

# MISSOULIAN

## Firm discusses Missoula downtown plan direction

By PAMELA J. PODGER of the Missoulian

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"It is how you want to change – everything changes over time," George Crandall told about 300 people gathered at the Holiday Inn Downtown at the Park Wednesday night. "The challenge is to get out ahead of it so it reflects your values and unique character."

The scope of the downtown master plan is likely to include elements such as parking, building heights, sidewalk widths, business retention and recruitment, public access to the riverfront, maintaining a government presence downtown and other elements.

The process is tentatively set to begin March 5 at the Holiday Inn Downtown, with public forums staggered about every two months. A final report will be issued before Thanksgiving, said Don Arambula.

Local sentiment will be gauged at about four public meetings and roughly 100 stakeholder sessions.

At the end of the workshops, participants will fill out ballots that help identify salient issues and concerns.

"This helps us tell what people think, what the issues are, what they want the plan to address and what problems they want solved," Crandall said.

Crandall said the procedure begins by tapping into local visions, then developing a design phase with maps and brochures to sketch out possible solutions, and lastly an implementation plan.

"We don't do plans that sit on a shelf," Crandall said. "Our plans get implemented. The trick is to identify the top half-dozen concerns and get moving."

The firm, which specializes in downtown planning, has done projects in Lincoln, Neb.; Fairbanks, Ala.; Knoxville, Tenn.; Racine, Wisc.; Santa Fe, N.M.; Portland, Ore., and elsewhere. This will be the firm's second Montana project, following one in Whitefish.

In several cities, Crandall said they have suggested opening up blocked roads, created more street-level retail, and encouraged pedestrian-friendly downtown with landscaping and parks.

Linda McCarthy, executive director of the Missoula Downtown Association, said about \$425,000 has been raised from private sources, as well as the Downtown Business Improvement District, the Missoula Redevelopment Agency and the Missoula Parking Commission. The funds will be used to pay for the study and for some aspects of implementation.

Anders Brooker, owner of the Runner's Edge on North Higgins, said he welcomed the study.

"The more vibrant the downtown is, the better we all are," Brooker said.

Annette Skaja, an employee at J. Elaine's Boutique, said she was impressed by the presentation, which highlighted some of the firm's work in other cities.

"I liked that they want to ask our opinions and hold meetings that are about our input," she said.