



Opinion | *Like I Was Saying*

A Community Engaged

This is how community municipal projects should work

BY KELLYN BROWN // AUG 2, 2018

Earlier this week, the City of Kalispell and Alta Design and Engineering wrapped up soliciting input on what the new trail replacing downtown railroad tracks should be called and how it should be branded. It was just the latest effort to involve the community in an ambitious project years in the making.

The goal of the redevelopment plan has been widely reported: to make the city's historic downtown more walkable and bikable; attract more business to the core area that will capitalize on more foot traffic; reconnect roads so vehicles will flow better through town.

It was an idea hatched years ago, began gaining momentum in 2012 after Flathead County Economic Development Authority purchased land for the future Glacier Rail Park, and became feasible once the City of Kalispell and FCEDA were awarded a TIGER grant to help fund the redevelopment plan in 2015. Now the idea is inching closer to becoming a reality with tracks expected to be replaced by trail next year.

What's as impressive as the project is the way in which the organizations involved have asked for locals' input nearly every step of the way. If you live in the region, and haven't logged on to www.kalispellcoreandrail.com, you should. There's a wealth of information, including interactive maps, a timeline and overall objective for the project.

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Even the more minute details of the trail have been presented to the public, such as what the logo should look like and

what it should be named. Options for a name include The Tracks of Kalispell, Kalispell Trax, Kalispell Rail Trail, Great Northern Historic Trail of Kalispell, and The Tracks – Kalispell Trailway, which I voted for. I also chose more of a modern design for the branding. I'm not sure how much this will influence the committee's decision, but I'm glad they asked, along with every other resident, what I thought about it.

This survey followed a series of brainstorming sessions, [or deep dives](#), that city leaders hosted for locals to provide feedback for the project. It also allowed the public to ride railroad “motorcars” along the future location of the trail. The event was well attended with many of the motorcars at capacity.

After gathering all this feedback, designers from Alta plan to spend much of the rest of the summer reviewing it and, from there, will eventually come up with a concept that it will present to the Kalispell City Council, likely in the fall.

Again, this is an ambitious project with several moving parts, involves several organizations and could have a long-lasting impact on Kalispell. On its site, the impact it will have on the city is explained like this: “The Core & Rail Redevelopment will spur growth across multiple sectors of the economy, implement critical infrastructure, and provide diversity in housing options. Simultaneously, it will serve to enhance pedestrian and motorist safety, and add incentives and services for a growing workforce.”

With any luck, it will reach those lofty goals. What's already clear is that this is how community municipal projects should work: the local government involved and engaged; the economic development arm of the city transparent and providing timely updates; and a community eager to be involved in a plan to change the face of its city.

Now, at long last, we're getting closer to seeing the fruits of this cooperation.

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