

NORTH ELEVATION NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN
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OVERVIEW

This plan is the first comprehensive plan for the North Elevation Neighborhood. The idea of creating a task force area was initiated by concern of the resident's with a variety of events influencing the neighborhood. Initially, a group of residents formed a committee to address traffic issues. This committee, along with Saint Vincent's Hospital, Deaconess Medical Center and the City of Billings, commissioned a traffic study. Data was collected in the spring of 1994. Currently, the committee, hospitals and the City are waiting for the final analysis.

Through this process, area residents became aware of the potentially fragile nature of their neighborhood. A Task Force was formed with the goal of proactively protecting and improving the neighborhood.

The North Elevation Task Force area is located (see attached map) immediately northwest of the Billings Central Business District and west of the Medical Corridor. To the north, west and south of the Task Force Area are residential neighborhoods.

The neighborhood is predominantly residential with some commercial uses on the eastern and southern fringes. While renter occupied housing is dominant, the frequency of rental properties increases toward the southeastern portion of the Task Force Area. There is a trend towards an increase in the number of owner occupied units throughout the Task Force Area.

Grand Avenue, 6th Avenue North and North 30th Street are the area's main arterial roads.

Most of the commercial developments within the neighborhood are located on these two streets. Businesses along these arterials are mainly service oriented. Examples include tax preparation, taxidermy, legal, and dental offices. Many businesses are located in remodeled houses. There are, however, several newly constructed office complexes with a variety of tenants.

Community facilities include Pioneer Park, Billings Senior High School, Daylis Stadium and McKinley Elementary School. The Good Earth Market Food Co-op, formerly the 10th Avenue Grocery, is also considered an important community facility. The owners of the Good Earth Market Food Co-op are actively involved in the neighborhood and residents use the store as an information source for local events and neighborhood happenings.

The appeal of living in a close-knit neighborhood with excellent accessibility to the downtown, medical area, a beautiful park, YMCA, and schools makes the North Elevation neighborhood a very desirable location for a diverse population. However, this desirable location also creates concerns for neighborhood residents regarding: a continual flow of nonresidential traffic through the task force area, noise pollution, and potential commercial intrusions.

Neighborhood History

In 1886, four years after Billings was founded, Henry C. McKinsey and his wife Sarah applied for a 160 acre homestead in what is today the North Elevation Neighborhood. This homestead was sold numerous times until Austin North platted the first filing for the North Elevation Subdivision in 1904. After acquisition of more property from Frederick Billings in 1914 and the creation of a second (1907) and third (1914) filings, all property within the current North Elevation Neighborhood was platted and recorded.

McKinley Elementary School was completed in 1905 and is the oldest school still in operation in Billings. Many of the original materials are still in place including polished oak newel posts and railings on the stairways along with real slate boards in the classrooms. The closing of nearby North Park Elementary School, in 1988, has forced many of those students to walk to McKinley School. The flood of 1937, caused by a break in the BBWA ditch, effected much of the City. North Elevation residents used the relatively high ground upon which McKinley School was built, to dry their soaked belongings in the sun.

Beginning with the opening of the first hospital in Billings in 1899 the medical industry has played an important role as a neighbor, as well as, employer to many of the residents of North Elevation neighborhood. In more recent years, a hospital corridor was established just east of North Elevation, providing a specified area for medical and medical-related

businesses.

The 1920's through the 1940's saw the North Elevation area, which, at the time, was considered a long way from the downtown, build out. Little neighborhood stores were common in the area including the Good Earth Market Food Co-op, formerly the 10th Avenue Grocery Store, which first opened in 1921. These stores were important in creating a sense of neighborhood as area residents conducted most of their shopping within North Elevation.

Areas of grass and trees have always been important characteristics of the neighborhood. Along with the large area dedicated to Pioneer Park and the tree-lined streets, there were grass medians running down the middle of North 30th and North 31st Streets (both removed by the 1950's). The three-cornered parks along North 32nd Street provide traffic separation along with adding to the green space of the neighborhood.

In a recent survey, by the Task Force, residents were asked what makes the North Elevation Neighborhood special to them. Most answers focused on "neighborliness" and "small town feel" along with other characteristics often used to describe a small town. In many ways, North Elevation has been, and still is, its own community within Billings.

Neighborhood Planning and the Planning Process

The planning process allows for specific examination of needs, issues, assets and problems facing a particular neighborhood. Once understood, these issues can be dealt with by identifying the organizations (governmental, citizen, business, etc.) that may be involved in addressing each area of concern. Specific procedures are then outlined so a cooperative effort efficiently carries out the tasks necessary to meet the goals of this plan.

In order to develop an effective neighborhood plan, citizen participation is of absolute necessity. The North Elevation Task Force is an active group and was very involved in this project through the identification of neighborhood concerns, inventories, survey's, participation in a traffic study, and generating involvement in the entire neighborhood planning process.

Once completed, this plan must be adopted by the Task Force, City/County Planning Board and City Council. This document will then guide these organizations in their decisions affecting North Elevation while promoting the goals of this plan.

Purpose

The purpose of this neighborhood plan is to guide development in North Elevation while uniting the ideas and desires of both residents and City officials. The neighborhood

planning process is an empowerment tool for North Elevation residents, as they will be the force driving the actual implementation of the projects identified in this plan.

This plan is not a set of regulations. It is a document of goals for improving the quality of life and living in North Elevation based on a current analysis of the area. The short-term goals developed through this plan are specific while fitting into the context of the neighborhood's broader long-term goals.

Methodology

In order to establish goals and assess the needs of the neighborhood in a logical manner, the following methodology was used in the development of this plan.

- 1) Inventory
- 2) Analysis
- 3) Short and Long-term Goals

Each element of concern identified by the neighborhood and the Planning Department, has short-term goals that when accomplished, move toward achievement of the long-term goal for that specific element (i.e. traffic, housing, etc.).

Inventory

The planning process began with meetings between the Task Force and Planning Department. These meetings led to an update of ongoing projects by the Task Force, the formulation of ideas and identification of goals to help proceed with writing the plan.

An inventory was undertaken and involved gathering data on a variety of neighborhood characteristics including land use, population, infrastructure, zoning and community facilities. A survey, by the Task Force, also helped identify how residents feel about living in North Elevation.

Analysis

The inventory process allowed for the identification and analysis of problem areas as well as future opportunities and constraints. Census data from 1980 and 1990 was compared to determine the social and economic direction of the neighborhood.

In order to establish short-term goals, the data was analyzed with respect to existing issues as well as, long-term goals of the task force.

Short and Long-term Goals

The analysis led to a series of goals for each element examined. Each goal has a specific action and responsibility listed to achieve attainment. These goals were then analyzed with respect to the 1990 Yellowstone County Comprehensive and Transportation Plans and the overall needs of the Billings community and Yellowstone County.

THE NORTH ELEVATION NEIGHBORHOOD

Most of the North Elevation Task Force Area encompasses Block Group #2 of Census Tract #4, as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau. The population within the Task Force Area in 1994 is estimated to be 1,600 people residing in approximately 800 households. There are also 29 businesses located mainly on the periphery of the Task Force Area.

Compared to the City of Billings, North Elevation's population is better educated and younger with a higher percentage of population in the 25-44 age category and a lower percentage 45 years and older. However, there are nearly 200 residents 65 or older. The percentage of single-parent households) is substantially higher in North Elevation than in Billings overall.

Due to it's location, it is not surprising to find 16% of North Elevation workers in the health service industry compared to only 9.5% of the City's workforce. A second locational benefit is the mode of travel to work. While 90% of City workers drive their automobile's to their place of employment, nearly one-third of North Elevation workers use non-automotive transportation. North Elevation residents also have fewer cars per housing unit, as compared with the City of Billings.

The quality of housing within the neighborhood has improved over the past five years,

despite the majority of units are occupied by renters. Most renters in the area are long-term, over two or three years, while some renters have been in the neighborhood as long as thirty years. Currently, the neighborhood is slowly gaining more owner-occupied housing, mainly as properties change ownership. The average year of housing construction in the neighborhood is nearly 30 years earlier than the City average. Despite this fact, North Elevation residents feel the older housing stock adds to the "feel" of the neighborhood and the overall quality of life in their area. Many older homes are in good repair with continual improvements being made by their owners.

Some North Elevation businesses operate from converted older homes. Since most of these businesses are located on the southern and eastern edges of the Task Force Area, the converted houses also serve as a visual transition from the more intensive surrounding commercial land uses.

CONCLUSIONS AND GOALS

The overall goal of this plan is to continue improving the quality of residential living within the neighborhood while further developing the communication and working relationship with surrounding areas and neighborhoods.

Housing quality is improving along with an increase in housing values (mainly over the last 5 years). This is due to the overall real estate market as well as improvements in infrastructure and other City projects. But more importantly, housing quality/values continue to rise because of the economic and time investments made by homeowners. On a tour of the neighborhood, the pride of North Elevation's residents is obvious by the number of well kept homes.

The relationships established with the hospitals in the Medical Corridor, through work on the traffic study, should be strengthened and broadened. There is a need for current and future cooperative co-existence between North Elevation, the Medical Corridor and other surrounding businesses.

The creation of long and short-term goals occurred with input from the Task Force, Planning Department, utility companies and City Departments. These goals are also supported by policies and goals outlined in the 1990 Yellowstone County Comprehensive and Transportation Plans. The overall intention is to:

1. Maintain the residential character of the neighborhood;

2. Maintain a neighborhood identity and unity;
3. Increase property values through the maintenance of existing design characteristics of homes;
4. Improve community facilities (i.e. parks, schools, etc.).
5. Limit non-local through traffic;
6. Reduce noise pollution from traffic;
7. Reduce crime; and
8. Focus commercial uses in appropriate locations;

It is important to note that the driving force in accomplishing these goals is the neighborhood task force. Upon final adoption of this document, the short-term goals should be prioritized for implementation. The task force, along with the Planning Department, should review these goals yearly. The entire plan should be updated every 5 years in order to examine and address changes within the neighborhood.

It is realized that cooperation between government, residents, and commercial entities is imperative for the goals of this plan to become reality. The North Elevation Neighborhood is an important residential area allowing workers easy access to the downtown area, as well as, the medical corridor and colleges. Accomplishment of neighborhood the following goals will be an asset not only for the residents of North Elevation, but also for the City of Billings and Yellowstone County.

Community Facilities

Important neighborhood community facilities include: Pioneer Park (both a neighborhood and City park), McKinley Elementary School, Billings Senior High School and the Good Earth Market Food Co-op.

Residents of North Elevation also use nearby recreational and community facilities extensively. The Alberta Bair Theatre, YMCA, Montana State University - Billings and Rocky Mountain College, Cobb Field and Athletic Park are popular destinations.

Through inventory and analysis, it is apparent most community facilities are used extensively, yet remain in very good repair. There are no immediate equipment or facility problems considered dangerous or detrimental to the neighborhood.

The long-term goal is **to continue improving community facilities as neighborhood centers for social and recreational activities, as well as, other neighborhood functions.**

SHORT-TERM GOALS

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
1. Assign a Task Force member to be involved with the City's recreation planning for future uses in Pioneer Park.	Parks and Recreation Department, Task Force
2. Determine the need to address the safety of children walking to and from McKinley Elementary School through expansion of crossing guard program, crosswalks and crossing lights.	City Engineering Department, Police Department, Billings Public Schools, PTA, McKinley Teachers and Administration
3. Examine expanding the academic "mentor" program between Senior and McKinley students, thereby linking the schools.	Teachers and Administration of McKinley and Senior High Schools, PTA, Task Force
4. Improve playground area at McKinley School by improving the quality and safety of the equipment.	McKinley School, Playground Task Force Committee, Task Force
5. Establish evening, weekend and summer recreational opportunities for neighborhood children, teens and families, using equipment and facilities at McKinley School, Senior High School and Pioneer Park.	Parks and Recreation Department, McKinley School, Task Force
6. Improve landscaping and fencing around Pioneer Park wading pool.	Task Force, Parks and Recreation Department
7. Support continued operation of the Good Earth Market Food Co-op as a legal non-conforming use.	Good Earth Market Food Co-op, Task Force, City Council
8. Organize a "neighborhood day" celebration for residents.	Task Force
9. Maintain swimming pool facilities at Athletic Park.	Parks and Recreation Department, North Elevation, North Park and Southside Task Forces, City Council

Traffic

Traffic issues are of great concern to neighborhood residents. A large amount of traffic flows through the neighborhood due to its proximity to downtown and Medical Corridor. Many people who work east of the North Elevation neighborhood and live on the west side of Billings travel through the neighborhood.

A second reason for the high traffic volume is due to vehicles avoiding the awkward transition between the downtown street grid pattern and the east-west street pattern west of Division Street. Vehicles traveling east on Grand Avenue turn north on 1st or 2nd Streets West and then east past McKinley School on 9th Avenue North.

Pioneer Park and Daylis Stadium users (day-to-day use, as well as, special events) create some congestion and through traffic. However, this traffic tends to be seasonal and not a continual problem.

The long-term traffic goal is **to ensure a safe environment for pedestrians and reduce traffic noise and discourage through traffic patterns.**

SHORT-TERM GOALS

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
1. Preserve neighborhood integrity by the implementation of traffic calming methods.	City Engineering Department, Task Force, Planning Department, Adjacent Businesses
2. Encourage non-motorized travel through the development of bike routes	City Engineering Department, Task Force, Planning Department
3. Apply for CTEP funding for transportation-related programs.	Task Force, Planning and Public Works Departments
4. Examine and determine if the traffic in the alley between Grand Avenue and Avenue B can be restricted to residential use only or if non-residential traffic is permitted.	City Code Enforcement, City Engineering Department, Businesses along Grand Avenue
5. Encourage buffers (i.e. fences, trees, shrubs, etc.) along the alleyways north of Grand Avenue and west of North 30 th Street to reduce noise and visual pollution between arterial streets and residential areas.	Planning Department, City Engineering Department, Task Force, Businesses in the area
6. Implement traffic study recommendations, including the evaluation of the need for a stop light or 4 way stop at the corner of 11th Avenue North and North 30th Street.	Task Force, Medical Corridor Businesses, City Engineering Department and Planning Departments
7. Enforcement of vehicle speed limits, especially during school hours.	Police Department

Zoning/Land Use

Most of the task force area is zoned Residential-6,000 with some Residential Multi-Family zoning south of McKinley School and a few lots zoned Residential-9,600 at the northern edge of the neighborhood. Commercially zoned properties are located along the north side of Grand Avenue (Neighborhood Commercial), the north side of 6th Avenue North (Community Commercial) and property on the west side of North 30th Street is in the Medical Permit Zoning District which allows for commercial development.

Residential Multi-Family and Residential-6,000 zoning designations allow for equal number of units built on similar lot sizes. However, there is no building height limit in the Multi-Family zone while the Residential-6,000 zone has a height limitation of 34 feet. The lot coverage also varies with 55% allowed in Residential Multi-Family zoning and 40% in Residential 6,000 zones.

Residents support zoning and land use controls that prevent commercial development and large multi-family developments, while maintaining single-family residential zones and land uses throughout the neighborhood.

The overall long-term zoning and land use goal is **to maintain a residential character in the neighborhood and limit commercial uses to those currently in existence.**

SHORT-TERM GOALS

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
1. Seek zone changes from Multi-Family to Residential- 7,000 zoning.	Property Owners, Task Force, Planning Department
2. Seek zone changes from Residential-6,000 zoning to Residential- 7,000.	Property Owners, Task Force, Planning Department
3. Establish visual and noise buffers between commercial and residential uses.	Property Owners, Business Owners, Task Force
4. Maintain scale of new and remodeled structures to fit neighborhood character.	Task Force, Property Owners, Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board
5. Notification of Task Force on all building activity within the Medical Corridor.	Community Services and Planning Departments, Medical Corridor Businesses
6. Discourage further commercial intrusions into existing residential areas.	Task Force, Planning Department, Zoning Commission, City Council
7. Develop a master plan to guide future land uses.	Planning Department, Task Force
8. Prohibit westward expansion of the Medical Corridor.	Task Force, Planning Department, City Council, Medical Corridor Businesses
9. Existing houses on the west side of 30th Street (in the Medical Corridor) should be used when converted to Medical Corridor uses, creating a transition from the MC to North Elevation.	Medical Corridor Businesses, Community Services Department, City Council
10. Discourage the Changing of Neighborhood Commercial zoning to Community Commercial on Grand Avenue.	Task Force, Planning Department, Zoning Commission, City Council

Housing

There are approximately 800 total housing units in the task force area. The median year of construction for all housing units is 1939. Over 60% of the homeowners have lived in the neighborhood for 20 years or more. Many residents intend on living in the neighborhood for many years to come (survey results ranged from five to fifty years).

Residents state that overall aesthetics, including the existence of older homes in the neighborhood, is one of the reasons they live in North Elevation. A strong commitment by homeowners to invest time and money upgrading and maintaining their homes is reflected by the overall good quality of housing in the area. There are a number of City and Federal programs available through the City's Community Services Department that assist homeowners in improving their property.

The potential intrusion of commercial uses into the neighborhood, thereby decreasing the number of housing units, is a concern for residents. Of similar concern is maintaining the character of structures in order to preserve the visual cohesiveness of the neighborhood. The long-term housing goal is **to maintain the residential character of the neighborhood by preserving structurally sound residences while replacing unsound structures with new and appropriately designed buildings.**

SHORT-TERM GOALS

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
1. Identify historic properties.	Task Force, Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board
2. Place qualified properties on National Register.	Task Force, Property Owners, Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board
4. Determine neighborhood support for the creation of design guidelines for new development to maintain housing characteristics.	Task Force, Planning Department, Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board
5. Identify structures in need of rehabilitation or demolition.	Task Force, Planning Department, Community Services Department
6. Encourage rehabilitation or demolition of dangerous and blighted structures.	Task Force, Planning Department, Community Services Department
7. Conduct a neighborhood survey/inventory to establish a current baseline data pool concerning housing.	Task Force, Planning Department
8. Increase number of owner occupied housing units.	Community Services Department, Task Force
9. Actively pursue rehabilitation for residential housing between 9th and 7th Avenues North.	Task Force, Community Services Department, Property Owners
10. Make homeowners aware of demolition, rehabilitation and home buyers financial aid programs.	Community Services Department, Task Force

Infrastructure

Current infrastructure, overall, is in good repair. However, non-functioning street lights and dangerous overhead street light wires are a major concern. This wiring is currently being upgraded and replaced as part of a 3 year project.

There is an ongoing process of sidewalk replacement and over the next several years, various water and sewer lines are scheduled for replacement. A new sidewalk, curb and gutter program is currently being implemented with completion occurring in 1996. The long-term goal is **to continue the current high quality of infrastructure maintenance with improvements focusing on those appropriate for a residential neighborhood.**

SHORT-TERM GOALS

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
1. Eliminate exposed overhead streetlight wiring.	City Engineering Department, Montana Power Company
2. Replace non-functioning streetlights.	Engineering Department, Montana Power Company
3. Replace streetlights with appropriate historical lighting.	Task Force, City Engineering Department, Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board
4. Continue curb, gutter and sidewalk replacement.	Task Force, Community Services and City Engineering Departments
5. Replace water and sewer lines in need of repair.	Public Utilities Department

Environmental

The dominant environmental considerations include noise pollution (helicopter, businesses, traffic, etc.). Complaints can be attributed mainly to the HELP helicopters from the hospitals, sirens from emergency vehicles and general traffic noise from cars passing through the neighborhood.

The hospitals and emergency vehicles are aware of these concerns and attempt to reduce their impact whenever possible. For example, the HELP helicopters vary their travel routes and emergency vehicles turn off their sirens whenever possible when traveling through the neighborhood at night. Despite these efforts, some noise is inevitable and is considered a trade-off for the overall high quality of life in North Elevation.

Noise generated by automobiles traveling through the neighborhood is a more difficult, but not impossible, problem. Results of the traffic study should make recommendations to reduce the impact of through traffic. (Cite traffic study recommendations. Add to the short-term goals, if appropriate.)

The long-term goal is **to improve the environmental quality of the neighborhood through land use control, increased buffering, transportation, and reduction in through-traffic.**

SHORT-TERM GOALS

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
1. Reduce noise pollution at east and south boundaries of neighborhood through developing buffering standards.	Planning and City Engineering Departments, Businesses
2. Identify specific sources of noise pollution, establish a plan to reduce impact of these sources and prevent future problems of noise pollution.	Planning and City Engineering Departments, Task Force
3. Develop a plan to discourage motorized through-traffic.	Task Force, Planning and City Engineering Departments
4. Encourage non-motorized travel through development of bike routes and associated signage.	Task Force, Planning and City Engineering Departments
5. Apply for CTEP funding for transportation-related programs and improvements.	Task Force, Planning and Public Works Departments
6. Maintain contact with hospitals and emergency services organizations regarding their impact on noise pollution.	Task Force, Medical Corridor Businesses, Emergency Service Organizations
7. Identify any hazardous or contaminated sites.	Task Force, Property Owners
8. Stay in contact with Logan Airport personnel concerning airplane takeoff and landing zones.	Task Force

Safety

Safety concerns in North Elevation include: 1) neighborhood crime (thefts, burglaries, etc.), 2) traffic through a residential neighborhood containing a large number of children, two schools, and a major park and 3) exposed overhead wiring for streetlights.

The long-term goal is to reduce crime events and reduce the impact of automobile through traffic in the neighborhood.

SHORT-TERM GOALS

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITY</u>
1. Implement traffic study recommendations.	Task Force, City Engineering and Planning Departments
2. Develop a plan to encourage non-motorized traffic through the use of pedestrian and bicycle routes.	Task Force, City Engineering Department, Planning Department
3. Assess the need, desire and resources for a community policing program.	Task Force, Police Department
4. Expand the Neighborhood Watch Program throughout the neighborhood.	Task Force, Community Crime Prevention Council
5. Eliminate exposed overhead streetlight wiring.	Engineering Department, Montana Power Company
6. Examine feasibility of installing crosswalks from the Avenues to Pioneer Park.	Task Force, City Engineering Department and Parks and Recreation Departments

SUMMARY

The North Elevation neighborhood has become a desirable residential area with its location close to the colleges, downtown and the growing medical corridor. There is a mix of older residents that have lived there most of their lives, as well as, more recently arrived, younger professionals with families.

Overall, its residents are better educated and younger compared to the entire City with a very high percentage of single-parent households. These facts reflect the desirability and affordability of the area. However, the affordability in parts of the neighborhood is changing as the past three years have witnessed an increase in housing demand and values, in the area.

The topics of most concern are problems associated with through-traffic, crime, potential commercial intrusions and increased intensity, and the improvement of housing quality where needed.

As one of the well established, older neighborhoods in Billings, North Elevation is important locationally and provides important affordable housing. This plan, along with the traffic study, which is to be completed soon, creates a solid base upon which to build a consistent policy for the future of the North Elevation neighborhood.