04. Implementation Strategies

(Strategic Approach, Priorities, And General Guidance)

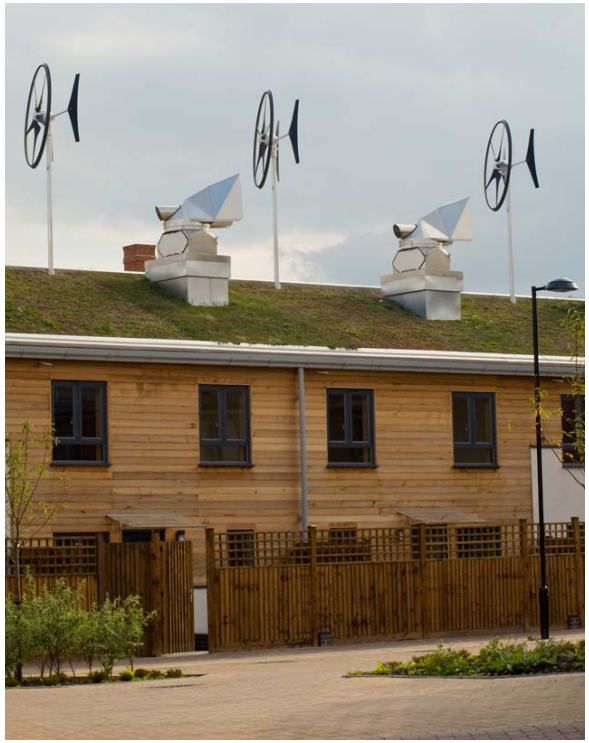
The following narrative describes the recommended long range approach to implementation of the plan, emphasizing key principles of successful revitalization and generally outlining how these principles apply to the East Billings Urban Renewal District and adjacent lands. A more detailed description of the Institutional Organization, Recommended Spatial and Regulatory Framework, and an Action Plan are included in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, respectively, all of which build upon the overall strategic approach. The proposed approach to revitalization and redevelopment within the study area, which relies heavily on incremental infill, requires a long-term perspective and assumes that the community vision will be achieved over a 20 to 30-year period. The following narrative describes the overall concepts that should guide long-term redevelopment in the study area, which include the following:

- Green and Sustainable as Identity and Brand
- Priority Districts
- Transportation, Utilities, Parking, and Energy Infrastructure
- Public Investment in Green Spaces and Amenities
- Housing
- Standards and Guidelines
- Opportunities, Investments, and Equity

4.1 GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE AS AN IDENTITY AND BRAND

Progressive green and sustainable strategies may serve to differentiate the EBURD neighborhood from other places in the city and region, as well as provide distinct identity with branding and marketing opportunities. The more comprehensive the approach to sustainable planning, design, and operation of the district, the more attractive and appealing this neighborhood will be to a certain sector of businesses and people. The EBURD planning process has unveiled several opportunities to promote green strategies including:

- A service hub and/or supply center focused on attracting environmental technology companies and companies that manufacture or distribute green products.
- Districts, neighborhoods, or perhaps a larger study area, designed around renewable energy (wind, solar, ground source heat, and/or combined heat and power) with environmentally friendly infrastructure or/or construction practices.
- Locating training and job incubator centers that focus on green collar work force training and green technologies.
- A recycling business cluster, possibly including byproduct exchanges within the neighborhood and/or creating and participating in a local or regional network of exchanges.
- A designated area with environmentally friendly infrastructure or construction practices, perhaps requiring or incentivizing building to green standards such as USGBC LEED.



Businesses may be willing to pay more to be in a district that promotes sustainable values and thereby provides heightened identity. The redevelopment consortium (described in Chapter 5) should explore incentives to encourage green building and defray added costs. During the planning process, preliminary discussions related to green strategies focused on landscaping and water-sensitive urban design. Later in the process, ideas on green enterprises emerged, such as solid waste recycling, alternative energy, district heating, and combined heat and power distribution. A review of the current trends and research of eco-industrial parks and sustainable development policy revealed that principles of industrial ecology may allow the district to capitalize on the synergy between the existing and proposed land uses and resources. A number of federal grants and programs encourage more sustainable approaches to the integration of urban planning and environmental quality. EBURD's location and physical configuration make this neighborhood a prime candidate for federal grants and potential certification by the USGBC as a LEED-ND Neighborhood. The commitment and interest of the property owners and City regulators in moving these concepts forward need to be further explored, perhaps in a series of workshops.

4.2 PRIORITY DISTRICTS

Focus on east/west neighborhood edges. The west end of the study area is adjacent to the downtown Central Business District, North Park neighborhood, and North Park Community Park, and close to the medical and university campuses. The west edge encompasses the western portion of the Rail Spur Village, as well as the Downtown East and Montana East Districts. The logical and desired development here is commercial and mixed use (with housing, office, and neighborhood retail services). Housing should be a mix of market-rate, workforce, and affordable. MSU Billings has an increasing presence in downtown. As the demand for more retail increases in the CBD, it may be feasible to locate MSU-B activities, outreach, and extension programs to a planned campus near the west edge, perhaps with student and workforce housing. Partnerships with business, technical, and vocational training schools and colleges should also be pursued.

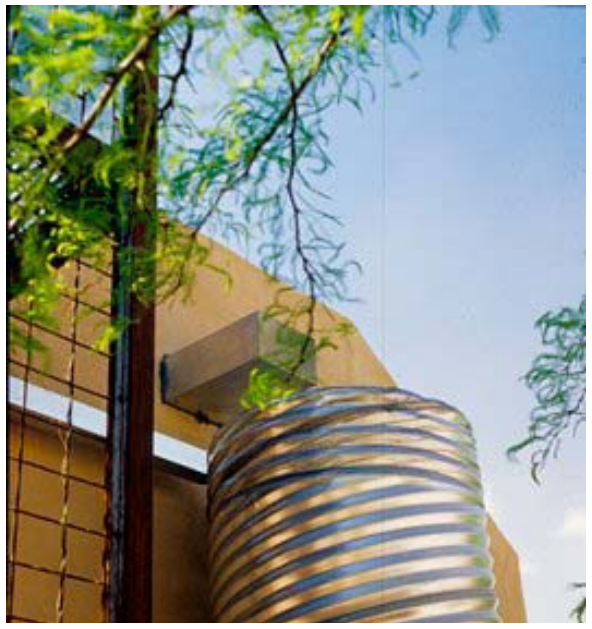
The east end should develop as an attractive gateway to Billings, reinforcing and supporting the economic driver provided by MetraPark. Lodging and catering services are obvious possibilities. Other options include a specialized retail environment that ties together food services, outdoor space, complementary recreation, entertainment, and connections to MetraPark. Standard strip commercial development, especially if it cuts off connections to the east-west avenues that connect MetraPark and downtown, should be avoided. Over the long term, the MetraPark's frontage on the Yellowstone River has the potential to develop as the city's urban waterfront. Connections to and through MetraPark and the river trail should be priorities.

4.3 TRANSPORTATION, UTILITIES, PARKING, AND ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

Good places come from good bones. Get the infrastructure right, especially streets, the rail line, drainage, energy, and telecommunications.

Streets

Streets are the visible skeleton, providing the above and underground right-of-way for all other services. Streets are important for access to and circulation through the neighborhood for cars, buses, and trucks, but they are also used by other modes and, if designed properly, can provide services beyond through-vehicle



travel capacity and local access. The transportation recommendations of the EBURD Master Plan focus on creating a distinct, human-scale place, a walkable neighborhood with enhanced transit and bicycle connections. Recommendations address the character and the utilitarian potential of streets.

Rail

The rail line, including the main line and rail spur, is another important component of infrastructure that services the existing businesses and may be an incentive for new or expanding businesses to be located here. Rail will become increasingly important as petroleum-based transportation and shipping costs rise. Were this neighborhood to become part of a regional byproduct exchange network, the rail will provide a cost-effective transport link to the region. Extending the rail and developing a shared shipping and receiving dock, accessible to all businesses in the neighborhood, may also be advantageous. Likewise, public investment in land for community services and shared parking should be addressed sooner rather than later.

Drainage

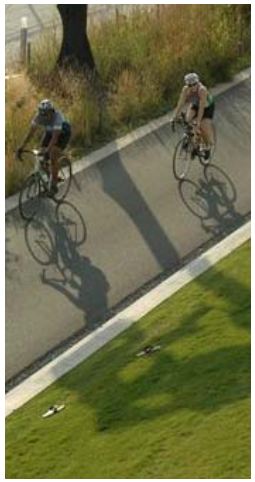
Streets provide the right-of-way for drainage, which is important in the southeast part of the study area. The sizable existing storm drains carry a large volume of water but lack the capacity to handle major storm events. Drainage solutions should reduce upstream flows, perhaps detaining some of the water in new and existing parks, curb extensions, roofs, and private green spaces. Water is a resource. The storm system should be designed using principles of water-sensitive urban design – capturing, infiltrating, and reusing storm and gray water. As streets are reconstructed, storage of water in underground cisterns located in street rights-of-way should be explored. Likewise, water can be detained and stored in open space, under parking lots, on roofs, and in parks.

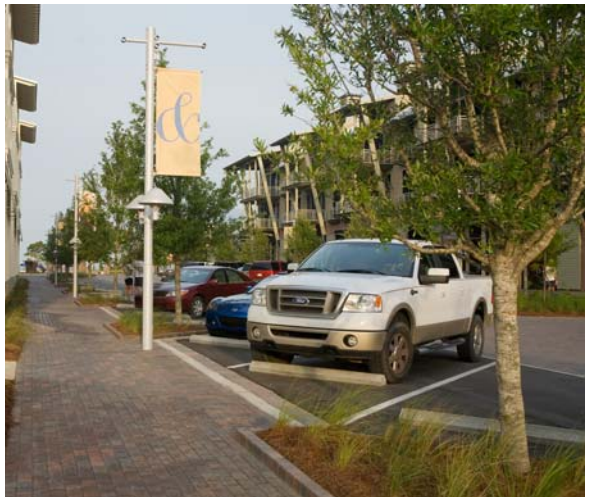
Energy

The costs of energy and the environmental consequences of fossil fuel dependence will continue to rise. Businesses may be attracted to the district if renewable energy sources are provided. Planning for energy in this district should incorporate solar and wind renewable energy and explore the feasibility of cogeneration or local combined heat and power systems. The central location of the existing substation in the neighborhood would allow new developments to feed excess energy back into the grid. As design guidelines and codes are finalized, give careful consideration to impacts of landscape and building codes on solar and wind access.

4.4 PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN URBAN GREEN SPACE AND AMENITIES

Parks, open space, and public amenities are essential to urban structure. A large downtown park in the CBD was a recommendation of the Billings Framework Plan that has not been realized because of limited land and high land costs. Development policies of the master plan must include public parks, and private and public open space elements. Investment in public amenities should not be set aside for later because money is needed for new utilities or buildings. Currently, land costs are low, and acquisition of land for a major downtown green space in the west end of the study area is highly recommended. A major, well-programmed downtown green space will draw people from throughout the community, provide a focus for development, and provide amenities to residents and businesses.





4.5 HOUSING

Encourage diverse downtown housing. Housing has numerous advantages beyond shelter; it creates a market for retail, and it creates more pedestrian and downtown activity, which adds to neighborhood attraction and security. Downtown housing can reduce auto dependency and travel costs, support nearby employment centers, and provide workforce housing. Challenges to developing housing within EBURD include an older industrial environment with some industrial uses that are incompatible with residences, as well as the high cost of developing urban-type housing in mixed-use projects. TIF district and other grants can help. Less expensive but high-quality ways to build housing are proposed, such as prefab and modular units that can be stacked. These are being built elsewhere to LEED standards for hard costs of $80-$90 per square foot. Thoughtfully designed, these can look just like stick-built three-four story structures. The creation of a residential neighborhood with a distinct identity will require the redevelopment of blocks versus individual sites. This will require up-front initiative to consolidate properties. The master plan proposes housing on the west end of the district associated with office employment, retail, and services that support residences, a major downtown green space, and perhaps an educational campus.

4.6 STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Encourage a mixture of uses and develop design standards. This plan proposes a new regulatory framework that requires new standards for building form and public realm elements. Form-based coding (FBC) is described in greater detail in later sections of this master plan. Understandably, property owners are concerned about over-regulation. In the longer run, development and design standards, if they are consistently applied, deliver more value and return on investment. This plan avoids the temptation to waive standards as part of a deal to attract new development. Instead, the plan advocates for adhering to reasonable design standards that will enhance value over time. This plan includes fairly detailed guidance on recommended code revisions. The recommended regulations should be refined in consultation with the community with active involvement of those who will be responsible for administering them. Codes require certain performance standards, whereas guidelines provide guidance and clarity on how vision can be achieved.

4.7 OPPORTUNITIES, INVESTMENTS, AND EQUITY

Develop opportunistically. Implementation is complex and involves numerous components - dozens of elements to accomplish, and hundreds of ways they could be organized. The City of Billings and stakeholders should stay flexible within the boundaries of the master plan. Limited resources can be leveraged to build momentum. For example, a federal office building is looking for an appropriate location within the city to meet its goals and objectives for operation. Recruiting this project to the neighborhood would be an enormous catalyst for other types of development in the vicinity. There will not be many comparable opportunities – the EBURD is a logical location, and the BIRD resources should be put forward to realize this opportunity.

Retain, recruit, and expand existing businesses. The study area and the greater downtown is home to several stable and successful businesses. The City and organizations responsible for stewardship of the EBURD Master Plan should proactively work to retain them and encourage reinvestment. It is possible that banks, hospitals, or other downtown businesses could locate

less public functions in the district such as back office service functions and administration or maintenance functions. In the past, the Downtown Billings Partnership has administered several grant, loan, and technical assistance programs. Begin planning now, and when TIF district funds become available, institute programs to retain and attract investment.

The importance of retaining existing businesses and encouraging the expansion of existing downtown businesses in this district is an important strategy. Federal, State, County, and City offices may be relocated or need space to expand. Begin discussions now. The activity and visitation associated with government offices would increase visibility and attraction of the district. The presence of a downtown library would complement a new neighborhood, student housing, or expansion of colleges or universities downtown.

Find a balance between focused investments and equity. Ultimately, the limited availability of funding for public sector improvements is a challenge to the EBURD. Other sections of this master plan describe some possibilities for financing projects, such as TIF districts, special improvement districts, standard City sources, and possible outside grants. However, the likely funding relative to what needs to be invested in the public infrastructure (i.e., not counting the buildings, which will be constructed almost entirely by the private sector) is large, as is the study area itself. Therefore, if the limited funds are spread equally each year over the entire study area, little will be accomplished. Some of the investment must be focused. One way to accomplish this is with a catalyst project, or investment in something that is expected to stimulate other development or investment by the private sector. Consistent with previous points, the logical locations for such catalyst projects are at the west and east edges. These are also the areas most at risk for unplanned development. This master plan proposes several catalytic projects that can help jump-start redevelopment within the neighborhood and specifically these neighborhood edges.