

# DOWNTOWN BOISE 2016

## A PUBLIC SPACES & PUBLIC LIFE STUDY

CITY OF BOISE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES







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# Foreword

The City of Boise's vision is to become the most livable city in the country. This document was created to support tangible progress towards that goal.

The City has undergone an ambitious period of planning over the last two years, incorporating a tremendous amount of external expertise and public feedback. Three significant documents were born from this process: the *2016 Transportation Action Plan*, the *2016 Downtown Parks and Public Spaces Plan*, and the *2016 City of Boise Cultural Master Plan*. Each details a wide-ranging, progressive vision for Boise's future.

*Downtown Boise 2016* finds itself at the locus of these three efforts. It addresses the challenge of building livable public space, which requires a multidisciplinary framework and a cooperative vision. Its mission is to provide a data-driven analysis of the built and cultural environment of Downtown Boise (hereinafter referred to as "Downtown"), which will help to inform all Boiseans' day-to-day efforts to build the most livable city in the country.







**INTRODUCTION**

THE LIVABLE CITY  
CONTEXT & PROCESS

BOISE AT A GLANCE



# Building Blocks

**The Goal:** To reach five central conclusions which identify trends and opportunities in the public space network of Downtown Boise, including everything from mobility and sustainability to comfort and cultural enrichment.

**The Method:** Data, data, data. The conclusions of this document are derived from a diverse set of data-driven analyses of Downtown Boise performed specifically for this study. These analyses are split into three categories: The Network, The Urban Fabric, and The Culture.

## The Vision:

### *LIV Boise's Three Pillars:*

**1. Lasting Environments:** Recognize, protect, and improve the health and sustainability of all our activities, our connections to one another, and our natural resources.

**2. Innovative Enterprises:** Work with individuals, nonprofits, and businesses to encourage creativity and collaboration that will promote economic prosperity and improve lives.

**3. Vibrant Communities:** Engage Citizens and organizations to spark new connections, inspire cooperation, and strengthen Boise's rich, community-minded spirit.

### *Downtown Boise Guiding Principles:*

1. People + Ideas = Innovation
2. Entertainment + Energy = Celebration
3. Connectivity + Convenience = Transportation

**The Foundation:** This study is informed by the principles established by the City of Boise in the following documents:

- *Blueprint Boise, City Comprehensive Plan*
- *City of Boise 2015 Livability Report*
- *Transportation Action Plan*
- *Downtown Boise Parks and Public Spaces Plan*
- *City of Boise Cultural Master Plan*
- *Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines*

**The Guide:** This study is based on Gehl Architects' 2009 *Downtown Seattle Public Spaces & Public Life*.





# Building the Livable City

On the streets of Downtown, how do the City of Boise's guiding principles manifest themselves in the effort to build the most livable city in the country?

**1. Innovation:** When **Many User Groups** collide with each other in a space which offers opportunities for **Long-Term Stays**, people are able to discuss and pursue transformative ideas.

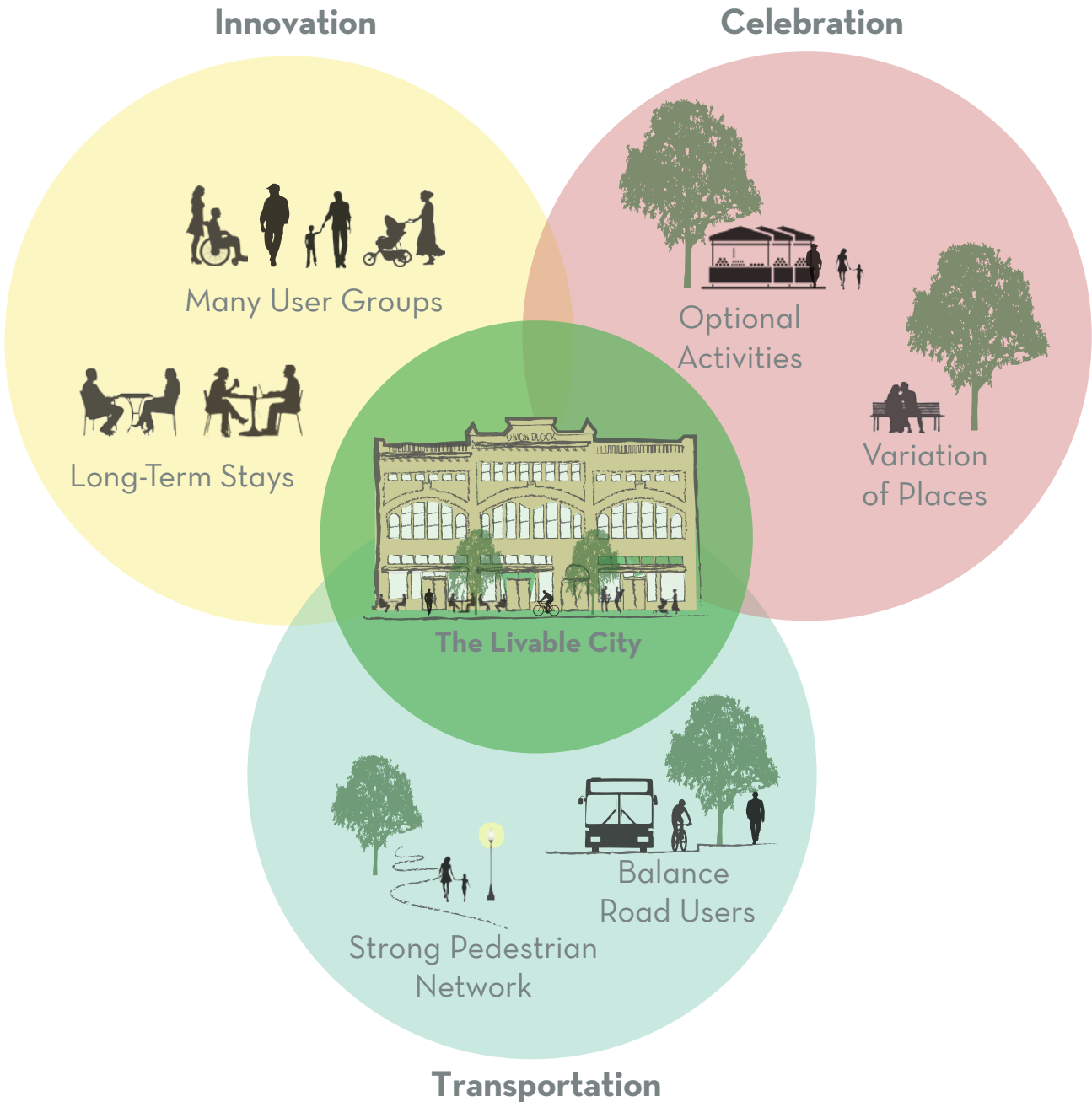
**2. Celebration:** Energy, entertainment, and cultural engagement arise from a wide **Variation of Places**, each of which must encourage a diverse array of **Optional Activities**.

**3. Transportation:** A livable and active downtown must **Balance Road Users** by delivering a **Strong Pedestrian Network**, assuring both connectivity and convenience for all modes of travel.

These six criteria, which are borrowed directly from Gehl Architects' 2009 *Downtown Seattle Public Spaces & Public Life*, define the tangible connections between cultivating lively public spaces and creating the most livable city in the country.

In the spirit of these goals and in light of the data gathered, this study identifies five conclusions for Downtown Boise, which will be detailed later:

- 1. Concentrated Identity
- 2. The Westside Opportunity
- 3. Destination Downtown
- 4. Bridging the Gap
- 5. A Reason to Walk







## The City...

Nestled into the foothills of one of the largest wilderness areas in the United States, Boise is unmistakably influenced by its remote geography and its access to phenomenal outdoor recreation. A city that prides itself on its active lifestyle, Boise offers its citizens a year-round calendar of hiking, camping, skiing, and other recreational opportunities, as well as a wide selection of festivals, concerts, and cultural activities. A thriving urban core, a vibrant tech sector, and a rapidly expanding metropolitan area add big-city flavor to this remote town.

Downtown Boise, an architecturally-rich historic district with a strong business presence and a lively social scene, is experiencing a period of growth unparalleled in the city's history. As Boise's lifestyle continues to attract new migration and development, this historic commercial center for miners and fur trappers is poised to become a true peer to larger Pacific Northwest urban areas like Portland and Seattle.



## ...and its People

Friendly, outdoorsy, and relaxed, Boiseans are known to fully explore the interims between work and play. While Downtown offers the chance to enjoy concerts, restaurants, and performances, Boiseans can also choose a walk along the lush Boise River or a day spent mountain biking in the foothills.

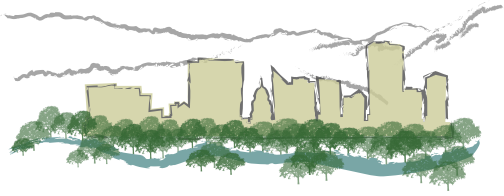
Every corner of this historical city has a unique story to tell, but only a handful of these neighborhoods retain a strong regional identity. The quaint and creative North End, as well as the beautiful and historic East End, offer refreshing exceptions. Authenticity, expressed both in the heritage of Boise's neighborhoods and in the spirit of its people, is central to the city's ethos.

The campus of Boise State University, a dense and engaging Cultural District, and a string of historic parks populate the Boise River. Each provides a unique complement to the growing business district just a few minutes' walk away.





# Downtown Boise 101



## Location, Location, Location

Tucked between mountain ranges and bisected by the tree-lined Boise River, Boise finds its identity in its geography. The foothills, one of the city's greatest assets, serve as the beautiful backdrop to everyday life in Downtown Boise.



## A Different Type of Gold Rush

A friendly business climate, well-educated workforce, and active lifestyle have made Boise an attractive home for a wide variety of companies, bringing hundreds of millions of dollars of transformative investment to Downtown.



## Meet Me Downtown

With office, residential, restaurant, and cultural uses popping up on nearly every block, the bustling Central Business District has cultivated a stimulating mixed-use dynamic. It is rich with local restaurants and boutiques as well as regional arts and cultural organizations.



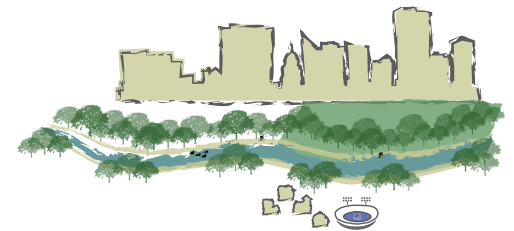
## The City of Trees (and Playgrounds)

A series of large and beautiful parks line the Boise River, offering a wide variety of recreational opportunities. In addition, many other parks and public spaces decorate other parts of Downtown.



## What's Past is Prologue

Historic art, architecture, signage, and venues contribute to the character of Boise, adding context to the Downtown experience by providing a window into the city's heritage.



## A River Runs Through It

Boise has protected a natural, tree-lined river corridor which runs through the center of downtown, separating Boise State University from the Central Business District. A popular mixed-use pedestrian path, the Greenbelt, runs along the length of the river.





**Boise is still so young and new—changing almost every day—and I don't think it's overstatement to suggest that our town represents everything that remains great about America: potential, youth, natural beauty, quality of life.... Hikers can still drink from a secret spring in the hills; paddlers can still go kayaking in the morning and meet with their accountants by noon. When we visit friends who live elsewhere, they ask, "Boise? Really? Why do you live there?" But when friends visit us, they say, "Oh, wow, now I see."**

-Anthony Doerr *"Smithsonian Magazine"* April 2009.



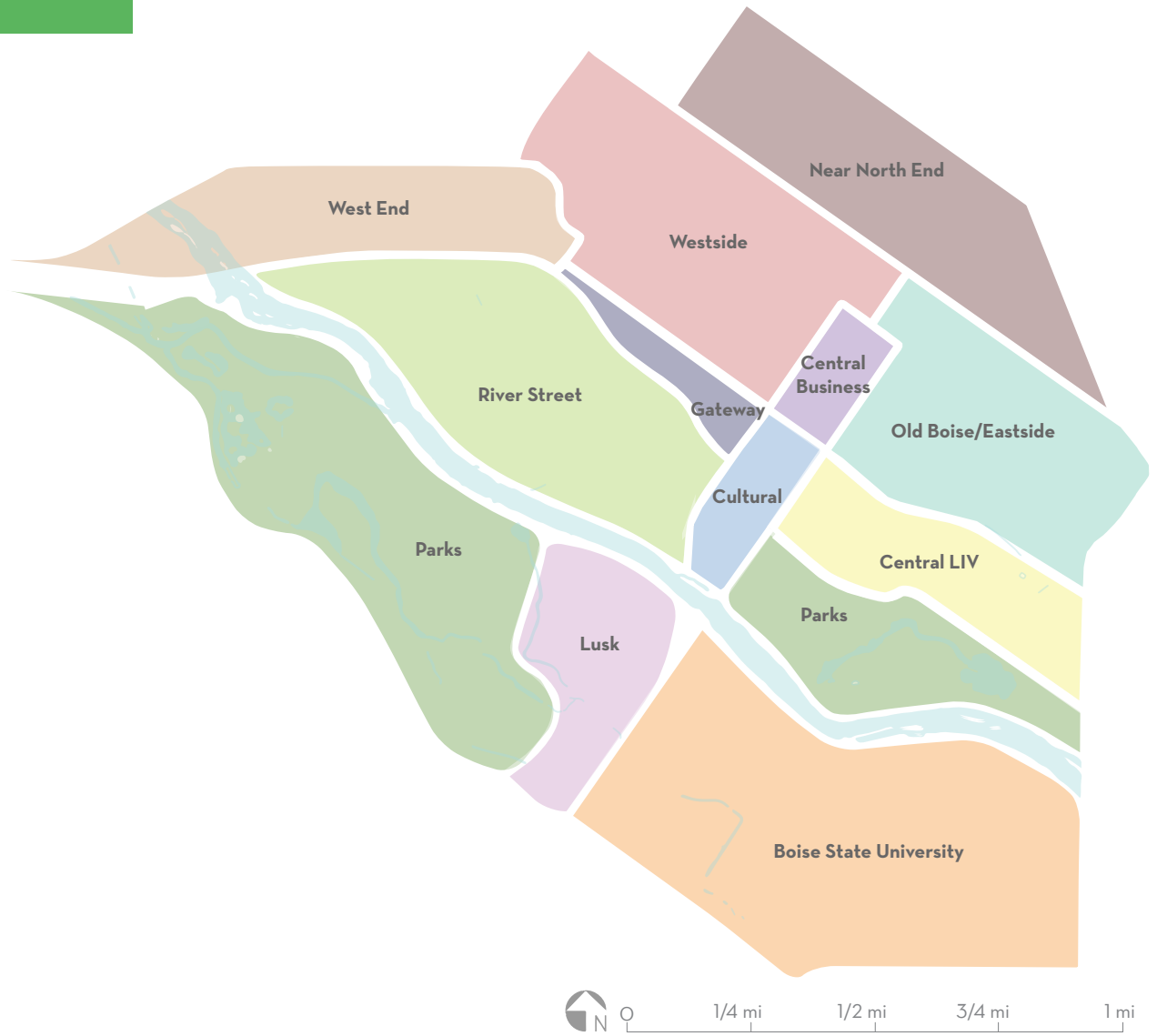
# Downtown Boise

The study area comprises  
a total of 1,529 acres.

Downtown Boise includes a wide variety of distinct urban neighborhoods. To many Boiseans, “Downtown” refers specifically to the Central Business District, the cultural and commercial heart of the city. In this study, the Central Business District will sometimes be referred to as the Downtown Core.

Surrounding the Central Business District are neighborhoods like the Near North End (a quiet residential area), Lusk (low-income and apartment housing with a burgeoning student presence), and Boise State University. Multiple large parks, including Julia Davis Park and Ann Morrison Park, are also included in the Downtown planning area.

The selected study area closely mirrors the Downtown Boise Planning Area as designated in *Blueprint Boise*. The area is bounded by the Boise Bench on the southwest, Beacon St. on the southeast, Broadway Ave. and Fort St. on the east and north, 16th St. and 19th St. on the northwest, and Main St. on the west.





# Conclusions

## 1. Concentrated Identity

The **Central Business District** and its immediate surroundings form the social, cultural, and economic heart of the city. This is by far the **most active** part of Downtown, and is the only area in which development is sufficiently **dense** to support a vibrant urban lifestyle.

## 2. The Westside Opportunity

The **Westside**, which has been passed over for decades, is now the city's **best opportunity for redevelopment** and cultural redefinition. A safe, active, and tree-covered Westside would expand Boise's **cultural and economic potential**.

## 3. Destination Downtown

Downtown serves **employees and visitors** much better than it serves **residents**. Because amenities cater to **day use** and evening use, Downtown lacks some of the cultural vibrancy (and feeling of safety) that can be provided only by a **strong residential community**.

## 4. Bridging the Gap

The city would capitalize better on some of its most significant assets by improving **connectivity** across **Front and Myrtle Streets**, which divide Downtown and present a **safety hazard** to bicycle, pedestrian, and vehicular travel.

## 5. A Reason to Walk

Activating ground-floor frontages and investing in streetscape improvements would inspire Boiseans to **drive less** and **walk more**, improving **pedestrian connectivity** between destinations and making Downtown a more **engaging** place to be.





# INVENTORY

## PART I: THE NETWORK

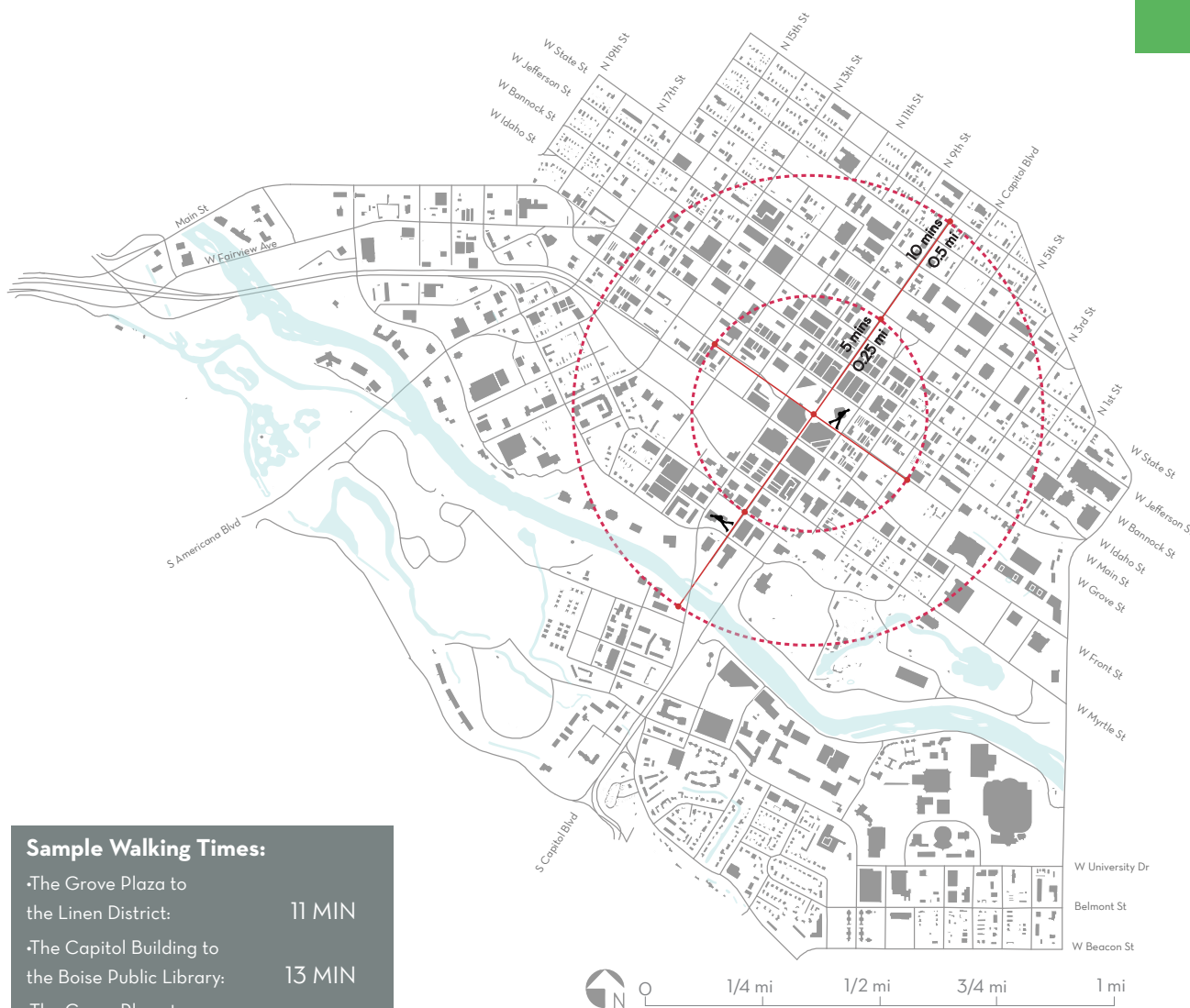


# Walking in the City

Though Downtown Boise is blessed with the gifts of unchallenging topography and a predictable street grid, pedestrian connectivity between different neighborhoods can be a challenge. Many Downtown destinations lie outside of comfortable walking distance from the Downtown core, forcing increased driving trips.

For the purpose of visualizing reasonable walking distances in Boise, the center of Downtown can be assumed to be the Grove Plaza. The Plaza, which is approximately a block from BoDo, JUMP, the Basque Block, and the 8th Street Pedestrian Corridor, serves as the primary focal point for the Boise pedestrian network. Most pedestrians are assumed to be willing to walk about half a mile (10 minutes) to reach their destination.

Readily available parking also tends to invite car trips between Downtown destinations. To travel west to the Linen District or south to Boise State University, for instance, many Boiseans would choose to drive their cars despite the short distance. “Park Once” campaigns, walkability initiatives, and the Downtown circulator are aimed to counter this trend.



## Sample Walking Times:

•The Grove Plaza to the Linen District:	11 MIN
•The Capitol Building to the Boise Public Library:	13 MIN
•The Grove Plaza to the BSU Student Union:	27 MIN
•Trader Joe's to JUMP:	6 MIN
•Boise High School to Albertson's Stadium	40 MIN

## SUMMARY:

**Only destinations within the Central Business District are easily walkable.**



# Walking Flow

This figure shows the amount of time, as a percentage of total time in transit, a pedestrian might expect to spend waiting while travelling across Downtown on major pedestrian routes at a walking speed of 3.5 MPH. Data was gathered at non-peak times. North-south routes, which cross major vehicular corridors like State St., Front St., and Myrtle St., have the highest waiting times. In addition, waiting times are higher when traversing Downtown close to the core when traveling both north-south and east-west.

High wait times on north-south routes are caused by signals at major street crossings, at which pedestrians will often wait a full minute or more. On 8th Street, the city's most visible pedestrian corridor, wait times are over 20%.

The possibility of timing streetlights to bicyclists and pedestrians has been suggested to decrease pedestrian wait time and make Downtown more welcoming to diverse modes of transportation.

## SUMMARY:

**It is more difficult for pedestrians to travel north-south than east-west.**

### Highest Percent Waiting:

#### 8th St.

(From Jefferson to Anne Frank Memorial)

Walking time: 13.6 MIN

Waiting time: 2.7 MIN

Percent waiting time: 20%

### Lowest Percent Waiting:

#### Washington St.

(from 3rd to 16th)

Walking time: 16.0 MIN

Waiting time: .30 MIN

Percent waiting time: 2%

**Total Waiting Time: 12.8%**





# Pedestrian Crossings

In this graphic, pedestrian crossings are analyzed at intersections at which major pedestrian and vehicular routes intersect. In recent years, the City of Boise and ACHD have embarked on a mission to modernize crossing infrastructure and improve ADA accessibility across Downtown. The results have been impressive and wide-reaching, with most crossings (especially in the northeastern portion of Downtown) now boasting fully modern striping, ramps, and signalization.

Crossing infrastructure in most of Downtown is satisfactory, with only a few exceptions. Unfortunately, satisfactory infrastructure doesn't always translate to a pleasant pedestrian experience. On Front St., Myrtle St., and State St., for instance, crossings with acceptable infrastructure can still be intimidating and uncomfortable due to high vehicular traffic.

Very few crossings in Downtown Boise meaningfully celebrate the pedestrian. Decorative markings, neckdowns, pedestrian-timed signals, and diagonal crossings could all help to prioritize the pedestrian more effectively.



## SUMMARY:

**Front, Myrtle, and State Streets present obstacles to pedestrian traffic.**



# Bicycling in Downtown

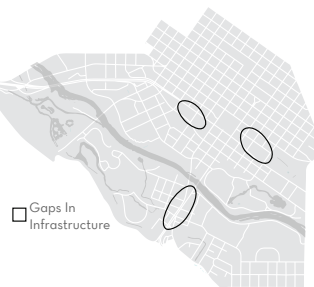
Boise's growing network of bicycle facilities is a major achievement, but it still holds numerous opportunities for improvement. While six major north-south routes have bike lanes, Bannock St. and Grove St. are the only east-west bike lanes in the central core. East-west bike routes on Main St. and Idaho St. would significantly improve the Downtown bike network.

The crown jewel of Boise's recreational bicycling infrastructure is the Greenbelt, a scenic mixed use path which runs along both sides of the Boise River. Unfortunately, the Greenbelt does not currently support bike commuting to most parts of Downtown. The majority of bike commuters to Downtown come from north and east of the Downtown study area, where easy connections exist to the Downtown core.

Boise's newest and most progressive bike initiative is the **Boise GreenBike** program, a service of Valley Regional Transit which allows people to get around Downtown quickly and affordably on rented bikes. Hubs are stationed throughout Downtown.

## SUMMARY:

The city should pursue expansion of the bike network to remedy service gaps and improve east-west connectivity.

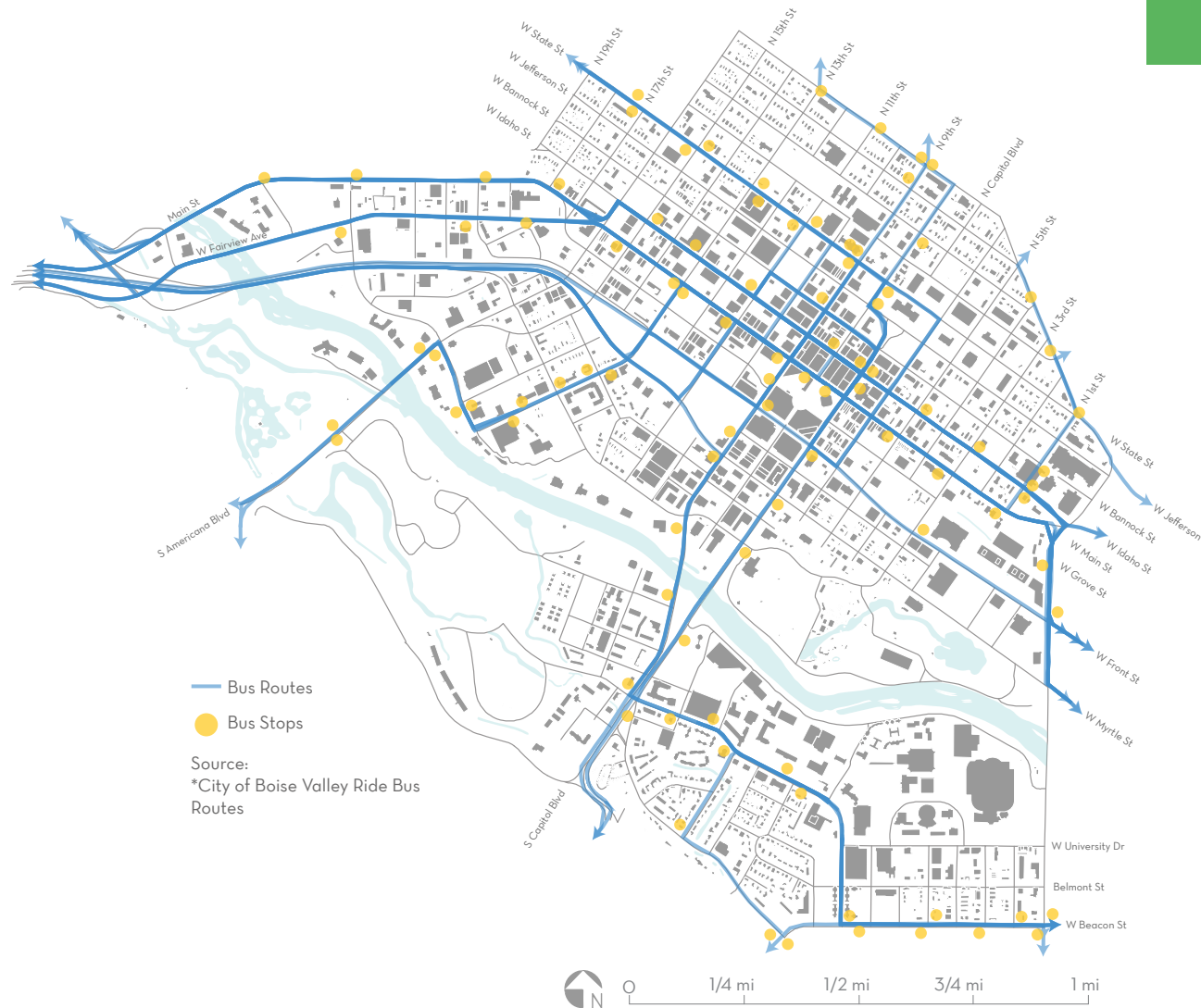


Boise ranks **4th** in the nation among cities with the highest percentage of bike commuters.

Source: US Census Bureau



ValleyRide Boise ridership has increased  
by more than 20% since 2007.  
Source: ValleyRide



# Public Transit

The map of Boise's public transit system and the system's recent record tell two dramatically different stories. Geographically, the bus system appears to be comprehensive and accessible. The unfortunate truth, however, is that public transit has always been underfunded and underutilized in the Boise area.

Valley Regional Transit (VRT), the valley-wide transit authority, acknowledges that their system primarily serves people with no alternative means of transportation. VRT continues to fight to expand their frequency and duration of service, but low ridership has mostly precluded investment. In addition, Idaho is one of only two states without state support or a local option for funding public transit. Despite limited funding and recognition, however, VRT has implemented numerous initiatives to make bus service more available and affordable to low-income Boiseans.

With the construction of a new city bus terminal, Main Street Station, in 2016, VRT hopes to make bus service more popular and convenient to all Downtown users.

## SUMMARY:

**Despite improvements, expanded bus service may not address Boise's transit needs. The city should look towards innovative new transit initiatives.**



# Collisions

Startlingly different patterns can be observed by separately analyzing pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile crashes in downtown Boise. While car crashes are distributed all over Downtown and pedestrian collisions are mostly confined to the Central Business District, bicycle conflicts seem to occur primarily on north-south streets that are considered “bike friendly.”

Capitol Blvd., 9th St., and 16th St. are bicycle collision hotspots, especially at Front St. and State St. Because north-south connectivity is assumed to be the strength of the Boise bike system, this is a concerning trend.

## SUMMARY:

**Front, Myrtle, 9th, and Capitol Blvd. are the most dangerous downtown streets, accounting for 40% of all collisions.**



**92.8% of total collisions were vehicular**

Source: Idaho Transportation Department



# Collisions



Particularly unsafe spots include the intersection of 11th St. and State St. for pedestrians (a point of access for the YMCA and Boise High School) and the intersection of River St. and 9th St. for bikes. Many automobile collisions occur between Capitol Blvd. and 9th St. on Front and Myrtle streets, which carry highway traffic.

For context, it is important to note the overall volume of each type of collision. From 2010 to 2014, total pedestrian crash volume in the Downtown planning area was 60. In the same time period, there were 170 bicycle collisions and 2,982 vehicular collisions. This statistic serves as a reminder that the vast majority of Downtown traffic, as well as the bulk of crashes, are cars.





# Surface Traffic Volume

Gehl Architects asserts in their 2009 *Seattle Public Spaces and Public Life* study that “the more traffic and the higher the speed, the lower the quality for pedestrians and bicyclists.” Though Boise’s traffic volumes are significantly smaller than those in Seattle, there is no doubt that traffic congestion and high speed one-way roads decrease the quality of the pedestrian and bicycle network in Boise.

The primary high-volume streets are Front, Myrtle, 9th, State, Broadway Ave. and Capitol Blvd. These streets present obstacles to pedestrians and are unfriendly to bike traffic.

High traffic streets cannot be eliminated, but the city should be strategic in designating how high traffic volumes should move through Downtown. While Front St. and Myrtle St., which connect to the highway, are logical automobile routes, for instance, great care should be taken that bikes and pedestrians are able to use routes like 9th St. and Main St. comfortably.

## SUMMARY:

**Though vehicular traffic through Downtown is not increasing from year to year, high-traffic streets present challenges to multimodal mobility.**

Maximum 24-hour traffic volume: **40,188** on  
Front St. west of 11th St.  
Source: ACHD



CCDC-owned facilities capacity: 2,567 spaces

Total parking spaces in Downtown Boise:

**more than 17,000**

Source: CCDC



Source:

\* Republic Parking Management

\*\* Boise Parking Office

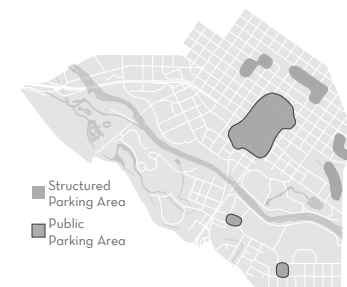
\*\*\* BSU Department of Public Safety

# Multi-Story Parking

As Boise grows and surface parking is redeveloped, the city will need to increasingly lean on multi-story parking to meet demand. Very careful attention, however, must be paid to the manner in which structured parking is integrated into the Downtown fabric. With shrewd development, the parking capacity of Downtown can be dramatically expanded without compromising the character of the area.

To minimize the potential damage caused by parking structures, it is important that ground floor frontages on garages are designed to be active and engaging. An example of such a garage is Capital City Development Corporation's 9th and Front garage, which incorporates both commercial uses and a high-density residential project.

In addition to being activated, future garages must be safe and easily accessible without being unsightly or unwelcoming. Many Downtown Boise garages currently pose significant risks to pedestrian safety because of blind exits onto the street. This should be avoided in the future.



## SUMMARY:

**Structure parking serves the most densely developed areas of Downtown.**



# Surface Parking

(and undeveloped lots)

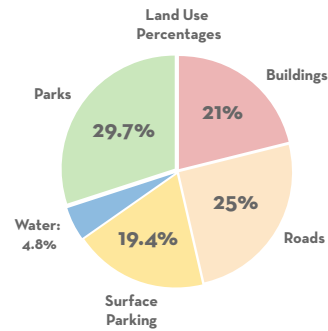
Surface parking is ubiquitous in Downtown Boise, covering a total of 10,246,534 square feet, 19% of the total area of Downtown (including the river corridor). This excludes on-street parking, but includes some undeveloped parcels which might not always be used for parking. As surface parking continues to be repurposed and redeveloped, its share of the Downtown planning area will fall dramatically in the coming decades.

The highest concentration of surface parking exists in the westernmost portion of Downtown in the area of Main St., Fairview Ave., and River St. The only area devoid of surface parking is the 8th Street corridor through the heart of Downtown, due to access to garage parking.

Surface parking is unattractive and damages the walkability and bikeability of the city. Though parking access is necessary to maintain a high quality of public life, structure parking provides a better (though more expensive) alternative. Sustained efforts should be made to reclaim surface parking lots for more valuable uses, while simultaneously being careful to protect sufficient parking resources for Boise's current and future needs.

## SUMMARY:

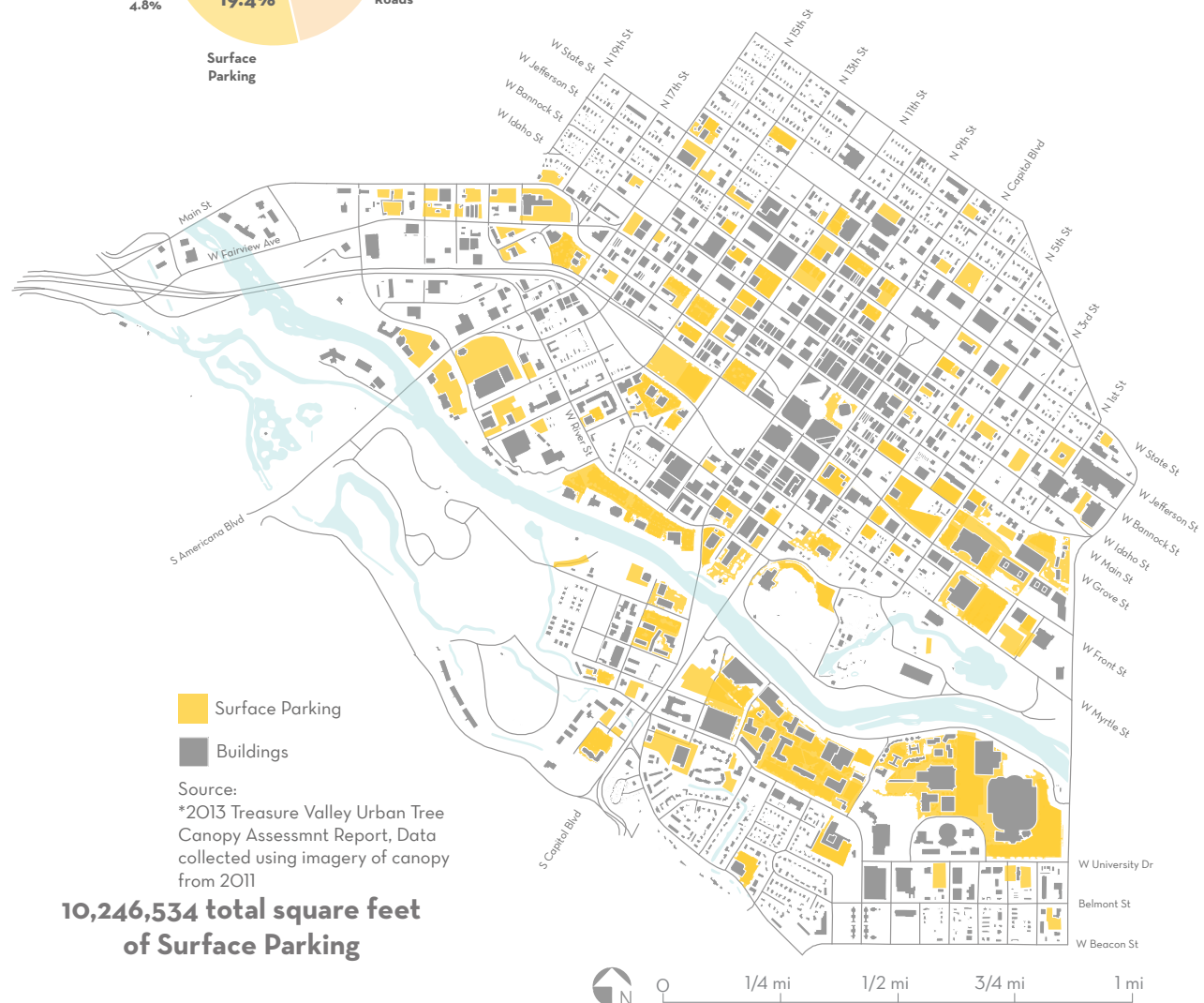
**Surface parking will (and should) continue to disappear, but its removal should be deliberate.**



**Average off-street parking occupancy: 59%**

**Average on-street parking occupancy: 63%**

Source: Carl Walker, Inc.



## Ten Takeaways: Inventory Part I (The Network)

1. Boise's Downtown transportation network prioritizes vehicular traffic.
2. Front St. and Myrtle St., along with other large one-way streets, make pedestrian and bicycle travel difficult and unsafe.
3. While crossing signalization and accessibility at almost all intersections meets technical standards, many crossings remain uncomfortable for pedestrians.
4. Though improving, the bike network is fragmented, making continuous bike routes almost impossible to find.
5. Public transit covers much of Downtown, but the system lacks ridership.
6. Multi-story parking serves the Downtown core, while surface parking serves most of the rest of Downtown.
7. Downtown Boise is too large to be walkable from end to end, a problem a circulator would help address.
8. For bicycles and pedestrians, north-south connectivity is more difficult than east-west.
9. The least safe Downtown corridors are Capitol Blvd., 9th St., Front St., and Myrtle St., accounting for 40% of Downtown collisions.
10. Surface parking and undeveloped land are ubiquitous, offering huge potential for redevelopment all across Downtown.





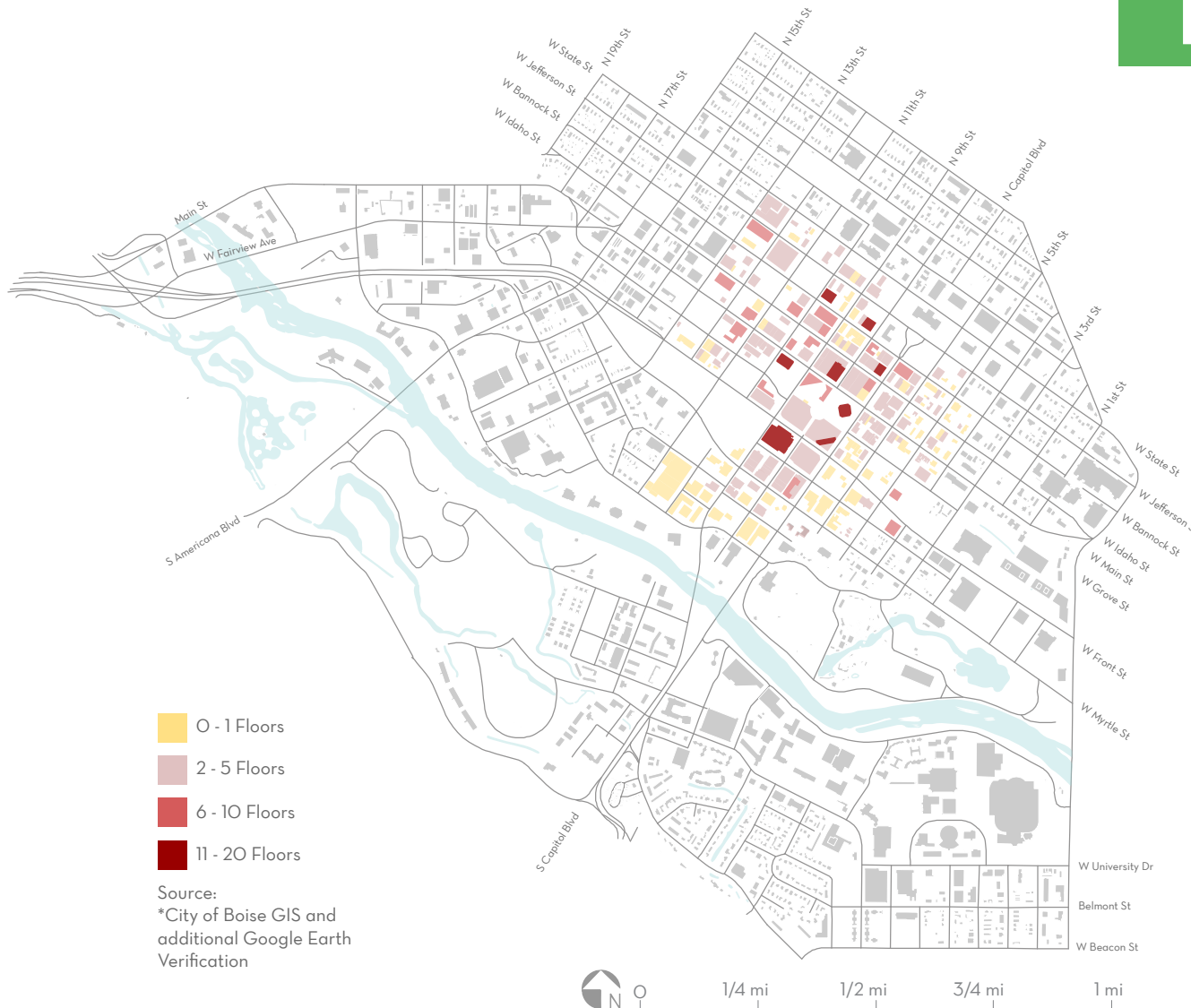
# INVENTORY

## PART II: THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

# The Tall Downtown

The Boise skyline forms the key visual identity of the city. The US Bank Plaza, Wells Fargo Building, and Idaho State Capitol, as well as the relatively new Zions Bank Building, comprise the most recognizable elements of the city's profile. When viewed from the south, the sprawling foothills serve as a beautiful backdrop to Boise's modestly-sized Downtown.

The tallest building in Boise is the Zion's Bank Building, which was constructed in 2013 to stand 323 feet. The US Bank Plaza (295 feet), One Capitol Center (206 feet), Idaho State Capitol (198 feet), and The Grove Hotel (196 feet) round out the five tallest buildings in the city. The oldest tall buildings Downtown are the Hoff Building, which was built in 1930, and Key Tower, which was built as the Bank of Idaho in 1963. Almost all 10 of the 10+ story buildings in Downtown can be found in the rectangle between 6th St., 13th St., Front St. and Jefferson St.



## SUMMARY:

**Boise's skyline is not yet mature, and will continue to develop for many decades to come.**



# Views

Because Boise doesn't have any skyscrapers, almost every building is visually accessible to street-level Downtown users. The perspective of a Downtown pedestrian usually includes a handful of 2-4 story buildings, as well as one or two taller structures. The city is not densely developed enough to have full blocks of tall buildings.

Historic buildings provide human-scale design interest at street level, while views to the north usually contain the foothills as a scenic backdrop. Views of the entire skyline are difficult to find, with Crescent Rim Dr. (the southern border of the study area) providing the notable exception. Though the State Capitol is considered to be a staple of the Boise skyline, it is only visible from a few corridors.

In most tall Downtown buildings, sweeping views can be accessed from the top floors, with viewsheds often reaching to Bogus Basin in the north, Table Rock in the east, Meridian in the west, and the Owyhee Mountains in the south.

## SUMMARY:

**At street level, Boise feels more like a medium-sized town than a large city.**



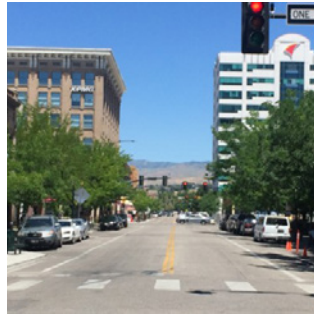
**A.** Though the State Capitol is considered a focal point of the city's skyline, it is only directly visible from Capitol Boulevard.



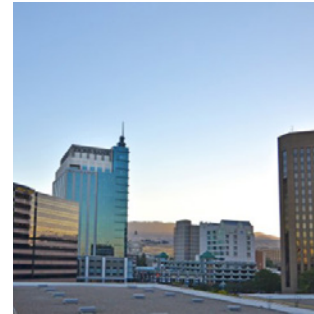
**B.** 8th and Main and the City Center Plaza have dramatically changed views Downtown, especially from 8th St., Main St., and the Grove Plaza.



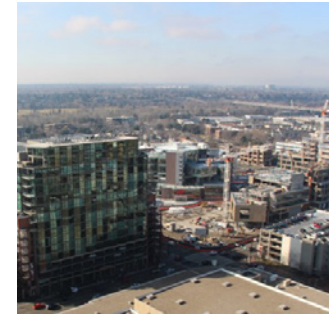
**C.** Most of Downtown is built tall enough to block views to the foothills.



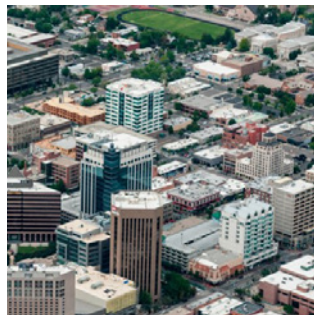
**D.** The foothills are directly visible from some north-south streets.



**E.** The classic Boise view is anchored by the foothills in the background.



**F.** JUMP and the Simplot headquarters are changing the skyline significantly.



**G.** Most of the 10+ story buildings in Downtown are clustered in a small area.



**H.** The Boise River is one of the city's key visual assets.



**I.** Historic buildings like the Hoff provide visual interest to Downtown users.

# The Riverfront

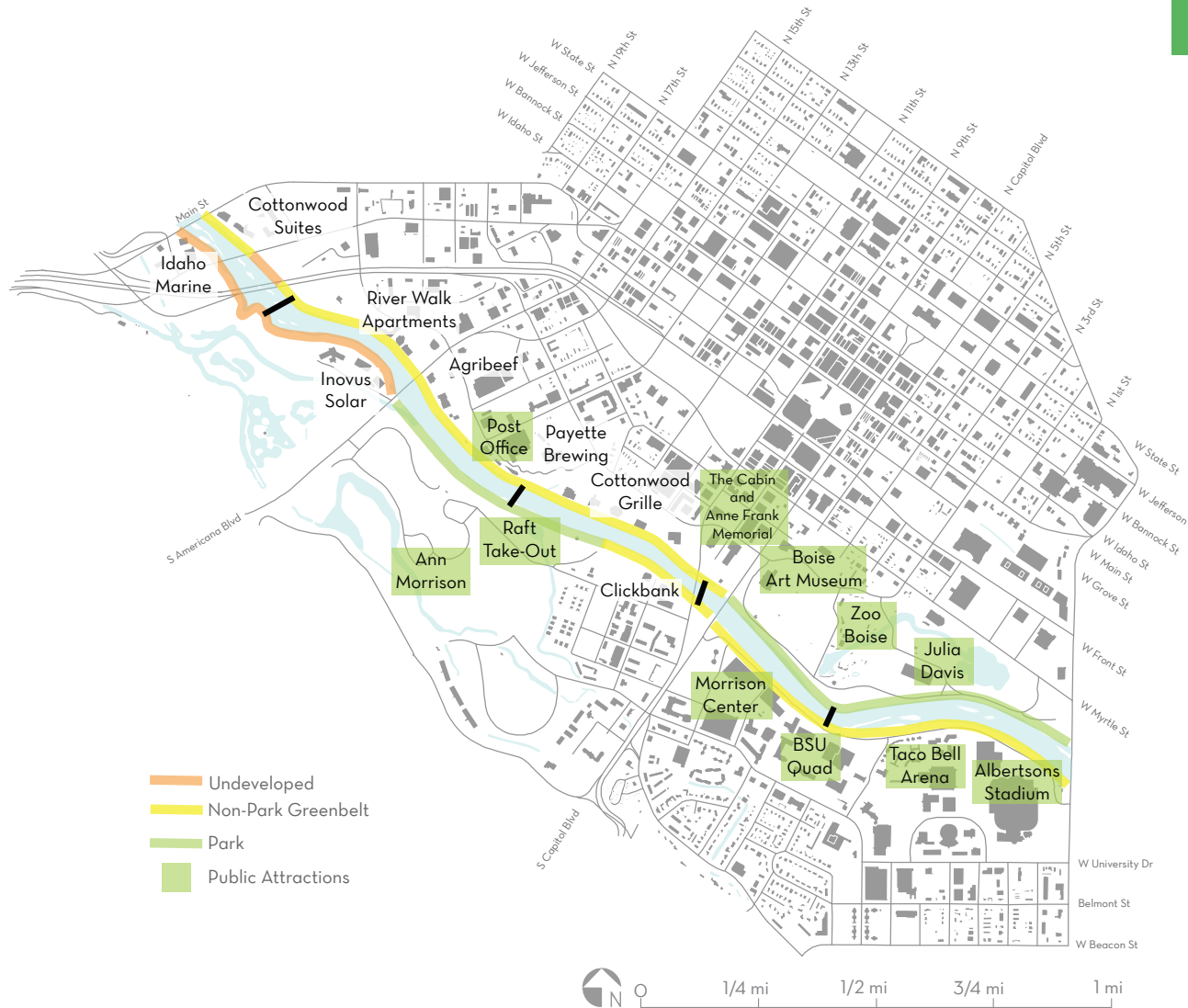
The Boise River presents Downtown's most idiosyncratic dilemma. The river corridor has been reclaimed and protected diligently throughout the recent growth of the city, yielding a stretch of land through the heart of Downtown mostly devoid of development. Because riverfront property is inaccessible, development patterns have turned away from the river.

In the minds of many, this is Boise's greatest accomplishment. Others point out, however, that the introduction of restaurants or shops along certain stretches of the river could round out Boise's economic development and make the river corridor an even more valuable asset.

Though many visions have been identified, it's hard to imagine Boise sacrificing the tranquil river corridor it has established in the heart of Downtown, along which most river frontage is occupied by parks or by popular stretches of the Greenbelt.

## SUMMARY:

**Development of the river corridor is unlikely within the boundaries of Downtown, though some opportunities exist.**





# Ground Floor Frontages

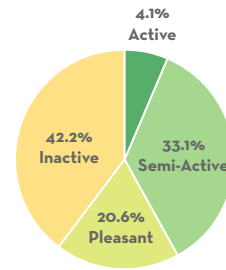
Active frontages in Boise are concentrated in the core of Downtown between 5th St. and 10th St. and between Myrtle St. and Bannock St. Much of the area immediately surrounding the Downtown core, especially in the West End, is occupied by semi-active and inactive frontages, with a large amount of frontage space dedicated to surface parking. In areas along the fringes of the Downtown planning area there is a high density of “pleasant” streetscapes, most of which are populated by historic homes or landscaped green space. St. Luke’s Hospital, which houses numerous clinics in historic homes, occupies a large amount of such frontage space along the east side of Downtown.

The lack of active frontages in the areas surrounding the Downtown business district damages pedestrian connectivity in the city, and the abundance of inactive frontages (most of which are parking garages or surface parking) can make Boiseans feel unsafe moving around Downtown.

The technical characteristics of active ground floor frontages are described in the *Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines*.

## SUMMARY:

**The Central Business District is clearly the most active part of Downtown.**



# Ground Floor Frontages

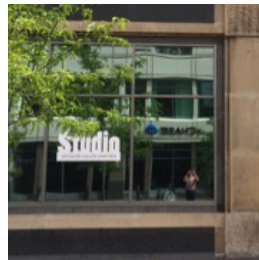
## Active

- Small units, many doors
- Diversity of functions
- Interesting relief in frontages
- Good materials and details



## Semi-Active

- Mixture of small and large units
- Uninteresting design of frontages
- Poor detailing
- Some closed or passive units



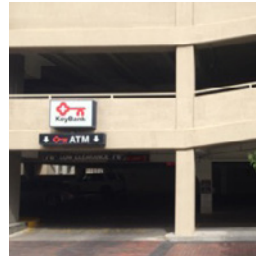
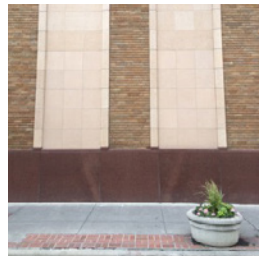
## Pleasant

- Residential or self-contained commercial units
- Lawn or green space
- Interesting to look at but uninviting
- Historic materials and detailing



## Inactive

- Large units with few doors
- No variation of function
- Closed or passive frontages
- Surface or structured parking



“The design of ground floor building frontages has a significant influence on the attractiveness of the public realm. They are the walls of the urban environment and contain the openings through which we see, hear, smell, and engage in the city’s many-faceted palette of activities. On the ground floor and at eye-level we come into direct contact with the city.

Good ground floor frontages are active, rich in detail and exciting to walk by. They are interesting to look at, to touch, and to stand beside. High quality ground floor frontages create a welcoming sensation and encourage people to walk and stay in the city.

Other positive qualities include a high degree of transparency enabling interaction between activities inside the buildings and those occurring on the street. Also, frontages with many small units, many openings and a diversity of functions make streets more diverse, stimulating, and attractive. Frontages with small units also provide a predominantly vertical facade structure which has the important visual effect of making distances feel shorter.”

-Gehl Architects “Downtown Seattle Public Space and Public Life,” 2009.



# Alley Quality

**“Downtown alleys have the potential for strengthening the public realm and increased pedestrian invitation.”**

-Gehl Architects *“Downtown Seattle Public Space and Public Life,”* 2009.

Especially north of the Boise River, Boise’s alleys have tremendous potential to connect pedestrians and serve as points of interest. Unfortunately, most alleys in Downtown are underutilized due to safety and cleanliness concerns. They are mostly used for delivery vehicles and trash collection, and are often dirty and poorly lit. Even in alleys which are not otherwise unattractive or unfit for public use, large dumpsters are usually present.

Among the many assets of Boise’s alleys are active residential and commercial uses, as well as interesting historic frontages. In addition, public art adorns a number of these spaces. Even where positive elements are present, however, waste containers are ubiquitous and frontages are often covered and/or neglected.

## SUMMARY:

**Boise’s alleys are currently underutilized and provide tremendous potential.**

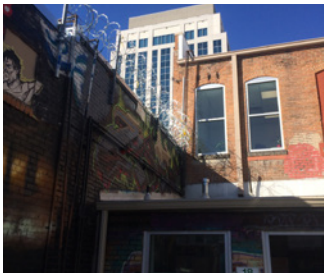




## Knitting Factory

Quality: Good

There is little doubt that this is Boise's best-activated alley. With numerous active frontages, multiple sets of patio seating, a variety of business entrances, and the main gates to one of Boise's most popular concert venues, there is little that this alley lacks. Smooth, high quality paving, good landscaping, and street-quality lighting have lured businesses on both sides to turn their entrance towards this safe and inviting pedestrian corridor. Though not every alley in Boise can (or should) aspire to this level of activation, the Knitting Factory alley can serve as a model for the rest of the city.



## Freak Alley

Quality: Average

Well known to locals and well loved by many, Freak Alley presents a development dilemma. While much of its charm comes from its gritty character and edgy public art, these exact elements make it unattractive to many Boiseans. Small corridors and hidden entryways often unnerv visitors. The best way to marry these concerns with the preservation of the personality is to improve lighting and lines of sight along the alley without encroaching on the expressive freedoms of its artists. As one of Boise's most heavily used thru-block corridors, Freak Alley deserves better safety and walkability, though it shouldn't come at the cost of its spunky identity.



## The Idaho Building Alley

Quality: Poor

This alley currently capitalizes on very little of its significant potential. Well connected to pedestrian destinations, surrounded on all sides by active commercial uses, and replete with visually attractive historical frontages, it could become a significant asset to the Downtown pedestrian network. Unfortunately, it has been overrun by dumpsters, oil barrels, and graffiti. Barred and boarded windows greet pedestrians at eye-level, and litter is strewn across the ripped-up pavement. A few strategic investments in cleaning up and beautifying this alley, which could include installing a trash compactor, rejuvenating windows and entries, and adding quality lighting, could make all the difference for this neglected passageway.

# Alley Quality



### ACHD Permeable Pavers:

As part of its green infrastructure program, the Ada County Highway Department (ACHD) has recently outfitted three Downtown alleys with permeable pavers: between 3rd St. and 4th St. north of Main St., and between 5th St. and 6th St. north of Idaho St. These pavers allow better

infiltration of storm water, creating a more environmentally-conscious Downtown pedestrian network. If these pilot projects are successful, ACHD has stated that "Ada County residents can expect to see more structures made using the environmentally-conscious pavers in the future." These pavers, which do not allow for dumpster storage on top of them, provide for a more comfortable and attractive pedestrian experience, and even make alleys safe and accessible for bicyclists. It is hoped that the continued conversion of Downtown alleys to permeable pavers will serve as a positive first step towards creating an alley network that retains its functionality while simultaneously providing better options to pedestrians.



# Street Elements

The quality of the pedestrian network in downtown Boise is significantly varied. Close to the core of Downtown, sidewalks are generally accessible, wide, and attractive, allowing for safe and efficient pedestrian travel, except where sidewalk clutter compromises the pedestrian realm. In the western and eastern reaches of Downtown, however, sidewalks tend to be narrower and accessibility tends to be scattered. In residential districts sidewalks are sometimes bumpy, cracked, and poorly accessible. Though the pedestrian volume in these areas is generally less than in the Downtown core, this is still a significant concern.

In the River Street area, the quality of the pedestrian network is poor. Randomly placed ramps, non-contiguous sidewalks, and dangerous sidewalk interruptions are common.

## SUMMARY:

**The pedestrian network across downtown is varied and discontinuous. The River Street area is particularly weak.**



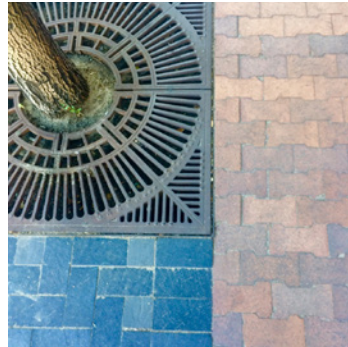
**A.** Café seating sometimes occupies a large portion of the sidewalk space, leaving insufficient room for pedestrians.



**B.** Wide, smooth, and accessible sidewalks cover most of the Downtown grid, providing a safe and comfortable pedestrian experience.



**C.** In historic neighborhoods, cracked or otherwise interrupted sidewalks are common.



**D.** High quality materials and good detailing provide interest to many of Boise's sidewalks.



**E.** Widened sidewalks cover most of the Downtown core.



**F.** Many crosswalks in older neighborhoods show signs of wear.



**G.** The great majority of Downtown crosswalks are fully ADA accessible.



**H.** In the River Street area, utility poles have been placed dangerously in the center of narrow sidewalks.



**I.** In the River Street area, curb cuts are unpredictable. This corner has no pedestrian facilities.





**A.** Commercial A-frame signs are common in Downtown.



**B.** Wrapped utility boxes are scattered throughout Downtown, providing visual interest to pedestrians.



**C.** Large planters lend beauty to Downtown sidewalks.



**D.** Benches in pedestrian areas are attractive and well-adorned with historical detailing.



**E.** Here, seating provided outside of a small boutique engages customers and offers an invitation to sit.



**F.** Benches often face large, automobile-heavy streets.



**G.** Signage, planters, public art, café seating, and other elements compete for sidewalk space in the heart of Downtown.



**H.** A more efficient system for newspaper vending would help reclaim the sidewalk space used by rows of newspaper boxes.



**I.** Bike racks are common on Downtown sidewalks.

# Street Furniture

In the liveliest portions of Downtown Boise, there are a wide array of items that occupy valuable sidewalk space. A corridor of planters, bike racks, mailboxes, commercial A-frame signs, and other items line the outside of the sidewalk, with interior sidewalk space kept clear for pedestrian traffic. This placement pattern is successful in most areas, but sometimes results in overcrowded sidewalks.

A major concern is the abundance of café seating in the Downtown core, which significantly limits pedestrian space in the busiest Downtown pedestrian corridors. While removing patio seating would be unwise, careful attention should be paid to areas in which outdoor seating competes with other elements which threaten the pedestrian realm.

Benches in Downtown Boise are often positioned to face major surface streets, where people are highly unlikely to decide to sit.

## SUMMARY:

**Sidewalk clutter often encroaches on pedestrian space, especially in the Central Business District.**



# Sidewalk Profiles

Crowded sidewalks have become a significant concern in Downtown Boise. Though Boise's sidewalks are relatively wide, active areas of Downtown have encountered trouble protecting a comfortably wide passageway for pedestrians. A typical 14' cross-section, for instance, might include a parking meter, a tree or bike rack, an A-frame sign, and a commercial decorative element, leaving only 4' of space for pedestrians to move. This amount of space is insufficient and can cause congestion.

Often, an extra 3' of sidewalk space are provided on expanded sidewalks to allow for 6-8' of patio dining, resulting in tiny pedestrian passageways. At one location on 6th St., only 18" of space is left for pedestrians. In contrast, the *Downtown Boise Streetscape Specifications Manual* recommends a minimum pedestrian zone of 6-8'.

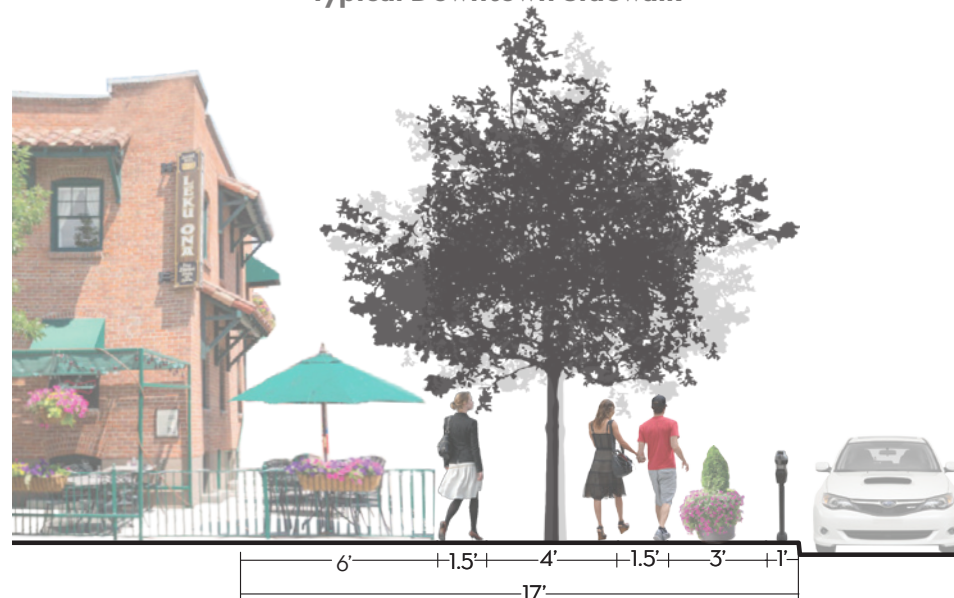
Boise's lack of dedicated bicycle infrastructure on numerous active Downtown streets forces bicycles onto the sidewalk, exerting extra pressure on severely limited sidewalk space. In addition to removing unnecessary clutter from streets, inserting bike lanes could provide a solution to this issue.

## SUMMARY:

**Lively sidewalks can quickly become dangerous and uncomfortable, especially when bicyclists and pedestrians are forced to compete for space.**

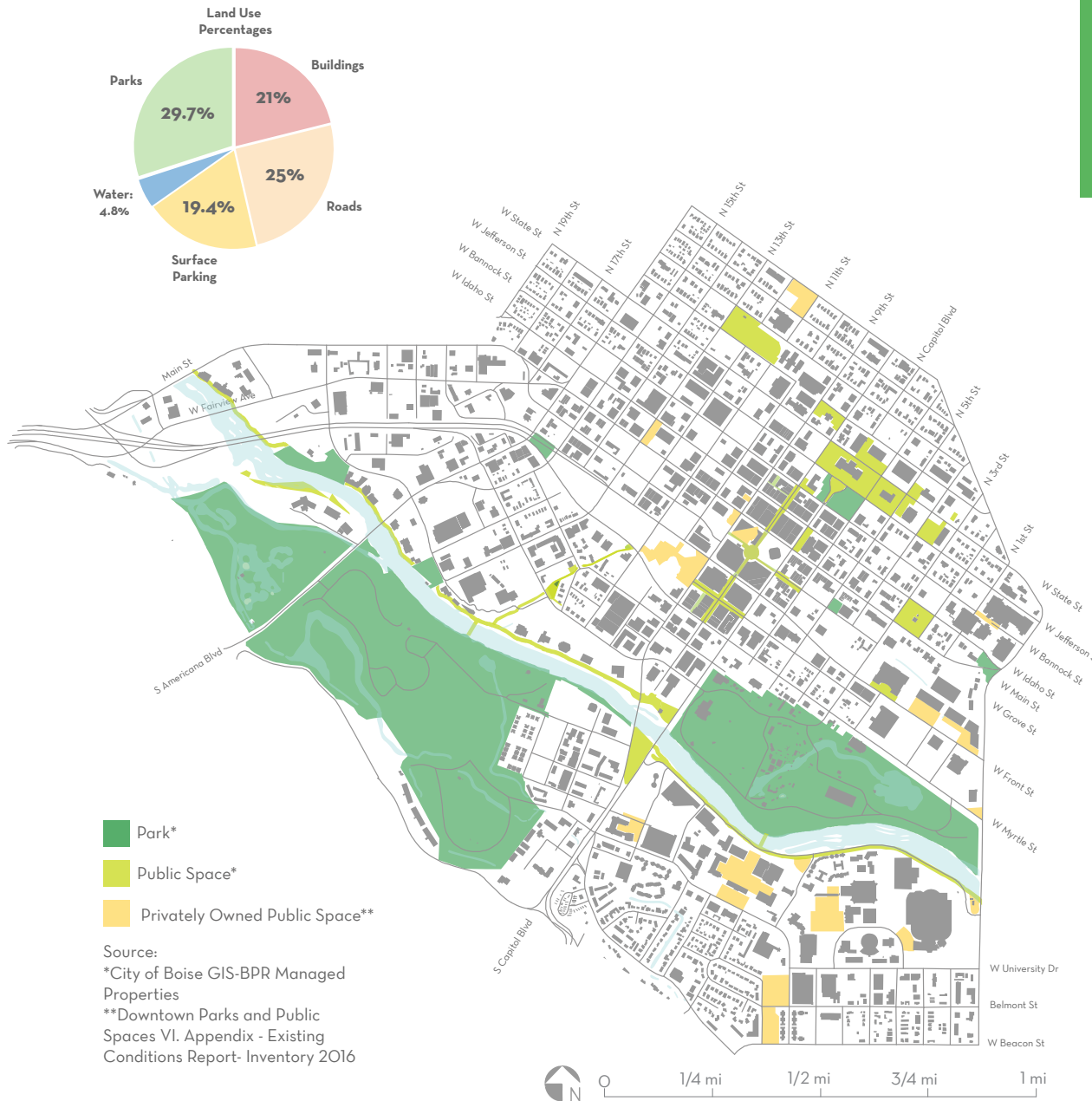


Typical Downtown Sidewalk



Expanded Sidewalk with Dining

# Open Spaces



Downtown Boise's open space network contains two primary achievements. The first is the park network along the Boise River corridor, which has long been a source of pride for the City and its residents. Ann Morrison Park, Julia Davis Park, and Kathryn Albertson Park, together totaling 283 acres, provide boundless opportunities for recreation in the heart of Downtown. They also serve as home to numerous cultural facilities and events including Art in the Park, Zoo Boise, and The Cabin.

A second achievement is Boise's series of public spaces centered around 8th St. from Myrtle St. to State St. BoDo, JUMP, the Grove Plaza, the Basque Block, the 8th Street pedestrian corridor, Capitol Park, and the State Capitol grounds provide a well-connected and heavily used open space network within the Downtown core.

Outside of these elements, Boise's public spaces are scattered and not particularly well connected, especially west of the Downtown core.

## SUMMARY:

**The Westside needs to be better integrated into Boise's sizeable and attractive public space network.**



# Open Spaces Quality

For this study, an analysis of a small selection of public spaces in Downtown Boise was carried out. 15 quality criteria, based on those developed by Gehl Architects, were applied. The criteria, evenly weighted and assigned on a binary basis, are as follows:

## Place

- 1) Accessible and connected to pedestrian flows and destinations
- 2) Strong identity and understanding of local, district, or city character
- 3) Respect for historic aspects and sense of place and context

## Delight

- 4) Buildings and spaces designed to human scale
- 5) Opportunities to enjoy sun/shade/heat/cold/shelter/breeze
- 6) Good design, detailing, materials, plants, views

## Comfort

- 7) Reasonable viewing distances with interesting and unhindered views
- 8) Low noise levels and opportunities to talk and listen
- 9) Opportunities for physical activity both summer and winter, day and night
- 10) Opportunity to walk safely and comfortably without obstacles
- 11) Edge effects and facades which offer chances to stand/stay
- 12) Opportunities to sit while comfortable and enjoying the space

## Protection

- 13) Protection for pedestrians against traffic and accidents
- 14) Protection for pedestrians against crime and violence at all hours
- 15) Protection against unpleasant weather and sensory experiences

Good = 11-15  
Average = 6-11  
Poor = 1-5

In addition to a score and quality rating, each public space has been given one of the following classifications, based on criteria established by the City of Austin in their 2008 *"Urban Design Guidelines for Austin"*.

•**Street Plaza**- widened sidewalk, walking areas, trees and landscaping

•**Corporate Foyer**- decorative porch, impressive forecourt, primary entrance to large building

•**Urban Oasis**- sheltered area with high concentration of planting and shade

•**Grand Public Plaza**- city wide plaza for concentrated public use and gatherings

•**Pedestrian Mall**- widened sidewalks both sides of street, common attraction

•**Thru-block Pedestrian Corridor**- means of traveling across the block at ground level

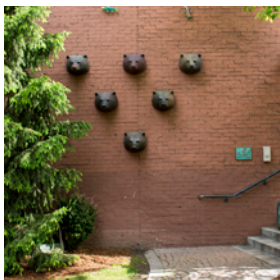
•**Pocket Park**- small green space, lots of seating

•**Neighborhood Park**- playground, gathering spaces, full park facilities

•**Parklet**- sidewalk extension for added amenities for people using the street







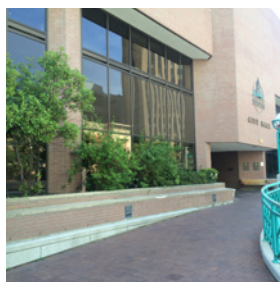
**Berryhill** - Corporate Foyer      Score: 13/15      Quality: Good

Notes: The Berryhill Foyer is a pleasant, well decorated, and well maintained public space. Tucked into a heavily trafficked section of 9th St., it functions as both an attractive restaurant patio and an inviting public sitting space. Historical elements, public art, and high quality design elements are all showcased.



**Assay Grounds** - Urban Oasis      Score: 9/15      Quality: Average

Notes: Picturesque and spacious, the Assay Grounds have the potential to become a Downtown recreational hotspot. Unfortunately, a low fence currently circling the block makes it unclear if members of the public are welcome, resulting in underutilization of this lovely space. Better invitations would likely attract more activity.



**City Hall** - Street Plaza      Score: 11/15      Quality: Good

Notes: With a variety of interesting details and spaces to sit, rest, play, and interact, the City Hall Plaza is designed to attract activity. Unfortunately, a lack of active uses surrounding the space deadens the mood.

# Open Spaces Quality



**Freak Alley** - Thru-Block Pedestrian Corridor      Score: 9/15      Quality: Average

Notes: Eclectic street art and visible historical character make this space one of the most beloved in Downtown Boise. Due to its rough pavement, unpleasant smells, and questionable safety provisions, however, it isn't accessible or attractive to many Downtown users.



**8th St. (Idaho to Bannock)**- Pedestrian Mall      Score: 14/15      Quality: Good

Notes: Boise's best public space, the 8th St. pedestrian mall offers an engaging, inviting, and comfortable experience for all. Active retail uses, shaded benches, artistic and historical elements, and beautiful greenery make the street a prime destination.



# Open Spaces Quality



**Grove Plaza** - Grand Public Plaza      Score: 11/15      Quality: Good

Notes: Good connectivity and ample space for pedestrians and bicyclists make The Grove Plaza a natural center for public life in Boise. Easily programmable, it also serves as home to many of Downtown Boise's biggest outdoor events. Inactive frontages, however, make this space less exciting than it has the potential to be.



**C.W. Moore Park** - Pocket Park      Score: 10/15      Quality: Average

Notes: Despite its richness of interesting historical detailing and attractive spaces for relaxation, C.W. Moore Park is significantly underutilized. Inactive frontages and views of parking lots can likely be blamed for its failure to attract users.



**Memorial Park** - Neighborhood Park      Score: 11/15      Quality: Good

Notes: A lovely green space just outside of the downtown planning area, Memorial Park is green, quiet, and beautiful. It is known for its lush tree canopy and views of the foothills.



**Main St. Park** - Parklet      Score: 10/15      Quality: Average

Notes: Though not heavily used, mirror image parklets on Main St. provide a pleasant place to sit and relax. Interesting historic art, signage, and lighting provide character to these small but charming spaces.

**"Attractive public spaces provide room for optional and social activities. How is it possible to transform the vision for an attractive and inviting public realm into actual physical spaces?"**

Analyses of existing well-functioning public spaces throughout the world show that they share common characteristics... Public spaces must be inviting, attractive, and provide room for recreation, pleasure, exercise, and play. They must act as urban meeting places and be able to attract and welcome a broad variety of people; children, teenagers, adults, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

**If public spaces are attractive one can, in fine weather, expect necessary, optional, and social activities to take place - and expect people to spend more time in those spaces."**

-Gehl Architects *"Downtown Seattle Public Space and Public Life,"* 2009.

Seats available for outdoor dining on 8th St.  
between Idaho St. and Bannock St.: 317

# Patio Seating

Boise's private patio seating clearly illustrates the overall development pattern of Downtown. Patio seating is concentrated around the Grove Plaza/North 8th St. area, with 8th St. between Bannock and Idaho streets showing the highest density.

Patio seating activity drops off very suddenly outside of the heart of downtown. Very little patio seating exists east of 5th St. or north of Jefferson St.

This trend highlights both a blessing and a curse of Boise's development pattern. On the positive side, it clearly demonstrates that Boise has a vibrant and engaging downtown core. It also shows, however, that the energy of downtown dissipates quickly as one moves away from Boise's single focal point of development.



## SUMMARY:

**Downtown Boise's one true focal point of social and commercial activity is the Central Business District.**





# Green Network

**“Street trees and other vegetation substantially enhance the quality of urban spaces and the pedestrian experience.”**

-Gehl Architects *“Downtown Seattle Public Space and Public Life,”* 2009.

Despite its moniker “City of Trees,” Boise has an inconsistent Downtown tree canopy. While the river corridor and park system boast a dense concentration of trees, parts of Downtown are unfortunately bare. The Central Business District and the Westside are two such areas. Though dense development and furnished sidewalks in the Central Business District make a rich tree canopy understandably difficult to cultivate, the Westside should be able to capitalize better on its diffuse development pattern with pleasant, tree-covered streetscapes.

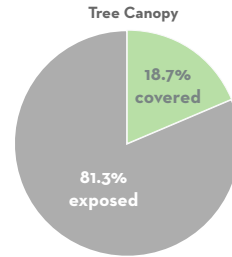
Tree cover is much denser in historical residential neighborhoods north of Franklin Rd. and east of 6th St, creating a comfortable walking and biking experience year-round. Better tree cover in other areas could do much to improve the overall Downtown pedestrian network.

## SUMMARY:

**The livability of the Downtown core and the Westside could be improved by expanding the city’s tree canopy.**



**13,429,703 total square feet of Tree Canopy in 2011**





**A.** Some creative Downtown restaurants separate outdoor patios from sidewalks with planter boxes.



**B.** A handful of large buildings in Downtown have spacious, landscaped foyers.



**C.** The largely undeveloped river corridor is the largest and densest part of Boise's green network.



**D.** The Capitol Building and other state buildings offer public open spaces.



**E.** Large planters are located on nearly every block in the Downtown core.



**F.** Interesting and attractive front lawns add a unique flare to the Downtown green network.



**G.** In outlying Downtown neighborhoods, the tree canopy is fully developed.



**H.** Small green islands break up long stretches of buildings, making streets more attractive.



**I.** Where street trees have not thrived, pedestrians feel less comfortable.

# Green Network

Boise's green network, which includes tree cover, natural green spaces, plantings, and other landscaping elements, is a strength of Downtown. The main artery of this network is the river corridor, which is occupied almost entirely by undeveloped natural green space.

In other parts of Downtown various green elements provide shade, beauty, color, and comfort to city streets. Trees are planted throughout Downtown Boise and planters (supported by the Downtown Boise Association) line the sidewalks. Landscaped parks, public spaces and government building grounds also provide natural oases. In the outreaches of Downtown, residential neighborhoods often boast dense tree cover, manicured front lawns, and pleasant gardens. The City has contributed significantly to this network by providing and maintaining trees and planters across downtown.

The primary gap in the city's green network is the Westside, where tree cover is diminished, plantings are less frequent, and few businesses incorporate landscaped elements.

## SUMMARY:

**The Westside is the only significant gap in this robust network.**



## Ten Takeaways: Inventory Part II (The Urban Landscape)

1. Downtown Boise's central core is the city's only fully-activated area.
2. Tall buildings are concentrated in and immediately around the Central Business District.
3. Most downtown street frontages are not activated, with almost all of the active frontages lying in and around the CBD.
4. Boise has high quality tree cover, especially along the river corridor. The Westside is noticeably lacking.
5. Downtown has a large quantity and variety of high-quality open spaces.
6. Many open spaces lack invitations, access, and/or programming, leading to underutilization.
7. The river is a beautiful recreational area, but it provides almost no active commercial or residential uses.
8. Sidewalks are generally wide, smooth, and clean, providing for the needs of all Downtown users.
9. Sidewalk clutter encroaches on the pedestrian domain in parts of the Downtown core, sometimes dangerously.
10. For the most part, alleys are well-maintained. They provide a great opportunity for improving the pedestrian network.





# INVENTORY

## PART III: THE CULTURE



# Living in The City

Downtown residents account for only about 2.5% of the population of Boise. Though there are residential neighborhoods and developments scattered across Downtown, residential density remains relatively low. New multi-family housing developments being built across Downtown, however, are defining a new trend.

Because Downtown has not evolved as a residential district, many vital services are not available within its boundaries. There are three grocery stores, for instance, none of which are particularly close to the centers of residential density along the borders of Downtown. Similarly, a Boise resident living in an apartment building in the Downtown core would not have a convenience store in walkable range.

As residential developments are erected closer to the center of Downtown, it can be expected that vital resident services will emerge as well. However, the continuing service gap for residents and lack of residential density makes living in Downtown Boise a tricky prospect for those close to the core.

## SUMMARY:

**Downtown Boise has struggled to support a residential lifestyle in recent decades, but new developments hope to change that.**



# Working in The City

Employment density in Boise is concentrated in the Central Business District, with a focal point at 8th St. and Main St. Saint Luke's Regional Medical Center, Boise State University, and the State of Idaho are also major Downtown employers.

While downtown residents represent only 1.3% of the Boise workforce, the district contains 22% of the city's jobs. The majority of these workers are car commuters, placing pressure on streets and parking during the business day and peak commuting hours. In fact, most streets in the Downtown core (Main, Idaho, Capitol, 9th) only reach capacity twice a day during short periods of time in the morning and evening.

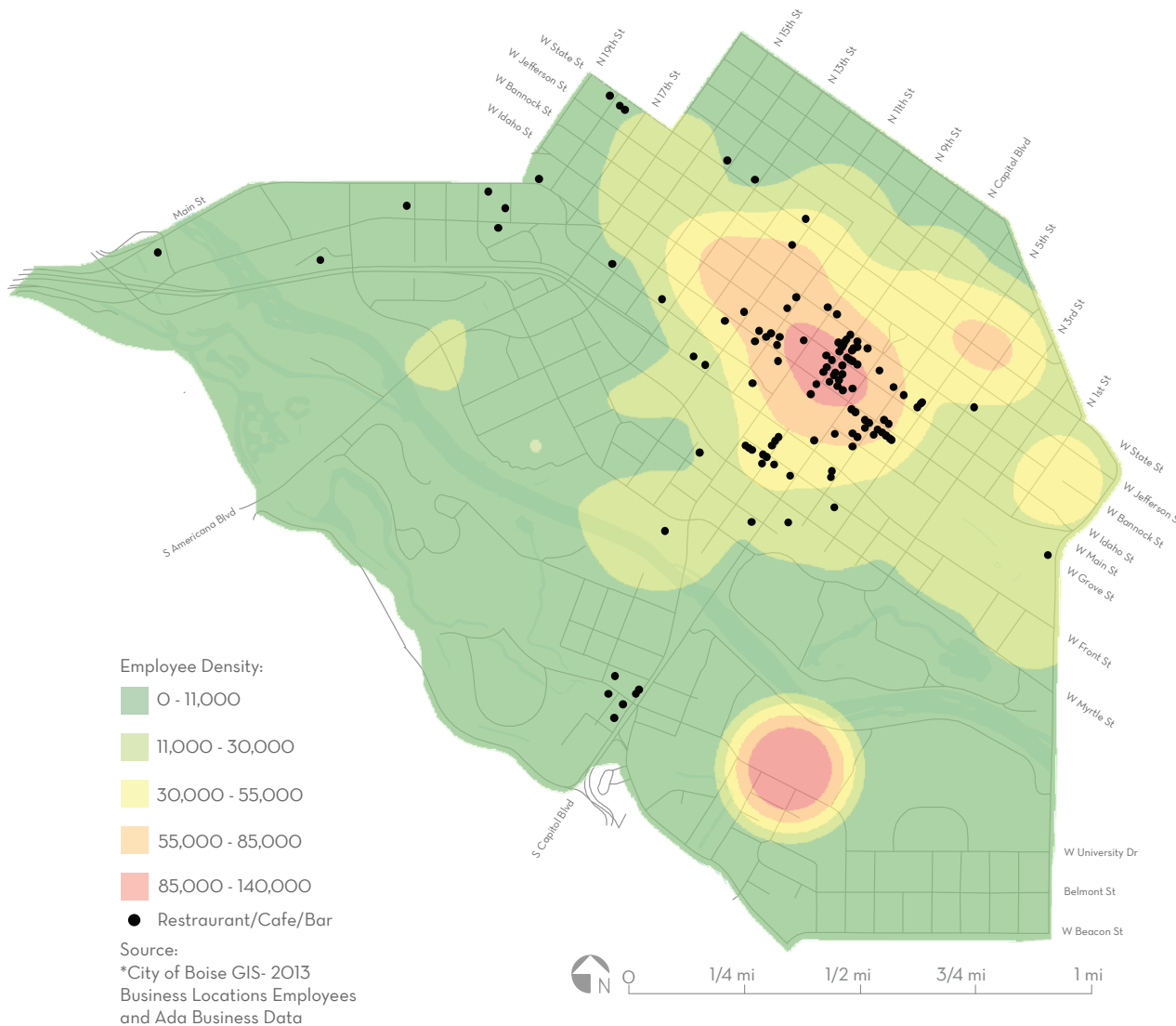
Though Downtown exhibits strong public life patterns through late evening, many restaurants rely on the Downtown lunch rush for a large portion of their business.

## Downtown Boise Top Employers:

1. Boise State University
2. State of Idaho
3. IDACORP/ Idaho Power
4. St. Luke's
5. City of Boise
6. Boise Cascade Co/Boise Inc
7. National Seed/ JR Simplot Co
8. Ada County
9. YMCA
10. Con Agra Food Lamb Weston

## SUMMARY:

**Public life patterns in Downtown Boise are deeply tied to the workday.**





# Visiting The City

Many of Boise's visitors come for conventions, concerts, and events which take place Downtown. The city's core currently has a shortage of hotels, but a swarm of hotels opening across the Downtown core should fill that gap. Many of Boise's hotels are clustered around Yale St. (close to BSU) and along Main St. west of Downtown.

Destinations and events mostly take place in the Downtown core, with many museums and galleries concentrated in the cultural district near Julia Davis Park. Restaurants, bars, theaters, and venues are most commonly found in and around the 8th St./Grove Plaza area.

Connectivity between downtown locations presents a challenge to visitors. Though Boise should aspire to be fully accessible to car-free travelers, the city hasn't yet reached that threshold. The creation of a circulator, the improvement of wayfinding systems, and the growth of rideshare services could all play a role in bringing about this transformation.

## SUMMARY:

**Boise should improve Downtown mobility to better accommodate visitors.**

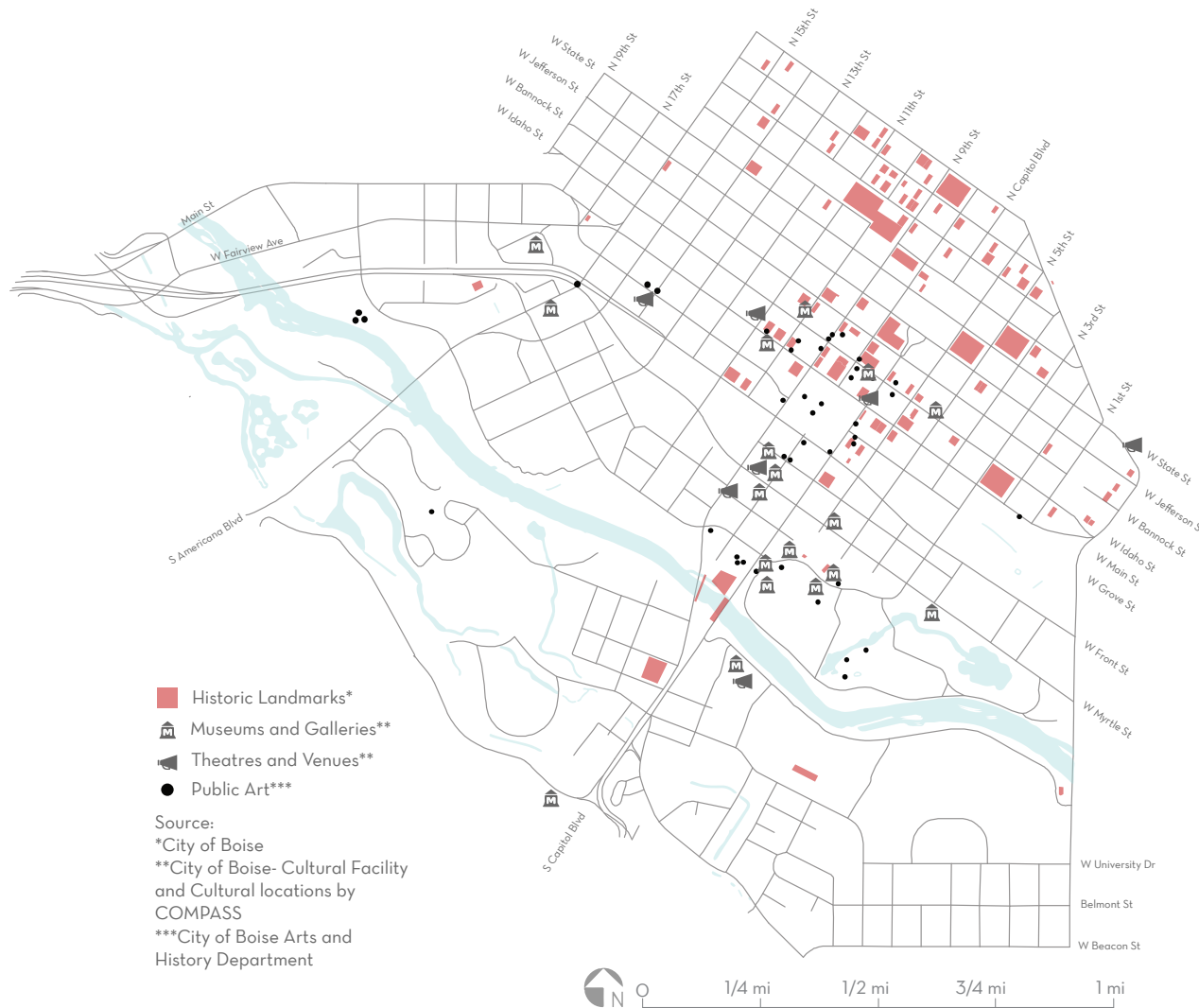


# Arts & History

Promoting the arts and preserving the city's history have become key components of Boise's effort to make itself the most livable city in the country. In 2001, the City Council passed an ordinance directing 1.4% of capital projects funds to be put towards developing and installing public art. Seven years later in 2008, Mayor Dave Bieter and the City Council established the Department of Arts & History to "solidify the public commitment to serving and promoting Boise's cultural diversity" (*A&H Department Brochure*).

Boise's identity as a historic city is visible in many pieces of art and architecture Downtown. After serving as a private sector defense fort beginning in the 1830's, the city of Boise was incorporated when the U.S. Army established Fort Boise in 1863, later becoming the capital of Idaho in 1866. The Assay Office (1872), O'Farrell Cabin (1863), and Boise City National Bank (1891) are among the city's few 19th century residences and commercial buildings still standing.

In addition to numerous historical landmarks and public art installations, Boise boasts a concentrated Cultural District in the immediate vicinity of Capitol Blvd. just north of the Boise River. This area is home to many of the city's premier performing arts groups, the Boise Public Library, the Boise Art Museum, and the Idaho State Historical Museum.



## SUMMARY:

**Generous public and private funding is essential to the city's ability to preserve its heritage and celebrate the arts.**



# Community Activities

This calendar, which includes city-wide events (not just events within Downtown), shows Boise's strong year-round offering of cultural, athletic, and performing arts events. One of Boise's most significant programming triumphs, BOISE 150, is highlighted.

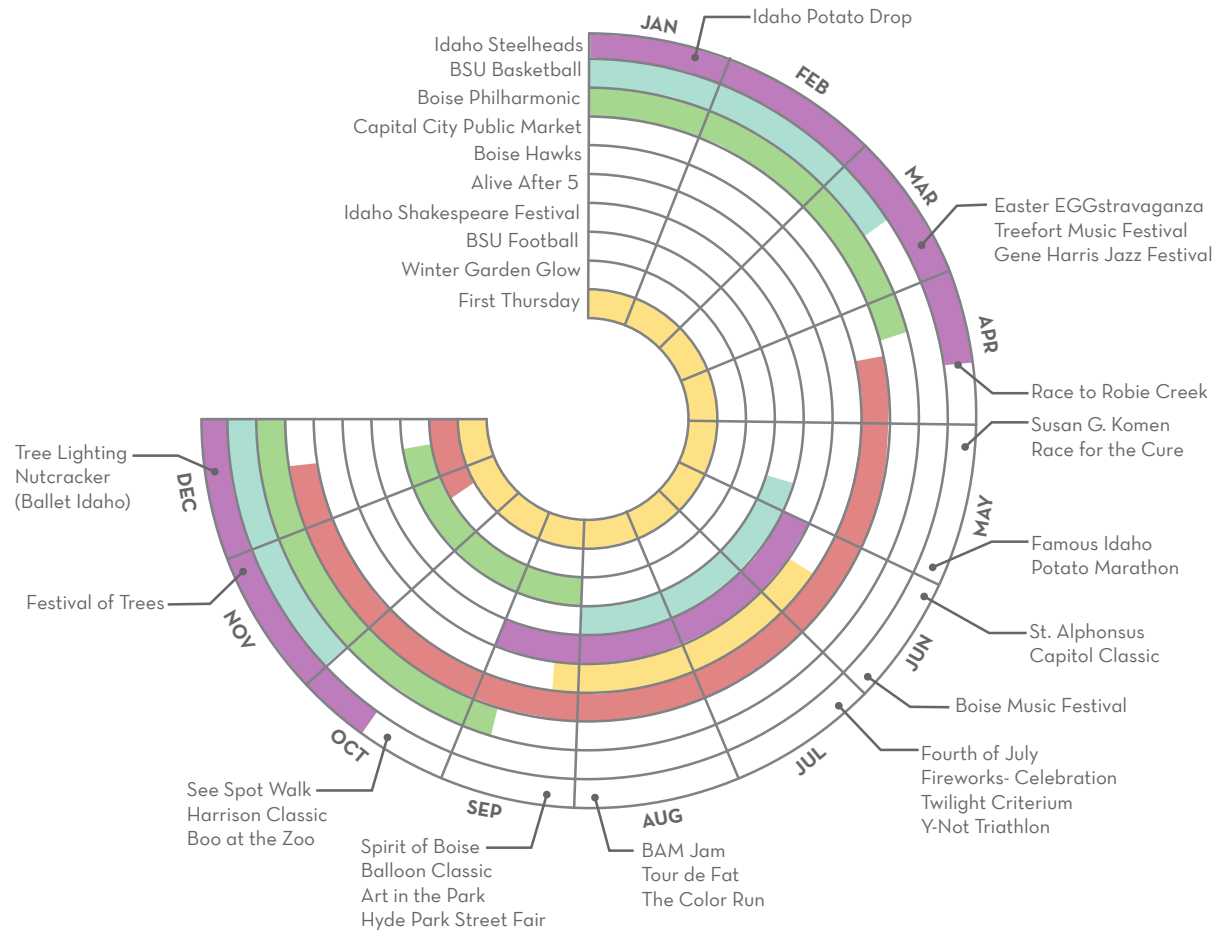
## BOISE 150

Place-based community programming is necessary to sustain vibrant urban spaces. Boise's most significant city-wide cultural celebration in the last decade, BOISE 150, exemplifies the importance of dynamic and meaningful celebration.

Hosted by the Department of Arts & History (A&H), BOISE 150 (B150) commemorated the city's sesquicentennial in 2013. B150 offered an entire calendar year of events, lectures, and projects honoring the city's past through modern, spirited, authentic cultural celebration based on the themes of enterprise, environment, and community. The city's founding date, July 7, was honored with the Sesqui-Party at Julia Davis Park, which brought together more than 20,000 people to enjoy local music, theater, dance, storytelling, food, historic fashion shows, and more.

A&H also operated a Sesqui-Shop throughout the year, a small community space in the historic "Gem Block" on Main St. which sold locally-produced commemorative merchandise and offered exhibits, presentations, and performances. By offering a physical space for Boiseans to acknowledge their city's cultural heritage and artistic richness, the Sesqui-Shop engaged citizens in a significant and meaningful manner.

If the city hopes to learn a lesson from its sesquicentennial celebration, it should be this: BOISE 150 was fun, but it also mattered. Future cultural programming in Boise should aspire to the same.



# Pedestrian Activity

Pedestrian activity is a key indicator of vibrant urban culture. This graphic shows average hourly pedestrian traffic on major Downtown streets in the central core between 8 AM and 5 PM during a summer weekday. Data was collected for ten minutes hourly and extrapolated to show hourly averages. It is important to note that high construction activity may have slightly influenced data.

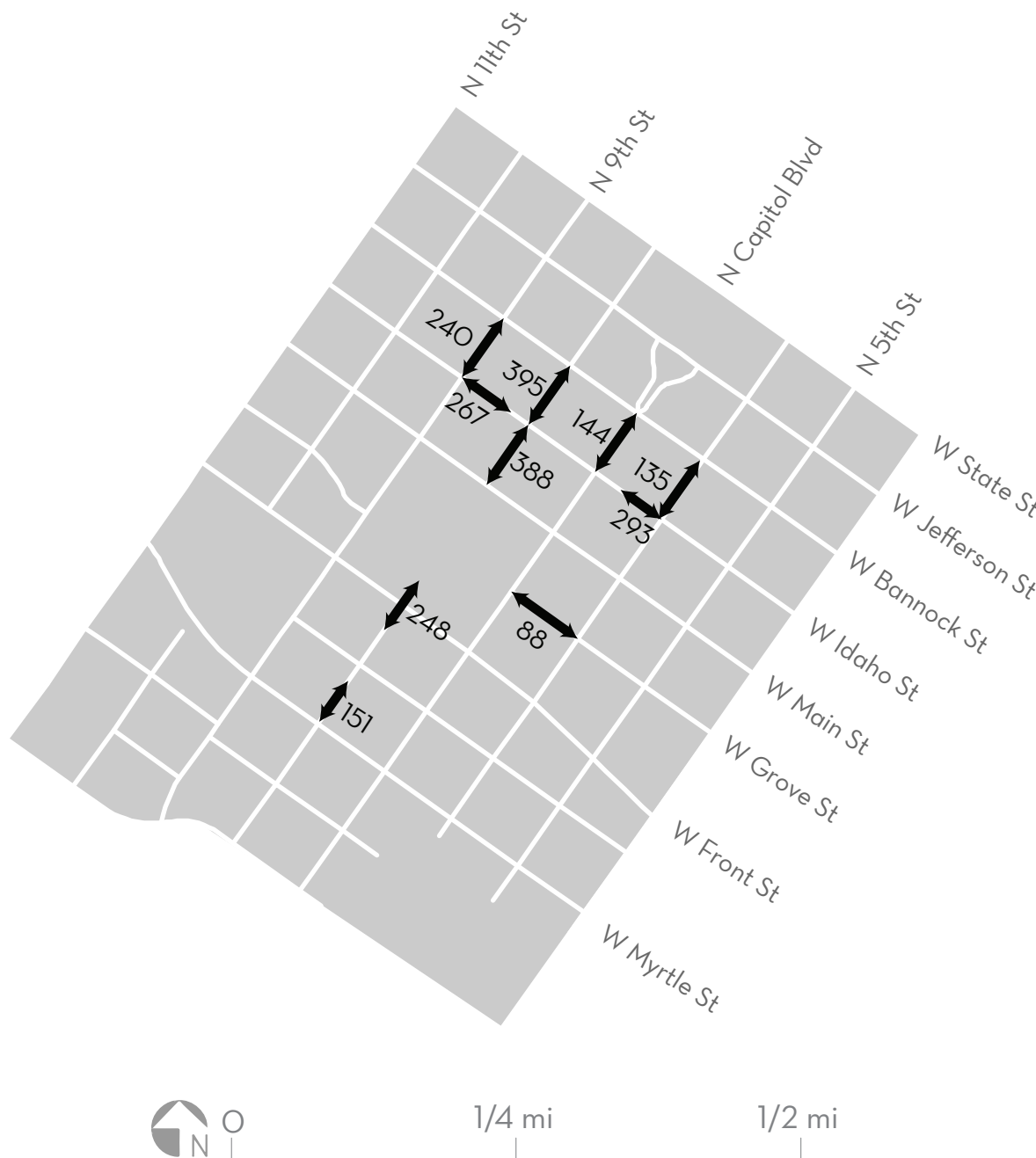
In this analysis, the 8th Street pedestrian corridor proved to be by far the most active part of Downtown. The maximum hourly average (395) was determined to fall on 8th St. between Bannock and Idaho, where peak pedestrian traffic occurred in the 1 o'clock hour (804 pedestrians per hour).

The least active pedestrian corridor sampled was the Basque Block (Grove St. between 6th St. and Capitol Blvd.), where only 88 pedestrians per hour passed on average. Though the Basque Block is a celebrated cultural and festival street, poor connections and limited office and residential uses have resulted in weak public life patterns.

Throughout Downtown, pedestrian activity occurs mostly during lunch and after-work hours. Average hourly traffic in the 8-9 AM hour across downtown (97) is less than 1/4 of average hourly traffic in the 12-1 PM hour (390).

## SUMMARY:

**Public life patterns in Downtown Boise are deeply tied to the workday.**





## Ten Takeaways: Inventory Part III (The Culture)

1. Downtown does not have a large residential population (just 6,364 in 2010)
2. The Central Business District, which contains the most restaurants, bars, and cafes of any part of the city, is the heart of public life in Boise.
3. Restaurants and attractions are concentrated in commercial, not residential, areas.
4. Jobs Downtown are projected to increase to 55,175 in 2030, up 63.5% from 2010.
5. Residential areas are mostly on the edges of Downtown.
6. There are few schools, grocery stores, drugstores, etc. convenient to areas of residential density.
7. The Central Business District is the focus of employee density, though BSU and St. Luke's hospital are also very large employers.
8. The Cultural District, adjacent to Julia Davis Park, holds many of the city's best museums and arts attractions.
9. The Westside and Near North End are mostly devoid of museums, theaters, restaurants, and tourist destinations.
10. Boise boasts a strong year-round calendar of community programming, with sports seasons and outdoor events occurring throughout the spring and summer and performing arts organizations carrying through the fall and winter.



# SUMMARY

CONCLUSIONS & EVIDENCE



# Conclusions

## 1. Concentrated Identity

The **Central Business District** and its immediate surroundings form the social, cultural, and economic heart of the city. This is by far the **most active** part of Downtown, and is the only area in which development is sufficiently **dense** to support a vibrant urban lifestyle. As a result, patterns of development across Downtown are **uneven**, and other parts of Downtown are seen as comparatively uninteresting and inactive.

### Evidence:

•“**Ground Floor Frontages**” shows that Downtown’s active frontages are found almost exclusively in the Central Business District.

•“**Structure Parking**” shows that, of all the downtown neighborhoods, the Central Business District has the highest capacity to support public parking garages.

•“**Visiting the City**”, “**Arts and History**”, and “**Patio Seating**” show that the Central Business District is the focal point for Downtown venues, attractions, public art, restaurants, cafes, and bars.

### Example:

While the Linen District is thought to be a major Downtown activity center, its restaurant and cultural presence is only a tiny fraction that of the Central Business District.

## 2. The Westside Opportunity

The **Westside**, which has been passed over for decades, is now the city’s **best opportunity for redevelopment** and cultural redefinition. A safe, active, and tree-covered Westside would expand Boise’s **cultural and economic potential**. With support from business owners and engagement from the community, the Westside could be revamped to provide a dynamic **counterpoint** to the Central Business District to its east.

### Evidence:

•“**Surface Parking**” shows undeveloped lots across the Westside, each of which should be viewed as an opportunity for redevelopment.

•“**Ground Floor Frontages**” shows that the Westside is culturally and commercially inactive.

•“**Surface Traffic Volume**” and “**Collisions**” show the Westside as a safe, low traffic area with a predictable grid system, a favorable condition for walkability and economic growth.

### Example:

Surface parking lots across the Westside provide an opportunity for the creation of new public gathering spaces, which could catalyze further development.

## 3. Destination Downtown

Downtown serves **employees and visitors** much better than it serves **residents**. Because amenities cater to **day use** and evening use, Downtown lacks some of the cultural vibrancy (and feeling of safety) that can be provided only by a **strong residential community**.

### Evidence:

•“**Ground Floor Frontages**” shows that activity is concentrated in areas of employment density, far from areas of residential density.

•“**Working in the City**” and “**Visiting the City**” show that restaurants, patio seating, and cultural destinations are concentrated far away from areas of residential density.

•“**Living in the City**” shows that there are few essential amenities available within walking distance of most residents.

### Example:

Most residents of the River Street Neighborhood, which is one of Downtown’s most heavily residential neighborhoods, are not within walking distance (.25 miles) of a convenience store or grocery store.

## 4. Bridging the Gap

Though Downtown boasts beautiful parks and a major public university south of **Front and Myrtle Streets**, these two vehicular corridors divide Downtown, impeding connectivity and **presenting a safety hazard** to bicycle, pedestrian, and vehicular travel. The city would capitalize better on some of its most significant assets by **improving connections** to Boise State University and the marquee parks and cultural attractions along the river corridor.

### Evidence:

- **“Crossings”** shows that pedestrian crosswalks on Front and Myrtle are either unpleasant or entirely absent, while “Walking Flow” shows that Front and Myrtle cause the longest pedestrian wait times.

- **“Surface Traffic Volume”** and **“Collisions”** show that Front and Myrtle are the busiest and most unsafe streets in Downtown, and thus the most challenging to bicycles and pedestrians.

- **“Bicycling”** shows that there is only one north-south bike lane which crosses Front and Myrtle between Broadway Ave. and 13th St.

### Example:

32% of pedestrian collisions within the survey area between 2010 and 2014 occurred on Front St. or Myrtle St.

## 5. A Reason to Walk

Many Downtown destinations are within walking distance of each other, but the area lacks **pedestrian connectivity** between activity centers due to inactive frontages and uninviting streetscapes. Activating **ground-floor frontages** and investing in **streetscape improvements** would not only make Downtown more attractive, but would also drive increased activity and connectivity by inspiring Boiseans to **drive less** and **walk more**.

### Evidence:

- **“Surface Parking”** shows that undeveloped parcels are common across Downtown, leading to an inconsistent (and potentially unsafe) pedestrian network. People will not decide to walk if streetscapes are not pleasant and inviting.

- **“Green Network”** shows that gaps in the tree canopy throughout Downtown make walking and biking less attractive to Downtown users.

- **“Walking in the City”** shows that connections between many Downtown neighborhoods are simply too long to be walkable.

### Example:

A pedestrian might be unwilling to make the seven-minute walk from the Grove Plaza to the Linen District because he or she would pass at least five blocks of surface parking along the way.





# By the Neighborhood

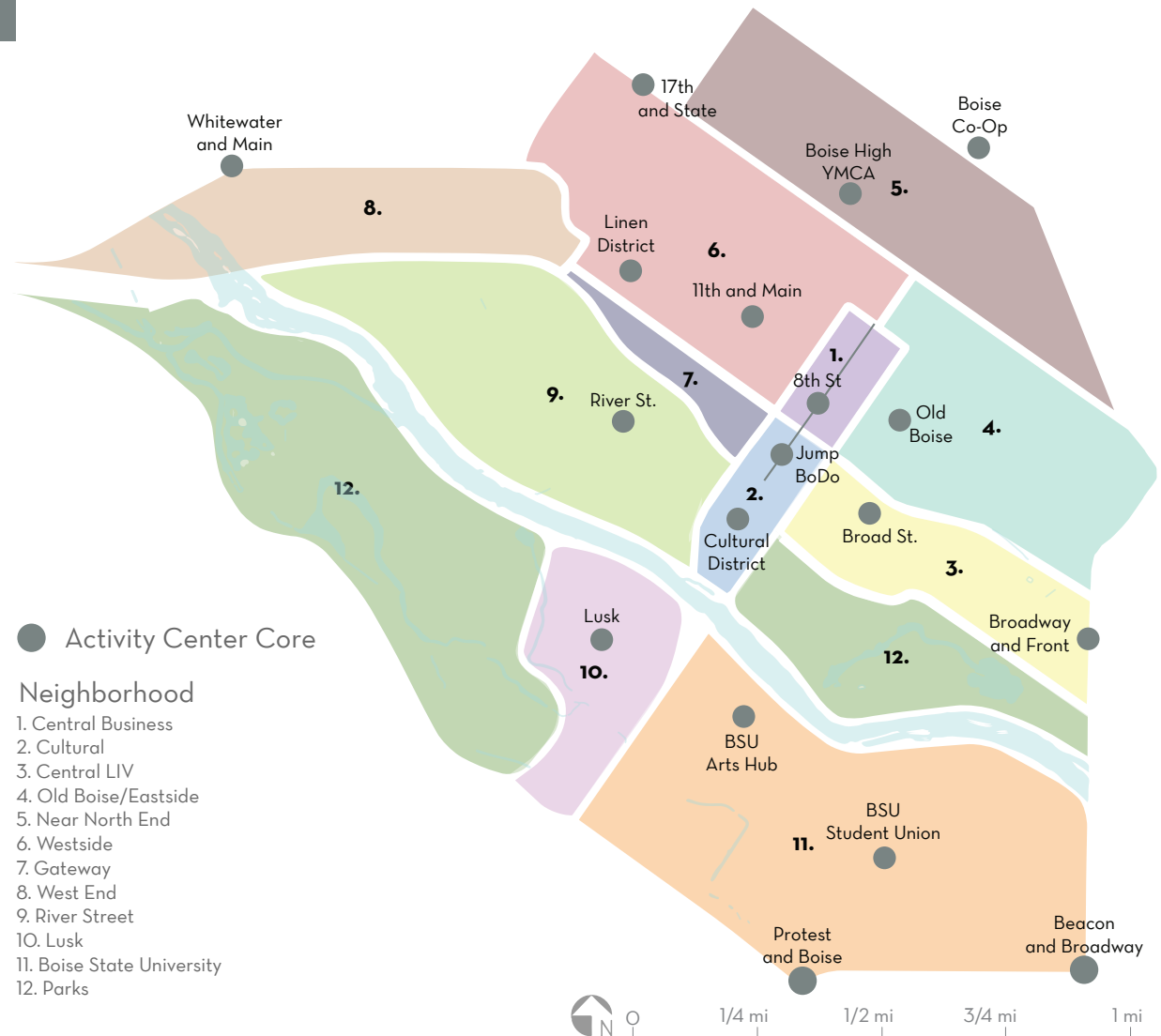
Downtown Boise is a collection of distinct and evolving urban neighborhoods, each with its own dynamic identity. As the city grows, these neighborhoods must be nurtured to develop organically without being bound to prescribed borders or personalities.

In Boise, like in any city, each neighborhood seems to draw its spirit from a different piece of its fabric. In the Central Business District, energy emanates and identity emerges from the bustling 8th Street pedestrian corridor. Across the river at Boise State University, pride in the Broncos provides a common bond. In the Near North End, a serene, tree-covered lifestyle beckons.

In many downtown neighborhoods, a regional activity center provides a gathering place and source of identity. The Westside's Linen District, for instance, is a commercial and cultural hotspot. In others, like the Lusk Neighborhood, a burgeoning resident population is redefining the area's character.

## SUMMARY:

**The diversity of Downtown Boise's neighborhoods must be understood and celebrated.**



## 1. Central Business District

### ●●● Network

Boise's best pedestrian mall. Bike access is difficult. Served by structure parking.

### ●●● Urban Landscape

Active frontages, tall buildings, street plazas, and patio seating.

### ●●● Culture

Many destinations, cultural attractions, restaurants, etc. Center of employment density.

## 2. Cultural District

### ●○○ Network

Isolated due to Front/Myrtle/Capitol. Poorly connected to CBD and to Lusk

### ●●○ Urban Landscape

Semi-active, with high-potential alleys. Few open spaces.

### ●●● Culture

Numerous museums, galleries, theaters, etc. Few restaurants or hotels.

## 3. Central Addition

### ●○○ Network

Difficult to access because of location between large, fast one-way streets.

### ●●○ Urban Landscape

Mostly inactive, with small buildings and few open spaces.

### ●○○ Culture

Very little activity or programming of any kind.

## 4. Old Boise

### ●●● Network

Pedestrian and bike friendly with low traffic. Lacks painted bike lanes.

### ●●○ Urban Landscape

Good tree canopy, pleasant frontages, some patios/active uses.

### ●●○ Culture

Historical destinations scattered throughout. Restaurants on the western half.

## 5. Near North End

### ●○○ Network

Pedestrian and bike friendly. Little public transit access.

### ●●● Urban Landscape

Most residential. Good tree canopy and pleasant frontages.

### ●○○ Culture

Many historical attractions, high residential density.

## 6. Westside

### ●●● Network

Few collisions, low traffic. Good bus access and bike amenities.

### ●○○ Urban Landscape

Low buildings, inactive frontages, sparse tree canopy.

### ●●○ Culture

Scattered attractions and restaurants, mostly in Linen District.

## 7. Gateway

### ●○○ Network

Surrounded by high-traffic streets. Unfriendly to pedestrians and bikes. Many collisions.

### ●○○ Urban Landscape

No tree cover, inactive frontages. Will change dramatically with new development.

### ●○○ Culture

No active use or programming of any kind. Will change with JUMP.

## 8. West End

### ●○○ Network

Irregular grid, unfriendly to bikes and pedestrians. Good transit access. No parking garages.

### ●○○ Urban Landscape

Inactive frontages, little tree cover, few green elements.

### ●●○ Culture

Numerous hotels and scattered restaurants.

## 9. River St.

### ●○○ Network

Obstructed and compromised pedestrian network. Irregular grid. No parking garages.

### ●○○ Urban Landscape

Few active uses, few patios. Good river access.

### ●○○ Culture

High residential concentration, no restaurants/attractions/other active uses.

## 10. Lusk

### ●○○ Network

Few collisions and low traffic volume. Very poor pedestrian and bicycle access.

### ●●○ Urban Landscape

No open spaces, few green elements. Poor alleys.

### ●○○ Culture

Mostly residential, with a few restaurants.

## 11. Boise State University

### ●●○ Network

Safe and comfortable for all types of transportation. River makes access difficult.

### ●●○ Urban Landscape

Partially residential, partially university. Few active uses. Strong tree canopy near the river.

### ●●● Culture

Center of employment density, few public attractions.

## 12. Parks

### ●○○ Network

Poorly served by bicycle and public transit networks.

### ●●● Urban Landscape

Open space, strong tree canopy.

### ●○○ Culture

Julia Davis hosts the most museums, destinations, events. Other parks may be underprogrammed.

Quality Analysis:

●●● Good

●●○ Fair

●○○ Needs Improvement



# Recommendations

## The Big Recommendation:

Cultivating the most livable city in the country will require ongoing coordination and collaboration between planners, developers, educators, artists, historians, businesspeople, and community members. As Boise moves towards this goal, it is important to foster partnerships which support smart, sustainable, and active development. No single organization can achieve this vision alone.

Note: These recommendations are the personal opinions of the authors of this document and are meant to promote engagement and discussion. They do not reflect an official City of Boise policy agenda.

## 1. Concentrated Identity

- **Identify emerging activity centers** outside of the Downtown core and strategically invest in the development of the most promising of these opportunities.
- **Support the growth of existing activity centers** (Examples: Linen District, Broadway and Front).
- **Continue to support cultural organizations** and growth opportunities in the Cultural District to draw increased activity to this unique area.
- **Update design standards** and consider a form-based code to allow for greater variation in commercial and residential street-front design, thereby celebrating the diversity of Boise's urban neighborhoods.
- **Support mixed-use projects** with street-level retail to create more active street frontages across Downtown.
- **Create new and interesting destinations** by encouraging place-making opportunities in unconventional spaces like alleys and under-utilized plazas and public spaces.
- **Commission new design studies** on Downtown streets and open spaces to identify long-term opportunities for building unique public places across Downtown.
- **Leverage investment in the Central Addition** by improving access to the area and publicizing the opportunities it offers.

## 2. The Westside Opportunity

- **Target surface parking lots for redevelopment** to commercial, residential, public space, and other active uses.
- **Protect existing buildings** and encourage modern and historically respectful renovation.
- **Create active pedestrian streets** which can serve as focal points for the community.
- **Engage arts and cultural organizations** in an effort to build a sense of identity and culture in the Westside.
- **Promote a uniform tree maintenance program** to support tree health and cultivate a consistent green canopy.
- **Install more planters** and other landscaped elements across the Westside to make streetscapes more appealing and therefore more comfortable.
- **Improve connections** between new residential developments (Watercooler Apartments) and existing activity centers (Linen District, 11th and Main).
- **Highlight the Westside's** low collision rate, low surface traffic volume, easy access, and high visibility as a favorable condition for economic growth and expansion of the Downtown core.

### 3. Destination Downtown

- **Encourage the inclusion of active street-level uses** and publicly-accessible amenities in Downtown residential projects.
- **Incentivize the provision of residential services**, including gyms, markets, schools, and convenience stores.
- **Commission a Downtown housing study** to identify available resources as well as existing service gaps in the residential community.
- **Develop connections between Downtown open spaces** to ensure access for residents (as per recommendations in the Downtown Parks and Public Spaces Plan).
- **Encourage “tactical urbanism”** in neighborhood and city plans by allowing for temporary, low-cost artistic and community interventions that make Downtown Boise a more vibrant place to live.
- **Promote affordable housing** in Downtown by providing incentives to preserve existing units and include affordable units in new projects.
- **Support families** by dedicating extra attention to developing daycares, publicly accessible playgrounds, parks and public plazas.

### 4. Bridging the Gap

- **Identify gaps in the bike network** to allow access to destinations on both sides of the Front/Myrtle corridor.
- **Improve crossing infrastructure**, decrease crossing distances, and implement curb extensions and other safety measures to protect pedestrians and decrease pedestrian wait times on north-south roads which cross Front and Myrtle.
- **Calm traffic on Front and Myrtle** by activating street frontages and connecting these frontages to the roadway, offering an opportunity for engagement.
- **Change light progressions** to match the speed of bicycle and/or pedestrian traffic rather than fast-moving cars.
- **Improve funding for public transit** to allow for expanded and more frequent service, as well as better north-south connections across downtown.
- **Pursue partnerships in the Gateway District** to prioritize walkability and bikeability across Front and Myrtle. This would improve north-south connections and provide more access to businesses and community spaces within the district.
- **Improve wayfinding and multimodal access** at the entrances to Ann Morrison, Julia Davis, and Kathryn Albertson parks, inviting Downtown users to venture south of Front and Myrtle.

### 5. A Reason to Walk

- **Update City ordinances** and guidelines to encourage the inclusion of attractive and pedestrian-accessible open space destinations in future development.
- **Clarify and enforce regulations** on sidewalk clutter to protect a safe and comfortable pedestrian realm.
- **Redevelop surface parking lots** to decrease the volume of inactive street frontages downtown.
- **Improve pedestrian connections** on the east and west sides of the Grove Plaza to allow for connectivity across Grove St. from the Linen District to the Basque Block.
- **Establish an online clearing house** for Downtown maintenance work, including tree maintenance, snow removal, damaged sidewalk or street elements, waste removal, graffiti, etc.
- **Transform alleys** into comfortable and interesting pedestrian spaces through infrastructure improvements and place making efforts.
- **Expand “Park Once” campaigns** to encourage Boiseans to spend less time driving across Downtown.
- **Continue to expand the Boise GreenBike** system to improve short-range connectivity within Downtown.





Photo Provided By: Boise City Department of Arts and History