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City of Kalispell Releases Preliminary Design of Rail Trail

Designers say U.S. 93 crossing will be major challenge

BY JUSTIN FRANZ // MAR 12, 2019



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The Kalispell City Council got its first look at a designer’s vision for the proposed rail trail through the heart of the city.

The council discussed the design report during its March 11 meeting after the Beacon went to print.

Alta Planning and Design of Portland, Oregon completed the report, which looks at various options for a trail that will replace the former Great Northern Railway tracks through town. In 2015, the city won a federal grant to construct a new rail-served industrial park east of town so

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that the final two businesses downtown — CHS Kalispell’s grain elevator and Northwest Drywall — could move there and the rails could be ripped up.



The proposed trail generally follows the railroad right-of-way, which the city hopes to purchase from BNSF

Railway this year, from Meridian Road to the U.S. Highway 2 underpass in Evergreen. The design report splits the trail into three areas. The Granary District runs from Meridian to Fifth Avenue. The Downtown District goes from Fifth Avenue to Third Avenue, including the Kalispell Center Mall and U.S. Highway 93. And the Park District encompasses everything from Third Avenue to U.S. Highway 2, including the area along Woodland Park.

The preliminary design calls for a 12-foot wide path along the old railroad right-of-way with trees and other design elements sprinkled throughout, including public art and interpretive signs. In the Park District, designers suggest building a water splash pad that can be turned into an ice rink in winter as well as putting an old train car on display.

The report states that one of the most challenging areas of the trail will be the intersection with Highway 93, which is currently four lanes wide. City officials would like the road to be reduced to three lanes, but that plan does not have universal support. Some have suggested building a trail overpass across the highway, but the design report notes that it would be cost prohibitive.

“Treatment of the trail crossing at Main Street will be a significant component of the overall success of the project,” the report states. “If safe and comfortable, the

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crossing has the potential to be a focal point joining the east and west portions of the trail. If accommodated poorly, it could limit overall use of the trail and hamper its utility as a transportation corridor.”

City officials will review the report this week and offer feedback that will be incorporated in a final design in the next few months.

The rail line through downtown Kalispell is still in use, but train service could end as early as this summer. Officials believe the rails could be removed in 2020 and trail construction could begin soon after.

[Click here to see the report.](#)

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