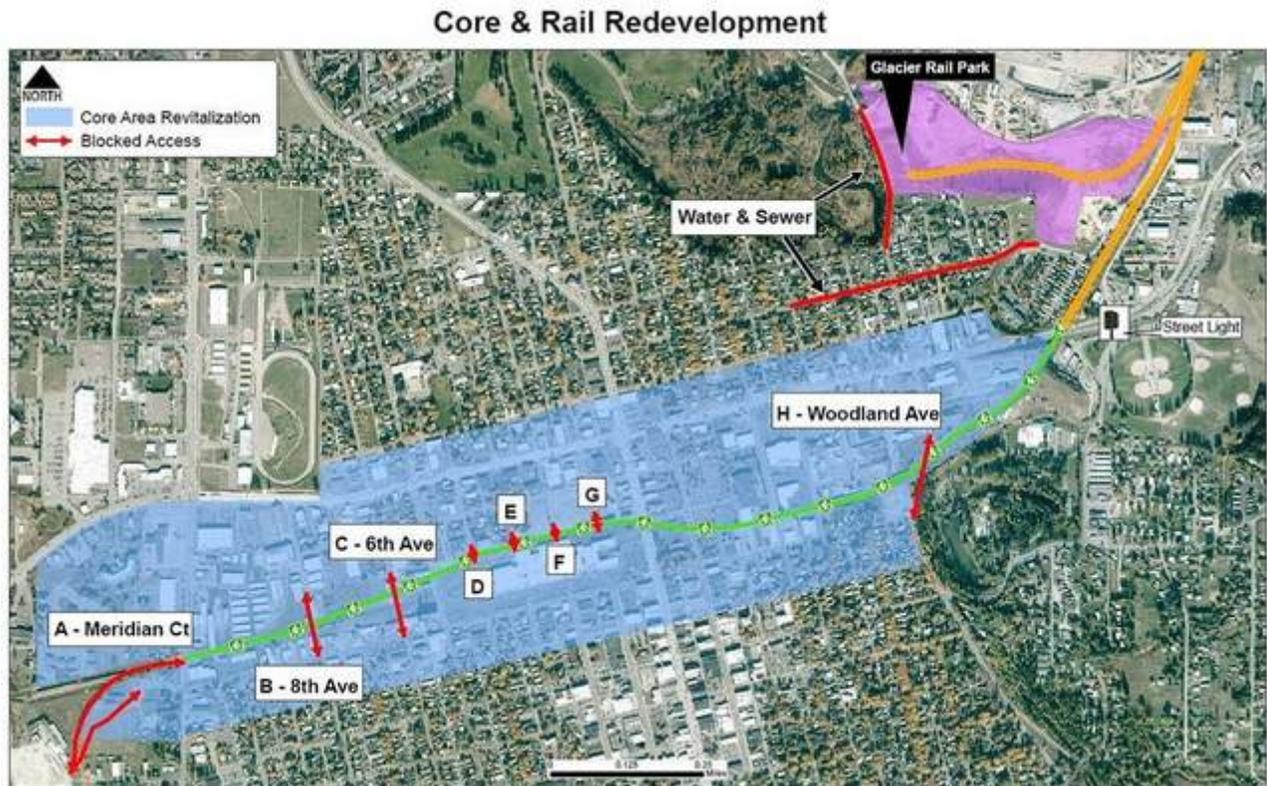


KALISPELL WRAPS UP REQUIREMENTS FOR \$10M REDEVELOPMENT GRANT

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After years of working toward a \$10 million federal grant slotted to revamp Kalispell, city officials said they've jumped through the last hoop needed to ensure the money arrives.

The U.S. Department of Transportation awarded Kalispell a federal TIGER grant in 2015 to drive a massive economic development project in the city's core area.

Community Development Manager Katharine Thompson said soon after celebration began, officials got to work on an environmental study to weigh the project's possible impact on Kalispell. She said after five years of trying to secure the funding — which included two rejection notices and nearly two years of stepping stones — she received the email Tuesday afternoon announcing the money was on its way.

"It's an important milestone," she said. "After all those years, that email feels anticlimactic."

Thompson said the city should receive the obligation of grant funds on or before July 31. She said the resulting projects are set to kick off in August.

The city's Core Area Plan was adopted in 2012. It launched the effort to remove the railroad tracks from Kalispell's downtown, reconnect disjointed streets and build a pathway system linking pedestrians to shops and parks.

Key to the plan is creating a rail industrial park in the old McElroy and Wilken gravel pit between Whitefish Stage Road and Office Max.

Thompson said a groundbreaking is set for Aug. 22 at the rail park site — though plans for the ceremony are still taking shape.

The same time last year, city planners touted proposals for lighted pathways leading through downtown Kalispell and art scattered throughout the trail during an open house in August.

"Imagine a downtown with access to parks and shops ... instead of the feeling of a highway going through town," Kalispell Planning and Building Director Tom Jentz told visitors during the 2016 open house.

In the early plans, a proposed pathway would connect the west side of Woodland Park to the envisioned path that would replace the tracks leading toward Depot Park and past Kalispell Center Mall.

More than a century after the tracks were laid, Thompson said the city is on the verge of meeting the business and community needs that's grown in Kalispell over the last several decades.

"It's pretty exciting and will get more exciting in the next 12 months," she said.

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