

Downtown Missoula's future discussed

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The city of Missoula is continuing to work on a long term plan for what downtown should look like.

Some of those ideas take a big step forward on Wednesday night at a workshop that went over some possible ideas.

The Portland-based consulting firm of Crandall Arambula City Planning is in the middle of proposing a distinct, two decade long plan for Missoula's downtown district and on Wednesday they shared several possibilities they think could improve the area.

The proposals include adding up to 50% more retail to downtown, erecting new housing near the railroad and on the Riverfront Triangle, and also increasing the size of waterfront area to host larger community events.

Meanwhile, public transit could also see improvements, including moving the bike lanes on Higgins Avenue away from traffic, and installing a street car system much like Missoula had 70 years ago.

The proposals would all change the face of downtown, but the consultants say Missoula already has a strong urban center.

"It's beautiful, and you have the river that really is the centerpiece" says consultant George Crandall. "So you're a picture postcard. It's a very desirable place, and you have some very vital businesses here right now. And the idea is to build on your strengths."

Crandall and his associates are meeting with over 600 individuals over the next few days and will compile, and then post all of that feedback on their web site sometime in the next few weeks.

