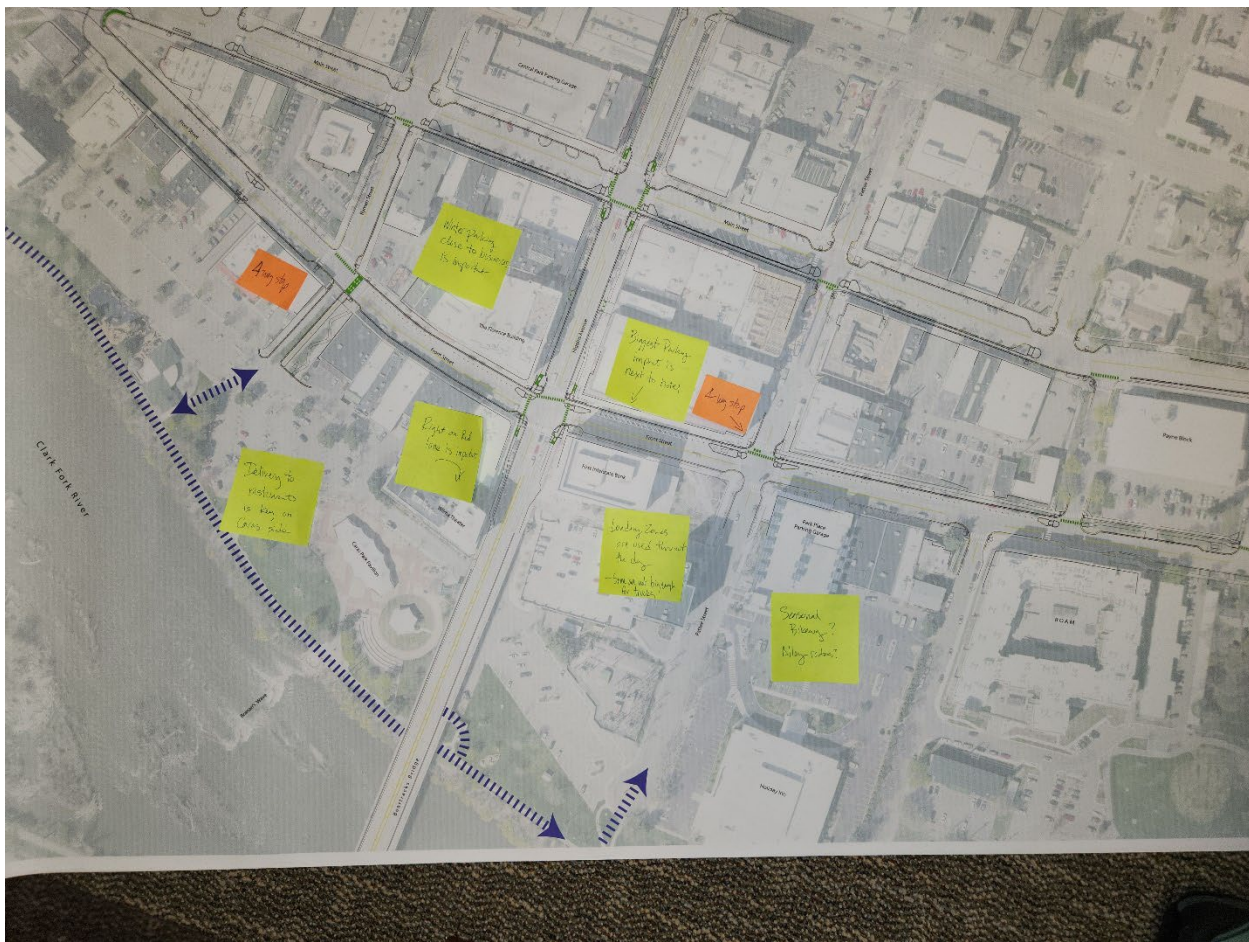
#### **Parking**

- *How is the city fine tuning the parking loss in these plans?*
  - City has a non-net loss of parking policy. Working on spaces in parking garages
- *Could we have shuttles for staff?*
- **Parking concerns:**
  - *Added 3 hotels but didn't add parking for the hotels. Added a lot of demand.*
  - *Hotels are great, great use of TIF.*

- *Parking in First Interstate Bank drive-through at night, so they have to tow people.*
- *Issues with leasing FI Bank ground floor because of lack of parking.*
- *Hotel valet is using the parking spaces in the garage.*
- *Hotels visitors park in regular street parking overnight, which takes away from options for diners coming to restaurants or events at night.*
- *People are parking by the Hip Strip area and walking downtown because it's free. Evening parking for restaurants is a big issue, and people won't walk in winter to any garage.*
- *Need to re-think how we communicate where parking is open in downtown – need more education.*
- *Allow parking garage parking on all ramps vs. lease-only spots.*
- *Need to maintain or grow more loading zones.*
- **Two-way conversion:**
  - *All for this project; it's scary for pedestrians (now).*
  - *Don't need a bike lane on Front/Main; we have trails and other options.*
  - *Those that need to park because of mobility issues have trouble with eliminated parking.*
  - *We need to add parking, not reduce it.*
  - *Widespread support for the two-way conversion project.*
- **Higgins Ave.**
  - *Walk us through why Higgins is a good idea?*
    - *Four lanes are not efficient and most dangerous.*
    - *Lane width is not standard and from the 1950's.*
    - *We looked at many alternatives, and left-turn lanes seemed like the best solution.*
    - *Transit efficiency – how can we help the transit system be better?*
    - *We look at 24-hour traffic on Higgins, and plan for that, not just the 5-6 p.m. rush hour.*
    - *Bridge does not have a turn lane – left turn lanes are on either side of the bridge.*
  - *We really wanted to understand the whole project and why you put these all together.*
    - *Traffic backs up on Front St. when there is an event in Caras Park – how can taking away a lane make that better?*
    - *Four-way stops – want four way stops at Front/Washington and other areas for pedestrian safety.*
    - *Can we have flashing lights or other safety measures for pedestrians?*
    - *Intersection at Ryman will be improved from what it is now.*
- **Bicycles**

- *Why a bike lane on Front/Main? Currently only have connectivity on Spruce St. and Riverfront Trail. RF trail does not have good connectivity.*
- *Seems like a one-way bike lane allows for loss of angled parking?*
- *No one bikes in the winter.*
- *Comparing Missoula to other large cities doesn't make sense. We don't have the same population.*
- *City overemphasizes bike traffic.*
  - *It's dangerous and encourages people to bike.*
  - *Bikers can keep up with traffic. There are no bikes chained up in front of my business.*
- *Can we have seasonal bike lanes that help with parking in the winter?*
- *Can we utilize alleys for bike lanes instead?*
- **General Comments**
  - *The City lives in an echo chamber. Don't always reach out to the right people. There's a lack of understanding.*
  - *I was told "you don't understand" by the City in regard to projects like these.*
  - *Feels like a bait-and-switch by the City and MDT with the Beartracks Bridge project.*
  - *Toughest time of the year for restaurants is January, February, and March.*
  - *This project is not convenient for us. Without us, you (City) wouldn't exist.*
  - *It's a risky strategy to force people to act in a certain way (comment about encouraging biking/walking/transit).*
  - *People don't take the bus.*
  - *Female staff don't want to walk in the dark to their cars.*
  - *Staff who are single moms need to be able to run their kids in their cars to things during the day. They can't park a long way away and walk.*





## April 21, 2023, at Noon at Le Petit Outre

### Attendees:

1. Athena
2. Otis
3. Rob Fleming
4. Bryan Hickey
5. Aimee McQuilkin
6. Erin McEwery
7. Michael Albitton
8. Spider Mcknight
9. Amy Dolan
- Staff:
  - Jeremy Keene
  - Aaron Wilson
  - Maci MacPherson

- Ian Ortilieb
- **General comments:**
  - *We like that downtown/Hip Strip is a destination, not a pass through.*
  - *What happens if we do not get the RAISE grant? Can we just do the South Higgins improvements?*
  - *Can we get all the pedestrians to cross the street at the same time? Then let cars go?*
  - *Between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> streets on Higgins is dangerous – this plan will help. Having four lanes is just not good for safety.*
  - *Would like to maintain loading zones in all of these projects.*
  - *How will we manage hotels and federal building with City/County staff when there's no new parking garages being put in?*
- **Parking**
  - *Don't like getting rid of parking.*
  - *Can we gain more parking garages? Don't want to lose out on an opportunity to gain more parking.*
  - *Can we manage parking on the Hip Strip/neighborhoods around there like north of the bridge?*
  - *People are parking on the south side of the river and walking over to work downtown.*
  - *Employees of the Hip Strip park on 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Street in the residential area and walk to work.*
  - *Can we use empty building parking lots for business employee parking? Can the parking commission help with that?*
  - *Have we considered how development (i.e., Missoulia building and new apartments behind Bridge Pizza) will affect these current Higgins Ave. plans?*
    - *Owners have to do a traffic study before permits are issued.*
    - *We don't plan for right now but for long-term transportation.*
    - *Other options like bus or walking if they live downtown.*
  - *Why are others concerned about the conversion of Higgins Ave?*
    - *Parallel parking concerns - because you don't have a lane to go around people who are parking.*
  - *Can we use money from the Missoula Parking Commission for parking improvements on S. Higgins? Could we have two-hour parking and ticketing?*
  - *We're always told, "there's a lot of parking and parking is coming." We would like to see that improved rather than always being told that.*
- **Bicycles**
  - *There are some concerns about the protected bike lanes – comfort factor for cyclists.*
  - *One-way bike lane on Front/Main is a compromise.*



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## **April 26, 2023, 9:00 am at First Interstate Bank Boardroom**

- **Attendees**

1. Otis McCullough
2. Carma Gilligan
3. Bob Giordano
4. Linda McCarthy
5. Todd Frank

- **Staff**

- Jeremy Keene
    - Ellen Buchanan
    - Ian Ortlieb
    - Ben Weiss
    - Lori Hart

- **Our Message:**

- **Safety**

- Includes bulbouts, dedicated bike lanes, and improved lighting.

- **Economic Health of Downtown**

- We're trying to figure out how we can add parking spaces. (Parking Commission is conducting study.)
    - Have added 500 spaces in last 7 to 10 years.

- **Access & Circulation**

- Treating traffic to address Downtown as a destination instead of just moving traffic through.
    - Upgrading traffic signals and adding center turn lanes.
    - Improving access to parks, especially for disabled persons.

- **Safety**

- *Crossing Front at Pattee is difficult with one-way traffic on Front because the angle-parked cars and delivery trucks cause drivers to move out into the intersection in order to see cars coming. There are also a lot of people crossing both Pattee and Front here as well. Won't having two-way traffic on Front make this worse because you have another direction you have to check for traffic?*

- *What about a small roundabout at Front & Pattee?*

- *Traffic speed is an issue.*

- *Safe environment for pedestrians and drivers is important for business health.*

- *One-way street promotes "racing." Consider one lane going one way.*

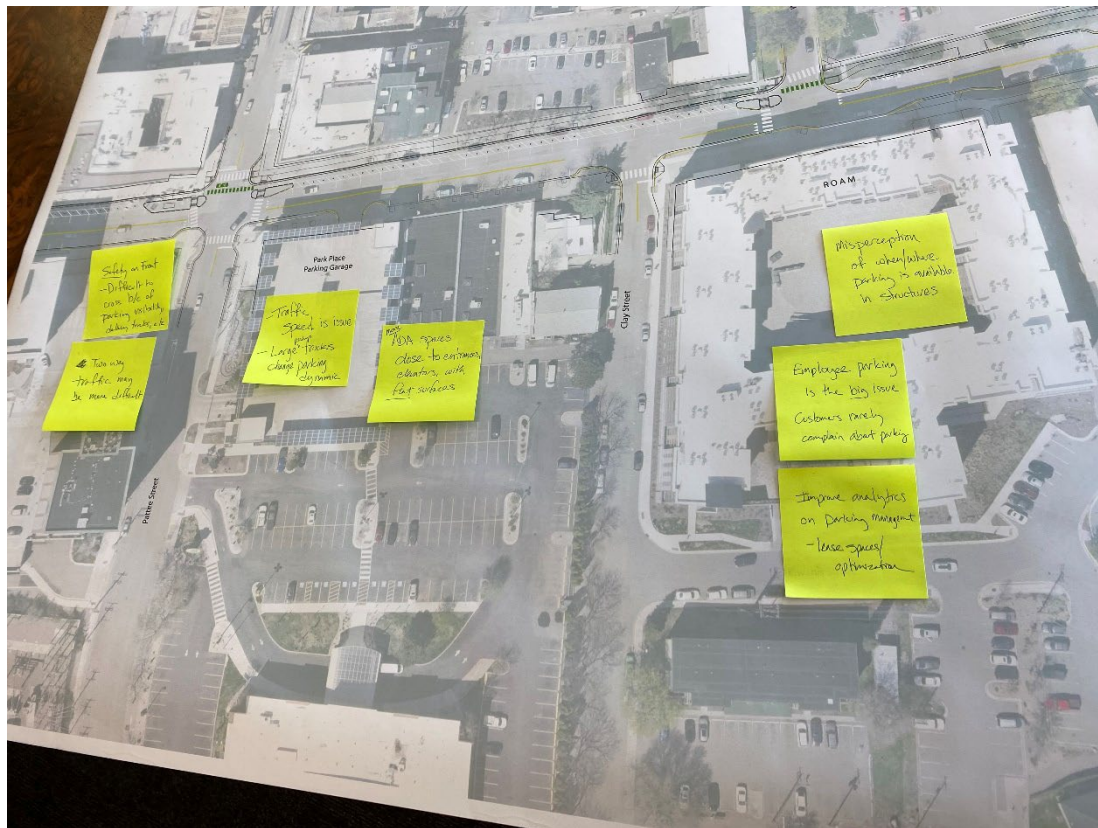
- *Was changing Front/Main to one-ways in '60s or '70s to help with safety?*

- Answer from Ellen Buchanan: At that time, the intent was to move traffic out of downtown and into the suburbs.

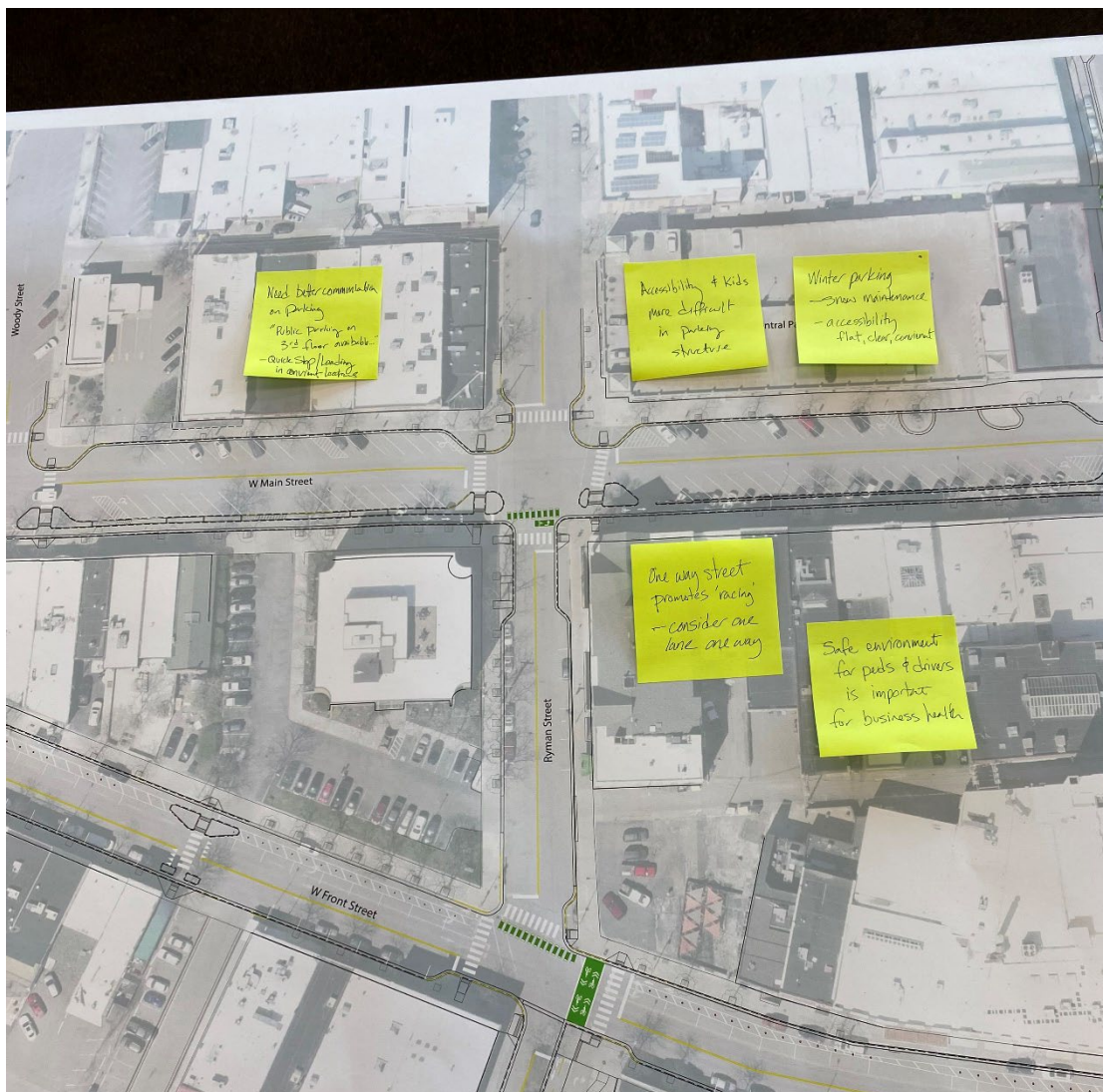
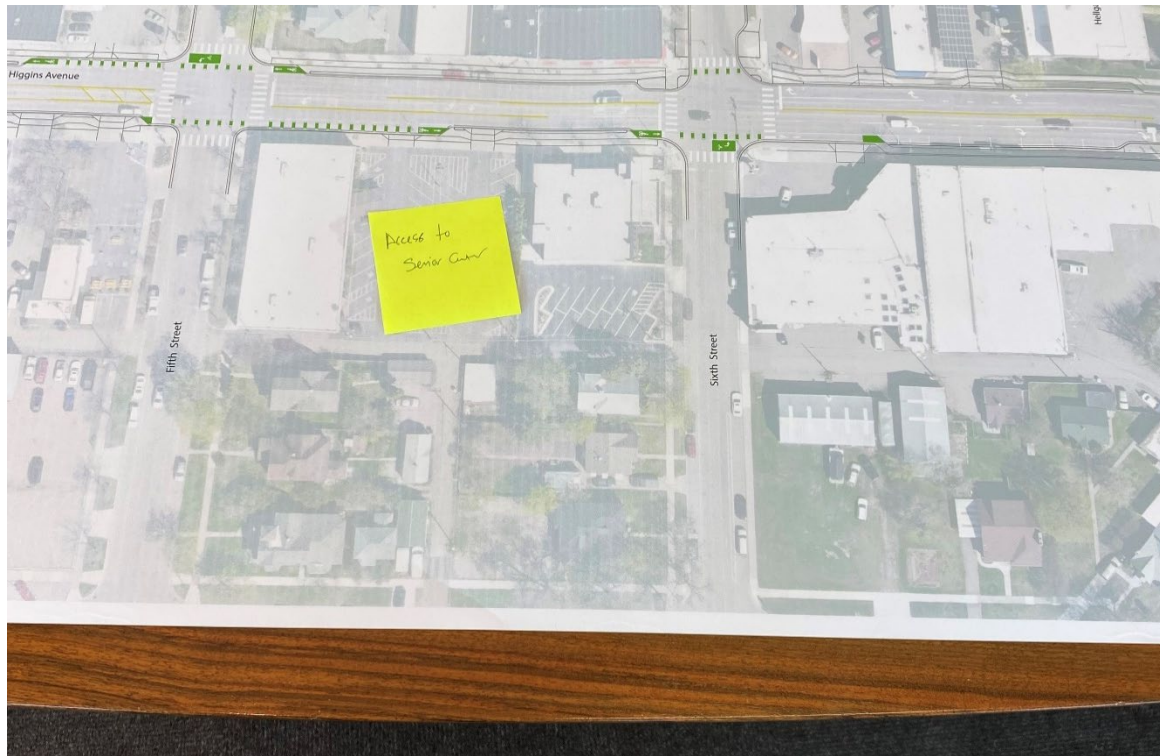
- **Parking**
  - *Employee parking is the big issue, especially in winter when most don't ride their bikes to work.*
  - *Customers rarely complain about parking.*
  - *Parking changes according to time of day:*
    - *Residents and hotel visitors park overnight.*
    - *Business, retail, and employee parking during the day.*
  - *Need quick stop/loading areas in convenient locations.*
  - *Need more hourly parking during the day.*
  - *Large pickup trucks change on-street parking dynamic.*
  - *Parking structures*
    - *Need better communication on parking (e.g., "public parking available on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.")*
    - *Misperception of when/where parking is available in structures.*
    - *Accessibility and getting kids in and out of cars is more difficult in a parking structure.*
    - *Need more ADA spaces close to entrances and need access to elevators areas that is flat. Difficult to get in and out of cars on sloped ramps.*
    - *Improve analytics on parking management for better lease space optimization.*
    - *Need more hourly parking during the day.*
  - *Winter parking—need better snow maintenance and accessibility—needs to be flat, clear, and convenient.*
- *On Higgins, don't want to give up four lanes, especially if it means less access to the Senior Center.*













- *We would like to hear about the projects from the horse's mouth. What are they and what's happening with them?*
- *How can we help the City receive this RAISE grant? What do we need to do?*
- *Need to shift idea/rumor of "it's so hard to park downtown" to "here's how you get to and park downtown."*
- *We're busy, need to hit us over the head when you need our input.*
- *Need to be concise about projects instead of having a huge document to read.*
- *Plans are vague – need to know how these plans are going to affect me and my business.*
- *Like working downtown, people like to visit our office, like the atmosphere and events.*
- **Parking**
  - *Staff parking and multi-modal options are fantastic.*
  - *We have a lot of bike traffic in warm months.*
  - *We have staff that bike in to work.*
  - *Our main concern is potential loss of parking.*
  - *We would like to see the Central Park garage safer – white ceilings, better lighting, doors fixed (they're always broken).*
  - *Employee parking is huge – we pay for 30 staff to park in garages.*
- **Safety**
  - *Most staff leave before dark, except for January.*
  - *Vandalism in alley is our biggest concern, broken windows on Main St. Going to get cameras soon.*
    - *Working on activating alley behind DCI Engineers to have a walking mall and seating.*
    - *Consider altering delivery hours in alley to activate alley?*
  - *Vehicle circulation will be a big benefit.*
  - *One-way bike lane on Front/Main is good common ground.*
- **Next steps:**
  - *We like the idea of a steering committee for Downtown SAM.*
    - *We have engaged business owners right now.*
    - *Catch businesses early on in process.*

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## **May 2 at 3:00 pm at Florence Building Conference Room**

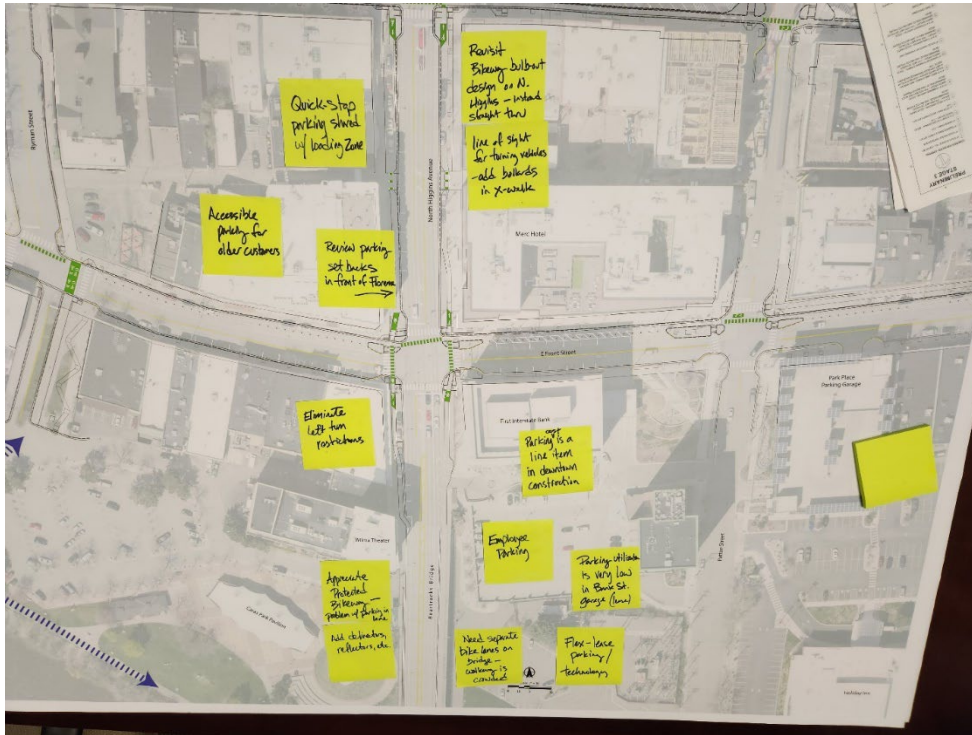
- **Attendees:**
  1. Paige Livingston
  2. Allison Reaves
  3. Otis
  4. Andrea Jones



5. Chris Sampson
6. David V. Gray
7. Jaim Sayer
8. Patrick Colleran
9. Alison Riley
10. Kelly M. Shields
11. Gwen Jones
12. David Lemm
13. 1 more person who came in later
  - Staff:
    - Jeremy Keene
    - Aaron Wilson
    - Maci MacPherson
    - Ian Ortilieb
    - Ben Weiss
  - **General Project Comments**
    - Not going to move vehicles through effectively without turn lanes.
    - We need all modes to work well.
    - Problem is were talking about lane capacity, but it's constrained by intersection.
    - We've seen a lot of development downtown, but traffic hasn't increased.
    - *Everyone at Midtown meetings wants a downtown—walking trails, retail, destination.*
    - *What are the plans for Caras Park?*
    - *3,000 people moved downtown to live in 15 years.*
    - *Significant federal grants right now, and legislature is going to be worse on property tax in 2025 because we'll be paying for everything if we don't get federal grants. We don't have to pay for this. We saw it because the crisis services mill levy failed. We're fiscally in a bad spot right now.*
    - *Caras Park terrace? We secured a \$1.2 million grant to help with that, will happen in fall of 2024.*
    - *Why is the curb yellow by the pharmacy when there's a bulb out there?*
  - **Safety**
    - *Electric vehicles/bikes etc. Lot of growth seen there. How does that new transportation fit into this?*
    - *Lots of commuter traffic on south side of riverfront trail, any improvements coming to that?*
    - *Front/Main—are all these separate projects under the same grant, and why all applying at the same time?*
    - *Try using a wheelchair on Higgins and see what your experience is. It's so difficult and dangerous. This will make a massive difference for people.*



- We'll see a lot of growth with the wider paths for people.
- I'm not against bulb outs—they're great.
- **Parking**
  - Bank parking garage: no one is parking there, can they fix that?
  - Are their plans to deal with parking in front of businesses? Deal with that with pricing.




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### May 5 at 10:00 am at Pangea

- **Attendees:**
  1. Emily Jensen
  2. Chad Morgan
  3. Meg Brooker
  4. Gwen Jones
  5. Scott Whittenburg
  6. Bob Burns
  7. Bob Giordano
  8. Hanna Reese
  9. Jim Sayer
  10. Linda McCarthy
  11. Sherri Davidoff

## 12. Scott Billadeau

- City Staff:
  - Ian Ortlieb
  - Tod Gass
  - Maci MacPherson
  - Aaron Wilson
  - Ben Weiss
  - Jeremy Keene
  - Jodi Pilgrim
  - Ellen Buchanan
- **General Project Comments**
  - *Excited for the two-way conversion of Front/Main. No issues there.*
  - *Is it a “we get this whole grant or we get no grant at all?” Can we only do parts of the grant, like we choose which projects we want?*
    - If we get the grant, these projects will be penciled out in detail in the final design stage.
    - Final design stage will include much more public engagement.
    - The \$25 million grant is an unprecedented amount of money to come into a community.
    - These projects have been in the pipeline for years.
    - Cannot do left-turn signal lights without a left-turn lane.
  - *There’s a huge issue with State funding any projects with this. Federal funding is the only way for us to do anything.*
  - *Are you going to do these meetings over Zoom in the future?*
  - *Never been an education campaign about getting to downtown. Many people view downtown as hard to get here. Don’t want to come because of homelessness problem. People don’t want to come because of that. This plan adds to the perception that downtown is hard to get to. We did a prototype north of Broadway and many businesses and bikers do not like that design.*
  - *Why did we build the bridge the way we did and now we’re going to do a road diet when we already put walking/biking lane on the bridge? What’s your response to that?*
    - North Higgins is now safer, and there is less turnover of businesses there now.
  - *It’s not an equal risk – businesses take all of the risk.*
  - *I think it’s an equal risk, because if downtown goes down, it’s bad for all of Missoula because people will not be leasing buildings downtown.*
  - *Why are we putting bikes in the busiest corridor? Can we put them on other streets?*
  - *Are there alternate bike route options?*

- *Are you all listening to the business owners? Because we've heard your plans I'm worried you're not hearing us?*
- **Traffic**
  - *Can you change signal timing depending on days of the week/time of the week?*
  - *What is the benefit of four lanes converted to three lanes?*
    - While we will give up some through-traffic capacity, it will help circulation (a new left-turn lane) and will help calm and slow traffic in a congested area.
  - *How far does this project extend?*
    - Broadway to Brooks St. on Higgins Ave.
- **Safety**
  - *Are you seeing more bikes using bike lanes?*
  - *We've noticed more people using rollerblades, pushing strollers, cars opening doors on the raised bike lanes.*
  - *Is there a safety issue with alley entrance/exit because of the way the bike lanes are?*
  - *The intersection of Ryman/Front is really dangerous for pedestrians. Lots of people and kids crossing, creates confusion for traffic. Especially bad on Saturday markets and events. Someone is going to die. Tow trucks will not tow here, only will when no one is present. Is the Clark Fork Market moving back or staying near the Carousel?*
    - This summer they are staying.
  - *Can we do local traffic only signs or other safety signs for vehicles/pedestrians during events/market?*
    - Downtown Missoula Partnership and Parking Commission just did a walk through of that area – sidewalk signs will be placed for Saturday market this year. They will observe this weekend for the first market.
    - New additional bike racks were placed by the carousel.
  - *I stopped biking on N. Higgins because it's unsafe. People open doors into bike lanes, and the lanes pop you back into the street at intersections.*
    - Intersections can be dangerous – need to look at this more.
- **Parking**
  - *Can you allow "handicap accessible parking only" signs in the entry to the Clark Fork Market? Vehicles block entry into our businesses.*
  - *Can we/do we have a policy for timing of delivery trucks in downtown?*
  - *Delivery trucks block our business parking/entry.*
  - *Can we have a policy of no 18-wheelers downtown?*
    - Other cities have that, but companies have capacity to unload deliveries to a smaller truck to take to the inner core.
  - *Can we upgrade the Central Park parking structure?*

