

# Helena Comprehensive Plan **One Connected Community**

ADOPTED BY PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION SEPTEMBER 15, 2022  
ENDORSED BY CITY COUNCIL SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

# Acknowledgments

Thank you to all those community members and stakeholders who participated in the One Connected Community process. We would also like to specifically thank the following individuals for their guidance and direction throughout the planning process.

This plan is supported by funding from the Building Communities Grant Program provided by the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) and the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Birmingham MPO or the RPCGB. For more information on this program, please visit [www.rpcgb.org](http://www.rpcgb.org).

## Mayor & City Council

J. Brian Puckett, Mayor

Leigh Hulseley, Place 1

Christopher R. VanCleave, Place 2

Alice Lobell, City Council President, Place 3

Laura Joseph, Place 4

Harold “Hewy” Woodman, Place 5

Amanda Traywick, City Council

## City Staff

Amanda Traywick, City Clerk

Dejay Jones, Building Official

Kym Rollan, Building and Inspections Administration

## Steering Committee

Darrell Howard, Planning & Zoning Commission

Brian Crumpton, Planning & Zoning Commission

Blair Perry, City Engineer

Dominga Gardner, Diversity & Inclusion Board

Kelly Morgan, Economic Development Board

Tanner Newhouse, Economic Development Board

Linda Wurstner, Historic Preservation Committee

## Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham Staff

Charles Ball, AICP, Executive Director

Ray Morris, Deputy Executive Director

Scott Tillman, Director of Planning and Operations

Lindsay S. Puckett, AICP, Principal Planner and Project Manager

Maria Hines, AICP, Senior Planner

Harry Graham, Community Planner

## Plan Consulting Team

**MKSK**

**DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGIES®**



**SAIN  
ASSOCIATES**

# Contents

- Welcome to One Connected Community..... 11**
- Background.....12
- The Process.....15
- Opportunities and Challenges.....18
- Plan Context.....20
- The Vision for Helena.....22
- Strategic Framework..... 24**
- Great Places.....24
- Prosperity.....60
- Connections.....82
- Implementation Strategy..... 108**



# Adoption Resolution

The One Connected Community Comprehensive Plan was formally adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission on September 15, 2022 through a motion and unanimous vote by the body.



**RESOLUTION 09152022**

**CITY OF HELENA PLANNING AND ZONING  
COMMISSION RESOLUTION TO ADOPT THE  
HELENA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**WHEREAS**, according to Section 11-52-8 of the Code of Alabama (1975), it shall be the function and duty of the Helena Planning and Zoning Commission to make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of Helena, Alabama; and

**WHEREAS**, the Helena Planning and Zoning Commission has made careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the land use, housing, infrastructure, design, environment and economic development of Helena, Alabama; and

**WHEREAS**, the Helena Planning and Zoning Commission has reviewed "*Helena Comprehensive Plan: One Connected Community*" and finds it to best promote the health, safety, prosperity and general welfare of the citizens of Helena, Alabama; and

**WHEREAS**, all requirements of the laws of the State of Alabama with regard to the preparation, public view and notification of said "*Helena Comprehensive Plan: One Connected Community*" have been met.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Helena Planning and Zoning Commission, that the planning document entitled "*Helena Comprehensive Plan: One Connected Community*" and all official maps pertaining thereto are hereby adopted this 15th day of September 2022 and made a permanent part and parcel of this Resolution by reference.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that this Resolution be transmitted to the Helena City Council and recommended for endorsement.

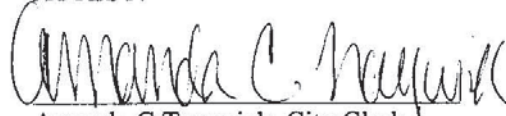
**THEREUPON, Laura Joseph**, a member, moved and **Tim Honeycutt**, a member, seconded the motion that Resolution 09152022 be given vote, and said Resolution passed by a majority vote of all members of the Planning and Commission present and the Chairman declared the same passed.

**ADOPTED** this 15th day of September 2022.

  
Jack Gray, Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman



ATTEST:

  
Amanda C Traywick, City Clerk

# Endorsement Resolution

The One Connected Community Comprehensive Plan was formally endorsed by the City Council on September 26, 2022 through a motion and unanimous vote by the body.

**RESOLUTION 09262022**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF HELENA ENDORSING THE NEW  
HELENA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**WHEREAS**, the City of Helena contracted with the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham to assist city officials in developing a new Helena Comprehensive Plan, and

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to Section 11-52-8 of the Code of Alabama (1975), it shall be the function and duty of the City of Helena Planning and Zoning Commission to make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of Helena, Alabama; and

**WHEREAS**, the process involved public input and compiling, evaluating and reviewing data with regard to land use, housing, infrastructure, design, environment and economic development of Helena, Alabama; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Helena Planning and Zoning Commission agrees that "*Helena Comprehensive Plan: One Connected Community*" promotes the health, safety, prosperity and general welfare of the citizens of Helena, Alabama; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Helena Planning and Zoning Commission adopted the "*Helena Comprehensive Plan: One Connected Community*" and all official maps pertaining thereto on the 15th day of September 2022.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the City Council of the City of Helena that the Council hereby endorses the "*Helena Comprehensive Plan: One Connected Community*" as a tool to be used in planning Helena's future development and redevelopment.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the "*Helena Comprehensive Plan: One Connected Community*" shall be made a permanent part and parcel of this Resolution by reference.

**THEREUPON** Leigh Hulsey, a councilmember, moved and Chris VanCleave, a councilmember, seconded the motion that Resolution 09262022 be given vote, and said resolution passed by a majority vote of all members of the Council present.

**ADOPTED** this 26, day of September 2022.

[CITY SEAL]



  
\_\_\_\_\_  
J. Brian Puckett, Mayor

ATTEST:



Amanda C. Traywick, City Clerk



# Letter from the Mayor





**H**elena has been experiencing some unique circumstances in recent years. We've seen significant growth in our population, with new homes built and more students enrolled in our schools. With this increase in people comes some pressing concerns in other sectors, such as mitigating traffic congestion and increased demand for amenities within the City. Helena is no longer the small, rural town it once was, and in order to maintain the historic charm and natural beauty of the City, many of these issues need to be addressed with thoughtful planning and care.

Whether you've lived in Helena for many years, or you've been recently welcomed as a new member of the community, one thing that all Helena residents can agree upon is that our city is full of charm, beauty, and friendly faces. Preserving that small-town charm and all its benefits amidst the rapid growth we've been experiencing is of utmost importance to our community members. The One Connected Community Comprehensive Plan is our guidebook to maintaining a beautiful, welcoming City for residents and visitors alike.

This Comprehensive Plan seeks to preserve the status quo of Helena while allowing for growth and smart development. The plan looks at methods for preserving the history and charm of our City, increasing revenue, improving connections within and around the City, and ensuring all residents of Helena can live a pleasant and prosperous life. This plan looks at vital topics such as land use, economic development, parks and trails, housing, and roadway capacity, just to name a few areas where the community has expressed concerns. Addressing these concerns by using the actions outlined in this Plan will help Helena continue to thrive despite the changes we've experienced over the last two decades. I believe that through the execution the One Connected Community process, which our dedicated community members helped shape, the ideas and projects contained in this plan will truly lead to a bright future in Helena.

**J. Brian Puckett, Mayor**  
City of Helena, Alabama





WELCOME  
TO  
OLD TOWN  
HELENA  
EST. 1877





# Welcome to One Connected Community

In 2021, the City of Helena began a community-led effort to develop a new Comprehensive Plan. The leaders of this effort were committed to an honest and open process. The One Connected Community Comprehensive Plan articulates the values of Helena’s residents and presents a vision for growth and investment over the next decade. This section introduces the focus of the plan, the process to identify priorities, and the key findings from the baseline research and analysis.

Helena completed its first plan in 2003. With a total of 10,000 residents, the City was growing rapidly along with the surrounding region. Since then, the City has doubled in population and continued to expand geographically. The One Connected Community planning process is a continuation of the City’s ongoing commitment to proactive planning and strategic investment. Helena is recognized regionally as a premier community of choice. The community’s high standards of living are no accident; growth has been met with investments in physical infrastructure, public services, and lifestyle-enhancing amenities. This plan seeks to build on the legacy and present a clear, community-derived vision that will guide investment for years to come. The values and ideas presented in this plan represent contributions of more than 500 residents who gave their time, energy, and creativity.

As the region emerges from the disruption of the 2020 worldwide pandemic and related economic shutdowns, there are challenges and opportunities that have become apparent. Spanning the second and third waves of the pandemic, the Steering Committee of the One Connected Community process fought hard to creatively engage residents in the conversation while meeting state and local guidelines. The group collected more than 3,000 unique comments and ideas through this process that have found their way into multiple chapters of this plan. Through these comments and ideas, one conviction became increasingly clear: the residents of Helena, love Helena. Their vision – presented later in this chapter – for the future of the community does not suggest transformation, but rather, validation and reinforcement of the unique qualities of life, place, and opportunity right here in Helena.

# BACKGROUND

A Comprehensive Plan is the broadest form of policy document a community can develop. The vision and recommendations of a Comprehensive Plan serve as a foundation for decision making and define desired future conditions for the community. As is the case of some communities, like Helena, that future state is quite similar to the one today, but enhanced. In order to protect the character valued by residents, deliberation and strategic action is necessary. The process to develop a plan is open and inclusive and the One Connected Community process sought to engage any person who cares about the future of Helena. This following section presents answers to key questions about the process.

## *What is a comprehensive plan?*

This Comprehensive Plan will act as a policy guide for future decision making. It is led by a unifying vision for Helena’s future. This direction will help lay the foundation for policy, infrastructure, and planning decisions for years to come. The plan presents the community’s goals, strategies and actions regarding a “comprehensive” range of topics. These include land use, development, economic performance, fiscal conditions and trends, parks and trails, conservation, transportation, utilities, services, and more. The plan serves several purposes:

- ★ **Consolidate findings and recommendations from past plans.** The City has a strong planning history of and has participated in pertinent regional efforts.
- ★ **Conduct research and provide recommendations on relevant topics.** Exploring issues related to land use, transportation, housing, economics, and others.
- ★ **Create a user-friendly document.** Present key information and recommendations clearly.
- ★ **Provide an accessible tool for elected leaders, the public and potential developers of Helena.** Send a clear message about the priorities and vision of Helena and its residents.



Steering Committee Meeting

## *Why does Helena need a plan?*

Every community evolves over time. Some move in positive directions, some negative, and most often, in a combination of both. Even when the long-term desired state is elevated “status quo,” proactive steps must be taken to ensure that internal and external forces do not disrupt the character. A Comprehensive Plan examines the various parts and systems that comprise a community, articulates a guiding vision and supporting goals, and provides a set of strategic recommendations to help move the community toward a common, desired outcome. The One Connected Community process considers the tremendous growth of the City over the past two decades and presents a framework for future investment. Over time, decision makers inside and outside of City Hall will work collaboratively to implement the plan. Each action—taken in service of the community’s vision—will move Helena incrementally closer to its vision.

**10,000+**  
New residents have moved to Helena since 2000, or just over one new resident per day



## Why plan now?

This is a major moment-in-time for Helena. As the region emerges from the uncertainty and economic upheaval caused by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, communities like Helena are eager to address the challenges this period exposed and take advantage of new state and federal programs. Even through the pandemic period, regional growth remained strong. This new development increases the pressure on the community's infrastructure and systems like education, parks, recreation amenities, services, and so on. Some of these challenges can be addressed by the City on its own, others will require regional collaboration. This plan presents a collection of actions that will allow Helena to expand on its earned reputation as a great place to live and raise a family. The future is not guaranteed. It takes the community working together to build a collective investment framework and commit to the long-term task of incremental implementation.

## Who was involved?

More than 500 people contributed to the One Connected Community process. Collectively, these individuals added more than 3,000 comments and ideas. The plan's major direction (including the community vision, goals, and objectives) is a reflection of this critical input. In addition to the community at-large, a representative Steering Committee convened multiple times through the process, offering their perspective and direction through the plan's development.

**500+**  
Unique participants  
contributed to One  
Connected Community

The One Connected Community Steering Committee Members included:

- » Brian Puckett
- » Darrell Howard
- » Brian Crumpton
- » Blair Perry
- » Leigh Hulsey
- » Amanda Traywick
- » Chris VanCleave
- » Dominga Gardner
- » Kelly Morgan
- » Dejay Jones
- » Tanner Newhouse
- » Linda Wurstner

## What does the One Connected Community Plan mean for Residents?

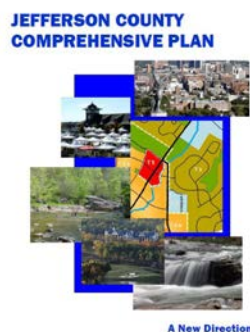
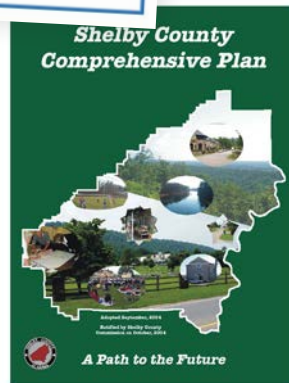
This plan represents a starting point for the next round of community investments in Helena. Despite tremendous growth, the community has managed to keep its charm and small town nature. Residents treasure this characteristic and are interested in funding projects and/or programs that will reinforce this identity well into the community's next chapter. With growth, however, comes complexity. While Helena may feel like a small town, its challenges have started to resemble those of a medium-sized city. Solutions today won't look like the solutions from 2000. The community will need to meet its future challenges with greater sophistication. This plan presents a series of proposals to evolve and grow the community solution "toolbox".



New Home in Hillsboro PUD

## What happened to the previous Comprehensive Plan?

Helena's previous plan was adopted in 2003, updated in 2011, and updated again in 2016. This plan covered topics including physical environment, socioeconomic conditions, land use, community facilities, and transportation. Maintaining the small town character of Helena while promoting it as a tourist destination through business opportunities and environmental protection was the overarching theme of this plan, and the new plan adopts similar goals for the City through an updated lens and a fresh perspective.



## Are we starting from scratch?

While this new Comprehensive Plan is separate from the previous plan, there are many sources from which the new plan is built upon. A number of additional plans and studies around Helena exist that are relevant to the City's future, and therefore have been considered in the One Connected Community process. These documents include plans from the counties within which Helena resides and research from the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham. It is important to understand the regional projects happening around Helena in order to plan the future of the City accordingly.

Relevant plans and studies include:

- ★ City of Helena, AL Zoning Ordinance
- ★ Helena Comprehensive Plan Preliminary Market Scan Findings
- ★ Hillsboro Master Development Plan
- ★ Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan
- ★ RPCGB 2045 Regional Transportation Plan
- ★ RPCGB Active Transportation Plan for the Greater Birmingham Region (B-Active)
- ★ RPCGB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2017
- ★ RPCGB Helena Schools Intersections Study
- ★ Shelby County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
- ★ Shelby County Comprehensive Plan

These past plans and studies are all valuable tools in determining where Helena is coming from, and where it is heading in the future. As a result, the actions included in this Comprehensive Plan may include some of the actions recommended by the previous plan, and also may have adapted actions based on the goals of these other relevant plans and studies.

Relevant plans and studies

## THE PROCESS

The One Connected Community Steering Committee committed to a fully open and inclusive planning process. Anyone who cares about the future of Helena was invited and encouraged to participate in any (or for some invested community members, all) engagement rounds. The three rounds of engagement were iterative by design, building on conclusions from one conversation to the next. The first round, punctuated by the Kickoff Workshop, included several generative prompts intended to elicit wide-ranging thoughts and reactions. Between the physical event and online feedback, more than 150 participants contributed to the kickoff conversations. In the second round, participants were asked to react to the draft vision and goal statements via a web-based survey. The planning team received more than 400 responses. The final community meeting and survey was hosted in June 2022 and asked participants to evaluate specific proposals in the draft plan. During each round, the planning team prepared an inventory of responses, categorized the feedback, and developed summary documentation for the Steering Committee. The full database of responses is available in the plan appendix.

### *Beginning a long conversation*

While the community process to develop the Comprehensive Plan concluded with the “Priorities Workshop”, participants throughout the campaign noted the importance of ongoing dialogue with respect to community investment. The City is committed to continuing the conversation with the community through implementation and ensuring all voices have an opportunity to contribute.

### *Understanding the results*

With more than 3,000 unique comments and ideas, the planning team and Steering Committee worked hard to ensure all feedback gathered through the process was databased, categorized, and documented.



## CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

The community engagement process for One Connected Community took place during several waves of the COVID-19 Worldwide Pandemic. To ensure the safety of all participants, the Steering Committee opted for a multi-platform engagement approach, utilizing in-person and virtual meetings, online surveys, small group meetings, and individual interviews. Through the group’s commitment and creativity, more than 500 unique participants had the chance to add their ideas to the plan. Below are several platforms and unique audiences utilized through the process.

- » 23 stakeholder zoom sessions
- » Teen Council Focus Group
- » 40+ individual interviews
- » Online surveys following each major round of engagement (more than 500 total submissions)
- » Virtual and in-person meetings with the Steering Committee



500+

People engaged in the One Connected Community process

3,000+

Unique comments and ideas collected

75+

Community stakeholder interviews

3

Distinct rounds of engagement

23

Virtual engagement sessions

450

Online surveys collected

1

Community vision





# MAJOR THEMES FROM THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Throughout the rounds of community conversations, a series of resonant themes emerged. Highlighted below, these topics represent the most frequent issues raised by participants. The following themes are not exhaustive but present the commonly mentioned issues.



**Community growth comes with advantages and challenges.** With population doubling between 2000 and 2020, many participants noted the need to “keep up” with other necessary investments into the City. This relates to schools, infrastructure, facilities, amenities, and others. Regional challenges include congestion and economic competition.



**Capacity challenges are becoming more acute.** As Helena continues to grow, it’s important for the community to proactively address capacity challenges before they emerge rather than waiting for these challenges to build and form into a crisis.



**There’s a need to define the Helena brand.** The City’s regional identity is not as well-articulated as other communities around the region. An identity in this case refers to the ways in which we describe “who we are” and “where we are going.”



**The community sometimes feels physically and psychologically disconnected.**

Helena has an odd jurisdictional border that contributes to a sense of physical discontinuity between east and west, but also between newer development and older parts of the community. Any project that helps to bridge this gap—either physically or psychologically—will help with the community’s sense of connection.



**Waterways are valued by residents and one of the City’s key assets.** Buck Creek and the Cahaba River are unique and should be better leveraged. This could relate to tourism, but most importantly as assets and amenities for current and future residents.



**Old Town is ready for its next chapter.** Old Town is the historic core or heart of Helena, but it is also ready for its next round of investment. There is a general feeling of nostalgia around the district and a strong sense that more can be done to enhance its vitality.



**Standards for new development or redevelopment are important.** To maintain the community’s historic charm and high quality of life, it is important to be discerning when considering new developments or projects. Helena should maintain a high standard as a community of choice in the region.



**Movements in the housing market are challenging affordability.** It is much harder to buy a home in Helena today compared to ten years ago. The price—especially of new housing—is rising much quicker than wages around the region and the City is losing its affordability advantage for young families.



**Regional relationships are increasingly important.** There are many challenges the City is facing that it cannot solve by itself. Traffic congestion, school capacity, and economic competitiveness, are several key areas of interest where Helena and its leaders should take an active regional role.

# OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Through a process of research and discovery, the One Connected Community process uncovered a series of critical issues and trends. These opportunities and challenges are the primary targets of the Comprehensive Plan’s Action Agenda. This is an important moment-in-time for the City. The community is quickly transitioning from a small town on the edge of the Birmingham Metropolitan Area, to an interconnected, mid-sized city with issues and assets more like its regional neighbors.

## *Addressing community challenges*

Community engagement and research revealed a set of central challenges facing the City in 2022. Some of these challenges are unique, others are shared regionally or nationally. The following is not an exhaustive list, but a selection of the most important.

★ **How will Helena pay for the amenities that the community says it wants?** The City is growing faster than its peers with an annual population growth rate of 1.4 percent from 2010-2021. With this growth, there is an increasing expectation for “complete community” amenities, services, or facilities, yet the City maintains one of the lowest millage rates (5.0) in the region, with one quarter of all revenue derived from development permits and licensing.

★ **Housing affordability is decreasing.** From 2012 to 2021, housing values in Helena are up 50 percent, slightly outpacing peer communities and the Birmingham Metropolitan area. Despite strong countywide population growth, from 2010 to 2020 the pace of housing development in Shelby County was slower than in the 1990s and 2000s. Unlike peer communities in the region who have been able to provide ample multi-family housing options in recent years, in Helena no multi-family housing has been delivered since 2010.

★ **Many challenges are regional in nature.** Issues like traffic congestion are caused and solved regionally. The existing pattern of single-use development adds to the traffic volumes, and traffic congestion will continue to increase with more people, homes, and jobs. The most congested areas are in those with significant amounts of commercial-only development. The City can pursue projects to mitigate regional challenges, but real movement will be achieved through collaboration.

★ **Old Town is ready for its next chapter, how do we determine the right first step?** Old Town is a long-term project that will require commitment to advance major initiatives and/or partnership between private and public actors. Old Town is the heart of the community. To build momentum, significant challenges must be addressed including building age, configuration and upkeep, traffic and road geometry, recent natural disasters, environmental constraints, and others.

★ **How does the City better connect the community, both physically and psychologically?** Growth and annexations over time have led to a geographic split between east and west, or new and old. The City is also psychologically split between long-time residents and those who have moved in more recently. The IRS maintains data on annual migration patterns. These trends reflect changes in the location of tax filing from year to year for individuals. This data shows that nine percent of the overall population have moved in the last year from another part of Shelby County, another county, or another state.

★ **How to do more with less: Addressing staff capacity.** Far from its origins as a “tiny mining town”, Helena must now operate as a fully-functioning, mid-sized city. With more than 22,000 residents and room to grow, proactive governance at this scale requires more time, more specialization, and more people.





## Taking advantage of opportunities

Helena has many inherent and emerging advantages. These opportunities are related to physical, economic, and social assets. The following is a collection of those most important opportunities revealed through engagement and analysis.

★ **Growth and “rising tide” allow Helena to be selective and set strong expectations for new development or redevelopment.**

Regional growth is expected to remain strong through the next decade. Despite the City’s development over the past 20 years, there are still significant tracts of undeveloped or underdeveloped land where Helena can apply its standards and achieve strong outcomes. There are currently no nodal or town-center-style developments within the city. This new pattern of development would allow Helena to address several challenges including sales tax leakage, congestion, amenity development, and more.

★ **The community has access to a wealth of streams and greenspaces.** Helena is split by the Cahaba River and Buck Creek and sits on the doorstep of the Cahaba River Wildlife Management Area. The City can better leverage these assets and embrace its position at the “edge of the wilderness”.

★ **Capture more local spending.** There is the potential for approximately \$292M of retail spending within Helena; however, the estimated annual retail sales in the City are approximately \$92M per year. Helena is leaking around \$200M of retail sales to surrounding jurisdictions, and sales tax is the primary revenue source. While not all types of retail can be captured, community members have the opportunity to identify specific retail typologies that could or should be pursued/encouraged.

★ **Define growth corridors and conserve where appropriate.** There is no shortage of developable land within Helena’s current jurisdictional boundary or in those growth corridors to the community’s south. With more than 4,000 acres of developable land inside the City’s current jurisdictional boundary and thousands more in the planning area, Helena can and should be selective about where and how it physically develops in the future.

★ **Defining the Helena brand and identity.** Helena has cultivated a strong reputation around the region as a premier destination for residents. Though the city’s strategic direction and regional economic position are less clear, this is the city’s opportunity to implement a bold and clear vision for its future. This would separate Helena’s identity from that of its peers. As regional discussions occur, the City can leverage its platform as it lobbies for its share of external investments, whether they be public or private.



# PLAN CONTEXT

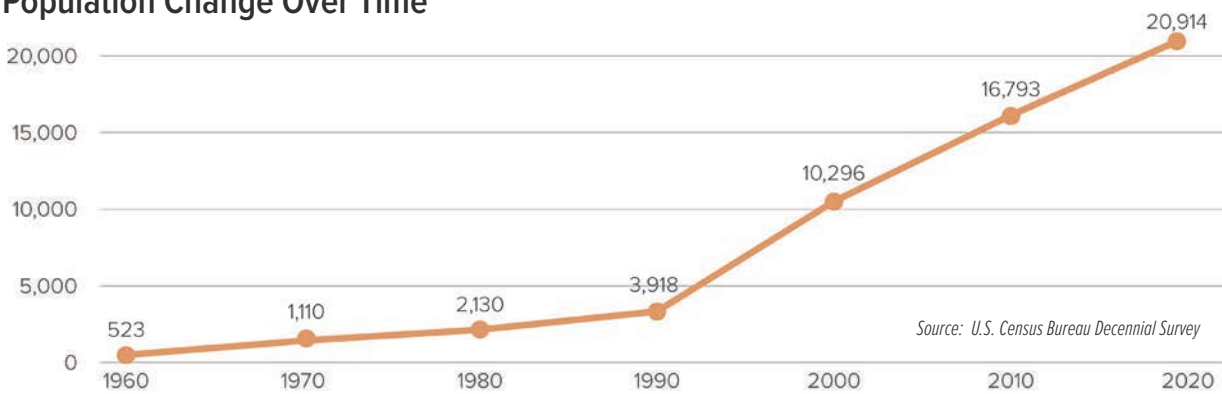
In 2022, the City of Helena is home to 21,000 residents spread across 21 square miles. The City straddles the border across Jefferson County (2.5 square miles) and Shelby County (18.5 square miles). Helena has also grown physically throughout its annexation; and the Comprehensive Plan considers a larger planning area territory extending three miles from the City’s current border. This section presents the context of which the One Connected Community shares recommendations.

## *A fast growing community*

Between 2010 and 2020, the City added more than 4,000 new residents. This growth rate of 25 percent is nearly double the rate for Shelby County—14 percent—over that same period. The 2020 Census counted 20,914 residents.

Figure I.1

### Population Change Over Time

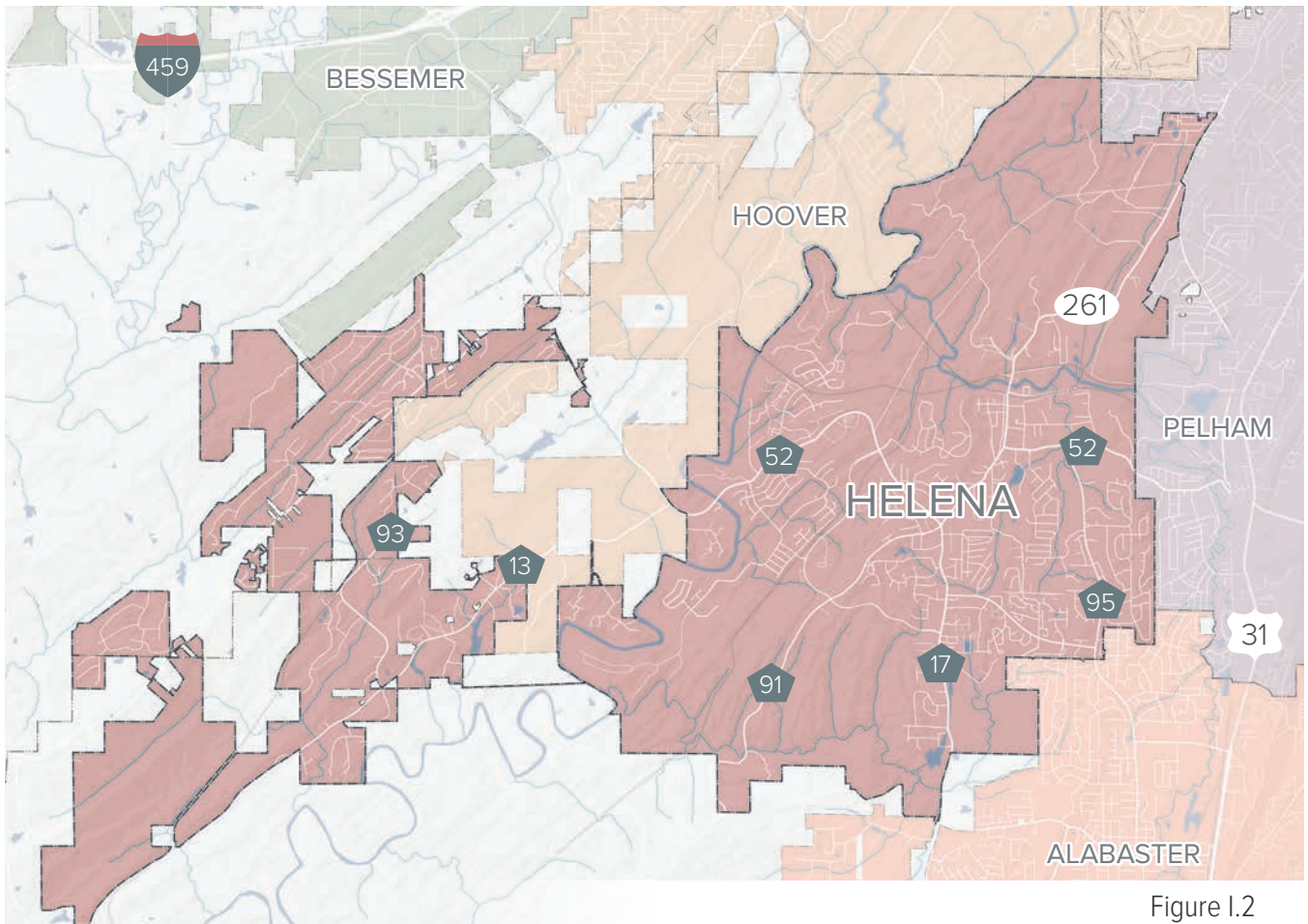


## *Addressing multiple community topics*

This plan addresses numerous interrelated topics. These are collected into three chapters: Great Places, Prosperity, and Connections. The following topics were studied as part of the planning process.

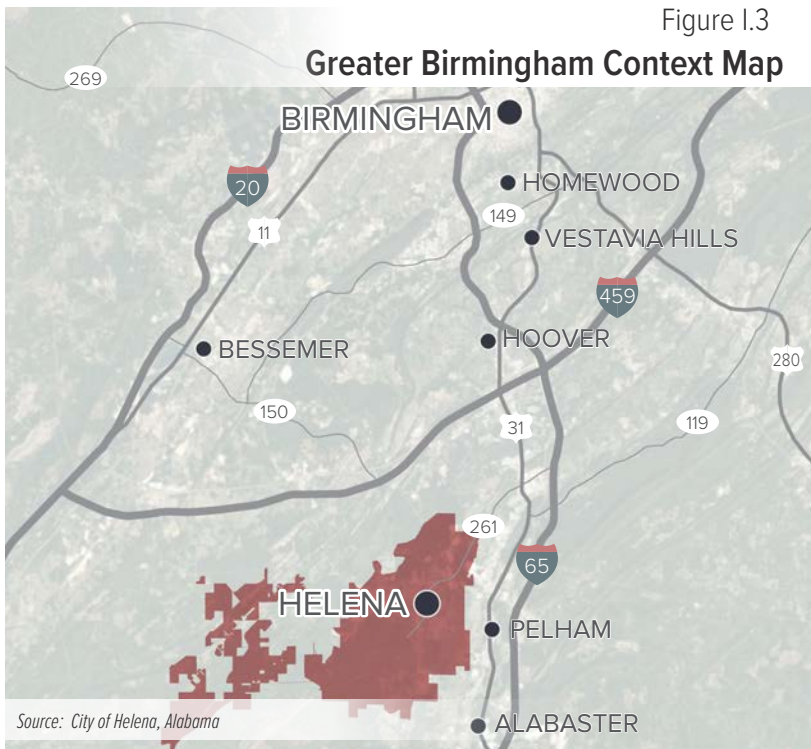






Source: City of Helena, Alabama

Figure I.2  
Helena and Peer Communities Context Map



Source: City of Helena, Alabama

Figure I.3

**Greater Birmingham Context Map**

**LEGEND**

- Bessemer
- Hoover
- Pelham
- Alabaster
- Helena

# THE VISION FOR HELENA

The vision statement sets the broad direction for the future of the City through a simple representation of the community's feedback and ideas. Helena's vision statement encompasses the breadth of feedback gathered from the community throughout the process and distills the message into a few simple, yet powerful sentences. The vision for Helena paints a picture of a thriving community made better through the realization of its plan.

## The Community Vision

### — PLAN CHAPTERS —

#### Great Places

Goal: *Built with intention.*

Topics: land use, development, conservation, parks and trails, Old town special focus area

#### Prosperity

Goal: *In all ways, prosperous.*

Topics: economic development, fiscal conditions & trends, housing, real estate, personal prosperity

#### Connections

Goal: *One community, well connected.*

Topics: regionalism, mobility, roadway capacity, trails, waterways, sidewalks, potable water, sanitary sewer

## The Implementation Strategy

Preparing the plan for adoption and integration into ongoing work planning.

# PLAN STRUCTURE

The One Connected Community planning process was designed to engage community members in a thoughtful discussion about Helena's future. Working from broad aspirations to specific outcomes, the planning team and Steering Committee developed a series of statements to better structure and arrange the plan. This was a process of discovery and iteration. The chapters of this plan contain a series of Goals, Objectives, and Actions to help guide Helena to its vision.

### GOALS

A goal is a desired outcome expressed in simple terms. These statements were produced using the public input received during the plan's engagement process. There are three community goals that support the overall vision statement.

### OBJECTIVES

There are several dozen objective statements in the plan. These are quantifiable elaborations on the goal statement that set aspirational targets for the community.

### ACTIONS

Actions are the most specific statements in the plan. They are projects, policies, and/or programs selected for their ability to help move Helena toward achieving its objectives and overall goals.



The vision for Helena ...

Helena is a complete community.

Our city is strong, beautiful, and prosperous. We've grown but kept our charm; we've invested in ourselves through critical projects and programs; we embrace all the special attributes that make Helena, Helena.

We are...

One, connected community.



The image shows a row of historic-style houses with prominent porches and white picket fences. The scene is overlaid with text. The text is white and centered on the image. The background is a warm, golden-brown color, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The houses have multiple stories, large windows, and decorative porches. The picket fences are in the foreground, creating a sense of depth. The overall mood is nostalgic and aspirational.

Our Goal for Great Places ...

Helena will be built with intention.

A beautiful and vibrant community  
comprised of strong neighborhoods, well-  
considered development, a re-energized  
Old Town, and with ample access to our  
parks, forests, and streams.



# Great Places

One of the base functions of a city is to plan for and regulate land use to ensure a harmonious movement through the built environment. In Helena, the community has significant control over the arrangement, form, and interrelationship between the built environment and undisturbed natural areas. The Great Places chapter describes the current conditions and trends in Helena related to development patterns, land use, community character, and open space. The chapter presents recommendations across three broad categories: development, redevelopment, and conservation.

## OBJECTIVES

*To achieve our Great Places goal, we will...*

- ★ Establish a regulatory environment that facilitates enduring, quality developments that include diverse housing typologies, a variety of commercial spaces, and productive industrial parks.
- ★ Enable strong tools to regulate land development based on best management practices.
- ★ Open up recreational and commercial access to the natural assets surrounding and within Helena - forests, streams, and trails.
- ★ Enhance character of, accessibility to, and activity within Old Town.
- ★ Invest in new community amenities that enhance the qualities of place including trails, parks, streams, and others.
- ★ Maintain and enhance neighborhoods by ensuring compatibility amongst development, investing in lasting infrastructure, and providing equitable access to employment and leisure activities.
- ★ Enable new—and support existing—employment and activity centers.



# INTRODUCTION

The plan outlines an approach for Helena to continue to foster great, vibrant places and preserve the heritage of the community. The specific topics covered include: Key Findings, Development Principles, Existing Zoning Map, Conceptual Development Diagram, Future Land Use Categories, Future Land Use Map, Zoning and Next Steps, and the Old Town Special Focus Area.

This section is organized around Objectives, Key Findings, and Action items. Objectives are measurable outcomes based around broad concepts that align with the City's larger goals. Key findings are based on analysis of existing conditions within Helena and identify opportunities for the City to work towards its Objectives. Action items are the specific policies or programs Helena can implement to achieve the objectives and overall goals of this Comprehensive Plan. Each topic covered by the plan sets out to define the topic, explain how it is relevant to the City's continued success, and

assign actions that will help to achieve the overall vision of the City. This section further describes the relationship of the Comprehensive Plan to the tools used to implement the Action Items related to Future Land Use Categories. Also illustrated in this section are a conceptual development diagram, Future Land Use Category character imagery, a Future Land Use Map, and guidance for future Comprehensive Plan updates and amendments.

Future Land Use Character descriptions and a Future Land Use Map (FLUM) present guidance on where and how development should occur within Helena. This FLUM also provides guidance to Helena on where and when utilities may need to be upgraded or expanded to support allowable development throughout the community. Old Town is presented as a special focus area and includes guidance to enhance the character while respecting the unique features and history of the area.

## Key findings from the process

The following items represent the key findings and opportunities related to the Great Places topics including land use, development, community character, Old Town, and implementation tools. These findings emerged from the research and analysis of the planning team and the input of stakeholders and the public overall.



Approximately 4,000 acres of developable land are within Helena. This accounts for 30 percent of the total land area of the community.



Growth within the community can be accommodated on existing vacant lands, and the City is looking at strategic areas to annex into Helena.



Single-family residential uses, include both attached and detached single family homes, comprise 98 percent of the total housing within Helena.



Helena is nestled within the Valley and Ridge region of the Appalachian mountains. This gives the community unique viewsheds and character.



Buck Creek and the Cahaba River provide unique opportunities to establish a blueway within Helena to expand ecotourism in the community.



Hillsboro, developed by U.S. Steel Real Estate and originally approved in 2007, encompasses more than 5,000 acres within Helena, and is entitled for up to 6,902 total housing units.



# CONDITIONS & TRENDS

## *From a small mining town...*

Early settlement of what would become Helena was focused around Buck Creek in the area defined as Old Town. European-American settlers came to the area, originally named Cove, around 1850. By 1856, the Cove post office was opened, and shortly thereafter the town name was changed to Hillsboro.

Through the Civil War, the community expanded due to the prosperous coal deposits and highly productive steel mill to meet the demands for materials to support the war. After destruction of the first steel mills, the community began reconstruction.

By the early 1880s, Helena contained six mercantile stores, one drugstore, two hotels, and several boarding houses. The rolling mill had been expanded and modernized and the number of merchants had increased [Ken Penhale and Martin Everse, *Images of America: Helena Alabama*]. A rail yard was added by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company.

The industry in Helena began to decline as the national economy contracted following World War I. The steel rolling mill closed in 1923 and multiple mine closures followed. This decline continued through the Great Depression and many residents left Helena to find employment elsewhere.

Post World War II, the population of Helena remained under 1,000 residents until 1970. Between 1970 and 1990 the population of the community increased from just over 1,000 to almost 4,000 residents. The rural character of the area began to change as suburban expansion of the Birmingham metropolitan area reached Helena in the 1990s. This expansion catalyzed commercial and residential growth within Helena. Lands historically used for mining and timber farming operations were rezoned for multiple large-scale Planned Unit Developments have expanded Helena's residential population, which is supported by a variety of commercial and retail services.



## *Recent plans and studies*

Helena's Comprehensive Plan, the roadmap to shape the community, was originally created and adopted in 2003. This plan was updated in 2011 and 2016, but the foundations of the plan remained unchanged. The previous Comprehensive Plan does not provide the tools necessary to address the issues Helena is currently experiencing.

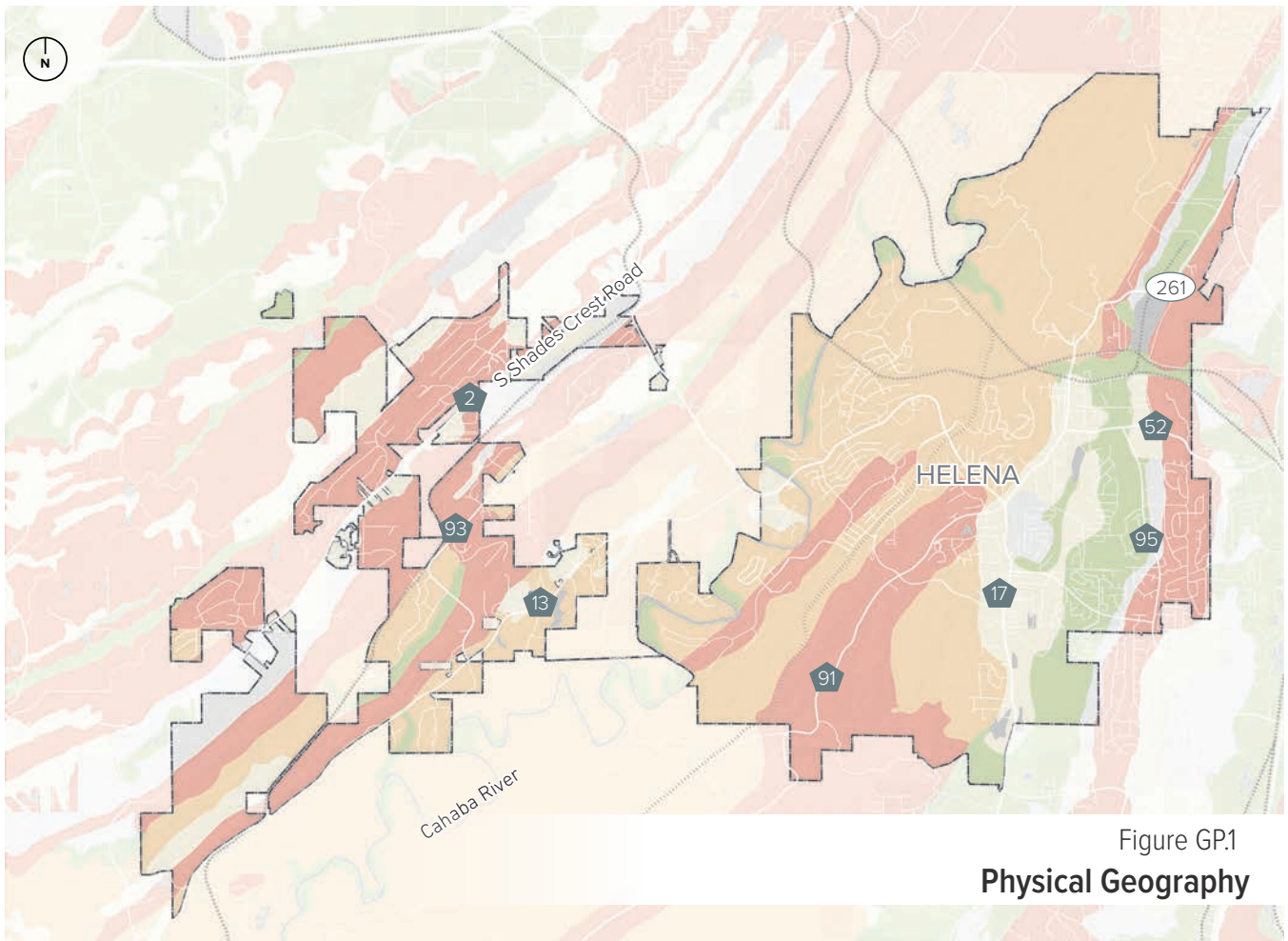


Figure GP.1  
**Physical Geography**

**LEGEND**

- Very Steep Slope (>20%)
- Steep Slope (16%-20%)
- Marginal Slope (11%-15%)
- Minimal Slope (6%-10%)
- Flat (1%-5%)

*Physical geography*

Helena lies within the general physiographical region known as the Alabama Valley and Ridge Region, which is comprised of a series of ridges and valleys that span the southern extent of the Appalachian Mountains. Sub-regions which traverse through the Helena area include the Cahaba Valley, the Coosa Ridges to the valley’s southeast and the Cahaba Ridges to the valley’s northwest. Elevations range from 500 feet to approximately 1500 feet throughout the sub-regions within the Helena area.

A series of ridges lie across the Cahaba River in the area of the county boundary beginning with Chestnut Ridge, followed by Pine Mountain and Shades Mountain, and then continuing with Bee Ridge and Bluff Ridge up to the city limits of Bessemer.

**21 SQ MI**  
 Helena has grown to its current size through incremental annexation over time



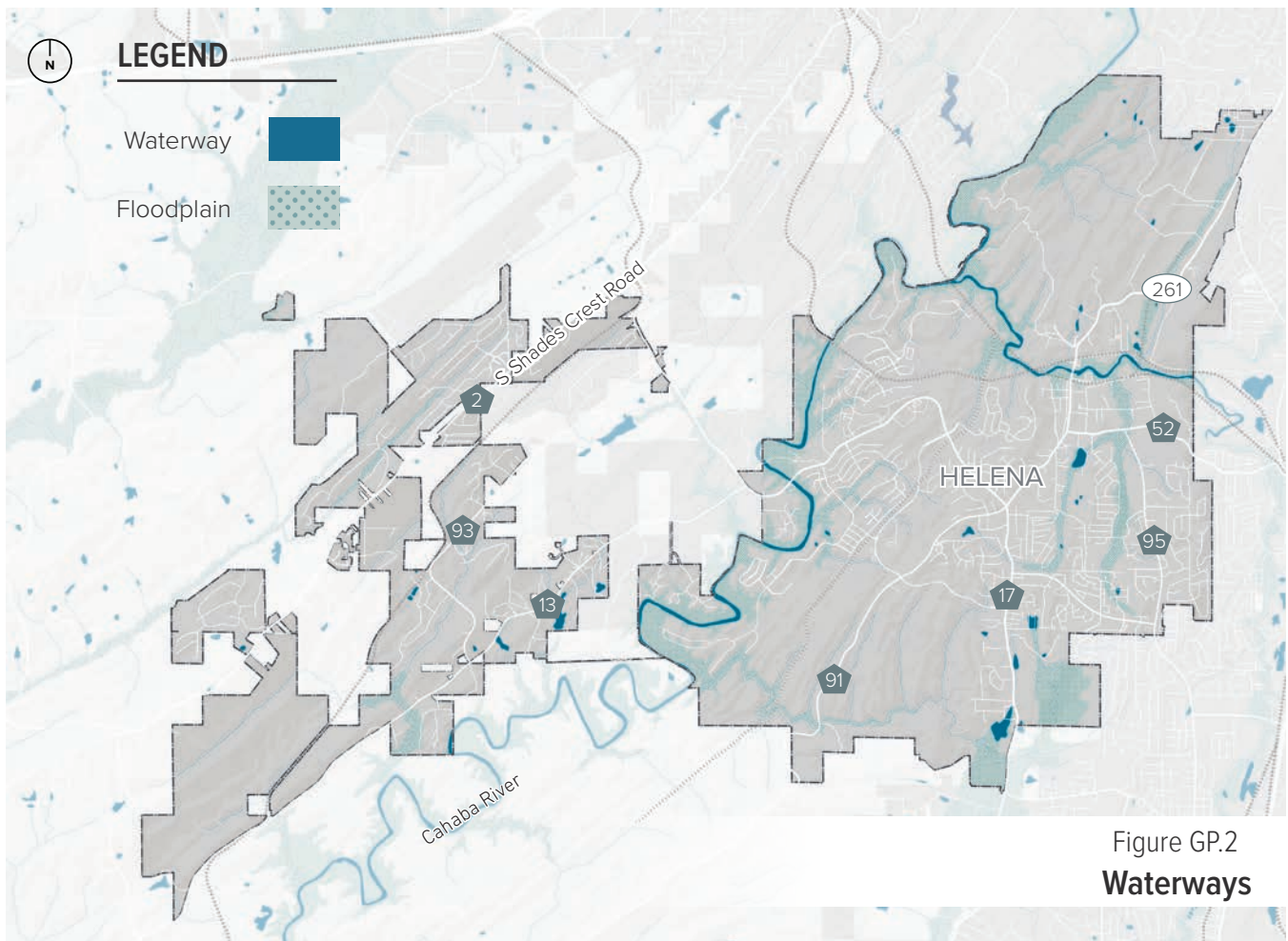


Figure GP.2  
**Waterways**

## *Waterways and hydrography*

Helena is positioned within the Alabama/Cahaba River Basin as all small and large creeks that meander through Helena ultimately flow into the Cahaba River at some point. The Cahaba River is the primary waterway which crosses through the City limits from one end to the other; and as such, a large swath bordering the river as well as areas surrounding the various creeks are situated within floodplains which are subject to periodic flooding.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as part of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), adopted the base flood standard. A base flood is a flood that has a one percent chance of being equaled or exceeded each year; otherwise known as a 100 year flood. Base flood zone designations or Special Flood Hazard Areas found on the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM)

within Helena are Zone A, which are determined by approximate methods of analysis, and Zone AE, which are determined by detailed methods of analysis. Examples of Zone AE are the full lengths of the Cahaba River and Buck Creek, while examples of streams that have shared designations of both Zone A and Zone AE are Beaverdam Creek, Lee Brook, Prairie Brook, and Roy Branch.

The Cahaba River/Buck Creek Conservation Overlay District (CRBC) is a zoning district implemented by Helena in order to protect the water quality and environmental integrity of these vital waterways and their tributaries. The district encompasses any land located within the floodways of Buck Creek, the Cahaba River, their tributaries, or the Stream Setback/Buffer.



## *Area soils*

The predominant soil within the City limits from the Soil Survey of Shelby County is the NcE Nauvoo-Sunlight Complex. This soil, which consists of moderately deep and shallow, moderately steep, well drained soils formed in residuum of sandstone and siltstone, encompasses a wide swath following the valley on both sides of the Cahaba River. NcE soil lies beneath the subdivisions of Hillsboro, Fallston, Riverwoods, Cahaba Falls, Moss Bend, Sunny Brook, and Old Cahaba, and the proposed subdivisions of Hillsboro South and Hillsboro North.

Another soil found within the City limits from the Soil Survey of Shelby County that has been used for residential development even though it is poorly suited for urban development is the BmF Bodine-Minvale Complex. Dearing Downs Subdivision was built mostly on top of this soil. Other soils found that also have poor suitability for urban development that have been used for residential development include BrF Brilliant Very Channery Loam (Old Cahaba), NaE Nauvoo Loam (Oak Park, Quail Ridge), ToD Townley Silt Loam (Wyndham), ToE Townley Silt Loam (Kingridge, Rock Ridge), TtE Townley-Urban Land Complex (Old Town), and Tx Tupelo-Dewey Complex (Plantation South). The reasons for these soils

poor suitability include slope, depth to rock, slow permeability, and low strength. Although these soils have development limitations, permeability is corrected through the use of a sewer system as opposed to using septic tanks; plus building techniques such as reduced site disturbance and roadway design can be utilized to eliminate or minimize other limitations. Two other soils found along the Cahaba River and its tributaries, Ch Choccolocco Loam and CS Choccolocco-Sterrett Association, are also poorly suited for urban development but have not been built upon due to flooding.

The predominant soil within the City limits from the Soil Survey of Jefferson County is 34 Nauvoo-Montevallo Association which is found in the subdivisions of Silver Lakes, Long Leaf Lake, and Timberlake. Two soils along Shades Mountain, 20 Gorgas-Rock Outcrop Complex (Sterling Lakes, Asbury Parc) and 27 Leesburg-Rock Outcrop Complex, have poor suitability for residential development. These three soils have limitations to development which are related to slopes and shallow soil depths, but can be overcome through extensive excavation. Another soil along Shades Mountain, 22 Hanceville Fine Sandy Loam (Glen Gate, Saddlewood), is favorable for residential development.

## *Physical growth & annexation*

Helena - like other cities around the region - grew slowly through its first several decades as access and transportation into the community remained a challenge. With the advent of the automobile and recent completion of major routes like I-65, Helena became a commutable living option for workers around the region. This led to strong physical and population growth around Jefferson and Shelby Counties that continues to this day.

Helena has continually annexed property from the 1960's through today. This allowed the City to absorb lands that support residential development(s) and continue service expansions where logical. Further annexations provide an opportunity to serve additional properties with

minimal impacts to public services. While there are no pending annexations to be added to the City, Helena is looking at some strategic areas to annex in the future.

Physical growth by annexation is limited for Helena. The City is bordered by the cities of Alabaster and Pelham in Shelby County to the south and east, and the cities of Hoover and Bessemer in Jefferson County to the north and west. Helena's jurisdictional boundary straddles two counties but the majority of the City, 18.5 square miles or 88 percent, is within Shelby County.

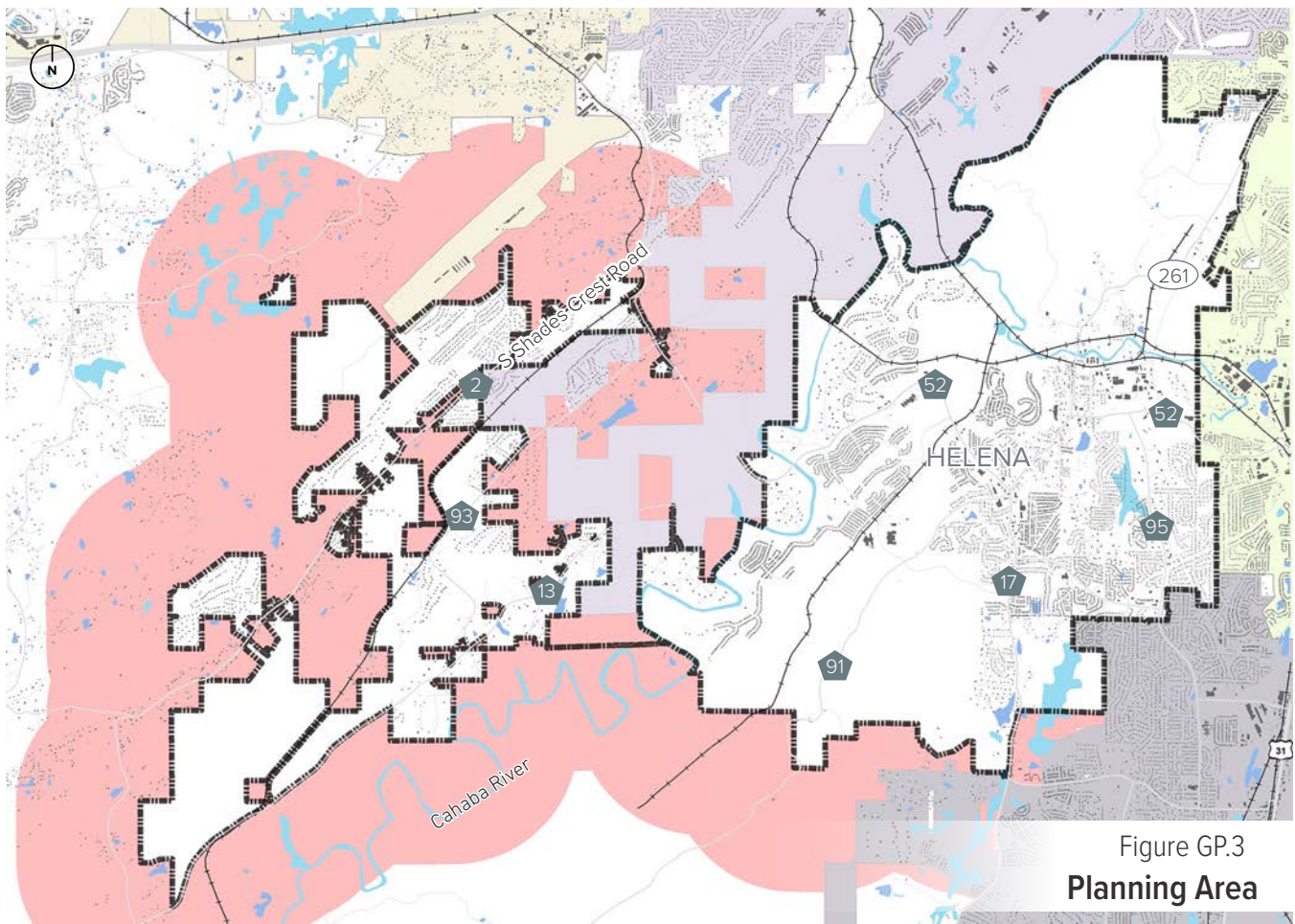


Figure GP.3  
**Planning Area**

**LEGEND**

Planning Area	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: #f08080; border: 1px solid black;"></span>
Bessemer	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: #f5deb3; border: 1px solid black;"></span>
Hoover	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: #d8bfd8; border: 1px solid black;"></span>
Pelham	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: #90ee90; border: 1px solid black;"></span>
Alabaster	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: #808080; border: 1px solid black;"></span>

*Regional planning area*

While this Comprehensive Plan is focused on those lands currently within the municipal limits of Helena, the plan should also be used to inform land use decisions as additional properties are annexed into the City. Helena also currently provides City services to areas outside of its existing municipal boundaries; annexation of these lands already served should be considered for annexation if requests are received. The illustrated planning area extends three miles outside of the existing Helena City limits.

As Helena is bordered by multiple other municipalities and has lands that are located within both Shelby and Jefferson Counties, continued coordination with these bodies is paramount to ensure timely provision of City services and logical expansion of Helena. The map above illustrates the planning area and includes current municipal boundaries and extra-jurisdictional lands.



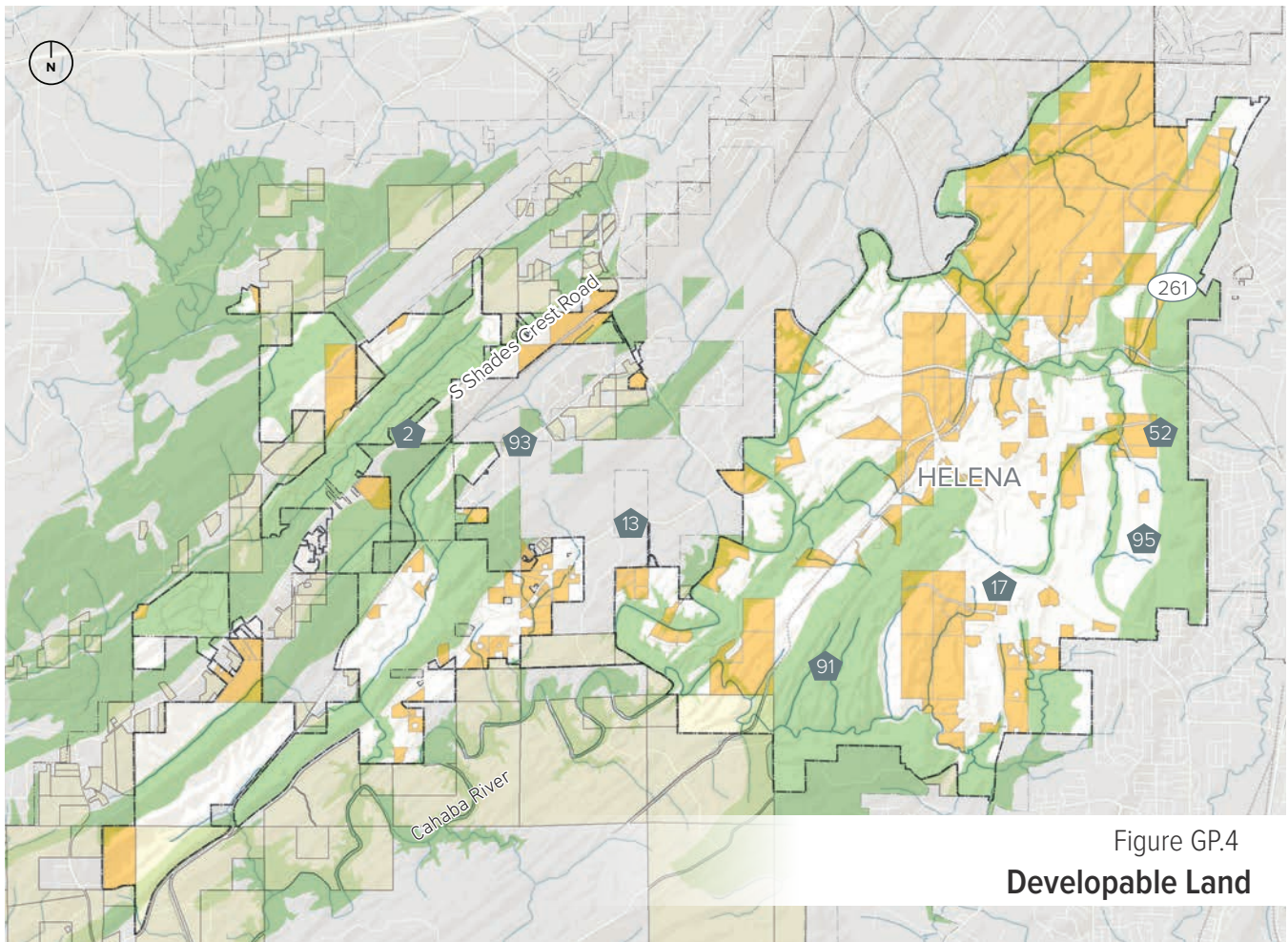


Figure GP.4  
**Developable Land**

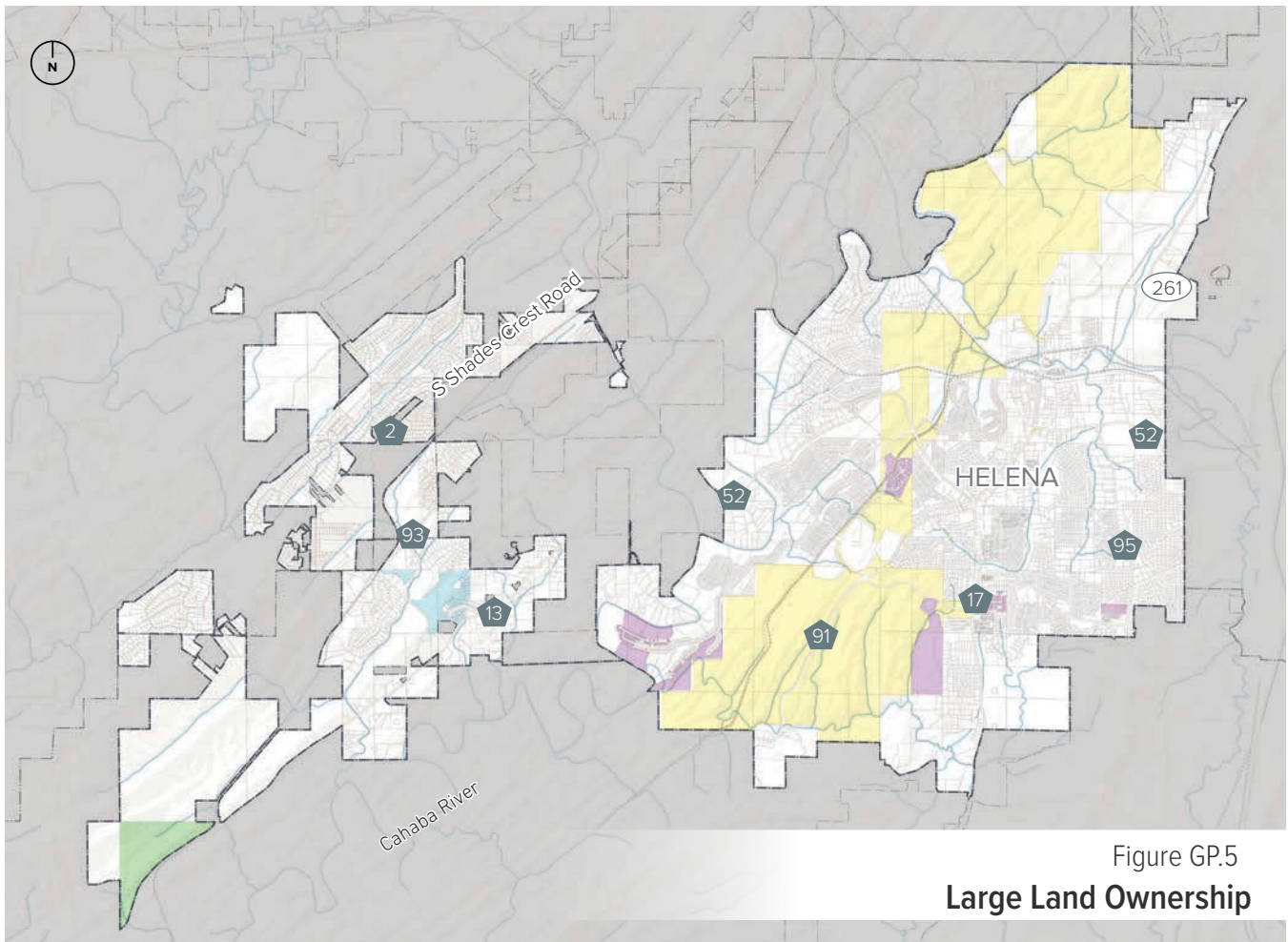
**LEGEND**

- Developable Land (Planning Area)
- Developable Land (in the City)
- Environmentally Constrained

*Developable land analysis*

There are large tracts of land, approximately 8,500 acres, within the jurisdictional boundaries of Helena that have not yet been developed for various reasons. Removing land that is environmentally constrained, within the 100-year floodplain, on a steep slope, subdivided, or in-use, there are just over 4,000 acres of “developable” land inside Helena as of 2022. This “developable” land accounts for 30 percent of the total land area. Extending this analysis to the larger planning radius for the Comprehensive Plan, there are more than 10,000 acres in this category. Continuing the current low-density, single-use development has the potential to add more than 15,000 homes and 47,000 new people. Even at a low density development scenario, the growth potential for the City is significant. At the current absorption rate of approximately 150 residential units per year, existing developable land within the Helena could support approximately 85 years of additional growth.





### *Land holdings & ownership patterns*

While there are numerous subdivisions within Helena, of the 8,500 acres of undeveloped land, much of this land is held by a tight set of major land owners. Most notable is the Real Estate Division of U.S. Steel Corporation. The Hillsboro Planned Unit Development is part of the U.S. Steel portfolio and includes more than 3,500 acres within Helena. The map above illustrates parcels larger than 50 acres under single ownership that are undeveloped.

### LEGEND

- U.S. Steel
- New Castle Development
- D.R. Horton
- Valley Creek Land and Timber

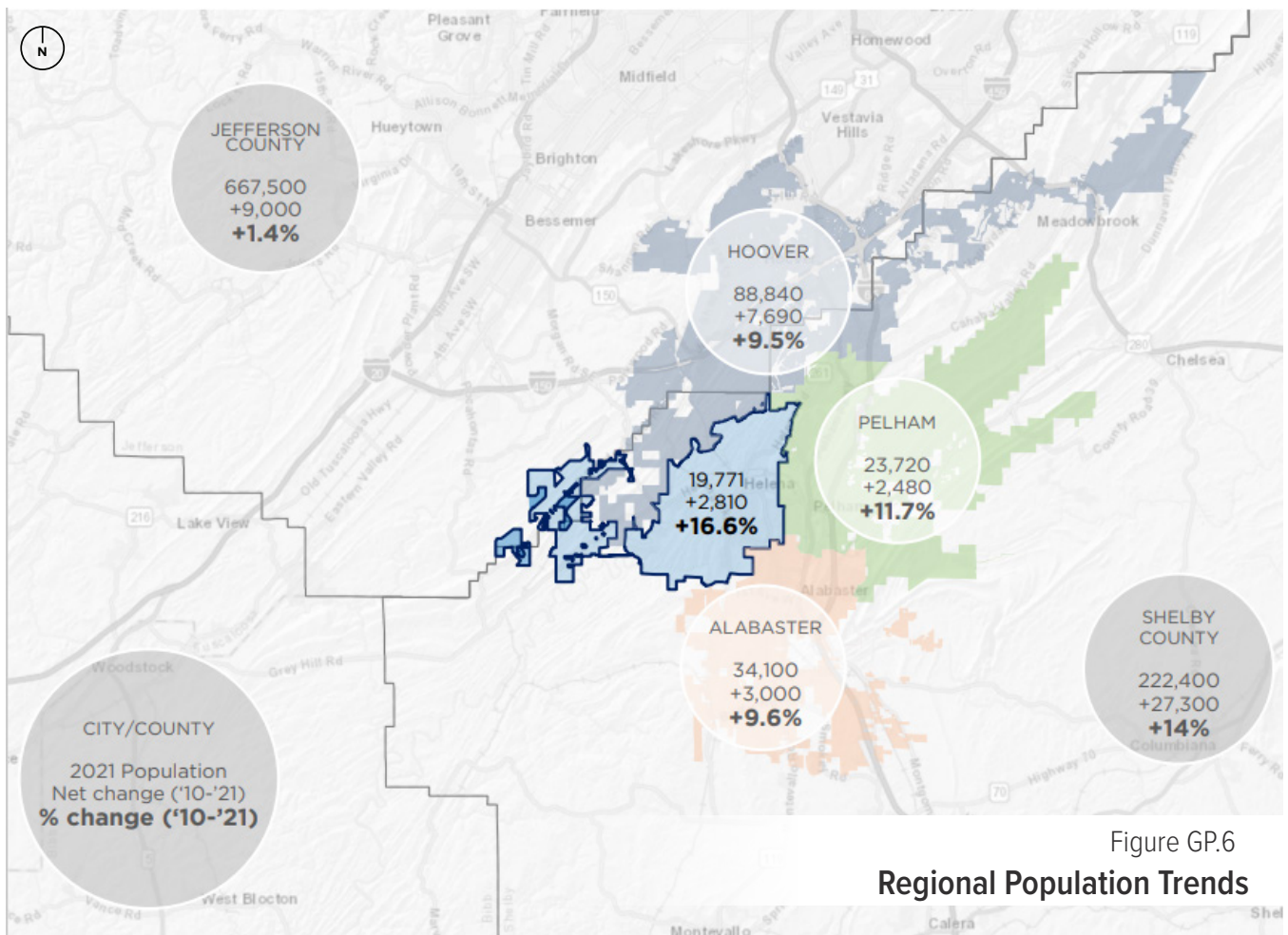


Figure GP.6

**Regional Population Trends**

**LEGEND**

- Helena
- Hoover
- Pelham
- Alabaster

*Regional population trends*

Helena consistently experiences significant growth pressure, primarily for residential development. Between 2010 and 2021 the City added approximately 2,810 residents, a 16.6% increase. This growth rate is higher than all neighboring peer communities, as well as Shelby and Jefferson Counties. While Helena has grown in population faster than peers in the region, the City lacks in diversity of housing and commercial deliveries. Between 2010 and 2021, no multifamily units or office square footage was constructed, and only 10,000 square feet of retail were produced, according to data from CoStar. Diversity of housing and additional commercial services are needed within Helena to support continued population growth at rates currently experienced.

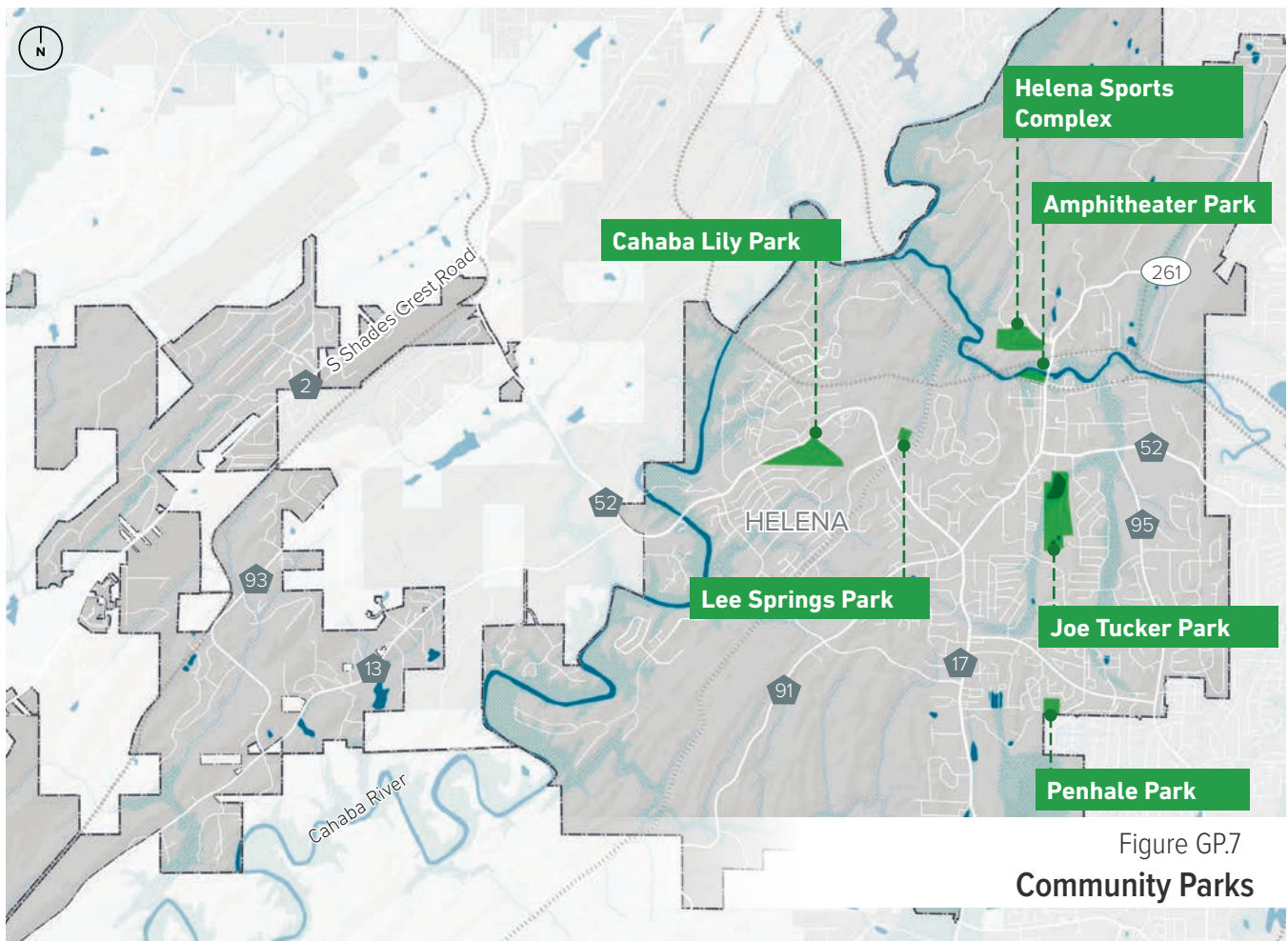


Figure GP.7  
Community Parks

## *Parks and recreation*

Helena owns and maintains a variety of public parks throughout the community. These parks include a mix of active and passive recreation opportunities.

**AMPHITHEATER PARK**  
 Located in Old Town, Amphitheater Park is an outdoor concert venue, festival grounds, and nature park. The park hosts numerous events throughout summer and fall.

**CAHABA LILY PARK**  
 This park includes a playground, picnic area, and an illuminated walking trail. The park is centrally located within Helena and adjacent to multiple residential developments.

**HELENA SPORTS COMPLEX**  
 The sports complex includes the Helena Community Center, as well as baseball and soccer fields.

**JOE TUCKER PARK**  
 Joe Tucker Park includes a lake, baseball diamonds, multiple tennis and pickleball courts, the Boundless Playground, and walking trails.

**LEE SPRINGS PARK**  
 This park includes a playground, walking trails, picnic area, access to the Billy Gould historic coke ovens, and a connection to the Hillsboro Trail that connects Helena Elementary, Middle, and High Schools to multiple residential developments within the community.

**PENHALE PARK**  
 Penhale Park is a small park in the southeast part of Helena and includes three baseball fields.



## Land development tools

This Comprehensive Plan is just one of multiple tools used to guide and regulate development within Helena. In addition to the Comprehensive Plan, the City has adopted a zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, impact fee ordinance, and regularly convenes the Helena Planning and Zoning Commission to hear planning and land use related items. Figure GP.8 below further describes the tools used to regulate and guide land development within Helena.



Figure GP.8

### Land Use Regulating Tools and Bodies

Land Use Tools / Bodies	Purpose / Role
<b>Planning and Zoning Commission</b>	The Helena Planning and Zoning Commission is organized to advise the City Council directly on all applications for changes in the Zoning Ordinance, pre-zoning properties petitioning the City for annexation, review preliminary development plans for Special District zoned areas, and review final development plans for new developments.
<b>Board of Adjustments</b>	The Board of Adjustment is responsible for hearing appeals for variances from the terms of the Zoning Ordinance, such as will not be contrary to public interest, where owing to special conditions a literal enforcement of the provisions of this Ordinance will result in unnecessary hardship, but where the spirit of the Ordinance shall be observed and substantial justice done. (Article XXX, Section 5, Helena Zoning Ordinance)
<b>Helena Zoning Ordinance</b>	The purpose of the zoning regulations is to promote the public health, safety, morals and general welfare; to provide for the orderly development and growth of Helena; to avoid congestion on the public roads and streets; to conserve life, property and natural resources and the expenditure of funds for public improvements and services to conform with the most advantageous uses of land, resources and properties, for the general good and benefit to the people of Helena. For a map of the city's zoning districts in 2022, please refer to Figure GP.11 on pages 34-35.
<b>Subdivision Regulations</b>	Subdivision regulations establish minimum standards and process for which the division of tracts of land must adhere. This process ensures that lots created meet applicable zoning standards, equitable access, provision of utilities, and stormwater regulations.

## Development potential analysis

As stated previously under the Developable Land Analysis, there are approximately 8,500 acres of land (4,000 acres developable) which have not yet been developed within Helena. This land is designated with a variety of Future Land Use and zoning designations, but the majority (approximately 8,000 acres) is intended to be developed with single-family residential uses. Figure GP.9, the Development Capacity Analysis, illustrates the general land use types of the vacant property within Helena. Absorption of new residential units is approximately 150 units per year delivered to the market.



**2,900**  
Acres of potential  
Single-Family  
Development



**490**  
Acres of potential  
Non-Residential  
Development



**5**  
Acres of potential  
Multi-Family  
Development



**5,000**  
Acres of potential  
Special District /  
Planned Development

Figure GP.9

### Development Capacity Analysis

LAND USE CATEGORY	TOTAL AREA (ACRES)	DEVELOPMENT YIELD	EXISTING ZONING
Very Low Density Single-Family Residential	2,005 acres	1 unit / 3 ac	A-1, E-1
Low Density Single-Family Residential	707	2-4 units / ac	E-2, E-3, R-1
Medium Density Single-Family Residential	18	4-6 units / ac	R-2, R-3, PRD
Multifamily Housing	5	8-10 units / ac	R-4, R-6
Commercial	36	-	B-1, B-2, B-3
Old Town	7	-	B-4
Industrial	441	-	M-1, M-2
Special District Commercial and Industrial <sup>(1)</sup>	96	-	-
Special District Planned Residential <sup>(2)</sup>	5,019 <sup>(3)</sup>	1.91 - 2.03 units / ac <sup>(4)(5)</sup>	-

Notes: <sup>(1)</sup> These districts must be approved through a public hearing process and have an associated site plan.

<sup>(2)</sup> This district must be approved through a public hearing process and have an associated site plan. The Hillsboro developments are within this district.

<sup>(3)</sup> The Hillsboro developments occupy 3,519 acres of this total area.

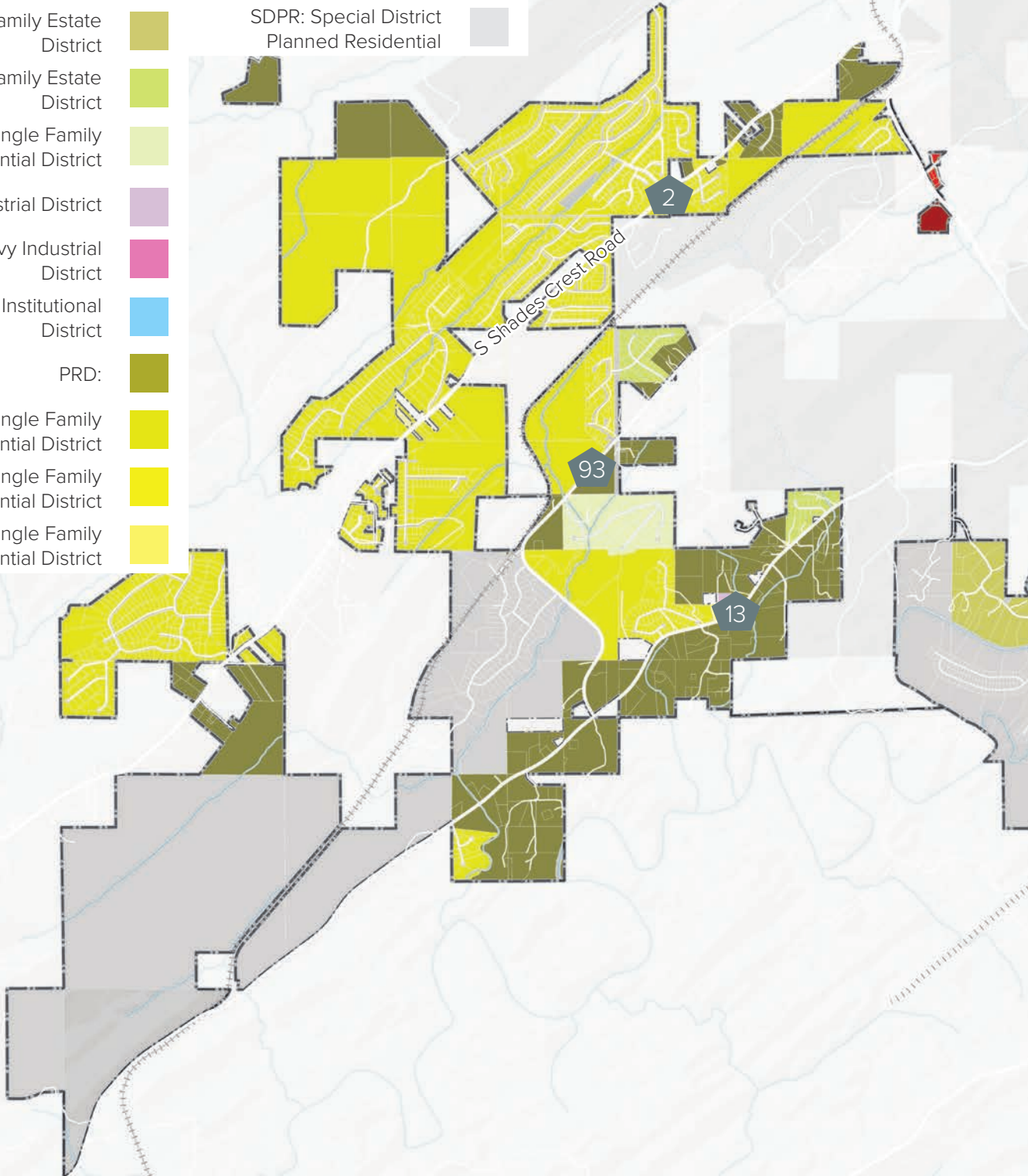
<sup>(4)</sup> The maximum allowable density of the SDPR developments currently approved is between 1.91 and 2.03 dwelling units per acre; however, this could be changed if the binding development agreements are amended.

<sup>(5)</sup> The Hillsboro developments (3,519 acres) have been permitted for up to 6,902 dwelling units that may include up to 504 apartments, 350 townhomes, and 400 attached single-family units.



# LEGEND

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| A-1: Agricultural District              |  | R-4: Townhouse District                       |  |
| B-1: Neighborhood Business District     |  | R-5: Two Family District                      |  |
| B-2: General Business District          |  | R-6: Multi-Family District                    |  |
| B-3: Mini Warehouses District           |  | SDC: Special District Planned Shopping Center |  |
| B-4: Business Renaissance District      |  | SDI: Special District Industrial              |  |
| E-1: Single Family Estate District      |  | SDPR: Special District Planned Residential    |  |
| E-2: Single Family Estate District      |  |   |  |
| E-3: Single Family Residential District |  |   |  |
| M-1: Light Industrial District          |  |   |  |
| M-2: Heavy Industrial District          |  |   |  |
| O-I: Office & Institutional District    |  |   |  |
| PRD:                                    |  |   |  |
| R-1: Single Family Residential District |  |   |  |
| R-2: Single Family Residential District |  |   |  |
| R-3: Single Family Residential District |  |   |  |





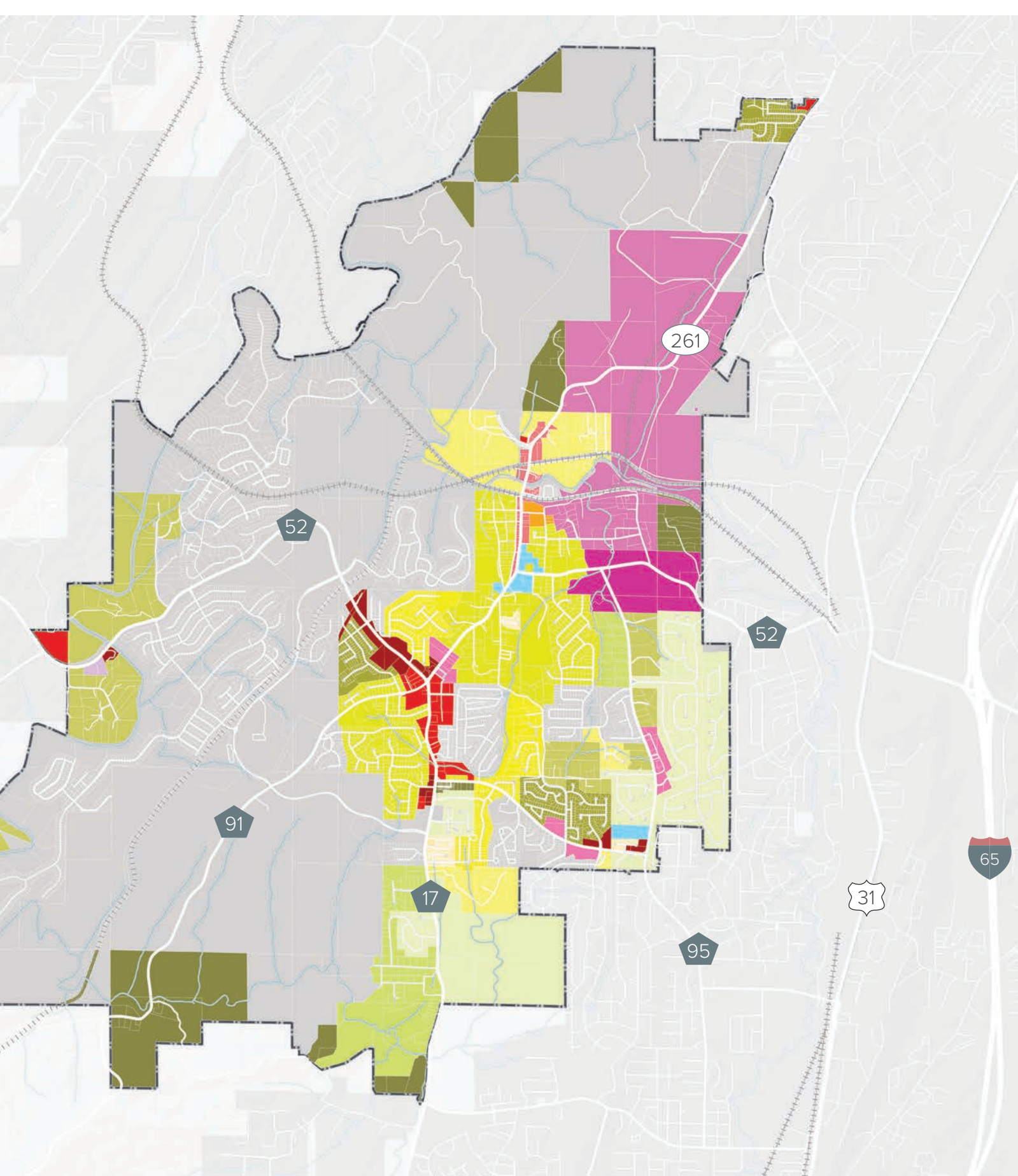
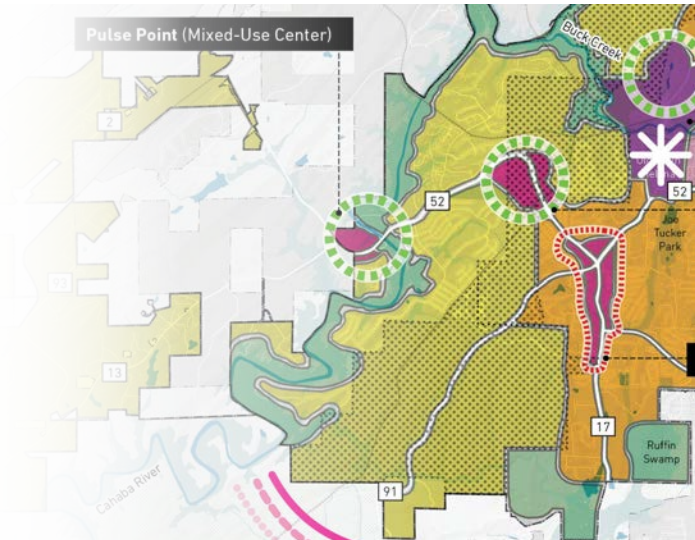


Figure GP.11  
Existing Zoning Districts and Map

# FUTURE LAND USE

Future land use presents the community's preference for how and where Helena will grow and invest in the future. Growth, in this sense, has several definitions. The community can and will grow outward in a manner that is fiscally and aesthetically additive. It will grow inward, and reinvest in neighborhoods, shopping districts, and Old Town. And last, it will "grow" its relationship and access to the natural assets right at Helena's doorstep. Progress in these three directions will ensure Helena is a strong and beautiful community for years to come. The development principles, presented below, articulate the values of the community as they are related to physical growth and evolution.



*As Helena grows and the community continues to evolve, it is our intent that...*

## **New development and redevelopment pays for itself in the long-term.**

- ★ The current development pattern within Helena is dominated by single-family residential subdivisions. Diversification of new development types is necessary to provide the housing, retail, and employment the community desires.
- ★ While Helena has implemented an impact fee for new development, varied development typologies within the community will allow for additional sales tax to be captured and increase revenues from property taxes. The impact fee should be monitored in the long-term and adjusted/expanded as necessary to fund necessary improvements to maintain community character and achieve Helena's long-term goals.
- ★ Creating opportunities for increased employment within the community reduces traffic congestion as a result of less commuting to nearby communities, and captures additional sales tax revenue from employees working within the community.

## **New physical growth meets our high standards with respect to quality, arrangement, access, and character.**

- ★ Any infill development should respect and enhance the character of existing neighborhoods.
- ★ New development on previously undeveloped lands of activity centers should explore unique architecture to foster a sense of identity and differentiate these areas from Old Town.
- ★ Development should incorporate the adopted community brand, as feasible, to foster a sense of community throughout Helena.

## **New growth integrates logical secondary uses that support the primary use within the development.**

- ★ Employment centers such as a medical office complex benefit from being supported by secondary retail uses, such as a pharmacy.
- ★ Incorporating secondary uses within an overall development creates better transitions between use types, and the surrounding developments.
- ★ Secondary uses provide residents local options for attaining their daily needs without traveling outside of the community, and promotes modes of transportation other than the automobile.

**Residential developments offer an array of housing products at varying price points and for multiple stages of life.**

- ★ Access to housing types other than detached single-family homes, such as townhouses, condos, or two-to-four unit homes, creates an appealing community to a more broad group of prospective residents.
- ★ Attracting housing at various price-points allows young residents to purchase their first home, or allows retired individuals to down-size while remaining within their community.
- ★ Varying prices and types of housing allows for employees in all market sectors to find housing within Helena, as opposed to living outside the City and commuting.

**Redevelopment strengthens the character of Helena and provides the community the opportunity to refresh, re-invest, and revitalize when necessary.**

- ★ A regulatory environment that guides redevelopment and ensures that reuse of property enhances the character of the community should be created.
- ★ Consider access for all transportation types and mixing of uses during redevelopment.

**Employment centers are protected, supported, and expanded.**

- ★ Opportunities for employment within Helena are important for the sustained long-term health of the community.
- ★ Lands for development of employment centers should be identified and protected.

**Helena's gateways welcome residents and visitors alike and improve recognition of the boundaries of the community.**

- ★ These gateways reflect the brand of Helena, and enhance the sense of community for residents and visitors.
- ★ Unifying the character across Helena assists in bridging the gap between the east and west portions of the community, addressing a key concern of residents.

**New multi-use trails, walking paths, and sidewalks better connect residents to amenities, shopping, and Old Town.**

- ★ Maintaining the small-town character of Helena is of paramount importance to community residents. This includes providing alternative modes of transportation to reduce the need for roadway expansions. Alternative modes of transportation, such as walking and biking, should be supported to reduce traffic volumes as new development occurs within the community.
- ★ Multi-use trails, walking paths, and sidewalks are unobtrusive, are less costly, and can utilize existing utility or other rights-of-way, maximizing effectiveness of the facility.
- ★ These facility types are easily used by residents of all ages, and provide alternative routes to access community assets.

**Neighborhoods remain strong and vital through enhanced connections and well-maintained quality infrastructure.**

- ★ Infrastructure needs should be routinely evaluated and programmed for maintenance or replacement.
- ★ Additional pedestrian connections are necessary to ensure equitable access to community assets.
- ★ Property maintenance standards adopted by Helena must be enforced to maintain community character.

**The built environment engages the natural environment including waterways, wildlife preserves, and dedicated open space.**

- ★ Development should connect to and enhance waterfronts, as appropriate, including Buck Creek and the Cahaba River.
- ★ Natural assets should be leveraged through forward-thinking development techniques to support eco-tourism efforts, while minimizing any detrimental impacts to natural assets.
- ★ Natural assets should be considered throughout the design process of new development, not as an afterthought, so these assets can be incorporated into project design.



## CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT MAP

The Conceptual Development Diagram illustrates the major concepts for where, when, and how the City should guide future physical development. The concepts are indicated on the map. Each of these topics is a visualization of one, or several, of the development principles presented earlier in the Great Places chapter. Shaded areas represent broad concepts applied generally, whereas circled locations refer to focus areas or specific opportunities. These focus areas are elaborated upon later in the chapter.

The Conceptual Development Diagram is based on several themes based on the objectives of this chapter.

### 1. Attracting Diverse Development Options

- Identifying locations for “town-center” activity centers.
- Adopting community character guidelines
- Introducing a variety of housing typologies

### 2. Committing to the revival of Old Town

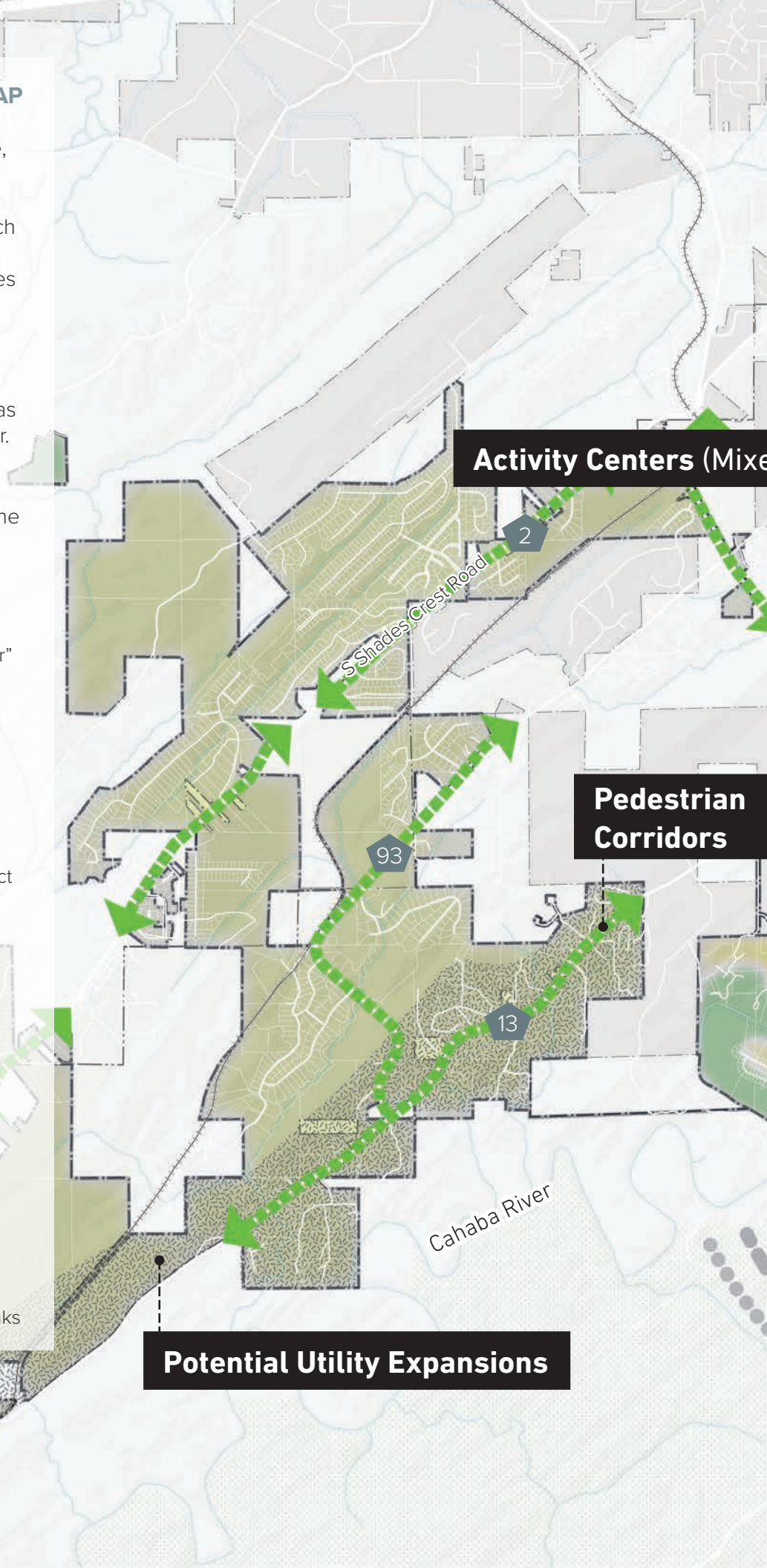
- Connecting pedestrians to the district
- Activating the water
- Attracting restaurants and retailers
- Creating more residential living opportunities

### 3. Maintaining and Growing Employment Opportunities

- Identifying sites for additional light-industrial “innovation district” future land use
- Expanding opportunities for development of commercial office space

### 4. Connecting to Our Waterways

- Adopt Buck Creek and the Cahaba River as “Blueways”
- Enable water access for canoe/kayaks



**Activity Centers (Mixed-Use)**

**Pedestrian Corridors**

**Potential Utility Expansions**





# Hillsboro Development

## Blueway

(ed-Use Center)

Buck Creek

261

52

52

95

31

91

17

Ruffin Swamp

Helena Industrial Park

Joe Tucker Park

## Old Town (Special Focus Area)

## Commercial Reinvestment Area

## Potential Growth Opportunities

### Land Use Legend

- Old Town
- Activity Center
- Tech & Innovation
- Near Neighborhood
- Suburban Living
- Estate Residential
- Conservation & Recreation
- Hillsboro PUD
- Potential Utility Expansion



## FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES

This plan provides direction on desired and expected future land uses within Helena. Land use planning is an essential component of a comprehensive plan. The Future Land Use Map and associated land use categories provide guidance as to where and what types of development should occur within Helena. It is critical for all communities to provide an appropriate mix of land uses to serve a wide variety of community needs, such as balancing jobs and housing, and to ensure its fiscal sustainability.

### *Old Town*



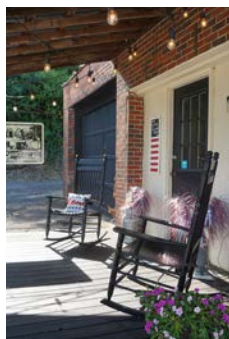
The Old Town Future Land Use Category is intended to protect the existing character of the area, and to ensure new development is pedestrian scaled and enhances the connectivity of Old Town. The historic center of Helena, Old Town is bisected by Buck Creek and contains multiple local retailers.



This Future Land Use Category is intended to foster the re-establishment of a traditional street grid, provide additional connection points within and to Old Town, and support a mix of retail, restaurant, office, and residential uses. This category supports local artists and retailers, and is frequented by residents, employees, and visitors. Uses within Old Town are supported by several community assets within the area including the Helena Amphitheater, the Helena Sports Complex, and Buck Creek.



Commercial frontages along SR-261 are adjacent to the sidewalk, are 1-2 stories in height, and are a mix of wood-framed and stone construction. Vehicular parking is generally located behind buildings or are in shared arrangements, with limited parallel parking along SR-261. New development should mimic these pedestrian-oriented elements to enhance the overall character of Old Town.



Residential uses are highly encouraged within Old Town. Additional residents within Old Town will expand retailers' customer base, support community events, and activate the district. Multifamily units should be constructed to address the street, and vehicular parking should be shared and located behind buildings. Detached single-family should mimic the scale and pedestrian features of homes along Lake Davidson Lane.



It is the intent of the Old Town category to support and enhance the existing mix of uses. Infill of additional residential uses at appropriate scale and density is strongly encouraged. Inclusion of missing-middle housing typologies (multiplexes, townhomes, condos) is encouraged, where appropriate, throughout the district. Establishing additional roadway connections that further the street grid is encouraged. Infill development within Old Town should blend with the existing scale and design of existing buildings. Additional pedestrian amenities including upgraded sidewalks and crosswalks should be considered and included in new construction.



## Activity Center

The Activity Center category is intended to guide potential neighborhood-focused retail clusters throughout Helena. These centers provide the opportunity for residents to be within walking or biking distance of grocers, restaurants, retailers, and medical offices. These centers help establish neighborhood identity and are best served when supported by a mix of missing-middle housing and single-family residences within walking or biking distance. These centers are best designed to provide automobile access within a pedestrian-oriented environment. Inclusion of public green space is encouraged.

Activity Centers are based around a pedestrian-focused foundation and a consistent architectural style should be implemented throughout. Plentiful pedestrian connections ensure the long-term health of the neighborhood and anchors the community around the public spaces within the Activity Center. While neighborhood-serving commercial uses are predominant within the designation, appropriately scaled commercial office space is encouraged to strengthen the mix of uses within the overall community.

Development within this category is pedestrian scaled. Buildings up to three stories are appropriate so long as they are properly buffered and screened from any lower-intensity uses in the area. Out-lot development should address the street, and parking should be consolidated to the greatest extent possible to maintain a pedestrian-focused environment.



## Tech / Innovation

The Tech / Innovation category is intended to support a collection of low-impact industrial uses that include assembly and processing, warehousing and distribution, shared space, and flex space suitable for high-tech or research and development activities. Growth of these areas should be focused in existing industrial areas or areas designated to support expansion of existing tenants and to attract new employers to Helena.

Appropriate buffering and separation from incompatible uses may be necessary in certain Tech / Innovation areas to protect the surrounding content from industrial operations. Outdoor storage should be very limited and temporary in nature. Buildings within this category range from 1-3 stories in height. Overall site development should ensure proper flow for large trucks and vehicles driven by employees and parking should be provided for all vehicles serviced. Pedestrian mobility should be considered, but is of a lower priority in this category.



## *Near Neighborhood*

The Near Neighborhood category represents existing built neighborhoods located adjacent to Old Town and the retailers located near the intersection of County Road 52, Highway 17, SR-261, and Coalmont Road. These neighborhoods were built out over time and include primarily single-family homes on lot sizes varying from 0.15 to 0.5 acres. Joe Tucker Park is proximal to many of these neighborhoods and serves as the primary public recreation facility.

Pedestrian connections to the existing commercial uses and parks are encouraged and should be used to increase connectivity throughout the community. Uses within this category are generally attached and detached single-family homes; however, infill development should consider appropriately-scaled middle housing products such as duplexes, triplexes, quadruplexes, and accessory dwelling units to increase density within the central portions of the community.



## *Suburban Living*

The Suburban Living category is intended to include low-density single-family neighborhoods. Application of attached housing products may be considered if included in an overall master-planned development. Much of this category includes portions of the Hillsboro Planned Unit Development (PUD), or other PUDs within Helena. Community amenities such as interconnected trails, parks, and community pools are encouraged. Due to the densities within this category, development must be served by potable water service and sanitary sewer.



## *Estate Residential*

The Estate Residential category applies to the very low density residential and agricultural land use patterns within the western portions of Helena. Due to limited utility availability and heavy reliance on individual septic systems, further development is intended to continue to be very low density residential and agricultural in nature.



## Conservation / Recreation

Lands within this category generally include parks, recreational open space or undeveloped natural areas that are protected from development by the City, state, county, or other authority. Other lands that are not currently preserved but should be considered for conservation may also be within this designation.



## Other Designations

**Potential Utility Service Areas** - This pattern illustrates areas where approvals of increased density may be appropriate based on possible utility service extensions.



**Hillsboro Planned Unit Development** - This pattern on the map illustrates the lands within the Hillsboro PUD.



The Hillsboro PUD includes more than 3,500 acres within Helena. Approval of this development occurred in three parts (Hillsboro, Hillsboro North, and Hillsboro South) beginning in 2004, with construction commencing shortly thereafter. The majority of the lands within the PUD were historically used for coal mining and timber growing and harvesting. Those activities ceased in the 1980's, and the disturbed lands were replanted with pine trees.

The three portions of the PUD were approved between 2004 and 2007. Hillsboro and Hillsboro South were approved in 2004, with Hillsboro North being approved in 2007. The Hillsboro South PUD, dated March 15, 2004, includes 1,530 +/- acres and includes single-family, multifamily, and neighborhood commercial uses. The Hillsboro PUD, dated November 18, 2004, includes 830 +/- acres and includes provisions for residential (single and multifamily) and shopping center commercial uses. The Hillsboro North PUD, dated December 3, 2007, includes 1,255 +/- acres and allows single-family, multifamily, and planned commercial uses.

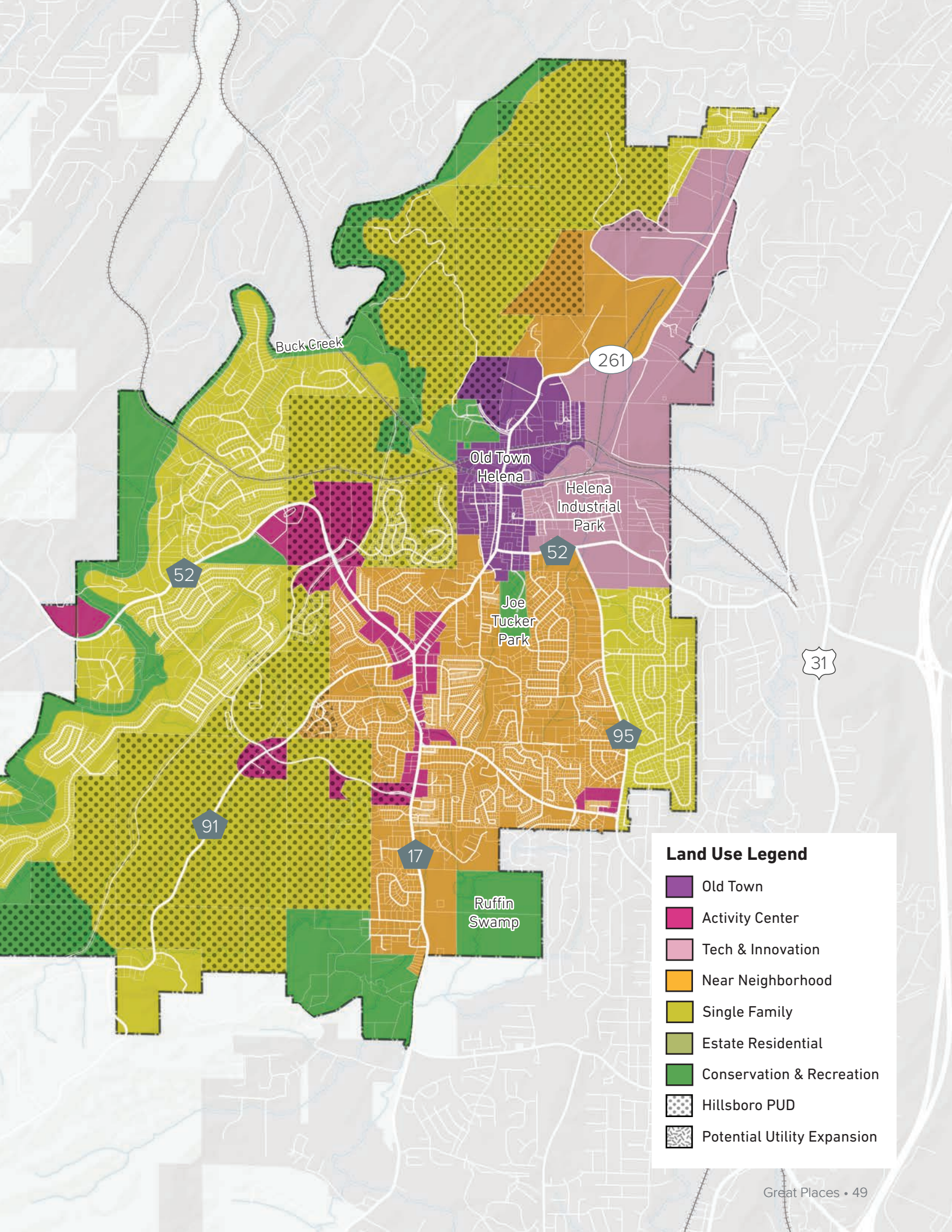
Based on the agreements in place, there is no sunset of these entitlements, and full build-out of any one portion of the overall PUD is likely decades away based on the absorption rate of new residential builds within Helena.



## FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The Future Land Use Map provides guidance on where and how development should occur within Helena using the Land Use Categories established on the previous pages. This map should be used to guide decisions to amend the zoning map. Deviations from this map should be avoided without first updating the Comprehensive Plan to reflect these changes in preference on behalf of the community.





**Land Use Legend**

- Old Town
- Activity Center
- Tech & Innovation
- Near Neighborhood
- Single Family
- Estate Residential
- Conservation & Recreation
- Hillsboro PUD
- Potential Utility Expansion



## Focusing on Old Town

Originally settled in the mid-1800's, Helena has a long and interesting past. During the Civil War, a highly productive steel rolling mill was built to support the Confederate war effort. After the original steel mill was destroyed and the Civil War ceased, growth in the area was fueled by significant railroad activity. Pete Boyle, a surveyor, completed the Helena Station railroad stop, further adding to the growth of what would eventually become Helena. Supported by the steel industry and prosperous coal deposits in the area, Helena quickly became a major contributor to the Birmingham steel industry. These industries and supporting commerce activities created what is now Old Town.

While the steel and coal industries are no longer contributors to the economy of the community, Helena, and Old Town, continue to be a highly desirable location for residents in the region.

Numerous structures originally constructed during the initial settlement of Old Town remain standing today, and define the character of the district which was named to the National Registry of Historic Places in 2006. Old Town is centered along Buck Creek, and Helena Road (SR-261) is the primary thoroughfare through the district.

Development within the district is currently a mix of restaurants, offices, parks, and single-family homes. The streets are oriented in a loose grid configuration with potential for additional connections. Sidewalks are present along Helena Road, but limited elsewhere within the district. Amphitheater Park sits adjacent to Buck Creek and features an amphitheater for outdoor performances. Nearby community facilities include the Helena Sports Complex/Community Center and the Helena City Hall.



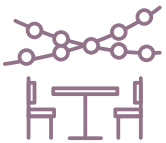




## GOALS FOR GROWTH

*To create a vibrant and attractive Old Town, we aspire to:*

- ★ Build a lively and active district
- ★ Match and extend the character of Old Town through appropriate, well-considered development
- ★ Increase the number of residents within Old Town
- ★ Soften the environment with landscaping and greenspaces
- ★ Humanize streets through streetscaping and re-orienting the pedestrian spine of the district
- ★ Identify and implement public improvements necessary to create a pedestrian-focused environment
- ★ Improve wayfinding within the district



## PRIORITY PROJECTS

*To catalyze the changes necessary to achieve our goals for Old Town, Helena will:*

- ★ Expand the B-4 zoning district that encompasses the entirety of Old Town and allow for increased flexibility of property use
- ★ Focus on programming pedestrian improvements to increase walkability (sidewalks, streetscape, Buck Creek and CSX railroad crossing)
- ★ Create a pedestrian spine along 2nd Street to encourage additional retail / restaurant expansion options
- ★ Encourage and/or incentivize new residential development within Old Town to add residents to the district



## DISTRICT CHALLENGES

*To create a vibrant and attractive Old Town we must address and acknowledge:*

- ★ Helena Road (SR-261) is controlled by the Alabama Department of Transportation, not the City of Helena
- ★ Limited pedestrian connections across Buck Creek and the CSX railroad tracks hinders walkability of the area
- ★ Existing opportunities to live in Old Town are minimal, and are primarily comprised of detached single-family units
- ★ Old Town lacks a cohesive aesthetic and streetscape features that would establish a consistent character throughout the area





# Old Town Revival Concept



Helena Sports Complex and Community Center

Helena Park and Amphitheater

Old Town Public Parking Lot

RUFFIN ROAD

261

2

4


1ST AVENUE

2ND AVENUE

## PRIORITY PROJECTS

- 1 - Expand B-4 zoning district
- 2 - Program pedestrian improvements
- 3 - Create pedestrian spine along 2nd St
- 4 - Encourage residential infill

## LEGEND

-  - Enhanced Pedestrian Crossing
-  - Parks / Sports Fields
-  - Buck Creek Water Access
-  - Proposed Sidewalks
-  - Proposed Roadway Connection



Live-Work Infill



Restaurant // Retail // Office Infill



Missing Middle Housing



Single-Family Infill





## Helena Forward

The Helena Forward initiative is a cooperative effort between the City and U.S. Steel Corporation to develop a new town center style development and sports park within the community. The town center is to include multifamily residences, ground floor retail and office uses, and a dedicated site for a new Helena city hall facility.

While the revival of Old Town is a high priority of the community, securing the space to continue City operations in modern, properly sized facilities must be addressed. The Helena Forward agreement includes dedicated space for a new city hall, provides opportunities for additional housing typologies not currently present in Helena, and offers new retail and office options within walking distance to residents. The town center is part of the overall Hillsboro Planned Unit Development, which designates the location at the southeast corner of County

Road 52 and Hillsboro Parkway for this town center. In addition to providing new residential and commercial options, the existing Hillsboro Trail will be integrated into the site, enhancing the trail network and creating a pedestrian friendly interface into the site. Approximately 16 acres has been designated as the “Town Center Property”.

Also included in Helena Forward a new sports park complex. The park, which is to be developed by U.S. Steel Corporation and conveyed to Helena is approximately 50 acres in size and is to include at least one athletic field and may include other types of fields and amenities. The park is proposed to be located at the southeast corner of County Road 91 and Hillsboro Parkway.



### EXECUTING THE PLAN

*To meet overall development goals established in this plan, the Helena Forward initiative will:*

- ★ Establish a location to construct a new Helena city hall
- ★ Create a pedestrian-focused development typology that can be duplicated in future activity center developments
- ★ Provide additional housing typologies not currently present within the community
- ★ Create additional sports fields and recreational opportunities within the community
- ★ Integrate into the existing trail network, expanding pedestrian access to amenities throughout Helena
- ★ Executed through a Project Development Agreement



### PROJECT DETAILS

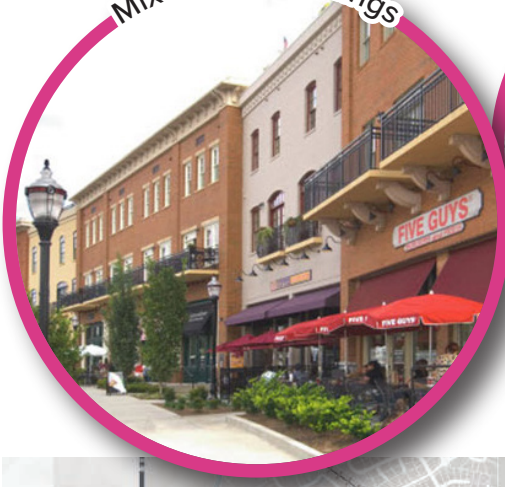
*Town Center Project:*

- ★ 16 acres +/- overall site area
- ★ Multi-family housing located above commercial and retail facilities
- ★ Donation of 0.50 acres from U.S. Steel to Helena for construction of new city hall
- ★ Extension of existing Hillsboro Trail into the Town Center

*Sports Complex Project:*

- ★ To be initially developed by U.S. Steel and conveyed to Helena
- ★ Initial construction to include at least one athletic field (soccer or baseball)
- ★ Overall park to include multiple sports fields, vehicle parking, multiuse trails, and a playground.

Mixed-Use Buildings



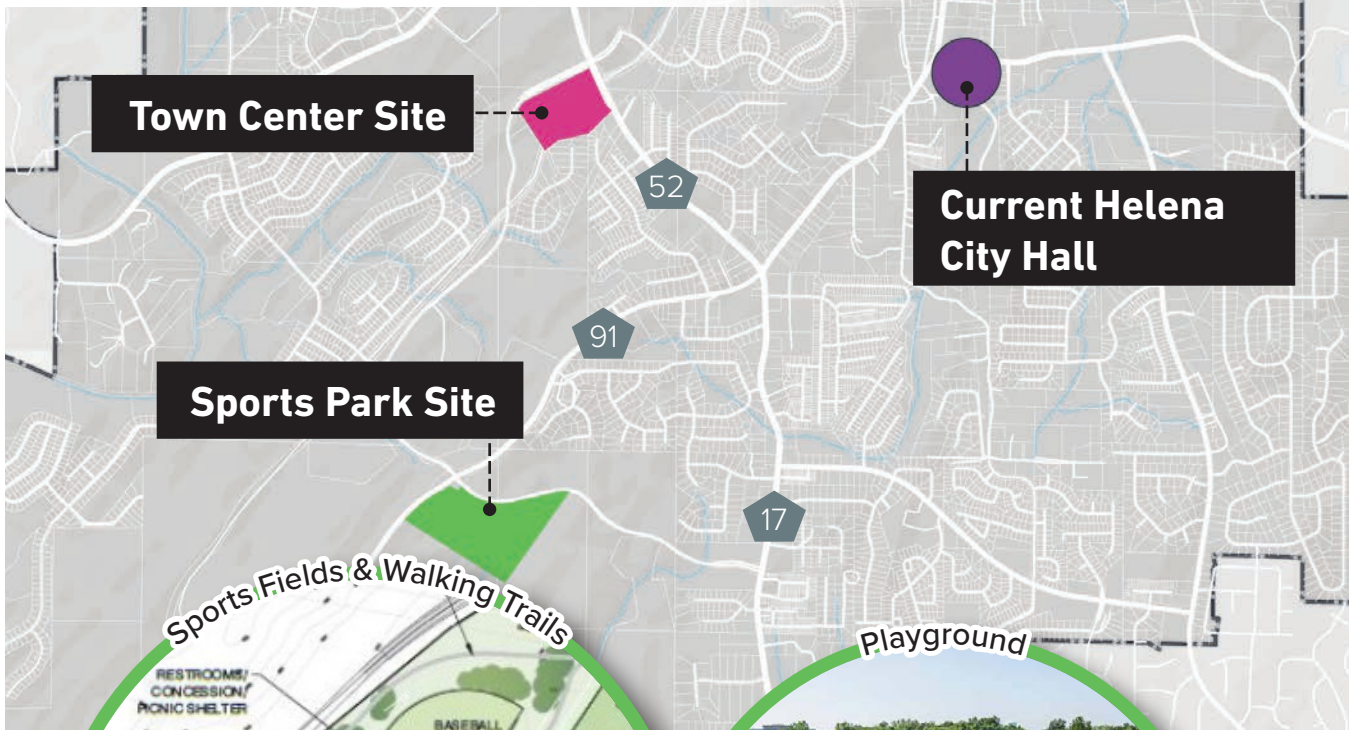
On-Street Parking



Pedestrian Focused



# Helena Forward Concept



Town Center Site

261

Current Helena City Hall

52

91

Sports Park Site

17

Sports Fields & Walking Trails

Playground



# GREAT PLACES ACTION AGENDA

The Comprehensive Plan for One Connected Community is a collection of ideas for future consideration and investment. These initiatives, policies, and programs are referred to as actions. They were chosen for their ability to help the city achieve its vision. This action plan is tailored to Helena's specific circumstances, conditions, and trends. The plan is ambitious, and it will necessitate significant investment, collaboration, and dedication. It represents a long-term strategy that, with continued focus and energy, will contribute to Helena becoming more prosperous and livable in the future. The actions in this chapter are focused on the built and natural environments and cover topics such as land regulation, development review, parks, trails, and more.

**G.01. Support the realization of the community's development principles through various policies and tools.** The community identified a series of expectations for development, investment, and conservation through the One Connected Community process. The city will realize these principles through incremental acts of community development and/or redevelopment. The Conceptual Development Diagram (Page 38) illustrates the principles across Helena.

**G.02. Update and modernize the City's zoning and land development codes.** Conduct a comprehensive review of Helena's zoning and land development regulations. This review should identify opportunities to implement regulations to create the types of places residents desire in Helena. Zones allowing a mix of uses and development typologies should be exercised to achieve the Great Places objectives of Helena. Subdivision and land development regulations should support a mix of housing typologies. Zoning and associated land development regulations are the primary tool to shape the place and character of the community.

**G.03. Monitor the effect of impact fees and update when necessary.** In 2022, the city implemented a schedule of impact fees for new development. These are nominal charges designed to help offset the cost of future infrastructure projects related to the use. The city should monitor the effectiveness of the fees and keep its schedule commensurate with other communities around the region.

**G.04. Hire a full time city planner.** Most communities Helena's size hire a fulltime staff person that is focused on community development and investment. Each development proposal is an opportunity to, incrementally, steer the city in the desired direction based on the community development principles. The planner will help ensure decisions taken by the planning commission and/or city council are based on the best information about the short- and long-term impacts of the development.



**G.05. Develop a traffic impact study requirement for new development.** As Helena continues to grow, it is important that any new development study clearly illustrates its potential impact on the traffic system. There are many issues related to congestion that can be handled with a more effective site plan including access management, signaling, etc. A traffic impact study / statement (TIS) will provide leadership with a clearer understanding on the traffic impact of a new project.

**G.06. Create a community development pattern book.** The quality and character of development is important to the citizens of Helena. Residents are interested in projects that are aesthetically additive and match the level of consideration

given to previous development. A Pattern Book is a visual description of these expectations across various land uses (including types of housing). This sends clear, visual messages to potential investors about the expectations for projects in Helena with respect to architecture, landscaping, and site configuration.

**G.07. Maintain and develop distinctive gateways.** It is important for residents, visitors, and potential investors to understand when they've entered Helena. These gateways are highly-visible opportunities to clearly state the brand and identity of Helena and establish a strong, mental boundary for where Helena stops and starts.

## ZONING AS AN IMPLEMENTATION TOOL

Decisions to change zoning on a property should reference the Future Land Use Map for guidance as to appropriate zoning districts and land uses. Zoning establishes not only allowable uses, but also applicable development standards (setbacks, heights, parking, access, sidewalks) that create a built environment that meets the future goals of the community. Zoning is the law by which all development must abide, so clear and concise language should be used in Helena's zoning code to create the built environment the city expects. Potential changes include:

- » Inventory the existing zoning code in its entirety to ensure the existing development standards match the expectations of the community, as well as the current development environment.
- » Create a specific zoning district for Old Town, or rename the existing B4 zoning district to clarify the uniqueness of this zoning district.
- » Work with property owners to determine the size and extent of the B4 (or renamed) zoning district to encompass the entirety of Old Town as compared to the existing application of the B4 district, which is limited to select properties along SR-261.
- » The overall zoning code for Helena should be simplified by either consolidating similar zoning districts, or removing those districts which are minimally applied and are not well differentiated from similar zoning districts.
- » Once consolidated, appropriate zoning changes should be made to apply these districts in accordance with the adopted Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map.
- » Create a mixed-use "town-center" zoning district that can be readily applied as mixed-use developments are proposed within Helena.
- » Avoid the further use of Planned Unit Development or similar case-by-case zoning decisions as these regulations are difficult to implement and generally do not produce developments that could not occur under standardized zoning regulations.

**G.08. Prepare an annexation and growth strategy based on the community growth framework.** Annexation is a process for physical expansion of the city through the incorporation of county parcels into Helena. The city should only pursue annexations where there is a demonstrable fiscal net benefit and/or where community goals can be addressed.

**G.09. Maintain an ongoing dialogue with planned community developers.** The vast majority of Helena is covered by the Hillsboro planned unit development. A planned unit development (PUD) entitles developers to execute a complicated, multi-use, multi-phase development outside of the traditional zoning process. It is important for the city to maintain a strong connection to the long-term project to anticipate any changes and enter negotiations with a strong understanding of the broader community's goals.

**G.10. Develop a commercial redevelopment playbook.** In the long-term, commercial properties across the city may choose to redevelop. The scale of these projects will vary from a simple re-investment into the existing building or site, to large-scale redevelopment of the parcel where a re-zoning may be necessary. The city should develop a clear guide for these projects that sets strong expectations and provides a visual representation of the community's needs.

**G.11. Explore adopting an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance.** ADUs offer benefits for property owners and renters alike. Properties outfitted with a compliant ADU offer a secondary income stream for property owners living on-site. Renters benefit from having additional options within the marketplace, and due to smaller footprint often offer more affordable options than larger rental complexes. The location, number, and size of these units should be carefully considered to preserve the character of the neighborhoods in which they are permitted.

**G.12. Develop new signage and wayfinding.** Based on the outcome of the community branding and identity initiative, replace and add signage in defined locations to implement the brand of Helena. While likely a phased approach, long-term adherence to this manual will yield a cohesive brand and identity for Helena.

**G.13. Develop a cemetery protection plan to identify, document, and maintain the various grave sites.** Protect and connect the cultural asset for future generations.

**G.14. Enforce regulations within the Cahaba River/Buck Creek (CRBC) Conservation Overlay District.** The purpose of the existing Cahaba River/Buck Creek Conservation Overlay District is to protect the water quality and environmental integrity of the Cahaba River, Buck Creek and its tributaries. This can be achieved through closer review and enforcement of lot size, impervious surfaces, etc.



**G.15. Require the use of package plants by new subdivisions west of the Cahaba River.** Where development precedes the extension of city water and sewer services, septic systems should be packaged to minimize non-point ground water pollution caused by multiple individual lot septic systems.

**G.16. Develop an Old Town Master Plan.** Old Town presents a major opportunity for Helena. The district is the heart of the community and ought to project its strongest image. There is a need to better strategize and align future investments and decision making. The master plan is a community-led process to articulate the goals for the district, lay out a set of guiding principles, and develop an action plan of community investments.

**G.17. Develop a land acquisition strategy for Old Town.** The city has a significant interest in the development or redevelopment of land in Old Town. It should actively engage as these properties enter the market. The city should not seek to hold or “bank” properties, but rather, facilitate transfers to partners who share the community’s vision and can execute projects that enhance the district’s quality of place and vibrancy.

**G.18. Prioritize a pedestrian / bicycle river and railroad crossing in Old Town.** The district is currently disconnected by its primary asset, Buck Creek, and the CSX railroad. In addition to improving pedestrian amenities on Helena Road / SR-261, the city should study an additional multi-use trail bridge connection that would access the expanding trail network and provide a second crossing for walkers and bikers.

**G.19. Establish 2nd Street as the signature street in Old Town.** Helena Road / SR-261 is the city’s primary transportation artery. Further streetscape investments on this road will be difficult without compromising its necessary right-of-way. 2nd Street is parallel to Helena Road, providing rear-facing frontage to existing businesses, and is under City control, allowing for more flexibility of use and improvements.

**G.20. Develop design guidelines and standards for Old Town.** Old Town’s charm comes from its history and quirkiness. When new development occurs, it should match the character of the surrounding district. The city can ensure this requirement through design guidelines and standards. These guidelines would be elaborated on as part of the expanded B4 zoning district standards.

**G.21. Initiate a Blueway ‘Trail’ along Buck Creek and the Cahaba River.** The city can and should tap into its primary assets and develop a “trail” along its two waterways. Investments could include canoe launches at Buck Creek Park, and Highway 52 West, portages in Old Town, etc.

**G.22. Develop a parks, recreation, and conservation master plan.** Helena’s boundaries walk along the edge of the wilderness. The parks plan will identify and work to protect wildlife habitats and establish new ones through the creation of passive parks, bird watching areas, and wildlife corridors and plan for new community parks investments like playing fields, trails, etc.

**G.23. Adopt renewable energy generation regulations.** These regulations should apply to both public and private investments. Availability of renewable power sources increase resiliency, reduces carbon emissions, and can be used to reduce energy bills. These regulations should be verified with subject matter experts, and consider local, Alabama, and Federal laws and incentives.







A photograph of a residential street. In the foreground, a concrete sidewalk leads towards the background. To the right of the sidewalk is a wooden fence. To the left, there is a wooden structure that looks like a trash can or a planter. In the background, a house is visible, and a white car is parked on the street. The image has a greenish tint.

Our Goal for Prosperity ...

In all ways, prosperous.

A community home to anchored and invested local employers, a diversified housing market to meet evolving lifestyle needs of residents, and an openness to visitors—for the day or a lifetime.





# Prosperity

Healthy communities are prosperous communities. The purpose of this chapter is to identify Economic Development initiatives currently underway, establish tools that can be used by business owners to expand opportunities, and provide guidance to create a more prosperous Helena. Topics covered include: Economic development, personal prosperity, housing, and special focus area(s).

## OBJECTIVES

*To achieve our Prosperity goal, we will...*

- ★ Capture more retail spending by increasing and diversifying retail offerings within Helena
- ★ Foster opportunities for local employers to expand within the community
- ★ Create opportunities for economic diversification
- ★ Establish tools and resources and provide technical assistance for entrepreneurs and small businesses
- ★ Monitor and balance fiscal revenue streams
- ★ Expand access to public services to strengthen the links between residents in the east and west portions of Helena
- ★ Expand access to quality, multi-lifestyle housing
- ★ Create opportunities for a multi-generational community
- ★ Embrace ecotourism potential within Helena and across the region
- ★ Evaluate cost and benefits of annexation

# INTRODUCTION

Economic development goals are intended to benefit all residents, workers, business owners, and visitors within Helena. These goals will create a more complete, connected community that provides options for residents of all ages and income levels. Housing diversification will enable residents to age-in-place, and attract the next generation of Helena residents. The special focus area includes Old Town and provides guidance to support existing businesses and attract active storefronts to create a memorable destination enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

This section is organized around Objectives, Key Findings, and Action items. Objectives are measurable outcomes based around broad concepts that align with the City’s larger goals. Key findings are based on analysis of existing conditions within Helena and identify opportunities for the City to work towards its Objectives. Action items are the specific policies or programs Helena can implement to achieve the objectives and overall goals of this Comprehensive Plan. Each topic covered by the plan sets out to define the topic, explain how it is relevant to the City’s continued success, and prescribe actions that will help to achieve the overall vision of the City.

## *Key findings from the process*

The following items represent the key findings and opportunities related to the Prosperity topics, including expanding the employment base, diversifying housing options, and leveraging natural and cultural resources. These findings emerged from the research and analysis of the planning team and input of stakeholders and the public overall.



Helena is growing faster than its peers—from 2010 to 2021, the City added more than 2,800 new residents for an average annual increase of 1.4 percent.



Households in Helena have approximately \$292M in annual retail purchasing power, but Helena retailers only capture \$92M in sales annually.



Over the last decade, 60 percent of net new households in Helena had yearly earnings greater than \$100,000.



Nearly all of Helena’s residents are employed outside of the city (96 percent) with 60 percent driving more than 15 minutes to their place of work.



There has been very limited commercial development since 2010. No new multifamily units or office space has been built and only 10,000 square feet of net new retail space has been delivered.



The largest share of General Fund revenue is from sales tax (43%) followed by licenses/permits (25%) and property tax (15%).



# CONDITIONS & TRENDS

## *Growing population and a changing community*

Between 2010 and 2021, Helena experienced significant population growth at a rate faster than its peers—the City added more than 2,800 net new residents for an increase of nearly 17 percent. This population growth confirms the desirability of Helena, and this growth is projected to continue, although at a slightly slower rate. By 2040, Shelby County is projected to grow by approximately 52,000 residents, a 23 percent increase over current population numbers.

Helena’s population, while increasing steadily, is not growing evenly. While Helena is an attractive community for families with children, with quality schools and ample recreation facilities, only 36 percent of households have school-aged children and the share of family households continues to decrease. Helena has the fastest

growing population of persons aged 50 and older in the region. From 2010 to 2021, its population of residents in this age cohort grew by 1,735, or 47 percent, significantly higher than Pelham experiencing a 35 percent increase, Shelby County a 32 percent increase, and the Birmingham-Hoover MSA experiencing an 18 percent increase.

# 47%

Increase in number of residents age 50+ between 2010-2021

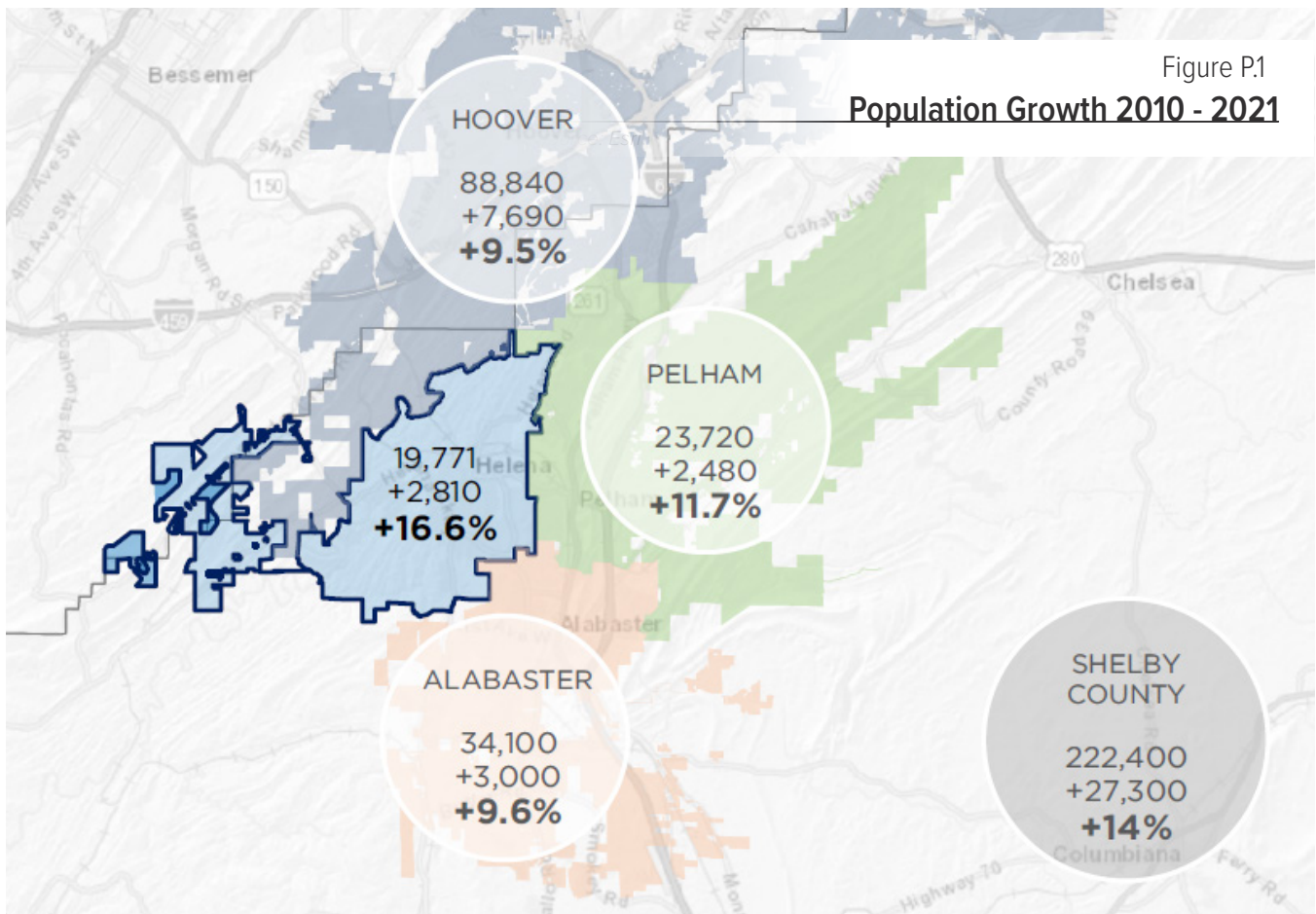
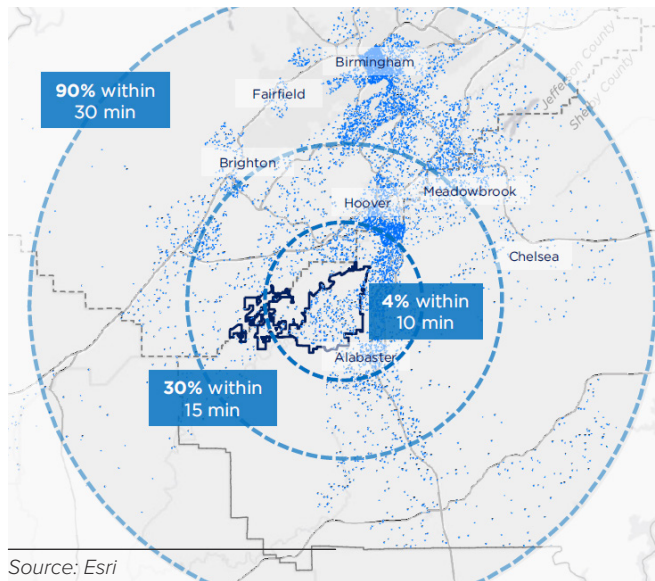


Figure P.2

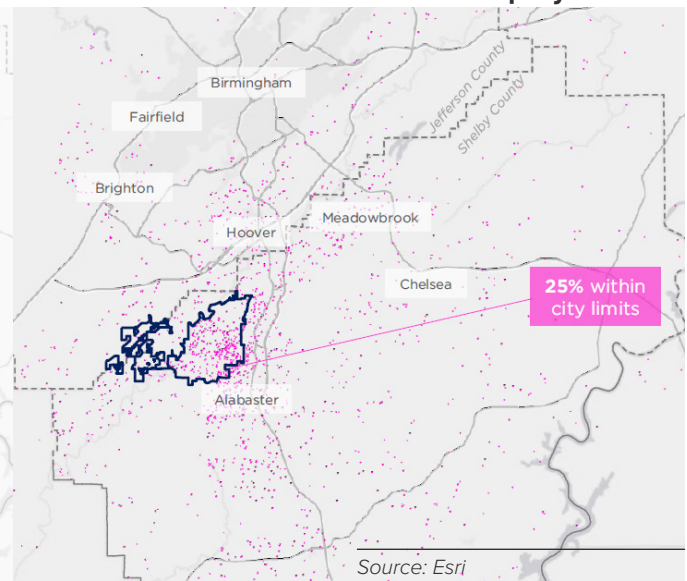
### Where Helena Residents Work



Source: Esri

Figure P.3

### Where Helena Employees Live



Source: Esri

## Personal prosperity and workforce

Helena is becoming increasingly attractive to higher-income households. From 2010 to 2019, the majority of net household growth was among households earning more than \$100,000 annually, while there was generally no change among households earning \$50,000 to \$100,000. During this time period, a total of 1,020 households earning more than \$100,000 moved to Helena for an increase of 60 percent among this income bracket. As with overall population growth, this increase is higher than Shelby County (46 percent increase) and the Birmingham-Hoover MSA (48 percent increase). According to the 2019 five-year estimates of the American Community Survey (ACS), the number of households in Helena earning greater than \$100,000 annually is 2,714.

Helena is a highly educated community with nearly half of residents aged 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree; however, according

to ACS, from 2010 to 2019 there was a net decrease of those younger than 44 with at least a bachelor's degree. Per 2019 Esri data, 33 percent of Helena residents have a bachelor's degree, and 15 percent have a graduate degree or higher. For comparison, only the City of Hoover has a higher number of residents with a bachelor's degree among Helena's peer communities.

Nearly all of Helena's working residents are employed outside the City (96 percent) with nearly 60 percent of those workers driving more than 15 minutes for their jobs. Conversely, only 25 percent of all workers employed within Helena live within the community. The cities of Birmingham and Hoover have the largest concentration of jobs held by Helena residents, which has increased traffic congestion and limited the amount of weekday spending at local retailers. Figures P.2 and P.3 illustrate employee destinations and residences within the region.

96%

of residents employed outside of Helena

60%

increase in households earning more than \$100,000 annually

33%

of Helena residents have a bachelor's degree



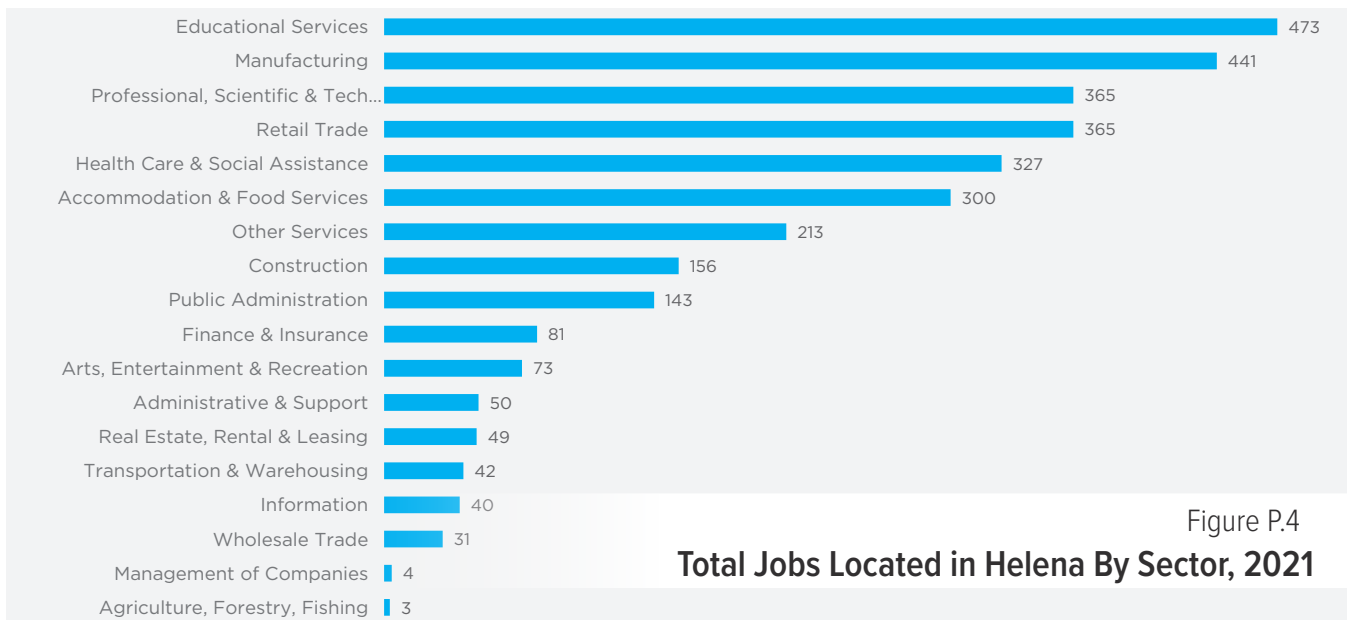


Figure P.4  
**Total Jobs Located in Helena By Sector, 2021**

### Local economic profile

Helena is part of a broader economic ecosystem in which the community’s future growth and prosperity are linked to the overall economic competitiveness and positioning of the Birmingham region. While intraregional migration can support new housing development (e.g., households moving from nearby municipalities to Helena), the general pace of development and future housing demand will primarily be supported by regional economic growth. From 2010 to 2019, the Birmingham region added nearly 50,000 jobs for an increase of just under 13 percent, slightly below national employment growth of 17 percent. Economic growth is expected to slow considerably within the region adding fewer than 26,000 jobs over the next ten years.

According to Esri, of jobs located in Helena, the largest sectors are Educational Services, Manufacturing, Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, and Retail Trade. The largest employment sector within the community is Educational Services, totaling 473 jobs with the majority in Helena’s public schools including Helena Elementary, Helena Intermediate, Helena Middle, and Helena High schools. There are currently no major higher education providers within the community. The next largest employment sector is Manufacturing, with a total

**15%**  
of jobs within Helena  
are in the Educational  
Services sector

of 441 jobs. Many of these employers are located within the Helena Industrial Park along Highway 52 on the east side of the community.

The industrial park is highly utilized, with minimal vacancies, but lacks additional space to support expansion. A summary of all jobs located in Helena by sector can be found in Figure P.4.

There are just under 3,200 jobs in Helena with the vast majority of these workers (2,800) commuting from outside the City. Contributing to the high number of commuters into and out of Helena is the mismatch of wages to housing affordability as approximately 60 percent of the jobs in Helena pay less than \$40,000 annually. Among all workers, average commute times for Helena’s workforce (31.3 minutes) are higher than the regional (26.5 minutes) and state averages (24.9 minutes).

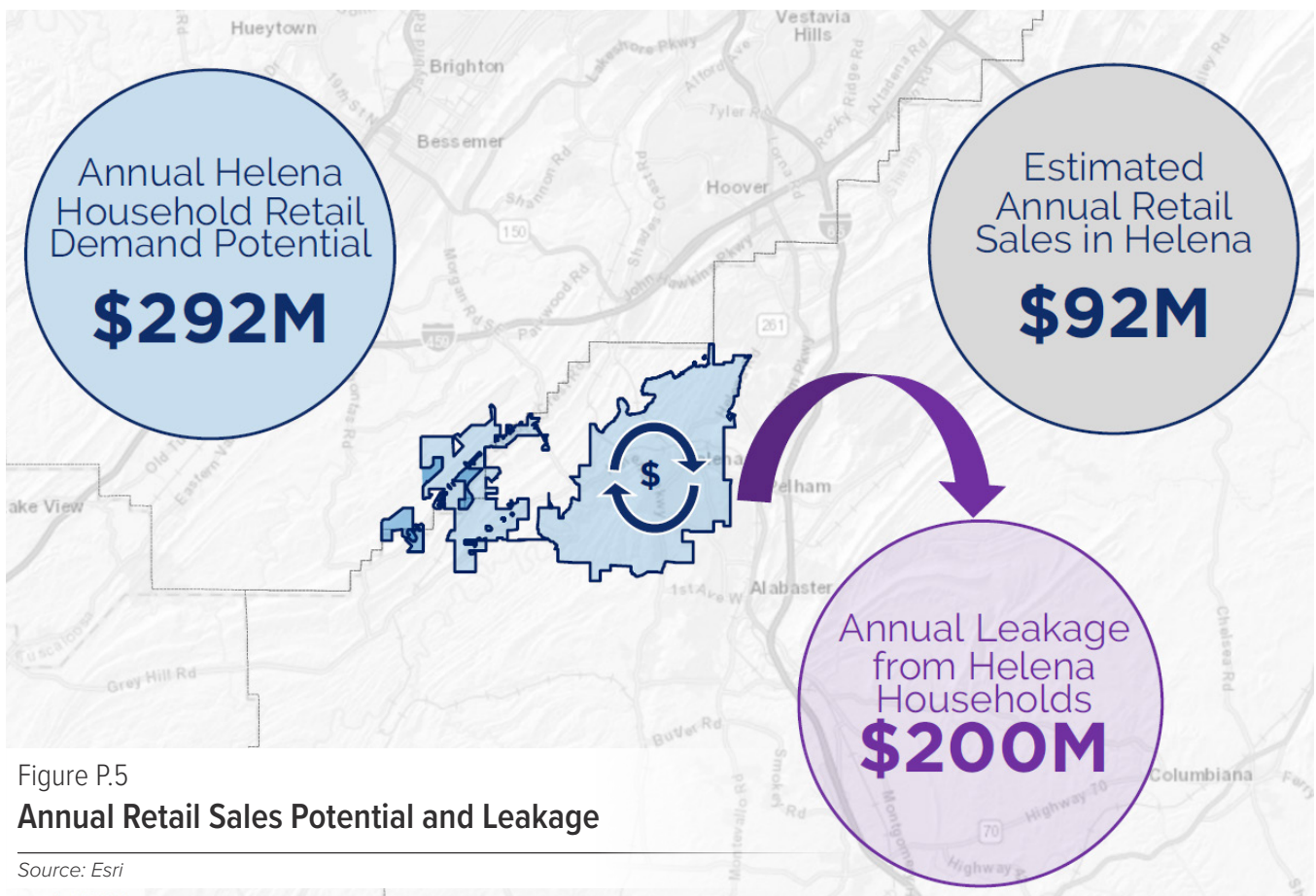


Figure P.5  
**Annual Retail Sales Potential and Leakage**

Source: Esri

### *Fiscal conditions and trends*

Based on information from the City of Helena, in Fiscal Year 2019, Helena generated around 43 percent of its General Fund revenue from sales tax, which highlights the importance of maintaining robust and diversified retail offerings. The market potential for larger-scale retail development is somewhat limited by Helena’s lack of efficient access to US Highway 31 or Interstate 65 and regional competition limits Helena’s ability to expand its customer base from nearby communities or from pass-through traffic. However, a significant share of local buying power is lost to retailers outside of Helena every year. Based on data from Esri, in 2021, households living in Helena have approximately \$292 million in retail buying power, yet there are only an estimated \$92 million in retail sales annually at Helena-based retailers. While most communities tend to have a surplus of retail, this \$200 million gap highlights the fact that Helena residents are spending a lot of money outside of the City, and Helena’s own retailers are not supported by a significant amount of visitors.

In Fiscal Year 2019, only 15 percent of Helena’s general fund revenue was generated from property tax, which can be attributed to it having one of the lowest millage rates (5.0) in the region, limiting resources available to expand services and undertake public projects that would benefit the community. The low millage rate has also limited Helena’s ability to leverage higher-valued construction over the last 10 years. Conversely, 25 percent of the General Fund revenue was derived from licenses and permits, most of which were generated from new construction. While countywide population growth will continue to support new housing development, the pace of development is declining—from 2000 to 2009, more than 19,000 housing permits were issued in Shelby County, with fewer than 10,000 issued from 2010 to 2019. Over the long-term, relying upon new housing development to support such a large share of revenue poses a significant risk to Helena’s fiscal sustainability, making it even more susceptible to recessions and competition from nearby communities for developable land.



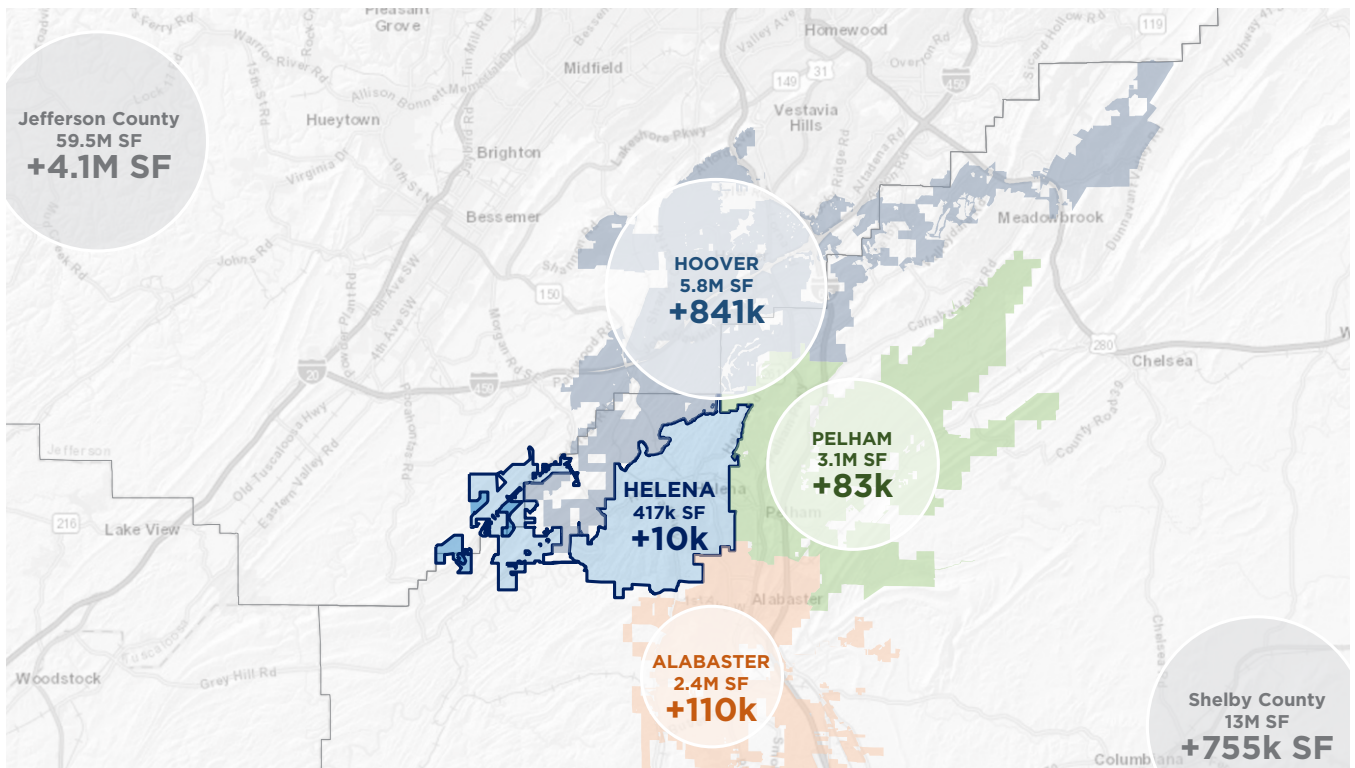


Figure P.6  
**Net New Retail Square Footage (2010-2021)**

Source: CoStar

Figure P.6 illustrates the total stock of retail space and net new deliveries from 2010 to 2021 for Helena, peer communities, and Shelby and Jefferson Counties. Compared to peers in the region, Helena offers significantly less retail space, and only had 10,000 square feet of net new retail space delivered since 2010 (while around 70,000 square feet of space was built, this development effectively replaced obsolete space.) In total, the community offers less than 500,000 square feet of retail space. For comparison, Alabaster, the peer community with the next lowest retail square footage, offers more than five times the amount of retail footprint in Helena.

There has not been any net new development of multifamily units, office, or industrial space in more than a decade. This lack of development directly impacts the operating budget of Helena and the ability of the community to pursue large-scale public improvements or leverage grant funding

to provide additional improvements requested by residents. Boosting sales tax revenue through increased sales within Helena bolsters the long-term financial health of the community.

Figure P.7  
**Helena Revenue Summary**

Source: City of Helena

SHARE OF REVENUE FY 2019		CHANGE IN REVENUE FY 2016 TO FY 2019
<b>43%</b>	<b>SALES TAX</b>	<b>+45%</b>
<b>25%</b>	<b>LICENSES/ PERMITS</b>	<b>+25%</b>
<b>15%</b>	<b>PROPERTY TAX</b>	<b>+16%</b>
<b>13%</b>	<b>ALL OTHER SOURCES</b>	<b>-15%</b>

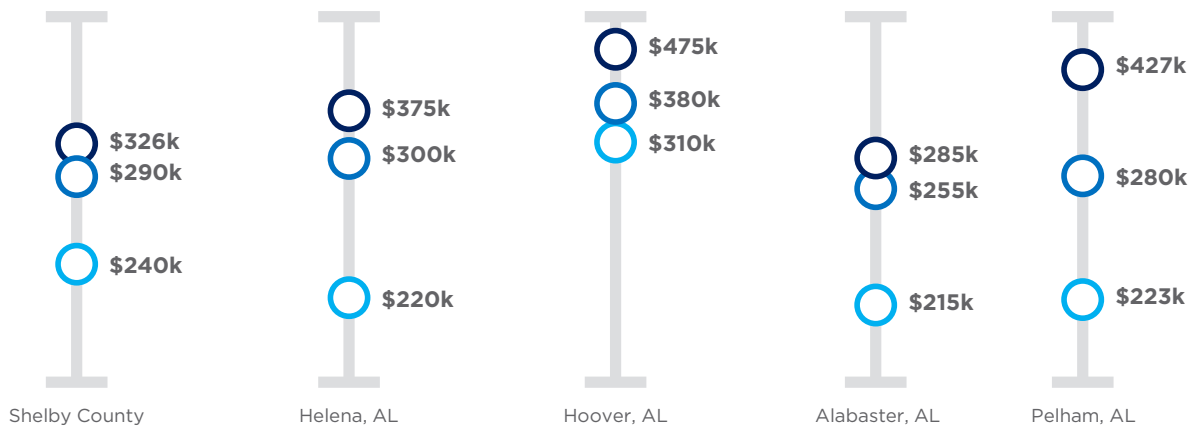


Figure P.8  
**2020-2021 Average Home Sales Price Based on Year Built**

Source: Redfin

## Housing

Strong population growth in Helena has placed pressure on its housing stock, and while housing development has somewhat kept pace with demand, housing built in the last 10 years is considerably larger on average (2,650 square feet compared to 1,700 for homes built before 2000) with much higher sale prices over the last few years (\$375,000 compared to \$220,000 for homes built before 2000). While higher sale

prices should be expected from newer construction, the options are very homogenous. Around 92 percent of the housing stock consists of detached single-family homes and 99 percent when including single-family

**99%**  
 Of available housing stock are single-family products

**92%**  
 Single Family Detached



**7%**  
 Single Family Attached



**1%**  
 Two to Four Unit Homes



**0%**  
 Accessory Dwelling Units

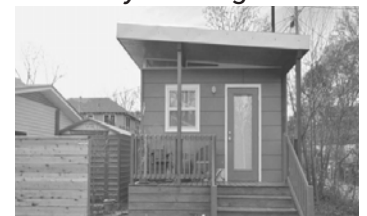


Figure P.9  
**Housing Products Available in Helena**



Figure P.10

**For-Sale Affordability (Median Income)**



To be considered affordable, housing prices should be below thirty percent of Area Median Income. Affordable home prices for the median salary of Helena’s largest job sectors are shown in light blue. Dark blue shows the average price of a existing home in Helena, Shelby County and a New Build in the City of Helena. May people that work in Helena cannot afford to live within the City.

attached homes, well above the share of single-family homes in Shelby County (80 percent) and Birmingham region (73 percent). Hoover, which has median housing values well-above Helena and the region, has a much lower share of single-family homes (69 percent). To meet the changing housing preferences from smaller professional households, smaller family households, and empty-nesters, as well as affordability challenges

for essential workers such as teachers, nurses, and public safety personnel (fire and police), Helena must diversify its housing stock.

Lack of housing options both for sale and for rent limit the ability of long-time residents to move and remain within the community, and creates a challenge for younger residents to move into, or back to, Helena.

0%  
**Courtyard Condos**



0%  
**Multiplex**



0%  
**Live-Work Units**



0%  
**Mid-rise Apartments**



Source: Esri

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The following principles define Helena’s values for maintaining and strengthening its economic position. Collectively, these statements express when, where, and how Helena invests in the future. These statements were identified through examination of most pressing conditions, community stakeholder input, and best practices. The principles are organized around the primary topic of this chapter, economic development.



*As Helena grows and our community continues to evolve, it is our intent that...*

## **Existing employers will be continually supported and better connected to create an economic growth engine.**

- ★ Adequate land areas should be designated to be used for employers (light industrial, office, retail) to expand or locate within Helena.
- ★ Helena administration should ensure that the needs of existing employers within the community are well documented.
- ★ The City should routinely communicate with existing and prospective employers.

## **New and diversified employers will be incentivized to locate within the community.**

- ★ In addition to the existing light-industrial employers, which are to be supported, other employers including medical and commercial office service providers should be pursued.
- ★ Incentives or programs should be implemented to attract new and support existing employers, and could be part of a joint initiative between Helena and other surrounding governmental agencies.
- ★ Helena should regularly study market trends, regional growth, and service gaps to ensure marketing efforts are effective.

## **Community assets such as Old Town, the Billy Gould Coke Ovens, Buck Creek, and the Cahaba River will be leveraged to create a vibrant ecotourism destination.**

- ★ These assets are unique to Helena, and should be celebrated and enlivened with activity.
- ★ Helena should actively partner with outfitters and nonprofits to foster growth of greenway and blueway corridors within the community.

## **Physical development, energy, and activity will be focused to activate and enhance underutilized assets.**

- ★ Development within Old Town should respect the character and enhance the pedestrian environment of the district.
- ★ Improvements near waterways should not impact the quality of the water body, and be designed to resist damage from flooding.

## **A diverse mix of housing typologies will be made available in the City in order to create a multi-generational, multi-lifestyle community.**

- ★ Diverse neighborhoods are an indication of a community open to residents in all stages of life desiring to live within Helena.
- ★ Homes with varying price-points provide opportunities to residents within all employment sectors to live within the community.



- ★ Diversifying housing typologies opens markets to developers not currently active within Helena, and attracts unique housing typologies to the community.

**Mixed-use development will be utilized to diversify types and sizes of commercial spaces within the community.**

- ★ The existing commercial node near the intersection of Helena Road, Coalmont Road, Highway 17, and Highway 52 provides retail and restaurant uses only. There are no residential uses, mixed retail, or office developments.
- ★ Mixing retail and restaurant uses with office space attracts more diverse tenants and additional employers to Helena.
- ★ Mixed-use development is encouraged to include residential uses amongst

the commercial uses to create unique neighborhoods.

**Residents will be able to work within the City.**

- ★ Opportunities for residents to work within the community reduces commute distances and times, allows additional sales tax revenue capture, and enhances the sense of community.

**Access to local healthcare will be available within the City.**

- ★ Designate areas of the community to allow medical office uses.
- ★ Helena should pursue partnerships with local healthcare providers and incentivize development of these uses, as possible.

*Expand local employment base*

Helena, like other municipalities in the region, has significant numbers of residents that commute to Birmingham or other nearby cities for employment. While there are employers within Helena, the City is primarily a “bedroom community” for Birmingham and Hoover. There are plentiful opportunities within Helena to capture additional employees, while simultaneously providing additional amenities to residents of the community.

- ★ **Protect and support the Helena Industrial Park along Highway 52.** Some of Helena’s largest employers, including Vulcan Engineering, ABC Polymers, and MSpark, are located within the designated industrial park, or immediately adjacent to the park, along Highway 52.

- ★ **To ensure continued success of the primary employers within Helena, the City should establish protections for Helena Industrial Park and identify areas within the community for expansion, or establish a new employment center.** Locations for new employment centers or expansions to the Helena Industrial Park should be evaluated to ensure any impacts to surrounding land uses are minimized. Research and development, light manufacturing (assembly / tooling operations), or logistics operations would best fit with existing uses, and draw from a similar talent pool of employees.

- ★ **Actively recruit retailers and restaurants to locate within Old Town and other identified mixed-use centers within Helena.** There is a potential for approximately \$292 million retail demand within Helena; however, approximately \$92 million in retail sales occur within the City.

Plentiful options for dining and shopping will attract additional residents and visitors, and create a more appealing environment for employers to locate within Helena.



★ **Expand employment within Helena beyond the dominant sectors of industrial and retail.**

Helena would greatly benefit from attracting a broader range of employers to diversify employment options within the community. Additionally, this will reduce the number of residents that commute outside Helena each day.

- » Forming a stronger alliance with the Shelby County Chamber of Commerce should be a priority. Shelby County has an existing

Chamber of Commerce that can be engaged within Helena to allow for partnerships with adjacent municipalities and consolidate resources within a single group.

- » Adding additional employees within the community will provide better support for existing businesses throughout the work week, as opposed to mornings and evenings as residents commute to and from work each day.

## *Diversify housing options*

Helena's existing housing stock is dominated by single-family residences. Detached single-family residences comprise 92 percent of the housing stock, and 7 percent are attached single-family homes (primarily townhomes with garages) for a total of 99 percent single-family units in the community.

★ **Since 2010, residences built within Helena are significantly larger and draw substantially higher sale prices than homes built in previous decades.**

Homes built prior to 2000 (1,700 SF average) are almost 1,000 square feet smaller on average than homes currently being constructed (2,650 SF average). These larger homes, and their higher sales prices, limit options for current and prospective residents to move within and to Helena.

★ **To create a multi-generational, multi-lifestyle community, Helena should identify areas for multifamily housing (townhomes, condominiums, flats, multiplexes) that match the character and scale of Helena to provide additional housing options.**

The preference of the community is to include these diversified housing topologies within mixed-use activity centers to create neighborhoods that are walkable and minimize reliance on personal automobiles.

## *Leverage natural and cultural resources*

Buck Creek and the Cahaba River present unique opportunities to the community which have not been fully leveraged to attract visitors to Helena. These water bodies should be utilized to create an ecotourism program within the City. Additionally, specific assets such as the former coke ovens, the Cahaba Wildlife Management Area, the Ruffin Swamp, and the nature trails within Helena affords the opportunity to expand the city-wide trail system for use by residents and visitors alike.

★ **Creation of a formalized greenway and blueway trail system signifies the intent of Helena to focus on connecting to natural resources, and allows businesses within the community to advertise these unique assets to draw additional customers.**

★ **Activation of these natural and cultural assets will attract outfitters to the community, filling a gap in current retail and experience offerings within Helena.**

★ **Creation of a robust ecotourism sector has secondary benefits for Helena businesses.**

Tourists visiting for the day to explore the natural assets will shop and dine in local establishments. In turn, additional businesses will locate within Helena to capture spending within this sector.



Page intentionally left blank

# PROSPERITY ACTION AGENDA

The Comprehensive Plan for One Connected Community is a collection of ideas for future consideration and investment. These initiatives, policies, and programs are referred to as actions. They were chosen for their ability to help the City achieve its vision. This action plan is tailored to Helena's specific circumstances, conditions, and trends. The plan is ambitious, and it will necessitate significant investment, collaboration, and dedication. It represents a long-term strategy that, with continued focus and energy, will contribute to Helena becoming more prosperous and livable in the future. The actions in this chapter are focused on economic development, housing, and other related topics.

## P.01. **Work to establish and advertise Helena as an ecotourism destination.**

Given the lack of well-placed boat launches or outfitters for recreational uses, Buck Creek and the Cahaba River are untapped assets for the community. Promoting Helena as an ecotourism destination can have multiple positive impacts on the community. Increased visitation can provide market support for 1) enhanced recreational amenities and resources that can then be enjoyed by Helena residents, 2) new small business opportunities for local entrepreneurs, especially near Old Town, and 3) added sales tax revenue for the City. Finally, increasing awareness and appreciation of these natural assets can support their long-term protection and preservation.

Key next steps include: The identification and mapping of publicly-accessible potential boat launch areas with particular focus on Amphitheater Park. The creation of an ecological review board and a waterway advocacy group is important. The boards should have participation from the public, private sector, non-profit establishments (Freshwater Land Trust, Cahaba River Society, and others) as well as community members, Shelby County, and engagement with regional canoeing/kayaking outfitters. Long-term efforts should include planning launch points to support small businesses.

## P.02. **Increase the municipal millage rate to bring Helena in line with regional peers.** Helena has one of the lowest millage rates in Shelby County at 5.0, which has limited the City's ability to expand services and provide additional investments in parks, recreation amenities, and other community amenities. The low millage rate has also limited the City's ability to leverage the higher-value residential construction that has been built over the last 10 years.

The City should explore increasing its millage rate to be more consistent with its regional peers (millage rates for Alabaster and Pelham are 10.0 and 14.0, respectively), but in a way that is incremental to avoid administrative or legislative barriers and minimize hardship for property owners. The City should form a task force that will evaluate the following: the municipal code, a millage increase program, the projection of near-term and long-term revenue, and the establishment a communication and community outreach plan.



**P.03. Review various permit, application, and user fees in an ongoing way.**

Helena generates around a quarter of its General Fund revenue from licenses and permit fees, highlighting the importance of routinely evaluating historic trends of this revenue stream. An internal audit of permitting fee structures and historic revenue should be conducted every 5 years and performance metrics should be established (such as a permitting dashboard) for evaluating current and projecting future revenue. The City should also research fees and revenues for its peer communities throughout Shelby County to understand its relative positioning and evaluate future changes.

**P.04. Continue to pursue rational contracting of City services.**

As Helena continues to grow its population, employment opportunities, and retail amenities, City government will need to expand its services and invest in infrastructure and community amenities to maintain its high quality of life. As with any organization, there are economies of scale to staffing and providing services. Given the City's growth, it should routinely evaluate its current staffing and contract expenditures by department and determine where full-time staffing would increase capacity and provide greater efficiencies for delivering services.

**P.05. Continue to support the operation and full build-out of the Helena Industrial Park.**

Helena has around 400,000 square feet of industrial space, of which 330,000 square feet is contained within the industrial park just east of Old Town. According to Esri, the industrial park supports about 300 jobs, or around nine percent of total employment within the City. There has not been any new speculative (leasable) industrial space built in the City for more than a decade. Conversely, there has been new industrial development activity just beyond the City limits in the nearby communities Pelham, Bessemer, and Saginaw. The marketability for larger-scale industrial development—buildings with more than 100,000 square feet occupying at least 15 acres—is limited by the City's lack of direct access to regional arterial roadways.

The City should explore smaller-scale industrial development opportunities and the potential for linking to the regional rail network. Expanding its industrial employment base would further diversify the local economy, while supporting regional economic development efforts. The City should conduct a capacity analysis of the current industrial park and engage and align with regional industrial development organizations, like 58 INC, to support site selection, recruitment of key clusters, and marketing efforts.

**P.06. Explore new governance structures and partnerships for supporting citywide economic development efforts.** Future economic development efforts in Helena should be strategic and intentional. The City should develop an economic strategic plan that outlines specific economic goals and objectives and an action plan for Helena with performance metrics and annual reporting of accomplishments. Key components to the strategy should include real estate development, workforce development, business attraction and retention, marketing and recruitment, alignment with regional economic goals and objectives, and partnerships with regional economic development entities. Historically, the Economic Development Board had been tasked with promoting, developing, and growing the City's economy in close conjunction with the Mayor and City Council, but the City should explore a smaller board structure that works in close conjunction with 58 INC. A decided staff person such as an economic developer director should be considered for initiating, developing, and implementing the strategic plan.

**P.07. Create more opportunities for medical and professional office space development.** Helena has around 70,000 square feet of dedicated office space, which was built more than 15 years ago. The lack of new office development has not only limited the City's ability to grow knowledge-based employment opportunities, such as finance and technical services, but it has also limited the availability and expansion of healthcare providers within the community. Given the weak office market countywide—only 29,000 square feet of office space has been built in Shelby

County since 2010. The City should explore ways to better integrate office and medical uses within retail and mixed-use districts to diversify the local economy and provide expanded healthcare for residents. The City should evaluate the permitting process for these types of uses and engage with local developers and property owners to reposition and/or repurpose aging or obsolete commercial buildings.

**P.08. Review home occupation section of zoning ordinance in light of recent Work-From-Home trends.** In 2015, approximately two percent of Helena's workforce worked from home, or 200 workers, but in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the share increased to 7.3 percent (or 700 workers), consistent with national trends. While it is uncertain how workforce dynamics and commuting patterns will change post-pandemic, the number of telecommuters has been increasing incrementally over the last decade and the pandemic in many ways unlocked the possibilities of remote work across numerous industries. Helena should not only accommodate these trends, but also explore ways to permit and even encourage smaller at-home business operations at a reasonable scale. The City should align efforts with 58 INC and explore opportunities for creating more shared office space, such as co-working spaces, and enhancing broadband infrastructure. Increasing the share of telecommuters in the city would not only reduce the number of vehicles on local roadways during peak commuting times, but also create more support for local retailers.



## P.09. Explore strategic land assembly to support redevelopment activity.

Often the greatest barrier to strategic real estate development is access to land or sites with the capacity for catalytic impact. This is especially critical for investments in key mixed-use nodes and corridors. While communities generally have little influence over the future development of privately owned land, when land or underutilized properties are under public ownership, they can be redeveloped through a request for proposals (RFP) process that incorporates strategic community vision, goals, and objectives. Helena should identify strategic reinvestment areas and establish an acquisition strategy that can incrementally assemble land over the long term. The City should leverage existing land holdings and explore tools for acquisition, including direct purchase or working with other public entities as well as engaging with property owners.

## P.10. Develop a fiscal model to evaluate land use decisions.

Real estate has a net positive impact on General Fund revenues through permit, application, and user fees during development and from future property taxes. Citywide fiscal benefits are also generated by sales tax revenue from local spending by households, workers, and visitors. Therefore, the size, density, and use of real estate development can return varying levels of general fund revenue that are then offset by government expenditures for infrastructure investment and services. The City should develop a fiscal impact model for evaluating land use decisions that considers revenues and expenses by use, density, and location.

## P.11. Develop and maintain a commercial property inventory.

With more than 40 percent of the General Fund revenue generated from sales tax and 96 percent of the city's workforce commuting outside of the City for their jobs, there is a critical importance to maintaining and expanding the commercial real estate supply—adding supply would help diversify retail offerings and grow the employment base. The City should take a proactive approach for monitoring commercial leasing, sales, and development activity and provide support and technical assistance to owners with aging or obsolete properties. The City should ensure that its inventory of leasable commercial space is on the EDPA's Advantage Alabama portal and should align with and leverage 58INC's marketing resources and commercial real estate network. The City should also support owners seeking reinvestment or redevelopment of their properties.

**P.12. Develop an annexation evaluation model.** As the City explores the expansion of its municipal boundaries, it should not only evaluate the costs and benefits for expansion, but also how annexation can meet broader community goals and objectives. The cost-benefit analysis component should document future costs for infrastructure expansion and providing municipal services and how these costs can be recovered over the long term by future development fees and tax revenues. The City should also apply a strategic lens to the evaluation that considers quality of life and other community benefits that may outweigh net costs. In some cases annexation may not generate a fiscal benefit, but it could move citywide strategic goals forward.

**P.13. Support the development of a diversified housing stock.** Around 91 percent of Helena’s housing stock consists of detached single-family homes. Additionally, homes built since 2010 are significantly larger on average—2,650 square feet compared to an average of 1,700 square feet for those built before 2000—with sale prices well-above the median home value. While this newer housing stock is positioned to meet the preferences of more affluent family households, there are very few housing opportunities for long-standing residents to downsize (e.g., empty nesters or elderly households) or smaller professional households—such as nurses, teachers, or recent new residents—who are seeking higher-quality rental housing. In most cases, these households have to seek out housing in Hoover or other neighboring communities. There is a risk that without a diversified housing stock, the City will not be able to support the needs of a multi-generational community. The City should adapt more flexible zoning

and development standards for encouraging high-quality rental, attached, and/or smaller-lot housing, and promote co-location of housing with retail, office, civic, and/or recreational uses in key nodes and mixed-use districts.

**P.14. Preserve older neighborhoods and support housing affordability.** Helena has experienced considerable residential development activity over the last decade with newer homes selling well-above \$400,000. While this development activity is a testament to the desirability of the community, some of its older housing stock—homes built before 1990—are showing signs of age and deferred maintenance. This older housing stock provides starter homes and more affordable housing opportunities for middle class households, but there is a risk that without targeted intervention and neighborhood stabilization efforts, conditions could significantly decline over the next 20 years impacting the marketability and quality of life of the community as a whole.

The City should take a proactive approach and conduct a citywide housing needs assessment and target key neighborhoods for stabilization efforts. Interventions could include targeted public realm improvements as well as direct property owner assistance.

**P.15. Attract postsecondary institutions for providing continuing education and other adult learning.** Helena is heralded for its high-quality K-12 school system, but there are very few local resources for adult education such as continuing education courses and technical training. A postsecondary institutional presence would not only enhance quality of life and broaden enrichment opportunities for Helena residents, but also attract non-residents that would provide additional market support for retailers. Community colleges or satellite campuses of larger institutions can also provide leasing opportunities for commercial space and can be incorporated as part of mixed-use districts. The City should engage with regional institutions to understand their potential expansion efforts and real estate needs as well as property owners, developers, and brokers for facilitating future development and leasing opportunities.

**P.16. Identify locations for expansion of the Helena Industrial Park 2.0.** In addition to the full build-out and expansion of Helena’s existing industrial park, the City should explore alternative locations to accommodate demand. The City should engage with regional economic development organizations—including Shelby County Economic Development Corporation and 58INC—to evaluate demand and align future development with regional strategic goals, including identification of key industrial target clusters, development trends, and site selection metrics.

**P.17. Develop the Helena community brand and marketing plan.** Helena is renowned for its quality housing, parks, and schools, but has the potential for also being a regional visitor destination. Given the significant importance of retail sales to support its General Fund revenues, the City needs to “sell” itself as a destination, while promoting its history, culture, and identity. Developing a community brand and marketing plan would directly support its small business community in terms of increasing the customer base for existing businesses and unlocking new entrepreneurial opportunities. The City should leverage its recreational amenities, promote ecotourism, and support business growth in and around Old Town.



A black and white photograph of a residential street. In the foreground, a concrete sidewalk runs from the bottom center towards the middle ground. To the right of the sidewalk is a wooden fence that runs parallel to it. To the left of the sidewalk is a dark, leafy bush. In the middle ground, a road with a white car and another car further down is visible. In the background, there are trees and a house with a gabled roof. The overall scene is a quiet residential neighborhood.

Our Goal for Connections ...

“One community, well connected.”

Physical connections bring our city closer together, and we invest in our trails, streams, and roads. We create opportunities for the full community to come together regularly and know our neighbors - new and old.





# Connections

Accessible communities are well connected. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight existing and desired community facilities, inventory public infrastructure and the responsible agencies, and propose connection improvements to foster a more accessible Helena. Topics covered include: Community facilities, infrastructure, mobility (transportation), and special focus area(s).

## OBJECTIVES

*To achieve our Connections goal, we will...*

- ★ Pursue projects that improve the flow and efficiency of Helena’s vehicular network
- ★ Maintain visibility and volume in regional transportation planning and discussions
- ★ Expand mobility options within the community to include active transportation (walking, bicycling, hiking, canoeing/kayaking)
- ★ Enhance walkability and bikeability in special districts like Old Town
- ★ Connect residents and visitors to community assets and facilities
- ★ Continually evaluate and emphasize safety for walkers, bikers, and drivers in projects
- ★ Modernize and expand community facilities
- ★ Inventory existing transportation infrastructure, the responsible party for maintenance and improvements, and take action to enhance connectivity within Helena
- ★ Continue to fund and grow programs, events, and activities that create opportunities for the community to come together

# INTRODUCTION

Connections are both physical and psychological. All connections should have the ultimate goal of creating One Connected Community. Connections between and development of new community facilities will help evoke a sense of place, and provide physical linkages that did not previously exist. Connecting pedestrians to Old Town, Buck Creek, and the Cahaba River will activate various currently underutilized assets, and attract a wider variety of secondary uses to support these connections. Additionally, creating ties between community assets strengthens the overall identity of Helena and, in turn, diminishes the psychological disconnect between “east” and “west”. This disconnect is a top concern from participants in community outreach.

This section is organized by Objectives, Key Findings, and Action items. Objectives are measurable outcomes based on broad concepts that align with the City’s larger goals. Key findings are based on an analysis of existing conditions within Helena and identify opportunities for the City to work towards its Objectives. Action items are the specific policies or programs Helena can implement to achieve the objectives and overall goals of this Comprehensive Plan. Each topic covered by the plan sets out to define the topic, explain how it is relevant to the City’s continued success, and prescribe actions that will help achieve the overall vision of the City.

## Key findings from the process

The following items represent the key findings and opportunities related to the Connection topics, including future conditions, city-wide transportation strategies, capacity projects, bicycle/pedestrian projects, connecting Old Town, Connecting Our Community Assets, Neighborhood Connections, and Regional Connections. These findings emerged from the research and analysis by the planning team and the input of stakeholders and the public overall.



There are no current functional access points to activate Buck Creek and the Cahaba River. While Buck Creek bisects Old Town, there are no facilities providing access to the water, such as a waterfront trail or kayak/canoe launch.



Old Town lacks connectivity for all forms of transportation other than automobiles. Pedestrians and cyclists have limited mobility around the area.



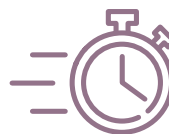
Developments within Helena are distinctly separated. Most commercial properties have individual ingress/egress points, with few sharing roadway access or automobile parking.



Helena is geographically separated by the topography and geography in the area. This has led to a diluted feeling of community between the east and west portions of the City.



Major thoroughfares through Helena, including those through commercial activity centers, do not include sidewalks. This leads to the automobile being the only convenient choice when moving through the City.



To maintain the community character, the preference of residents and leadership is to avoid roadway widening projects and plan for focused improvements to increase efficiency.



# CONDITIONS & TRENDS

## *The impacts of geography*

Helena is geographically separated by its hills or topography along with other natural features like waterways. This has led to a reduced feeling of community connection, especially between the east and west portions of the city. The portions of Helena west of the Cahaba River are generally identified as “West Helena” based on input received during community outreach. There are approximately 3,600 people, or approximately 16 percent of the total Helena population, that reside within Helena west of the Cahaba River.

Portions of Helena generally east of the Cahaba River are considered “East Helena” and have a population of approximately 17,900. Adding to the diluted feeling of community is that parts of Helena west of the Cahaba River fall within Jefferson County, as opposed to Shelby County.

While the geography of the area cannot be changed, establishing new connections throughout the community using waterways, multi-use trails, and sidewalks will help to bridge these gaps currently perceived by residents of the community.



## PRIORITIZING THE PATHWAY

Helena has the opportunity to better connect its neighborhoods through strategic investments in its sidewalks and trails infrastructure. The City has made progress over the last decade in extending this system, and the One Connected Community plan suggests building on this momentum. Connections are key to building the network, and not just for recreation. A well-connected multi-use trail network can provide safe, internal mobility options for individuals and families as they move around the community. Connections to schools, activity centers, and neighborhoods are critical and will only add to Helena’s high quality of life.



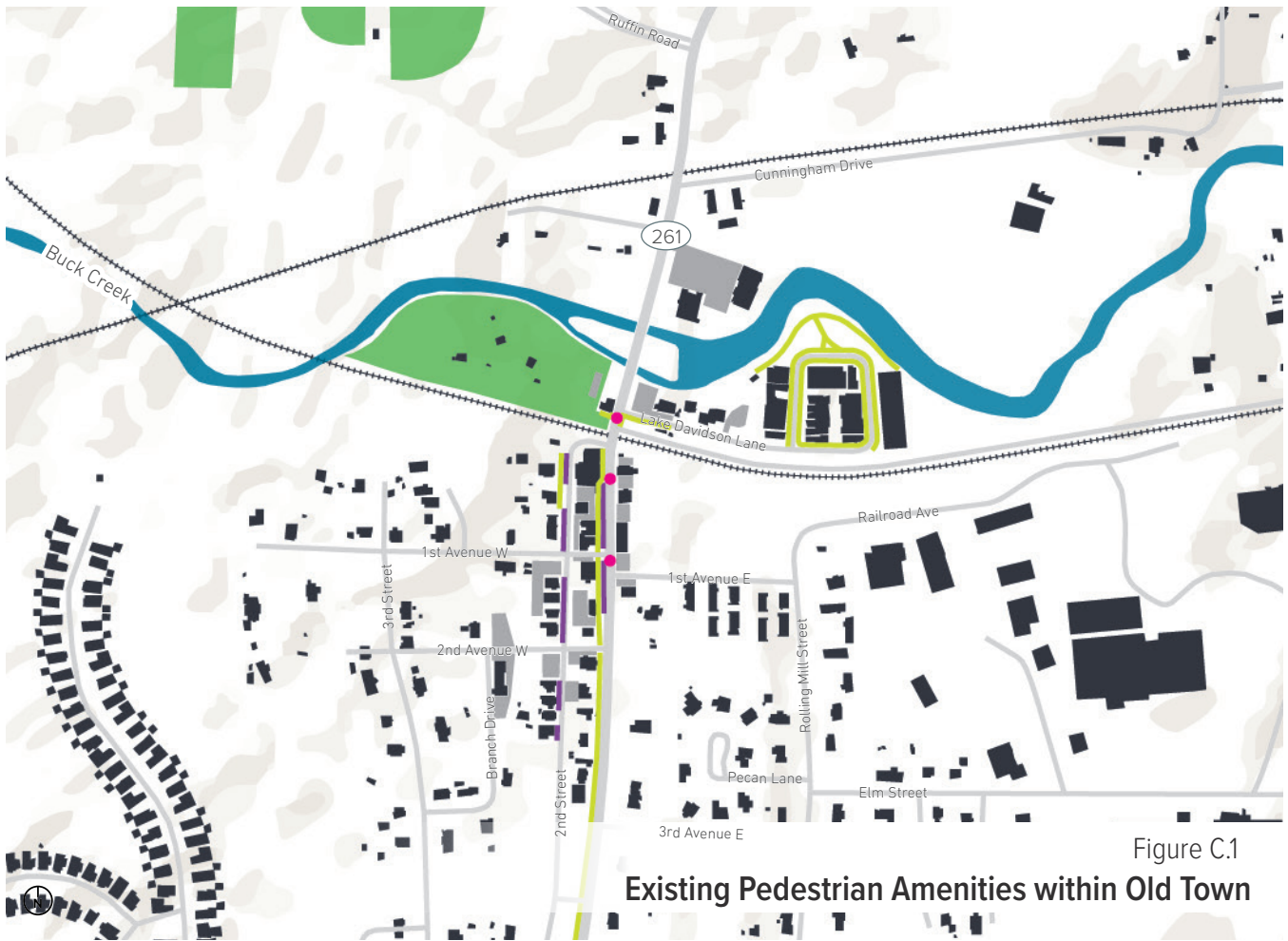


Figure C.1

### Existing Pedestrian Amenities within Old Town

#### LEGEND

- Designated Crosswalk
- Sidewalk
- On-Street Parking
- Off-Street Parking
- Building Footprint
- Park / Sports Fields

### Connecting to Old Town

Although much of Old Town was constructed prior to the advent of the automobile, the district lacks connectivity for all forms of transportation other than automobiles. Within the district, pedestrian connectivity is problematic as there is no pedestrian connection across Buck Creek or the CSX Railroad.

Within the district, sidewalks are present along Helena Road (SR-261) on the south side of Buck Creek from Railroad Avenue to just south of 1st Avenue East on both sides of the road. The sidewalk along Helena Road on the west side of the roadway continues south and terminates at 2nd Street, near Helena Elementary School. There are currently no sidewalks present north of Buck Creek. The existing sidewalks along SR-261 within Old Town are too narrow to support outdoor seating for restaurants, or outdoor displays for retailers.



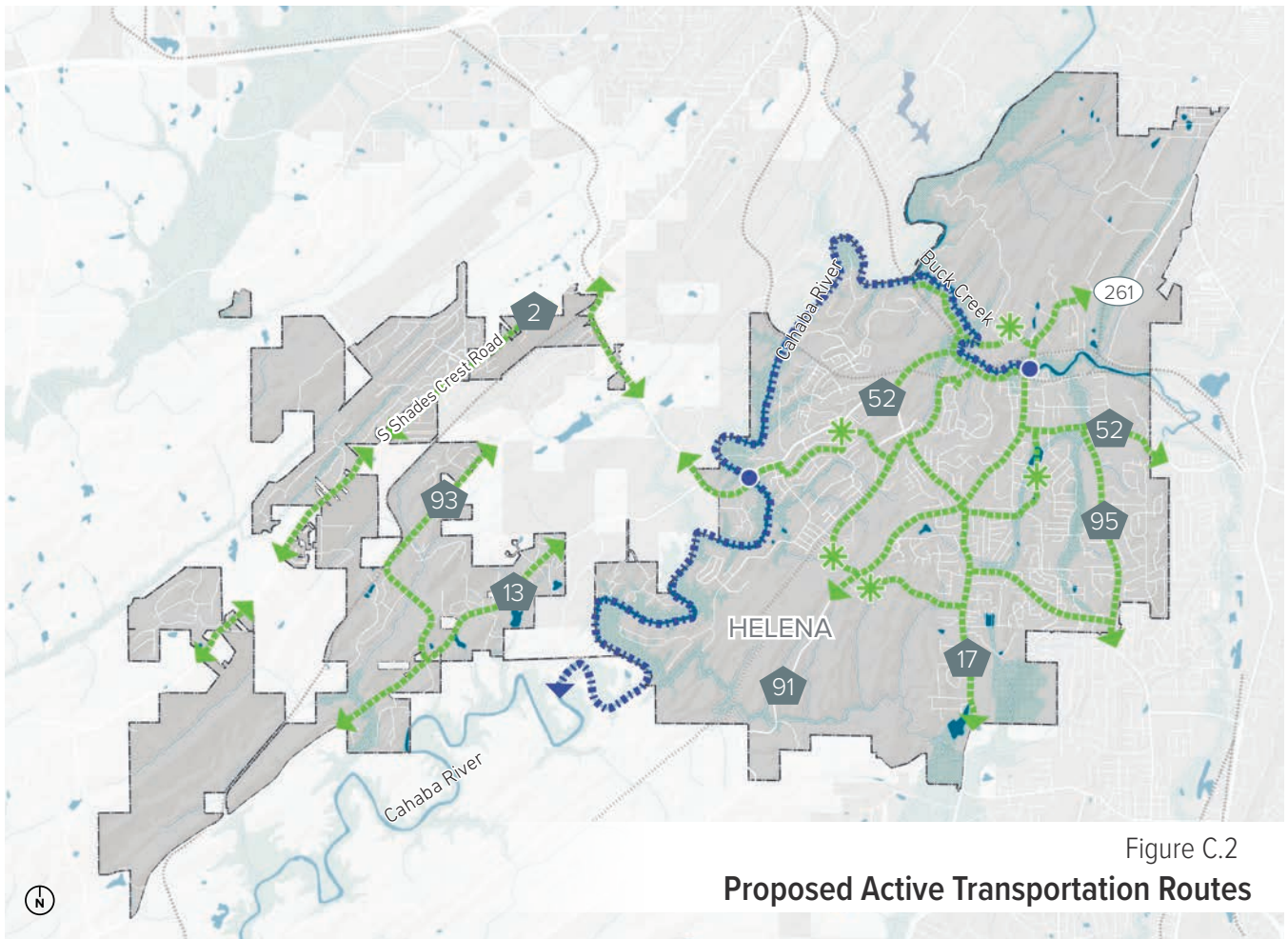


Figure C.2  
Proposed Active Transportation Routes

### *Pedestrian connectivity*

Pedestrian access to existing activity centers is extremely limited within Helena. Major thoroughfares through Helena, including those through commercial activity centers, do not include sidewalks. This leads to the automobile being the only convenient choice when moving through the City.

While many single-family subdivisions constructed since 2000 have sidewalks, most older subdivisions do not include sidewalks or other pedestrian facilities. Based on high-level analysis, there appears to be sufficient right-of-way to accommodate installation of sidewalks.

### LEGEND

- Proposed Greenway
- Community Connection Point
- Proposed Blueway
- Blueway Connection Point



## LEGEND

-  RPCGB B-Active Plan Segments
-  Existing Trails and Greenways
-  Existing Bike Accommodation
-  Proposed Bike Accommodation
-  Existing Pedestrian Accommodation
-  Proposed Pedestrian Accommodation
-  Existing Sidewalks
-  Proposed Buck Creek Trail

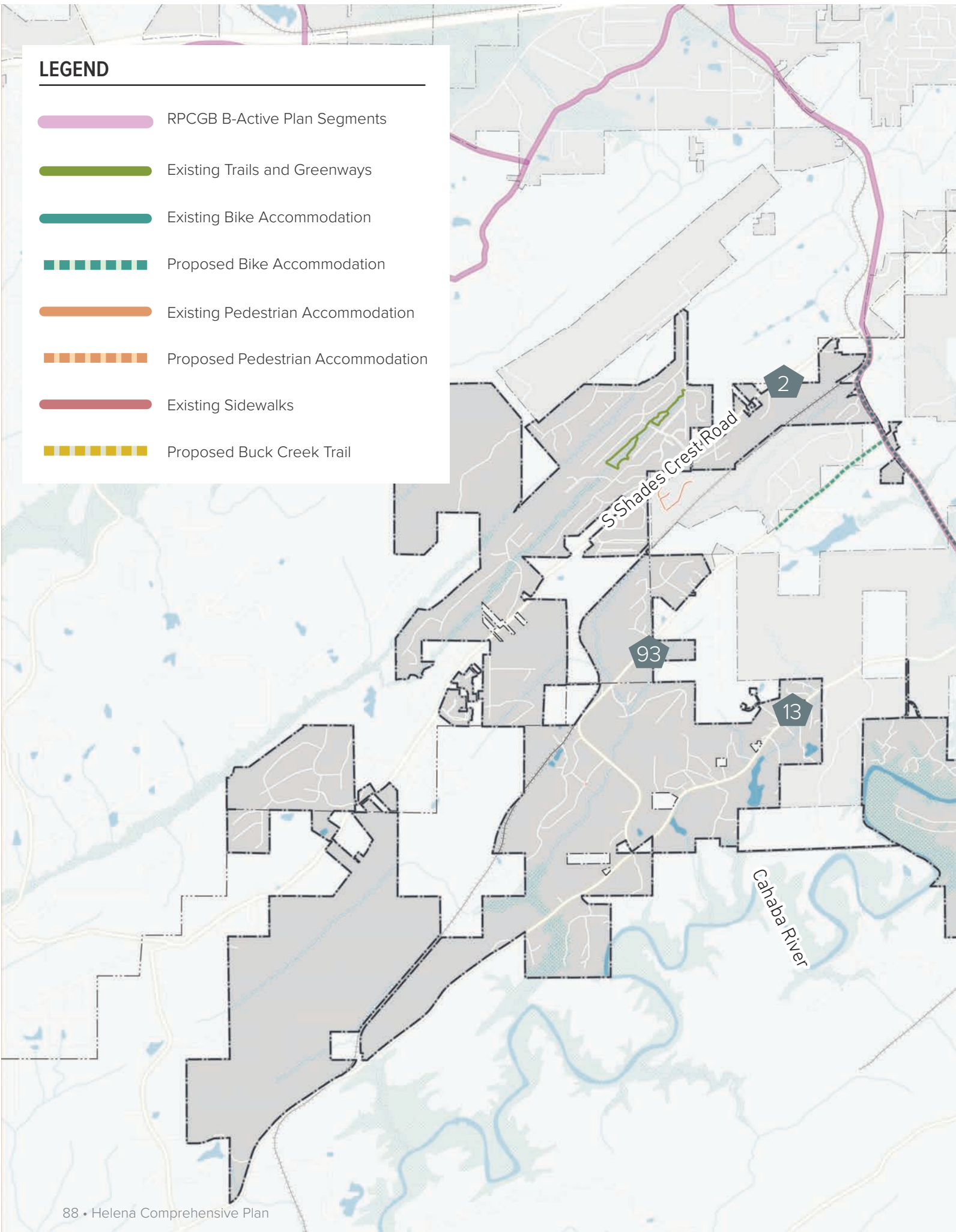
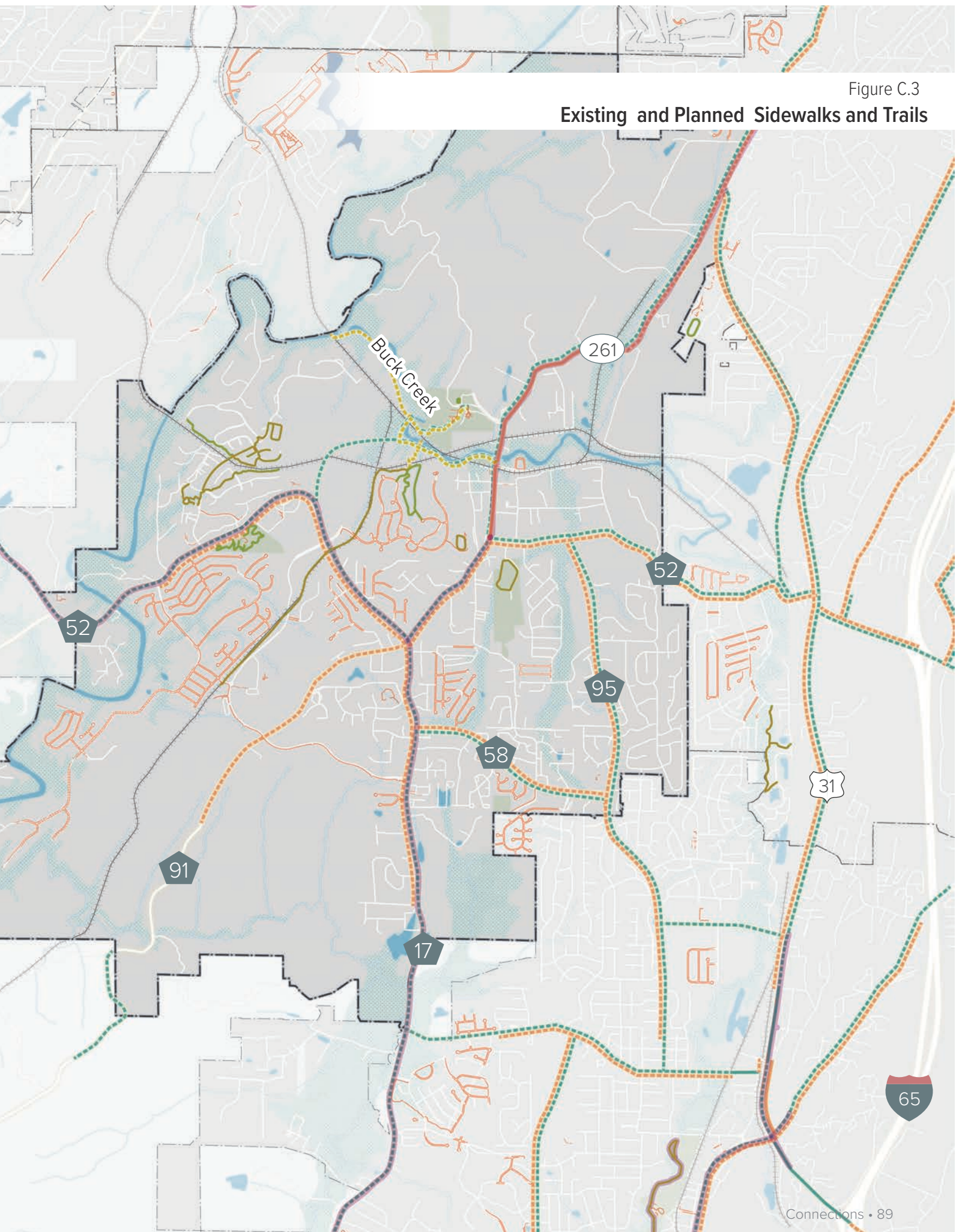




Figure C.3

Existing and Planned Sidewalks and Trails



## *Separation of development*

Developments within Helena are distinctly separated. The interface between non-residential and residential uses are often non-existent, and these use types are typically separated by required landscape buffers, utility easements, or stormwater conveyances. Most commercial properties have individual ingress/egress points, with few sharing roadway access or automobile parking. This creates significant “friction” on roadways within commercial areas. The lack of shared access slows traffic, further reduces pedestrian comfort, and allows for unnecessary pavement within the community. Residential and commercial uses are not linked in any meaningful way, and many commercial properties are inaccessible to pedestrians. In addition to the predominance of automobile infrastructure, the lack of sidewalks greatly hinders access to non-residential uses as a pedestrian.

## *Local transportation network*

The existing transportation conditions assessment evaluated vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle accessibility in Helena and the surrounding area. Helena relies on a system of roadways to support the local transportation demands of its citizens and businesses, but as the existing conditions transportation summary illustrates, the City faces challenges with local and regional accessibility and mobility. City leadership has actively sought to enhance the community’s transportation infrastructure through new and improved facilities. Some of the projects recently completed or underway include:

- ★ Intersection improvements at SR-261/CR-17/CR-52W (Recently Completed)
- ★ Intersection improvements at SR-261/CR-52E (Design)
- ★ CR-17 right-turn lane at CR-58 (Design)
- ★ SR-261 turn lanes at new commercial development (Recently Completed)
- ★ Buck Creek Trail (Design)

As the City’s residents have expressed an interest in maintaining the historic character of their community, new capacity-building projects should be carefully chosen to enhance and connect with the existing system. These improvements should be programmed to achieve the long-term mobility goals of the community. During the development of the Helena Comprehensive Plan, several concerns were repeatedly expressed by citizens and City leaders, including the following:

- ★ Maintaining the small town character of Helena is paramount to citizens and elected officials.
- ★ Widening existing roadways is not considered a viable option in the City due to the desire to maintain the rural character combined with right-of-way limitations.
- ★ The proposed Helena bypass is shown as a constrained long-range plan project in the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization’s 2045 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), however, discussions with RPCGB indicated that this project will be removed from the upcoming 2050 RTP and is not considered a viable project at this time.
- ★ Additional dedicated pedestrian and bicycle facilities are necessary to encourage other modes of travel; in particular, a bicycle/pedestrian “spine” is needed to connect the activity centers throughout Helena.
- ★ Street connectivity is very important to support balanced and evenly dispersed traffic demand.
- ★ Street design and operation should be consistent with the adjacent land uses.
- ★ More local job, recreational, shopping, and education/training opportunities are needed within the city limits to reduce the number of trips in and out of the City and make the City’s transportation network more sustainable in the future.



## *Evaluating roadway capacity*

These concerns seem to reflect a desire among citizens that Helena maintain its residential “small town” character while still providing efficient travel options that support growth. The strategies needed for implementation of that vision are the City must:

- ★ Maintain existing transportation system integrity.
- ★ Ensure new development is built around a well-connected network of streets.
- ★ Establish new regional roadway connections where feasible.
- ★ Be sensitive to roadside context when planning new or modified transportation projects.
- ★ Consider the needs of all transportation users in planning and designing new transportation facilities.
- ★ Execute access management improvements to important collector and arterial roadways to preserve capacity.
- ★ Encourage alternative modes of travel through design and policy decisions.
- ★ Amend subdivision development standards to improve access management, traffic flow, and mobility safety in the City.

## *Maintaining infrastructure*

In recent years, maintenance of existing facilities has become a top priority for government agencies. If new roadways cannot be constructed, it is imperative to maintain the highest possible performance out of the existing roadway network. Roadway network maintenance includes managing a list of items associated with roadway performance such as pavement, drainage, markings, signage, and traffic signals.

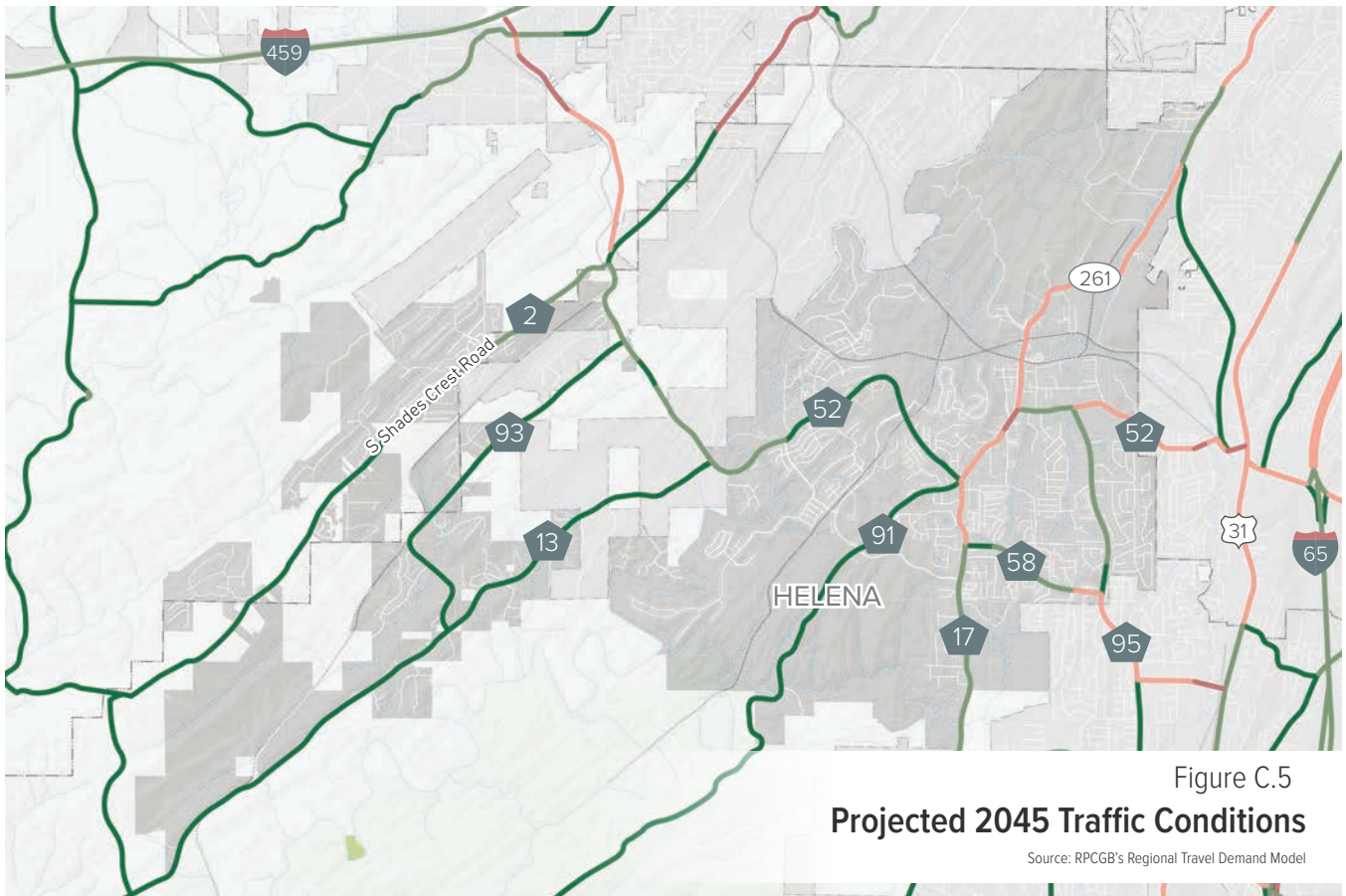


## CONNECTIONS TO THE WATER

There are no operational access points to activate Buck Creek and the Cahaba River. While Buck Creek bisects Old Town, there are no facilities providing access to the water such as a waterfront trail, or kayak/canoe launch points. This limits opportunities for activities on the water, and does not take advantage of the ecotourism opportunities presented by these unique waterways within Helena.

Opportunities for connections are present within Old Town, specifically within Amphitheater Park, and at the County Road 52 crossing of the Cahaba River approximately one-mile west of Cahaba Lily Park to establish dedicated canoe/kayak/paddle board launch points.

Connections to Buck Creek and Cahaba River at the points mentioned above provides Helena the opportunity to establish a blueway within the community. Paddle distance from Old Town to County Road 52 bridge is approximately 5.3 miles of water, creating an opportunity for an approximately 2-4 hour paddle. Establishing a blueway aligns with the input received during this process to connect to natural resources in the community and to support the ecotourism economy of the region.



## Assessing future conditions

A future conditions projection was conducted to evaluate the future transportation impacts of land use decisions made during the planning process and to develop recommendations that support future growth and improve mobility and safety for all modes of transportation within Helena. The transportation assessment was conducted at the city-wide level. This analysis is based on the RPCGB's travel demand model, which does not capture queing related to driveways or signal timing. As illustrated in Figure C.5, approximate locations of roadway segments currently exhibiting heavy to severe congestion based on analysis of the volume to capacity ratios seen from the 2015 base year model 24-hour volumes include:

- ★ Helena Road (SR-261), between CR-91 and CR-52E
- ★ Helena Road (SR-261), between Starkey Street and Bearden Road
- ★ CR-17, between Helena Road (SR-261) and CR-58
- ★ CR-52E, between CR-95 and Mullins Drive
- ★ CR-52, between CR-2 and CR-13

### LEGEND

- Severe congestion —
- Heavy congestion —
- Moderate congestion —
- Low or no congestion —

## *Planned projects and investments*

As illustrated in Figure C.5, the 2045 traffic conditions based on the output from the RPCGB's regional travel demand model illustrate that the existing congested areas will continue to experience congestion at the same level in the future. Without any roadway improvements, overall congestion is forecast to increase within Helena as a function of continued population and employment growth. The existing roadway segments projected to experience significant congestion by 2045 include:

- ★ Helena Road (SR-261), between CR-52W and Bearden Road
- ★ CR-52E, between CR-95 and Mullins Drive
- ★ CR-58, between Independence Drive and CR-95

The 2045 regional travel demand analysis is based on the demographic and highway network assumptions used by the RPCGB. A review of the proposed land use plan developed

for the comprehensive plan illustrated that the population and employment forecasts are consistent with the assumptions used in the regional travel demand model. Given the feedback received from RPCGB and the City, there is not funding available to construct the Helena bypass, and as such this roadway project is not assumed to be constructed within the planning horizon of this Comprehensive Plan.

In summary, the roadway segments forecast to experience congestion in the year 2045 include:

- ★ Helena Road (SR-261), between CR-91 and Bearden Road
- ★ CR-17, between SR-261 and CR-58
- ★ CR-52E, between CR-95 and Mullins Drive
- ★ CR-52W, between CR-2 and CR-13
- ★ CR-58, between Independence Drive and CR-95



## CAPACITY PROJECTS

Multiple planned roadway capacity projects in the Helena area will impact future traffic conditions in the City; these projects are illustrated in Figure C.6. Additionally, fiscally constrained projects are illustrated in Figure C.7 and visionary projects are in Figure C.8. As noted previously, the Helena Bypass has recently been removed from the RPCGB’s long-range transportation plan, and several other proposed roadway capacity projects do not align with the City’s vision of maintaining the existing two-lane cross-sections and rural character of the City. Consideration should be given to constructing more three-lane cross-sections, particularly around commercial areas to improve traffic flow and safety.

## BICYCLE / PEDESTRIAN PROJECTS

The 2018 Shelby County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and the RPCGB’s 2019 Regional Active Transportation Plan, referred to as the B-ACTIVE Plan, identified corridors needing future pedestrian and bicycle improvements in the City. The identified corridors are illustrated in Figure C.9—Bicycle Accommodation Needs and Figure C.10—Pedestrian Accommodation Needs map. There are no planned bicycle/pedestrian projects currently programmed based on the B-Active Plan.

Figure C.6

### Helena Area Projects - RPCGB’s 2045 Regional Transportation Plan

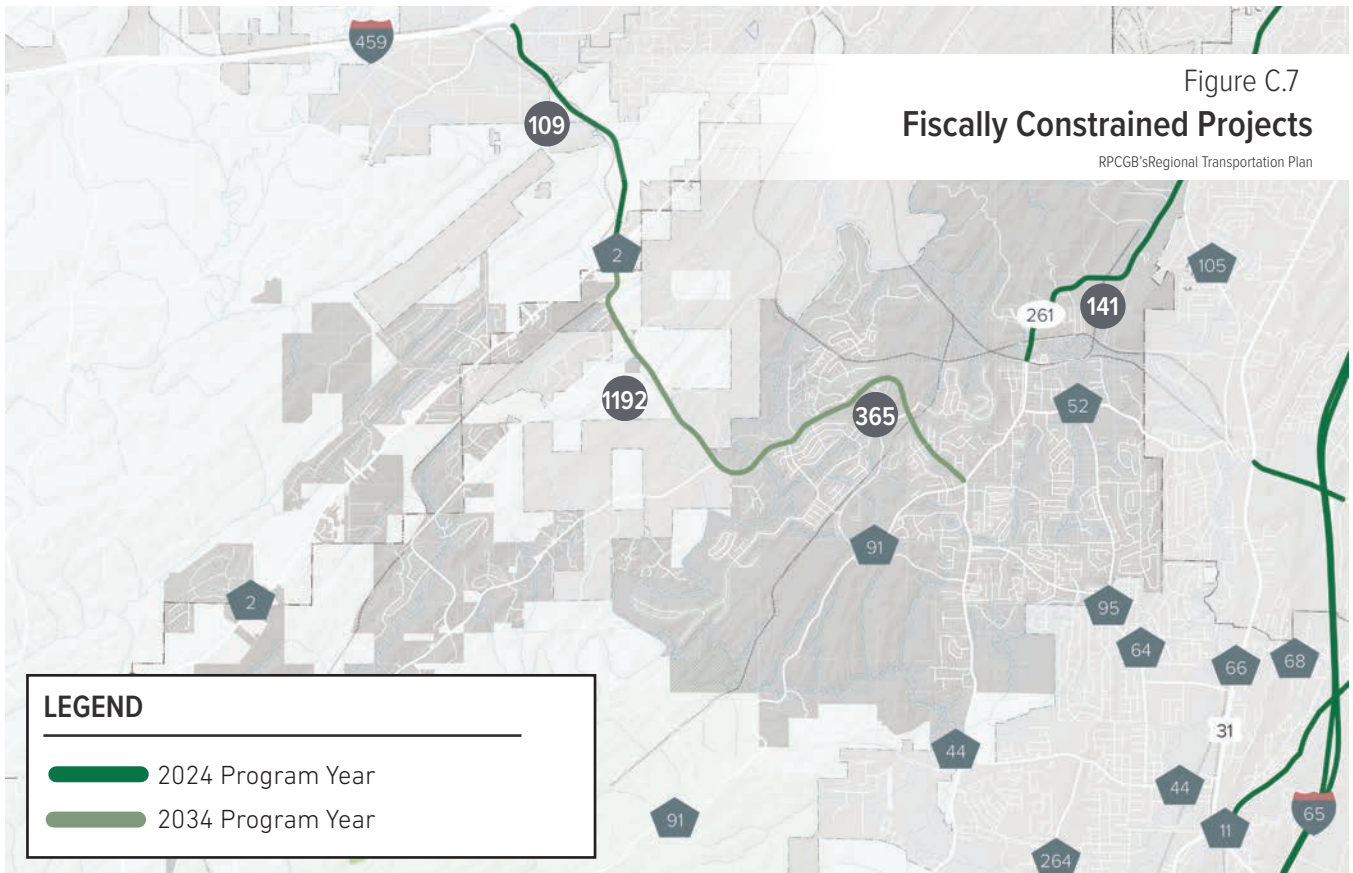
PROJECT NAME	TARGET YEAR	POTENTIAL COST	MAP ID
FISCALLY CONSTRAINED PROJECTS			
SR-261 (Helena Road) Widening - 2 to 4 lanes from Bearden Road to SR-3 (U.S. 31)	2022	\$23,753,064	141
Morgan Rd (CR-52) Widening - 2 to 4 lanes from I-459 to South Shades Crest Road (CR-2)	2024	\$12,383,363	109
Morgan Rd (CR-52) Widening - 2 to 5 lanes from CR-13 to SR-261	2025	\$8,539,871	365
Morgan Rd (CR-52) Widening - 2 to 5 lanes from South Shades Crest Road to CR-13	2028	\$9,236,724	1192
VISIONARY PROJECTS			
US-31 Widening - 4 to 6 lanes from CR-52 to I-65 in Alabaster & from CR-105 to Riverchase Pkwy	-	\$75,000,000	1152
Ross Bridge Pkwy Extension - Extend and widen 0/2 to 4 lanes from SR-150 to CR-52	-	\$38,925,262	630
CR-17 Widening - 2 to 5 lanes from SR-261/ SR-52 Helena south to CR-12 (Butler Road)	-	\$43,624,926	424
CR-52 Widening - 2 to 5 lanes from SR-261 east to Johnson Street	-	\$15,240,595	429
Helena Bypass - New construction from CR-52 west of Helena to SR-261 north of Helena	-	\$28,609,680	78

Source: RPCGB <https://www.rpcgb.org/regional-transportation-plan>

Figure C.7

### Fiscally Constrained Projects

RPCGB's Regional Transportation Plan

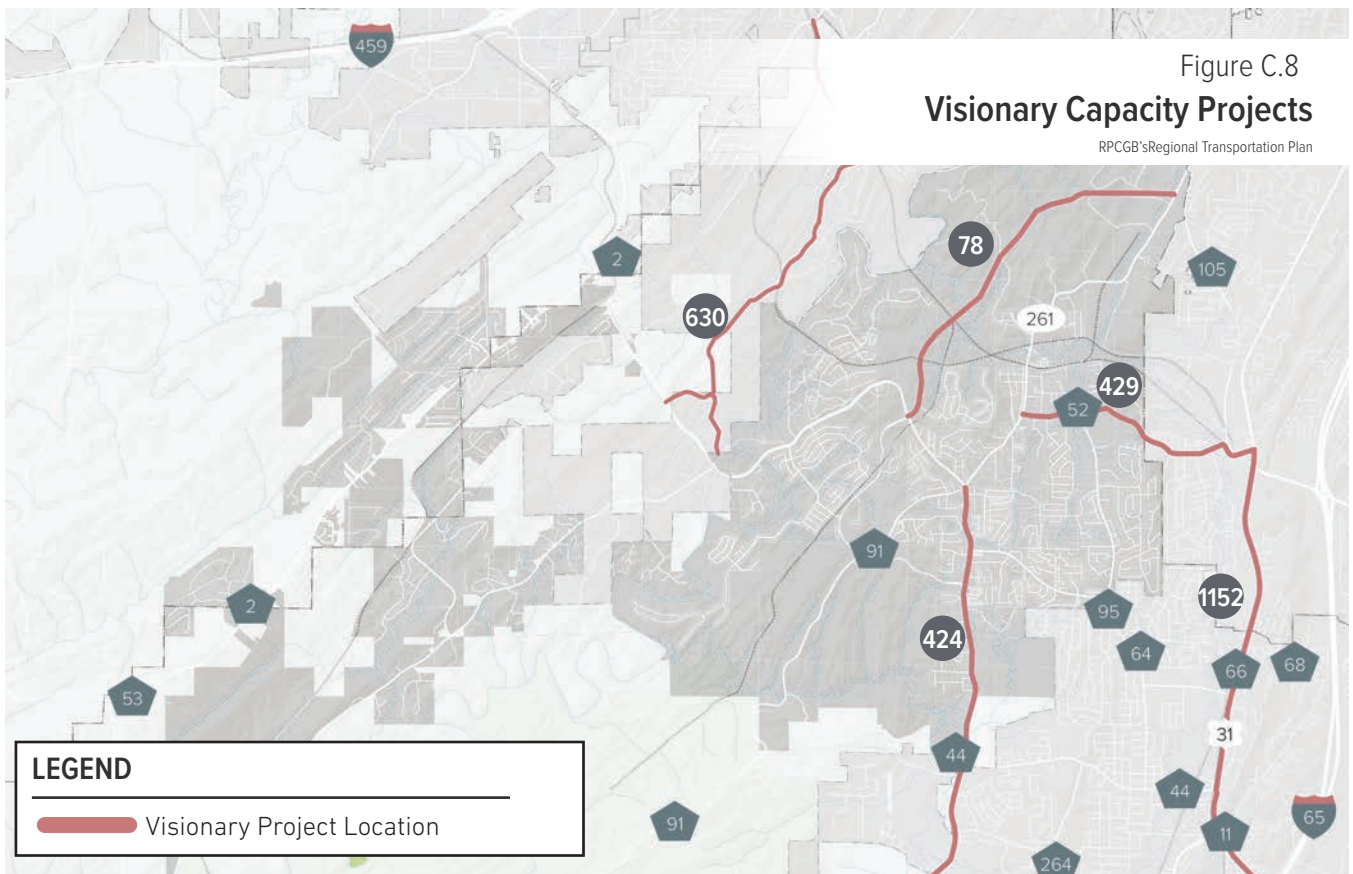


Source: RPCGB <https://www.rpcgb.org/regional-transportation-plan>

Figure C.8

### Visionary Capacity Projects

RPCGB's Regional Transportation Plan

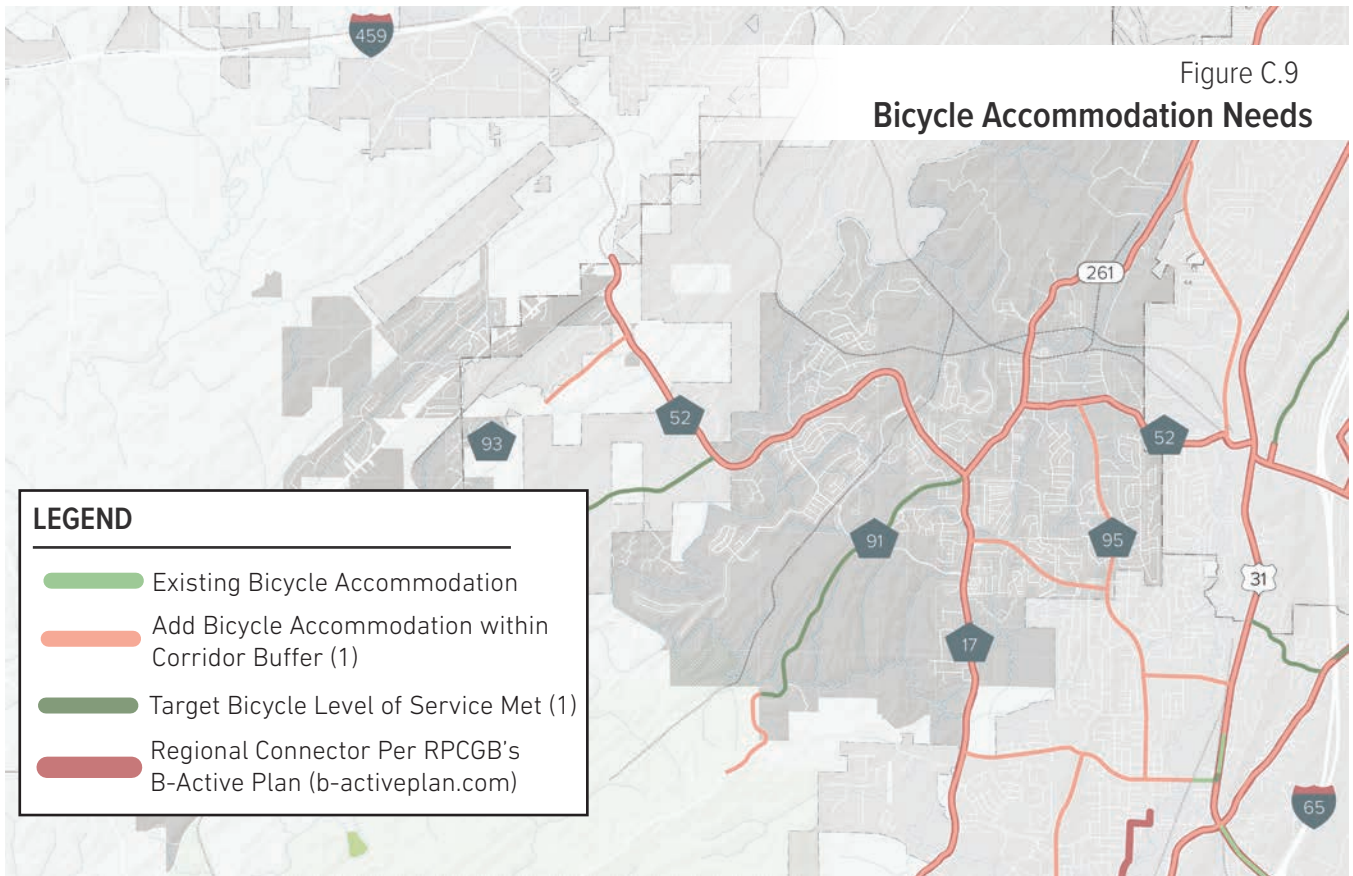


Source: RPCGB <https://www.rpcgb.org/regional-transportation-plan>



Figure C.9

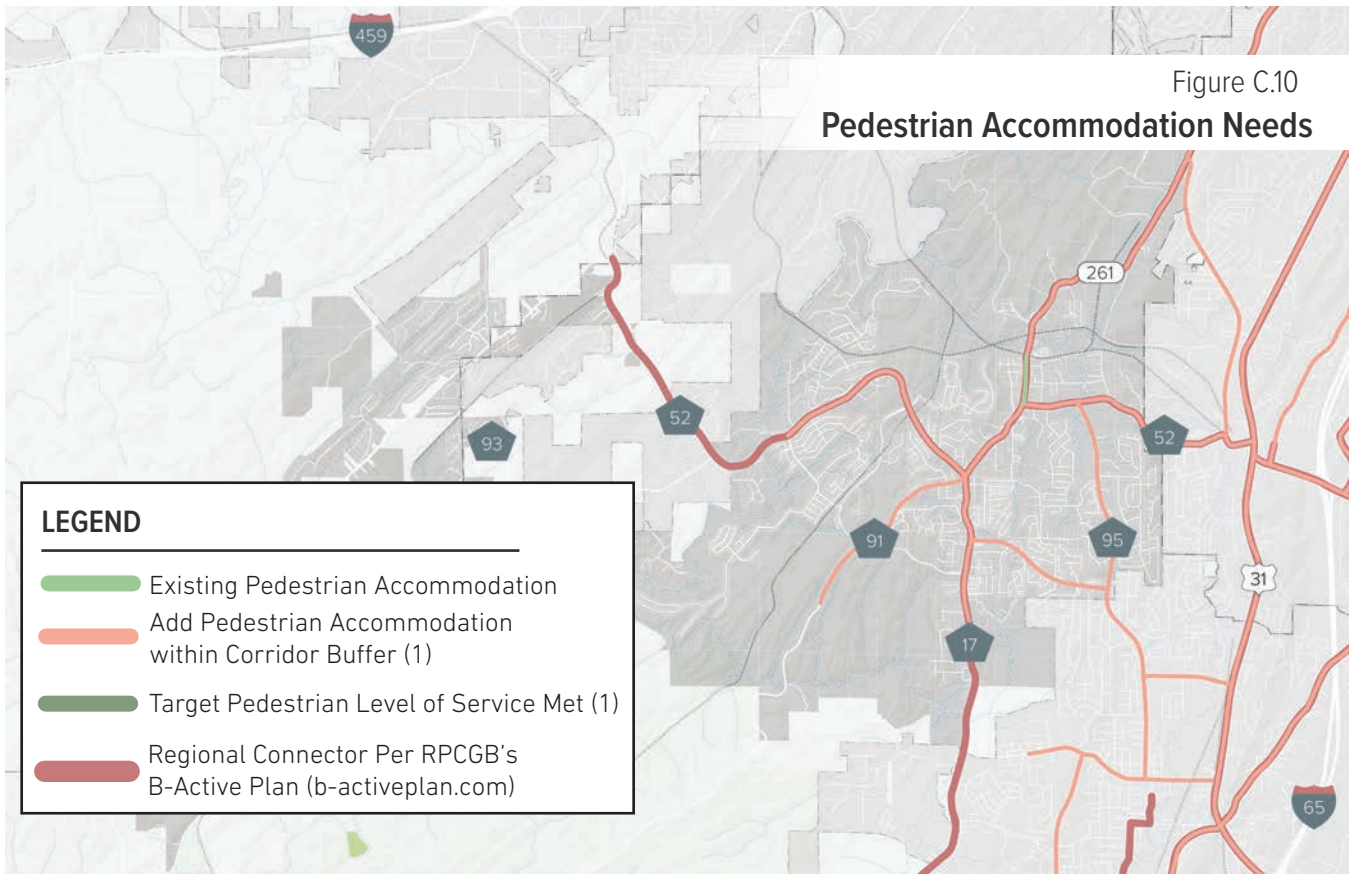
### Bicycle Accommodation Needs



Source: RPCGB's Regional Active Transportation Plan ([www.B-ActivePlan.com](http://www.B-ActivePlan.com)) and the Shelby County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan  
Notes: (1) This information is based on the Shelby County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Figure C.10

### Pedestrian Accommodation Needs



Source: RPCGB's Regional Active Transportation Plan ([www.B-ActivePlan.com](http://www.B-ActivePlan.com)) and the Shelby County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan  
Notes: (1) This information is based on the Shelby County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan



# MAKING CONNECTIONS

The principal statements present the community's preference for how Helena invests in its physical and non-physical connections. These statements establish connections, internally and externally. In this case, Connection has multiple definitions. Helena will establish physical connections between and to existing and future community assets. The community will also foster connections to internal and external groups in order to create a vibrant community. Establishing these connections will ensure that the vision and goals set by Helena are achieved.



*As Helena grows and our community continues to evolve, it is our intent that...*

## **Existing neighborhoods will be connected to community assets via sidewalks, trails, and multi-use pathways.**

- ★ Pursue RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) grant funding or other funding sources to connect schools, parks, and other cultural assets to existing and new neighborhoods within Helena
- ★ Identify corridors of existing rights-of-way that could be used to construct sidewalks, trails, or multi-use pathways
- ★ Connect community assets to each other and adjacent neighborhoods to foster a cohesive community feeling
- ★ Coordinate branding at connection points to convey a clear image of Helena, regardless of location within the community
- ★ Connection points between new and old neighborhoods enable neighbors to easily visit friends and family and provide alternate routes for recreation and leisure

## **New development is well-connected on all fronts.**

- ★ This includes connection to transportation (both pedestrian and vehicular) and internal connections to neighborhood assets (parks, pools, community centers)
- ★ Connections to potable water and sanitary sewer should be in place, or programmed to be installed concurrently with all proposed development
- ★ Connections with regional partners should be leveraged to attract new developments to Helena

## **Strategic partnership connections will be cultivated that strengthen Helena's position within the region.**

- ★ Partnerships with peer communities offer learning opportunities and establish new channels of communication to share and receive information
- ★ These relationships can strengthen applications for funding to secure infrastructure improvements that benefit Helena
- ★ Partnering with County, State, and Federal agencies will provide insight on opportunities for land acquisition, infrastructure funding opportunities, and how to strengthen regional initiatives

## City-wide transportation strategies

These strategies guide programs that, if implemented, will ensure Helena is positioned to address existing transportation deficiencies and position the community for future growth.

- ★ **Maintain system integrity.** System maintenance includes managing items associated with roadway performance such as pavement, drainage, markings, signage, and traffic signals. A routine assessment of operational performance on the City's major roadways is an excellent way to identify low-cost improvements and prepare for higher-cost projects that may take years to program and implement. Proactive pavement management and signal timing programs are excellent building blocks for a system preservation program.
- ★ **Plan for streets in new growth areas.** The Helena Comprehensive Plan outlines several growth areas for Helena. These areas are primarily within the Hillsboro Planned Unit Developments, within Old Town, and at designated Activity Centers. As these areas develop, it will be imperative to plan a well-connected local street system that provides access and disperses traffic in a less concentrated way. Traffic flow is particularly important in the area around Helena because there are multiple capacity projects under construction or planned on roadways entering the City. Some of these capacity projects do not align with the goals of Helena, which prefers to maintain the existing two-lane roadway cross-sections within the city.
- ★ **Be sensitive to roadside contexts.** Throughout public input efforts for the Helena Comprehensive Plan, citizens expressed concerns about maintaining the quality of life in their community. Perceived quality of life and aesthetics can be heavily influenced by transportation facilities. Numerous examples throughout the United States exist of roadways that were improved to increase capacity and travel speed, yet these improvements created

significant damage to the appearance and quality of the community.

An alternative approach is to consider the roadside context when making transportation decisions. Mobility, typically measured as capacity or level of service, is not the only important consideration for transportation improvements. Instead, transportation decision-making must consider a wide range of issues including, but not limited to, safety, community values, environmental impacts, aesthetics, cost, and mobility for all modes. Helena has some streets that will have deficient capacity and less-than-desirable traffic operations across the horizon of this comprehensive plan. For some of those streets, adding capacity would mean a significant trade-off for adjacent land uses.

- ★ **Consider all transportation users.** The City of Helena has been proactive in advocating for consideration of pedestrian mobility in recent residential developments. Continued implementation of Complete Streets initiatives will assist in achieving the community's goals of limiting roadway expansions while allowing residents to connect to their daily needs with minimal congestion. "Complete Streets" is a name adopted by the National Complete Streets Coalition to describe a process of planning and design that considers the entire roadway area (travel way, shoulders, and adjacent space) and all potential users.



★ **Encourage, implement, and enforce access management.** Access management is the planning, design, and implementation of various land development and transportation strategies to maintain traffic flow and safety along a primary transportation corridor, while considering access needs of various uses along a corridor. Allowing unlimited or unrestricted access to roadside development degrades the carrying capacity and overall safety of a transportation corridor. By properly managing roadway access, a governing agency can increase safety, extend the functional life of a major road, reduce traffic congestion, support alternative modes of transportation, and improve the appearance and quality of the built environment.

★ **Support alternative modes of travel.** Helena is heavily reliant upon automobiles for transportation within the City. There is a modest network of sidewalks, few acceptable bicycle routes, and no fixed route transit service. Encouraging the design and construction of new bike and pedestrian facilities is an excellent way to support and encourage citizens to make alternative choices for their transportation.

★ **Encourage the use of the existing park and ride lot off of Shelby County airport exit and promote programs like CommuteSmart.** Given the City's reliance on non-residents for local employment, particularly in the service industry, consideration should be given to exploring partnerships to determine the feasibility of establishing transit service between Birmingham/Bessemer and Helena. [www.commutesmart.org](http://www.commutesmart.org)

## *Connecting Old Town*

Old Town encompasses the original settlement area of Helena. As the city was originally platted and built prior to the advent of the automobile, the structures in the district were designed and constructed to address the street. As transportation preferences changed, SR-261 (Helena Road) has been expanded to focus on the throughput of automobiles, at the cost of the overall accessibility of the district. To realize the full potential of Old Town, mobility orientation in the district must shift from cars-first, to holistic accessibility (people, bikes, canoes, cars).

★ **Old Town is the historic “core” of Helena.** This core thrives when connected to all parts of the community (people, assets, infrastructure).

★ **Connecting Helena to Old Town.** Additional development will benefit this connection, as people begin to include Old Town as part of their lives on a routine basis. To support this momentum, all forms of transportation should be accommodated.

★ **Extending the sidewalk network along all corridors leading to Old Town is a first step.** This effort will need to be executed in close coordination with Shelby County and ALDOT, as the primary connection corridors to Old Town are not under the control of Helena.

★ **Old Town as an essential connection point.** When identifying corridors for trails and / or multi-use pathways, Helena should consider alignments through Old Town to establish a comprehensive network within Old Town.

★ **Opportunity to begin a blueway along Buck Creek within Old Town.** This connection point could be within Amphitheater Park to provide activation of this public space throughout the day.

★ **Extend the sidewalk network along all streets within Old Town.** Establish and extend the character of overall mobility throughout the district.

★ **Bridging the gap.** Construct a dedicated pedestrian crossing across Buck Creek in order to connect pedestrians to the entirety of the district.



## Connecting community assets

Community assets include parks, community centers, and other public places. Expanded connections to these public spaces by all residents enhances the One Connected Community sentiment amongst all residents. Special focus should be placed on activating points of interest; namely, Old Town and other locations that are uniquely Helena should be invested in to create community connections to these assets.

### TRAILS, GREENWAYS, AND MULTI-MODAL CONNECTIONS

Trails / greenways offer opportunities to improve underutilized corridors to establish active transportation connections. Trails and greenways are able to utilize narrower right-of-ways (ROWS) than a roadway to carry vehicles, and are more easily implemented to connect existing developed neighborhoods. These active transportation connections allow persons of all ages to access community assets, further supporting the objective of creating a multi-generational, multi-lifestyle community.



- ★ These possible connections should be included as part of an overall mobility plan for Helena. An overall mobility plan will prioritize routes and identify connection opportunities, estimate execution costs, and identify possible partnerships.
- ★ Identify existing corridors within Helena that could be used to provide new connections. These corridors can include existing transportation corridors, underutilized utility/ stormwater ROWs, or other corridors not currently owned by Helena.
- ★ Existing utility or stormwater right-of-ways should be analyzed to identify potential improvements. The use of existing ROWs lowers implementation costs and better utilizes existing public assets.

### WATERWAYS

Helena is home to Lake Davidson, Buck Creek, and the Cahaba River. These waterways should be accessible via canoe / kayak and Buck Creek could be easily accessed within Old Town at Amphitheater Park with provision of launch facilities. The Cahaba River is home to the Cahaba Lily, a flowering plant that only grows in the southeastern United States. Connecting to the waterways within the community offers Helena the opportunity to create a vibrant eco-tourism industry.



- ★ There is an opportunity for a blueway (Buck Creek/Cahaba River) from Old Town to the existing County Road 52 bridge over the Cahaba River. Connection to Buck Creek within Amphitheater Park in Old Town should be established as a starting point for canoes and kayaks. Cahaba River Park in Shelby County could serve as an additional take-out location for paddlers starting their journey in Old Town.
- ★ The route between Old Town and the County Road 52 bridge, a potential take-out location, is approximately 5.3 water-miles. This distance leads to an approximately 2-4 hour paddle.
- ★ The existing County Road 52 bridge will remain in place once construction of the new bridge for County Road 52 is completed, and could be converted to recreational uses or support a kayak/canoe launch or take-out point.

## CULTURAL ASSETS

What is now Helena was originally settled starting in the 1850s. Due to this lengthy history of population, many cultural assets have been preserved within Helena. Connecting all residents to the cultural assets within the community will solidify their place in Helena's history.

- ★ Old Town is comprised of the fabric of the original settlement of Helena. Several of the existing structures along SR-261 date to the late 1800's and currently house a variety of local businesses.
- ★ Kenneth R. Penhale City of Helena Museum is located within Old Town and includes photos, documents, and artifacts that represent the history of the community.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

Well-connected neighborhoods are healthy, resilient, and desirable. These connections offer mobility options for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. Connections between neighborhoods allow safer pedestrian routes to link children to schools, families to one-another, and visitors to community assets. Well-linked neighborhoods benefit from additional pedestrian activity, and afford residents the opportunity to mix their transportation options, reducing reliance on personal automobiles.

- ★ New residential developments should link to existing neighborhoods. While most recent development (within the last 20 years) includes sidewalks, and some trails, pedestrian connections between existing neighborhoods are non-existent. Sidewalks often end at subdivisions boundaries and many older subdivisions do not have sidewalks. Often, subdivisions can be linked with active transportation facilities with minimal impacts to neighborhood character.
- ★ Trail connections should extend into existing neighborhoods. The Hillsboro developments include an internal trail system in addition to neighborhood sidewalks. While the Hillsboro Trail is currently approximately 2 miles in length, this will expand as each of the three PUDs are built out. Identifying other potential trail corridors within Helena and connecting established neighborhoods using this trail network should be explored.



- ★ The Library of Congress notes the Billy Gould Coal Mine, and the remaining coke ovens, as one of the earliest known efforts to exploit the mineral resources of the area. The site represents a crucial stage in the early development of the Birmingham Industrial District. The original ovens were initially constructed around 1871.



- ★ Connecting existing neighborhoods to each other using active transportation routes will unify the city. Generally, subdivisions within Helena are connected to the community only through vehicular roadways. Relying solely on roads designed for throughput of automobiles does not create a safe, walkable environment for pedestrians. Constructing dedicated active transportation routes through the community should be pursued to establish unique connections throughout Helena. These routes should connect residents to jobs, healthcare, education, grocers, and other essential services to reduce the near-total reliance on automobiles.

## REGIONAL CONNECTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Helena is located in the southern portion of the Birmingham metropolitan region. Strengthening existing and establishing new connections to neighbors and peers ensures the community is well-represented in decision making. Entities that have control of assets within the community should be identified and appropriate points of contact established.

**Building great places.** From the public input gathered through this process, it is clear that residents in Helena care about community, and want walkable mixed-use developments within the City. Establishing partnerships with major landholders within Helena, such as U. S. Steel Real Estate, allows the City and major developers to have an open dialogue about development preferences and what is expected of the development community when working within Helena. Setting clear expectations is preferred by land owners and developers because it creates a predictable development process.

- ★ Maintain Helena's relationship with the Community Planning division of the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
- ★ Establish contacts with planning departments in peer communities within the region to solicit input on regional development trends and best practices for policy amendments

**Growing prosperity.** Retaining current employers and attracting new employers to the community are significant based on public input. Partnering with the economic offices within Shelby County and Jefferson County will strengthen Helena's regional position and express the community's openness to new businesses. Connecting with local groups to foster ecotourism activities will allow the community to activate its waterways and trails to provide new recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.

- ★ Maintain Helena's relationship with the Economic Development division of the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
- ★ Consider joining the Birmingham Business Alliance or similar group that provides better visibility of sites available for development within the community
- ★ Continue to collaborate with 58 INC to promote sites available for development within Helena

**Making strong connections.** Major thoroughfares through Helena are not under the direct authority of the city. The decision-making authority for these arterial roadways is Shelby County and ALDOT. While Helena does not have final approval authority, the city should be well connected with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) East Central Region Birmingham Area office, Shelby County Highway Department, and the Jefferson County Roads and Transportation Department. Helena should be familiar with proposed transportation improvements by these outside entities and disseminate this information to residents and property owners on a routine basis.

- ★ Maximizes use of local matching funds
- ★ Allows for more timely and competitive responses for grant funding
- ★ Ensures that the voice of Helena is well-represented within agencies that control infrastructure within the community



# CONNECTIONS ACTION AGENDA

The Comprehensive Plan for One Connected Community is a collection of ideas for future consideration and investment. These initiatives, policies, and programs are referred to as actions. They were chosen for their ability to help the city achieve its vision. This action plan is tailored to Helena's specific circumstances, conditions, and trends. The plan is ambitious, and it will necessitate significant investment, collaboration, and dedication. It represents a long-term strategy that, with continued focus and energy, will contribute to Helena becoming more prosperous and livable in the future. The actions in this chapter are focused on mobility and community connections.

- C.01. Prepare and maintain a Master Street Plan.** A street plan, a focused component of a mobility plan, could be used to inventory existing facilities, identify needed improvements, and prioritize projects. A Master Street Plan should be used to inform a larger plan, or used to inform the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) for Helena. The city will designate a hierarchy of streets and character classifications. Street designations include alley, local, collector, and major collector. This hierarchy should support the vision for land use, growth, and density across Helena through the application of appropriate street typologies.
- C.02. Commit to a public process when prioritizing major transportation events.** It is strongly recommended that a collaborative public process be used to encourage broad consideration of the impacts and opportunities created by future highway capacity projects, and alternatives that may better align with the goals of the community.
- C.03. Adopt a Complete Streets policy.** This policy would guide developers on the appropriate typical sections (including number and width of vehicle lanes, bicycle facilities, buffer zones, sidewalks, and/or parking lanes) required for future development based on the magnitude, location, and land use of the proposed development.
- C.04. Designate access management corridors.** These important roadways are where the City would either retrofit access management where feasible or enforce access management principles on existing properties when they re-develop over time.
- C.05. Study a potential roundabout at Hillsboro Pkwy and HWY 17.** Roundabouts promote safe and efficient intersection management especially between like road typologies. This study should be conducted in coordination with Shelby County.
- C.06. Develop and implement a citywide signal timing program.** Re-timing every three years is optimal as traffic volumes change with time.
- C.07. Explore feasibility of constructing a local roadway connection between River Oaks Drive and Ruffin Road near the Helena Sports Complex.**
- C.08. Promote RPCGB's CommuteSmart Program.**
- C.09. Identify more three-lane cross-sections, particularly around commercial areas to improve traffic flow and safety.**

**C.10. Maintain active membership in the RPCGB's regional planning process.** Helena is a member of RPCGB and should continue to be involved in the regional planning process to advocate for local projects and obtain federal funding.

**C.11. Develop a comprehensive Greenways and Blueways Plan.** A greenways and blueways plan may be part of an expanded "mobility" plan or may serve as a stand-alone document. This plan should be utilized to identify opportunities to connect residents and visitors to assets within the community and to neighboring municipalities. Existing programmed improvements by Shelby County or ALDOT should be consulted and used to provide further connections within Helena. Buck Creek and the Cahaba River should be designated blueways, and opportunities for activation along the waterways should be considered such as establishing activity points at key locations to allow canoe/kayak use along the waterways. Greenways should identify opportunities to connect residents and visitors with the cultural resources within Helena, including Old Town.

**C.12. Improve sidewalk connectivity between neighborhoods and nearby complementary uses.** Identify existing system deficiencies by utilizing the existing city-wide inventory. Based on this inventory, identify priority connections. Focus should be placed on connecting residential developments with other uses throughout the City including Old Town, parks, schools, places of worship, commercial developments (where appropriate), and existing/future residential developments. The inventory should explore routes within existing roadways right-of-way and other utility right-of-ways or

easements. When boosting this type of connectivity, organizations are often able to apply for Safe Routes to School funding, and expanding sidewalks creates an overall more appealing community.

**C.13. Ensure Helena has a seat at the table for transportation planning.** Identify appropriate contact points with Shelby County and ALDOT and engage these contacts to provide input on proposed projects within Helena or projects that impact the community. When projects outside the direct control of Helena emerge, Helena should express support for improvement. For segments or actions under the authority of Helena, identify and make available the required funds to ensure that projects are complete with the minimal amount of delays.

**C.14. Support the extension of the regional trail network with connections to Helena.** Work with Shelby County, neighboring municipalities, and regional partners to support extensions of the Buck Creek Trail, Tacoa Trail, and other greenways and blueways that utilize routes through Helena. These extensions should be identified in the greenways/blueways or mobility plan, whichever is applicable. Enhancing regional non-motorized connections to Helena aligns with multiple goals of the overall vision of Helena, including Place, Prosperity, and Connections.

**C.15. Integrate historical sites into trail planning, alignment, and storytelling.** Connecting residents and visitors to the cultural assets of Helena is a priority of the public based on input received during public outreach for this Comprehensive Plan. Identifying these assets and including this

information in planning efforts for trails and greenways will maximize connections to community assets and provide education to residents and visitors alike.

- C.16. Upgrade and improve safety of railroad crossing warning gates at SR-261 (Helena Road) north of Buck Creek.** Support and engage local railroad ownership, Shelby County, and the Alabama Department of Transportation to execute existing planned improvements to railroad crossings along SR-261.
- C.17. Add solar-powered lighting in trail tunnels.** Improve safety and visibility at underpasses.
- C.18. Establish a “Walking School Bus” Program whereby parents volunteer to walk neighborhood kids to and from schools.**
- C.19. Develop and maintain a regular Capital Improvements Plan.** Annual development and update of a CIP creates transparency on behalf of Helena, and provides opportunity for residents to identify and understand programmed improvements to city facilities. The CIP serves as a roadmap and guide when developing or maintaining public facilities.
- C.20. Develop a Community Facilities Master Plan.** A community facilities master plan serves multiple purposes. This type of plan provides Helena an opportunity to inventory existing community facilities, identify additional desired facilities based on public input, recognize possible funding sources / mechanisms, and a roadmap / timeline for execution of identified projects.
- C.21. Explore future uses for the existing Senior Center Building to provide additional public safety facilities.**
- C.22. Expand facilities at existing parks on city-owned land.**
- C.23. Add soccer fields at the Helena Sports Complex.**
- C.24. Construct parks to meet the needs of a growing community in line with the Helena Forward Initiative.**
- C.25. Support the addition of publicly accessible alternative fuel vehicle fueling stations such as E85 ethanol, biodiesel, liquefied petroleum gas (propane) and electric vehicle charging stations to existing fuel stations and stores within Helena.**
- C.26. Explore the purchase of alternative fuel vehicles and equipment when replacing City-owned vehicles and equipment.**
- C.27. Support necessary expansions or investments in local schools.** Coordinate with Shelby County Board of Education on Helena Intermediate School expansion. An open channel of communication between Helena and Shelby County Board of Education is imperative to ensure continued success of school facilities within Helena. Continued residential growth within Helena will determine when and where additional education facility expansions are necessary to support an expanded population.



**C.28. Execute the schedule for upgrading and repairing existing streets within established neighborhoods.** This should currently be addressed on an ongoing basis by the CIP approved and executed by Helena. A long-range component could be created and included in an overall Mobility Plan for Helena. An inventory of existing streets should be updated routinely to reflect current conditions. This inventory should document the maintenance responsibility of roadways within Helena, the condition of roadways, existing traffic counts, and metrics on how priorities established in the plan were reached. This long-range component, once adopted, should be used to guide CIP programming over the horizon of the long-range plan.

**C.29. Continue to implement the recommendations of the 2017 Helena Schools Intersection Study.** Coordinate with Shelby County Board of Education to ensure Helena provides the necessary support to implement the Intersection Study.

**C.30. Add call boxes to greenways.** Call boxes are a safety system for trail users and provide an immediate connection and location for anyone in need of help or medical assistance.









# Implementation Strategy

Great plans are judged by the real-world action they inspire, and this implementation is – and should be – a community effort. The realization of the One Connected Community plan will be achieved through this type of collaborative work between city leaders and the community overall. The plan identifies dozens of projects, policies, and programs that were elevated through conversation with the public and stakeholders. Each of these proposals will require focus, planning, resources, championing, management, and evaluation. This chapter presents a more detailed path forward to the plan recommendations along with a management structure to ensure progress is continual.

Every one of the 80 actions in this plan will require some level of deliberate planning, budgeting, execution, and evaluation. Without intention and leadership, the plan will fail to deliver on the vision of the community. To ensure ongoing implementation, Helena must commit to a righteous cycle of community investment. Transformation is a slow and incremental process, but progress can accelerate with early, catalytic wins. Collaboration is also key. Few of the 80 proposals will be achieved by a single leader, department, or the city, alone. Partnering will be essential, especially for those actions with a regional component. Through regular communication and engagement, the City can attract project champions and foster new leadership in the process. This cycle of

involvement will help build trust between the City and its collaborators and encourage continued investment and involvement. Last, Helena must be the champion of Helena. When an action is realized, the City should commit to celebrating the progress and tying this work back to the One Connected Community conversation. Without this essential input, this plan would be half finished. This section presents a strategy through which city leaders and departments can implement the comprehensive plan. The chapter presents a full matrix of plan actions with associated timeframes, priorities, resources, and supporting partners.

## GREAT PLACES | BUILT WITH INTENTION

RECOMMENDATIONS	PRIORITY	TIMING	RESOURCE	SUPPORT
G.01		Ongoing	Minimal / Policy	
G.02	★	Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Partnering necessary	RPCGB, Consultant
G.03		Ongoing	Minimal / Staff capacity	
G.04		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Moderate	
G.05		Immediate (next six months)	Minimal / Policy	
G.06		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Partnering necessary	RPCGB, Consultant
G.07		Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Moderate	
G.08		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Partnering necessary	RPCGB, Consultant
G.09		Ongoing	Minimal / Staff capacity	
G.10		Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Minimal / Policy	Consultant
G.11		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Minimal / Policy	RPCGB, Consultant
G.12		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Moderate	
G.13		Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Minimal / Policy	

## GREAT PLACES | BUILT WITH INTENTION

RECOMMENDATIONS	PRIORITY	TIMING	RESOURCE	SUPPORT
G.14		Ongoing	Minimal / Policy	
G.15		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Policy	
G.16		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Partnering necessary	RPCGB, Helena Economic Development Board, Consultant
G.17	★	Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Partnering necessary	RPCGB, Helena Economic Development Board, Consultant
G.18	★	Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Significant	
G.19		Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Moderate	
G.20		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Policy	RPCGB, Consultant
G.21	★	Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Moderate	
G.22	★	Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Moderate	RPCGB, Consultant
G.23		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Significant	
G.24		Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Significant	
G.25		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Minimal / Policy	



# PROSPERITY | IN ALL WAYS, PROSPEROUS

RECOMMENDATIONS		PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	RESOURCE	SUPPORT
P.01	Work to establish and advertise Helena as an ecotourism destination.	★	Ongoing	Moderate	RPCGB, Consultant
P.02	Increase the municipal millage rate to bring Helena in line with regional peers.	★	Immediate (next six months)	Minimal / Staff capacity	
P.03	Review various permit, application, and user fees in an ongoing way.		Ongoing	Minimal / Staff capacity	
P.04	Continue to pursue rational contracting of city services.	★	Ongoing	Minimal / Staff capacity	
P.05	Continue to support the operation and full build-out of the Helena Industrial Park.		Ongoing	Moderate	Helena Economic Development Board, Shelby County EDC, 58 INC
P.06	Support the mission of the Economic Development Board.		Ongoing	Minimal / Staff capacity	
P.07	Create more opportunities for medical and professional office space development.		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Policy	
P.08	Review home occupation section of zoning ordinance in light of Work-From-Home trends.		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Policy	
P.09	Explore strategic land assembly to support redevelopment activity.		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Moderate	
P.10	Develop a fiscal model to evaluate land use decisions.		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Policy	
P.11	Develop and maintain a commercial property inventory.		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Staff capacity	58 INC
P.12	Develop an annexation evaluation model.		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Moderate	
P.13	Support the development of a diversified housing stock.		Ongoing	Minimal / Policy	

## PROSPERITY | IN ALL WAYS, PROSPEROUS

RECOMMENDATIONS	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	RESOURCE	SUPPORT
P:14	★	Ongoing	Minimal / Policy	
P:15		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Partnering necessary	
P:16		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Minimal / Staff capacity	
P:17	★	Immediate (next six months)	Minimal / Policy	

## CONNECTIONS | ONE COMMUNITY, WELL CONNECTED

RECOMMENDATIONS	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	RESOURCE	SUPPORT
C.01		Ongoing	Minimal / Staff capacity	
C.02		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Policy	
C.03		Immediate (next six months)	Minimal / Policy	
C.04		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Policy	RPCGB, Consultant
C.05		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Partnering necessary	ALDOT, Shelby County Transportation Department
C.06		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Staff capacity	

## CONNECTIONS | ONE COMMUNITY, WELL CONNECTED

RECOMMENDATIONS	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	RESOURCE	SUPPORT
C.07		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Moderate	RPCGB, Consultant
C.08		Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Minimal / Staff capacity	
C.09		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Moderate	Consultant
C.10		Ongoing	Minimal / Staff capacity	
C.11		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Moderate	Consultant
C.12	★	Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Moderate	
C.13	★	Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Partnering necessary	RPCGB, Land Owners, Shelby County
C.14	★	Ongoing	Minimal / Policy	
C.15		Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Minimal / Policy	
C.16		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Moderate	
C.17		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Moderate	



## CONNECTIONS | ONE COMMUNITY, WELL CONNECTED

RECOMMENDATIONS	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	RESOURCE	SUPPORT	
C.18		Establish a “Walking School Bus” Program whereby parents volunteer to walk neighborhood kids to /from schools.	Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Partnering necessary	Shelby County School District
C.19		Develop a regular capital improvements plan.	Immediate (next six months)	Minimal / Staff capacity	
C.20		Develop a community facilities master plan.	Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Moderate	Consultant
C.21		Use the Helena Municipal Building exclusively as an administration building.	Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Minimal / Low	
C.22		Acquire land in area near the Helena Municipal Building and build a combined police administration and courts building.	Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Significant	
C.23		Explore future use for the existing Senior Center Building to provide additional public safety facilities.	Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Minimal / Low	
C.24	★	Expand facilities at existing parks on city-owned land.	Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Moderate	
C.25		Add soccer fields at the Helena Sports Complex.	Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Significant	
C.26		Add an additional four field baseball/softball diamond at the Helena Sports Complex.	Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Significant	
C.27		Construct parks to meet the needs of a growing community.	Long Term (7 to 10 years)	Significant	

## CONNECTIONS | ONE COMMUNITY, WELL CONNECTED

RECOMMENDATIONS	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	RESOURCE	SUPPORT
C.28 Support the addition of public alternative fuel vehicle fueling stations such as E85 ethanol, biodiesel, liquefied petroleum gas (propane) and electric to stations and stores within Helena.		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Minimal / Low	
C.29 Explore alternative fuel vehicles and equipment when replacing aged City vehicles and equipment.		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Minimal / Staff capacity	
C.30 Support necessary expansions or investments in local schools.		Ongoing	Minimal / Staff capacity	
C.31 Establish a schedule for upgrading and repairing existing streets within established neighborhoods.		Short Term (6 mos. to 3 years)	Minimal / Staff capacity	
C.32 Support widening Highway 52 from South Shades Crest Road to State Route 261.		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Minimal / Staff capacity	ALDOT, Shelby County Transportation Department
C.33 Continue to implement the recommendations of the Helena Schools Intersection Study.		Ongoing	Moderate	Shelby County School District, ALDOT, Shelby County Transportation Department
C.34 Add call boxes to greenways.		Mid Term (3 to 7 years)	Moderate	

