

## 8.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community design is a cornerstone chapter of the Comprehensive Plan in that it dictates the framework for what the community is hoping to achieve in the fulfillment of a livable and sustainable community. This chapter discusses a new planning approach for the City—**Smart Growth Principles**—and outlines Mountain Home's goals for community design in the future.

Having a well-thought out plan for the design of private and public space, and the way public spaces are experienced, is important in helping leaders of the community make well-informed land use and development decisions since these development decisions affect people's everyday lives — their homes, their health, the schools their children attend, the taxes they pay, their daily commute, the natural environment around them, economic growth in their community, safety and emergency services, and opportunities to achieve their dreams and goals.

What, where, and how communities build will affect residents' lives for generations to come; therefore the priority of community design is to utilize intelligent planning to facilitate a functional, attractive, livable and economically sound community.

## 8.2 Background

Transitioning from a small rural town, to—now—the largest city in Elmore County and the principal city of the "Idaho Micropolitan Statistical Area", Mountain Home has experienced a steady and almost constant progression over time—and it continues to. The City is on the precipice of its next transformative transition and, while its former cycle of growing and evolving organically, without formal planning, has worked up until now, it won't work for the future if the City wants to progress into a livable and functional community. The City has reached a size and a scale that requires prescribed planning and design.

## 8.3 Existing Conditions

Mountain Home's overall 'design character' is not truly defined by any existing or designated theme, element, or type. Mountain Home is composed of a number of separate, individual areas, each having its own unique qualities related to elements such as age, era, use, type, and style, that make it diverse.

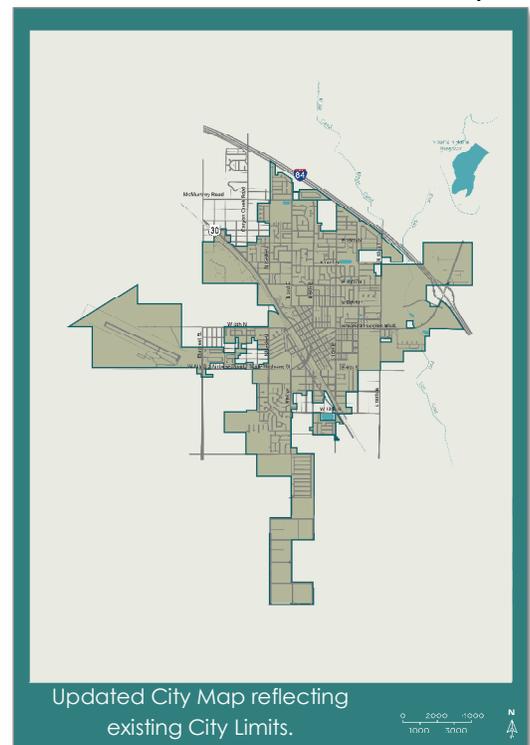
A positive with regard to how Mountain Home has grown and developed is that there isn't a strong pattern of urban sprawl; though somewhat disjointed, the community has remained mostly centrally developed (in part a result of constrained City Limit boundaries—see **Map 8.1**). While Mountain Home strives to retain its small town character, it has grown to a point of need, and an expressed desire, for consistency in the aesthetic of the community, and for quality of development throughout; a congruity in the City's design.

Community  
Development/  
Design

A TOP 5  
PRIORITY ISSUE

Identified as a  
focus for the next  
10 years

Map 8.1



## 8.3 Existing Conditions

Mountain Home currently consists of nondescript neighborhoods and detached commercial centers. There isn't a distinct pattern of development, and the lack of cohesive development and wayfinding signage poses difficulties navigating through town for visitors who don't live here and new residents alike.

### GATEWAYS

There are three separate gateways into Mountain Home, two of which are from I-84, the interstate freeway. None of the gateways express a sense of arrival into the community nor do they offer wayfinding as one enters town. One may be headed out of town before they even realize that they've passed through Mountain Home.

### DOWNTOWN

The downtown core of Mountain Home has, for decades, experienced various levels of decline. Though much discussion had been given to the downtown over past decades, with several planning documents adopted, very little had actually been implemented to remedy the economically struggling district.

The **2018 Downtown Master Plan** was adopted to revitalize the downtown core, to return it to its former identity as a destination for residents and visitors. The overall goal of the Downtown Plan is to boost economic development citywide.

### NEIGHBORHOODS

With the severe lack of residential construction over the last decade, Mountain Home's neighborhoods are aging. Lack of connectivity and ease of access to public spaces creates areas prone to decline, blight and general concerns with regard to social health and safety. The housing shortage exacerbates the dilemma; with the increases in demand, a trend of neglect can take hold. Also, the lack of commercial services in close proximity to most neighborhoods creates vehicle-centric areas, which diminishes public interaction and gathering.

Mountain Home as a community, and as a place to live and do business, has the potential to be better; time and inattention has simply not been favorable. However the City is committed to revitalizing this historic community.



"Entering Mountain Home" sign  
Gateway Entrance from Exit 90



"Visitor Center" sign  
Gateway Entrance from Exit 90

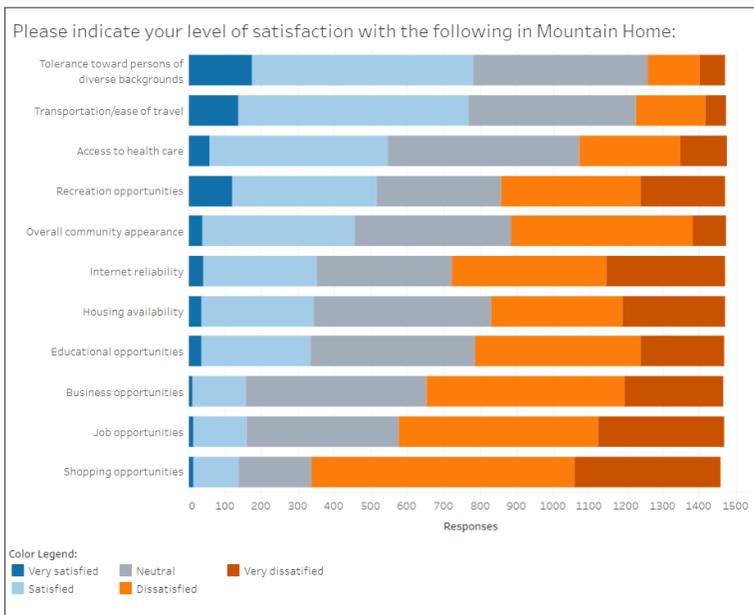
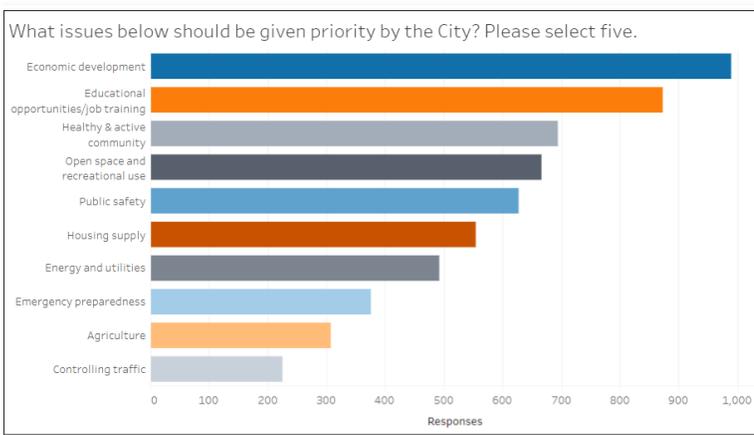
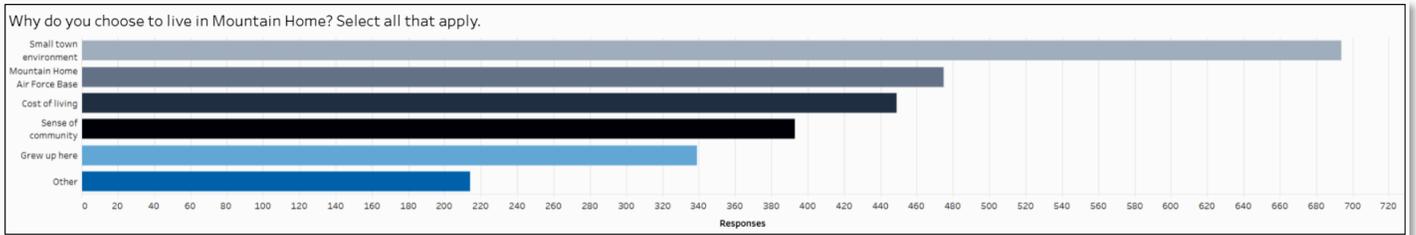


Existing Downtown Corridor



Neighborhood in Decline

## 8.3.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS THE PUBLIC'S PERSPECTIVE



A theme found throughout this updated Comprehensive Plan is that preserving and fostering the “small town” character that Mountain Home currently enjoys is vitally important to all residents who provided feedback. The above graph illustrates this well.

**When asked why they choose to live in Mountain Home 100% of the respondents to that question said it was for the small town environment.**

Since community design is critically important to the citizens that live in the community, the City asked the public numerous questions about how they see Mountain Home today, and what they hope to see it become in the future.

**70% responded that they want the City to prioritize a healthy and active community.**

**67% said they want a focus on Open Space and Recreational Use.**

When small and rural towns transition into a city (based on population, location and community needs), it is very common to see the responses below, demonstrating the need for formal design planning.

**40% of respondents are very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the current overall community appearance.**

**Only 31% responded with satisfaction at the current overall community appearance.**



## 8.4 Future

With an extensive set of community design goals identified (found at the end of the Chapter) the City is preparing to apply formal community planning principles into the future landscape of Mountain Home, and part of that design planning will include utilizing “**Smart Growth Principles and Strategies**”.

**“Smart Growth encompasses a range of development and conservation strategies meant to help protect our health and natural environment, and to make our communities more attractive and economically stronger<sup>3</sup>.”**

While the City was exploring paths toward a prime goal of creating cohesiveness in the aesthetic of Mountain Home, the smart growth approach addressed many factors that the City has been hoping to achieve.

### 8.4.1 SMART GROWTH APPROACH

Some basic principles designed to guide smart growth strategies, developed by the Smart Growth Network, also provided a feasible outline the City could follow to completion. The following eight basic principles will become the fundamental focus for Mountain Home:

- ⇒ **Mix land uses cohesively**
- ⇒ **Create a range of housing opportunities**
- ⇒ **Foster distinctive, livable, walkable communities with a strong sense of place**
- ⇒ **Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas**
- ⇒ **Direct development toward existing communities.**
- ⇒ **Encourage use of a variety of transportation**
- ⇒ **Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in major development decisions**



Part of Mountain Home's community design goal includes creating and adopting updated design standards for development—standards that will enhance community aesthetic and distinctiveness, in addition to other benefits. To these ends, the smart growth principles will act as a foundational barometer to ensure that all future planning and design maintains “true north” in that direction.

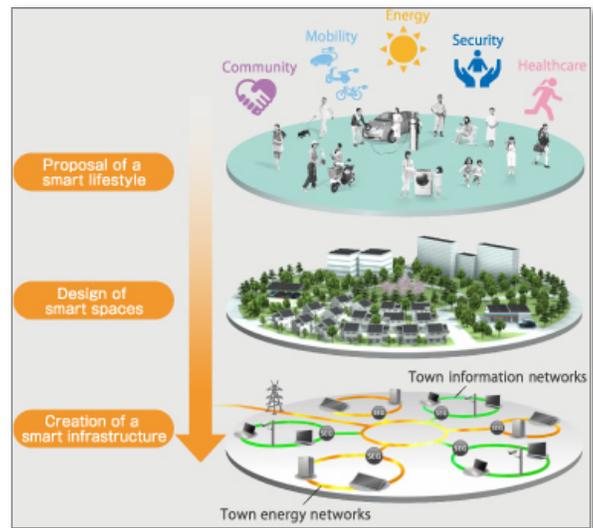
As the City begins to execute formal design planning—guided by the vision of steering Mountain Home into a cohesive community fabric—the City will be reimagined.

Since the next evolution of the community will be planned, the sense of place will remain; and the small town feel will be preserved; but a new distinctiveness of community will emerge.

## 8.4.2 PLANNING AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Integral to any community design planning are tried-and-true, time-tested planning and design principles that, for Mountain Home, will be applied in concert with smart growth principles. Namely, the following urban design principles will be key to Mountain Home's next evolution (and should be considered with any proposed development):

- **Livable Centers**  
Encourage and create walkable neighborhoods
- **Create a Sense of Place**  
Define (or redefine) existing fabric of neighborhoods instilling a sense of neighborhood cohesiveness
- **Promoting Social Interaction**  
Develop and integrate placemaking with all development and redevelopment
- **Integrate Design Statements**  
Visual repetition creates community identity: signage, lighting, landscaping, furnishings
- **Deemphasize Brownfields**  
Remove focus from the negative by enhancing and adding positives
- **Plan Mixed-Use Areas Well**  
Ensure these areas don't create a hodge-podge effect
- **Prioritize Civic/Public Gathering Places**  
Focus on areas outside of private development for community/public access
- **Ensure Community Design is Proportionate**  
Preserve the historic, balancing it with the new



## 8.5 FUTURE – SUMMARY

With the strategic approach to Mountain Home's community design established, it makes sense to break down the many goals of this chapter into a snapshot of the overarching goals; doing this will aid in keeping the big picture in mind as all of the more detailed action items get underway. The City's "big picture" goals include:



### Define

Define neighborhoods  
Establish districts  
Designate boundaries



### Innovate

Vision and map  
Develop public spaces  
Enrich human activity



### Integrate

Connect districts  
Wayfinding  
Enhance the journey



### Deliver

Honor the design  
Foster public interaction  
Ensure preservation

## 8.6 GOAL 1

**Update land use, residential, commercial and all other development standards in support of the goals as outlined in this chapter.**

- A. Develop and adopt into ordinance an extensive Design Standards Manual to direct the identity and design of the community, including but not limited to, architecture, landscaping, signage, rights-of-way, setbacks, building standards.
- B. Implement a commercial and residential Design Review process for mixed use and multi-family uses within the community, and especially for visually sensitive areas such as downtown, and access points into the city.
- C. Standards should address transitions and buffers between different land uses, landscaping, quality of architecture and building materials, and pedestrian amenities.
- D. Review and update ordinance standards to ensure cohesiveness with large scale mixed-use developments.

## 8.7 GOAL 2

**Protect and enrich Mountain Home's "small town" character and community lifestyle through updates and additions to policy, code and practice.**

- A. All development applications will be considered for impact to schools, local services, utilities and transportation networks for which development is anticipated to occur.
- B. Encourage compatible infill development and redevelopment which will minimize impact to the existing landscape of the community, and which will maximize efficiency with infrastructure connectivity.
- C. Ensure building scaling is appropriate to the site.
- D. Ensure small town character and community appearance through consistent public property maintenance.
- E. Conduct a review of code and standards, and if applicable, draft and adopt additional standards and code to ensure consistency in preservation of the character of the community.
- F. Develop community-wide sign standards based on land use zones.



## 8.8 GOAL 3

**Designate and design entryway and gateway points into Mountain Home providing visual queues to the character and identity of the community.**

- A. Develop gateway design plan and standards to improve highway systems to be visually attractive and consistent at gateway entrances, setting the visual identity of Mountain Home.
- B. Gateways shall integrate well-designed and clear directional signage from the gateway to community destinations.
- C. The City shall foster development of attractive transition zones along gateway and commercial corridors.
- D. Update ordinances to establish a scenic corridor overlay, in accordance with city goals and objectives, which prohibits or regulates any new billboards or digital billboards within the scenic corridor.

## 8.9 GOAL 4

**Create a clear and perceptible community identity that sets the benchmark for all development, and redevelopment, resulting in a unified and cohesive community design.**

- A. Establish and maintain development patterns and design criteria in keeping with the small town and rural transitional identity of Mountain Home.
- B. Determine and standardize public design elements meant to enhance and reinforce the City's identity and sense of place (i.e. decorative street lighting along all arterials and commercial frontages).
- C. As a unifying element the City shall establish and enforce a streetscape standard, which will include a street tree program, specifying standards and guidelines for types, species and sizes of trees to be planted in public places and City property throughout the community.
- D. Prescribe landscaping and screening devices at gateways and other highly traveled and visible areas to minimize signs of neglect and blight.



## 8.10 GOAL 5

### Prioritize neighborhood revitalization with a focus on neighborhoods in decline.

- A. Create and adopt standardized Design Review policies and procedures to direct future development and redevelopment of existing uses.
- B. Encourage neighborhood focus groups to activate residents to participate in the revitalization process.
- C. Establish and enhance areas of tree growth that will create beauty, add to a healthy environment, and increase economic stability.
- D. Integrate Complete Streets policies, ensuring connectivity throughout the City.
- E. Prepare and adopt design guidelines and development standards to be the basis for design review of architecture, landscaping, signage, and other visual impacts of development projects.
- F. Ensure that development is scaled appropriately to the regional, community, and neighborhood use.
- G. Require all non-transmission utility distribution within the City to be installed underground.
- H. Establish recognitions and awards to community members and neighborhood associations exemplifying exceptional home maintenance or neighborhood projects.
- I. Identify neighborhood amenity deficiencies (open space, pathway or transit needs) in older neighborhoods and prepare a program strategy for systematic improvement.
- J. Require new housing infill and additions to existing residential structures that are visible from adjoining properties or the street, to be sited and designed to be compatible with the character of the existing neighborhood.
- K. Encourage major renewal and redevelopment in blighted sectors when prevailing structural conditions are not amenable to renovation, and where planned residential or mixed-use clusters will rejuvenate the greater area.
- L. Evaluate small vacant lots with low development options for potential use as community gardens or parks.
- M. Encourage, incentivize and support infill development to take advantage of existing infrastructure, community and educational facilities, to enhance the existing neighborhood overall, and finally to act as a potential catalyst to other improvement projects in the same vicinity.



## 8.11 GOAL 6

**Warrant that all new development will include high quality community spaces, including public amenities, gathering places, green space and pathways.**

- A. Require that private and public open space be included in all new single-family and multi-family developments, and that they are capable of being enjoyed by all residents.
- B. Encourage the development of community spaces and plazas within commercial developments that can accommodate cultural and social events and function as community gathering areas.
- C. Support the installation and maintenance of public art throughout the community.
- D. Developments, both commercial and residential, shall ensure integration of connectivity to existing pathways (if existing) and include pedestrian and bike friendly amenities on site for future development connectivity.

## 8.12 GOAL 7

**Safeguard and protect the historic, natural, and recreational resources of the city and its surrounding landscape, ensuring that development doesn't pose a threat or negatively impact these resources.**

- A. Identify areas with environmental sensitivity and design programs and facilities that could provide enjoyment without negatively impacting the sensitive areas.
- B. Protect and maintain important habitat areas for rare, threatened, endangered, or protected plant and animal species.
- C. Maintain, restore and enhance the natural environment, where appropriate, to improve the quality of natural resources and support biodiversity of plant and animal species in the area.
- D. Encourage the use of native, drought tolerant and fire resistant plants and landscaping for easier maintenance and to preserve water resources.



## 8.13 GOAL 8

**Promote historic preservation (including historic buildings and sites), with efforts toward adaptive redevelopment in combination with preservation.**

- A. Encourage the private sector to preserve and rehabilitate buildings and sites through local landmark designation, public improvements, guidelines, and other tools.
- B. Update policies and ordinances as applicable to be consistent with historic preservation goals.
- C. Evaluate alternative building safety codes and fire safety protections adapted for historic buildings.
- D. Promote the cooperation of city departments, Commissions, Boards, and historic preservation organizations in considering the historic character of the city when processing and reviewing development applications.
- E. Improve economic opportunities in the City Center through sensitive adaptive reuse of historic properties.

## 8.14 GOAL 9

**Work to improve the accessibility to local commercial services, and to enhance commercial centers, creating a walkable and livable neighborhood environment, and preserving the small town feel of Mountain Home.**

- A. Embrace and support a "Main Street" theme to further the goals of retaining the small town character that residents have stated the desire to protect.
- B. The City will identify ideal locations for possible integration of "urban centers" (small scale local commercial service centers, located at intersections of established neighborhoods), which will work to reinforce a walkable community atmosphere. Urban centers reduce dependency on motorized travel, encourage gathering of local residents and serve to enhance the close-in fabric of neighborhoods.
- C. The City should improve the visual quality of existing commercial corridors along major thoroughfares by requiring landscaping, right-of-way treatments, and visual screening of obtrusive uses.
- D. The City shall continue to work on the revitalization of the downtown corridor, recreating a vibrant and pedestrian friendly environment that will draw local patronage and economic development.



## 8.15 GOAL 10

**Integrate components of Complete Streets throughout the community, investing in a livable and walkable environment, while also maintaining and enhancing the functionality of transporting people and goods.**

- A. Preserve the function of regional transportation corridors through the city while ensuring compatibility with alternate modes of transportation, land uses and design standards of the city.
- B. Plan for the impact that the regional transportation system will have on land use and community design.
- C. Audit existing and establish new right-of-way and design standards, appropriately scaled for surrounding land use; enforce standards for activity centers and public nodes along regional corridors to serve the needs of both the community and transporters passing through.
- D. Utilize a variety of traffic calming and speed reduction methods, such as street trees, textured crosswalks and signage to slow traffic on arterial routes and on adversely impacted local residential streets.
- E. Promote housing opportunities within walking distance of future transit corridors.
- F. Plan for and promote neighborhoods that integrate mobility methods that are accessible, visually pleasing, and properly integrated to encourage walking and cycling.
- G. Work with the community, land owners and developers to set aside and dedicate portions of open space for trails, pathways and greenbelts in proximity to the City's entryways and view-shed areas.
- H. Update the Master Transportation Plan to include a Complete Streets Policy for the City.

