

OLD BOISE BLOCKS ON GROVE STREET PLACEMAKING AND REINVESTMENT STRATEGY

Phase I Visioning: Preliminary Findings Report – **REVISED**

June 2020





C.W. Moore Park and Plaza

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*Prepared for CCDC by Agnew::Beck, 2020
Historical research conducted by Stevens Historical Research Associates*

I. About the Project

Overview

The Old Boise Blocks along Grove Street is ripe for catalytic transformation. The project area is located within the broader River-Myrtle/Old Boise Urban Renewal District, which will sunset on December 31, 2024. The area features unique characteristics and history, contains several parcels with high redevelopment potential, and includes property owners and neighbors supportive of transformative investments. The area also offers critical linkages to increase mobility throughout downtown, attract more economic activity, and provide needed infrastructure such as gathering spaces, parking, retail and housing. Creating a collaborative, community-supported vision for the area will drive the overall placemaking and reinvestment strategy, helping kick-off a modern-day transformation of Grove Street in the Old Boise Blocks.

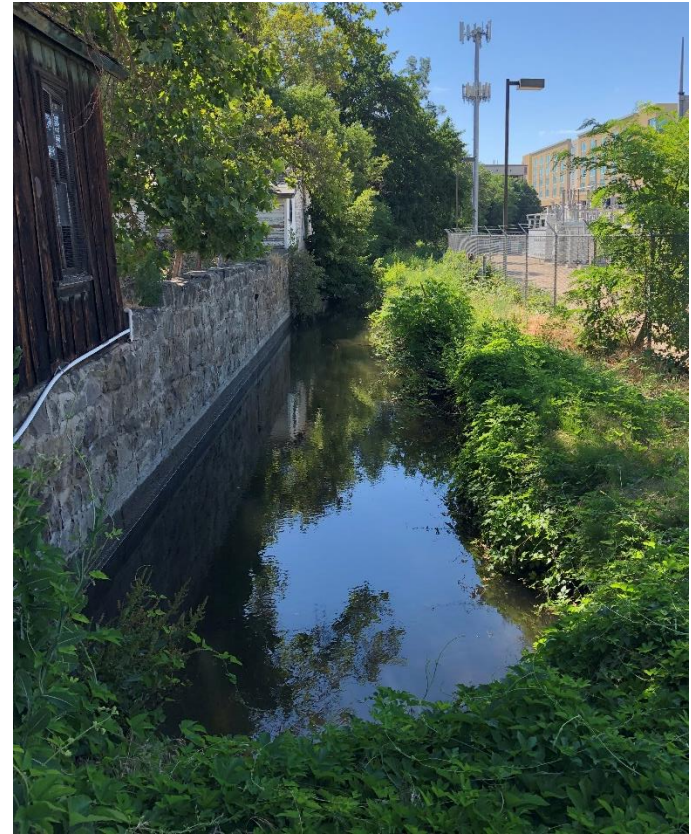
Through an inclusive visioning process, CCDC aims to create opportunities for property owners, stakeholders and the general public to articulate a coherent, collaborative vision for the redevelopment of the district. The intent of the vision and process is to:

1. Identify community needs and how they could be met in this area
2. Bring forward and recognize ways to incorporate the area's history and culture
3. Help direct public investments, and
4. Influence and inspire private development.

Stakeholders and the general public will be invited to be partners in transformation of this area and create a space that is unique and beloved.

CCDC hopes this process and resulting public investments – which could include streets, sidewalks, stormwater systems, lighting, public art, tree canopy, street furnishings, design details, parking garages and public spaces – will stimulate economic benefits, such as:

- Creation of attractive activity centers that draw more commerce and visitation into this area,
- Improvements to employee, visitor and resident mobility and circulation,
- Catalyzing additional private investment and an increase to the tax base downtown.



The Boise Canal sees daylight before heading underground along Grove Street.

Project Area

The Old Boise Blocks project area consists of eight city blocks along the east end of Grove Street, adjacent to Boise's downtown core. The project area includes properties on the east side of 3rd Street west to Capitol Boulevard and is bounded by Main and Front Streets on the north and south. The project area includes Boise's Basque Block, the C.W. Moore Plaza, the Umpqua Bank building and some residential uses between 3rd and 5th Streets. The project area is predominantly covered in surface parking which currently serves the Idaho Department of Labor, Ada County and several small office and residential users.

Within this project area, particular focus is given to Grove Street itself between 3rd and 5th Streets, and the properties immediately adjacent to the street. Redevelopment of the street and frontage properties are key investment areas to galvanize reinvestment in the area, overall. The figure below identifies the project and focus areas.

Figure 1. Project Area and Focus Area



Project Background

In 2000, property owners requested the Old Boise Historic District area receive urban renewal assistance due to the area's economic under-performance, lack of street infrastructure, and need for financial assistance with structured public parking to overcome barriers preventing private infill development and revitalization. Between 2000 and 2019, private investment had largely not occurred in this area despite an up-cycle in real estate trends. Interest in creating a reinvestment strategy for the Old Boise Blocks on Grove street picked up again in 2019 when a private parking structure began construction with assistance from CCDC, Boise's redevelopment agency.

Previous master planning efforts as depicted in the 2004 River-Myrtle/Old Boise District Foundation identified key public investments including:

- Create a people-oriented Grove Street, extend the Basque Block Festival Street another block East.
- Provide public parking in structures to catalyze compact, urban style development on existing surface lots.
- Re-establish the street grid between Grove and Front by reconstructing 4th Street.

These previous suggestions and planning efforts formed the basis for the Old Boise Grove Street Placemaking and Reinvestment Strategy.

Project Purpose

With some of the barriers removed, private investment is beginning to take place in the focus area, but in order to fully achieve the vision for the Old Boise Blocks, additional investment will need to occur. The Old Boise Blocks Grove Street placemaking and reinvestment strategy is designed to help usher positive changes and direct investment into the project area to meet the interests of public and private stakeholders. The reinvestment strategy will serve the following roles:

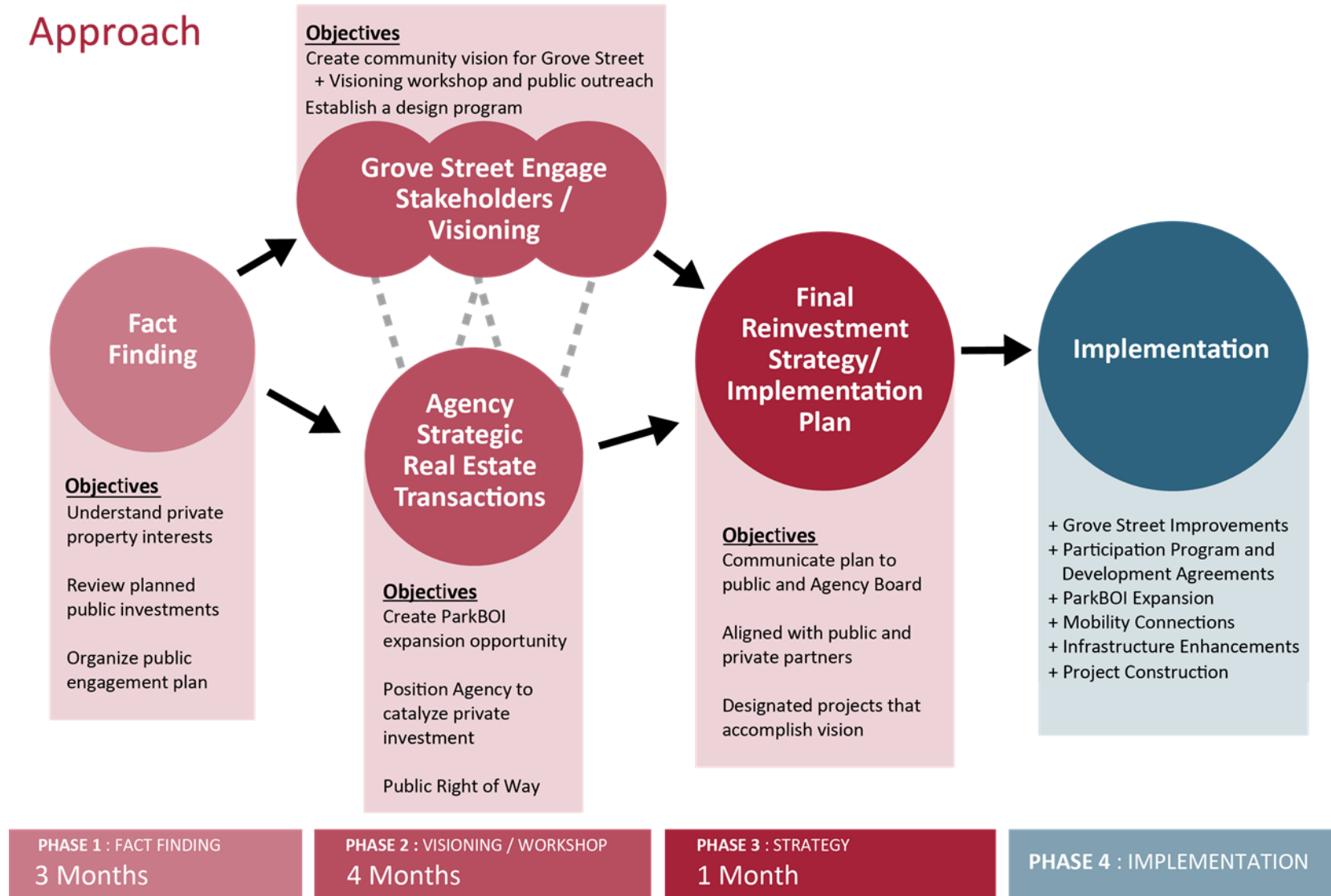
- Explain the proposed public investments, including costs and benefits.
- Serve as a coordination document with public and private partners, consultants, and general public.
- Organize the multi-layer public investment strategy to ensure best use of public funds.



The Basque Block, between 5th and 6th on Grove Street

Figure 2. Proposed Process

Approach



2. History of the Place

The history of Boise's Grove Street tells us a great deal about the history of the city itself. Grove Street was one of the originally platted streets on the city's first plat, in 1864. Historic Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps show that the street's original alignment was slightly to the north of the current street between 4th and 10th. The city widened Grove Street three times before 1903 and has since extended it west to 16th Street. Historical records illustrate significant trends in urban development along its length, from a mixed-use residential area with lush tree groves to a commercial neighborhood dominated by the automobile industry in the mid-20th century. Today, the street is home again to residents, and is beginning its return to a dense, mixed-use corridor. In examining the history of Grove Street, four themes emerge that help describe the street's history as well as the history of the city overall:

- Irrigation
- Industry
- Transportation
- Homes

Taken together, Grove Street is representative of 125 years of trends in downtown use and development, ranging from the earliest blend of mixed uses dictated by necessity in the city's earliest years, to a return to mixed uses today.

Theme 1: Irrigation

Irrigation played a crucial role in the development of Grove Street. The first Sanborn map for Boise City, recorded in 1884, indicated that the Grove Street Ditch - which diverted water from the Boise River - formed the southern city limits. Canal water irrigated numerous orchards in the surrounding area and allowed the groves of trees that gave the street its name to flourish. By the mid-1880s, newspaper reports indicate that the trees along Grove were so lush and full that they arched over the road. The ditch, known today as the Boise City Canal, provided valuable support for infrastructure and the Boise Fire Department often used its water to extinguish fires with potential to decimate the area.

Despite the canal's importance, complaints about its hazardous and unsanitary nature were common in the newspaper, leading to its ultimate disappearance from the landscape. An account from the early 1890s insisted that the ditch accumulated filth, that the "apology for a bridge in the center" was a hazard, and that the open water was dangerous to children, several of whom drowned after falling in. Casual pedestrians dumped trash and sometimes political refuse in the ditch, as they did with a Republican newspaper press following one journalist's scathing review of the Governor in 1899. As a result of the mixed feelings about the resource, the city gradually covered over the canal with pavement, starting in 1905. Newspaper records indicate that the majority of the canal was covered by the early 1930s, and today the canal remains buried beneath a line of asphalt.

*"When I was a child, growing up on Grove Street, there was a real mix of cultures – Italians, Chinese, Basque – and it was nice and quiet. **The street had a warm feeling**, of being very safe. Like everybody on the street was a grandma to you. I would like to see it have that feeling again."*

*—Basque Block representative
and property owner*

Theme 2: Industry/Industriousness

Over the course of the past 150 years, a wide variety of businesses have operated along Grove Street, ranging from industry to retail shops. Livestock and lumber interests dominated the street's early history. Sanborn maps indicate that W. H. Ridenbaugh operated a lumber yard that occupied a city block at the intersection of Grove and 3rd Streets from 1888 to 1949, and multiple wagon shops, livery stables, and blacksmiths operated on the east end of Grove Street during this same era. Another major employer in the area, the Jellison stone cutting yard, briefly occupied Grove Street around the turn of the century before relocating to Main Street. A few ethnic businesses also occupied Grove Street, including members of the Basque community who operated several boarding houses and stores around the present-day Basque Block and at least two Chinese businesses, On Wo Ho Co and the Chong Wah Low Noodle House, which both operated on Grove Street in the 1920s.

Theme 3: Transportation

Transportation innovation is reflected in the history of Grove Street, particularly on the eastern end of the street. Sanborn maps from the 1880s and 1890s indicate a plethora of feed yards, corrals and barns along the route, and a stable operated on the corner of Grove and 5th from 1884 until ca. 1912. Speculation on a potential railroad near Grove Street appeared in the newspapers in the 1870s, and a section of the Oregon Short Line Railroad appeared on the Sanborn maps by 1903, though not in the same place as was originally envisioned. While the railroad ran close to Grove on the west end of the street, it was more distant on the east end, and its influence on the east end of Grove Street is less apparent. There were, however, structures that housed railroad workers near the corner of 5th and Grove Streets. The economic activity along Grove Street shifted with the advent of the automobile. Between 1912 and 1953, Sanborn maps indicate a growing trend on the street: a move away from small, local businesses mixed with residences to a primary focus on auto-related businesses, including used car lots, parking lots, mechanic shops, gas stations, and tire shops.



Apartments on the south side of Grove Street

Theme 4: Homes

In addition to the commercial uses described above, Grove Street also boasted many beautiful residences, and was home to both prominent citizens as well as temporary boarders and even some professional women. In fact, the street was part of the first residential district in the downtown. The south side of the street remained primarily residential until the 1940s. Some of Boise's notable citizens owned and lived in large homes along Grove Street's south parcels, including Idaho State Chief Justice John Noggle, John Lemp, C. W. Moore and General Lafayette Cartee. More modest residences dotted the north side of the street and, at one time, "quaint little bridges spanned the ditch at the entrance to each home on the north side of the street." Boarding houses were also common on both sides of the street along the east blocks of Grove. Others, who did not



Surface parking covers a large portion of the project area.

Sanborn maps indicate the presence of livery stables, boarding houses, a lumber yard, paint shops, named buildings, and the Y.M.C.A. The rich variety of uses was clearly what the residents loved and remembered.

Increased automobile industry began to edge out other businesses beginning in 1912, a trend that is reflected in the marked increase in automobile service advertisements that appeared in the newspaper. By 1953, the majority of businesses along Grove Street were automobile-oriented. During more modern times, the street evolved into a mix of office and residential uses, predominated by parking areas. It is interesting that today, Grove Street may move toward a return to the traditional mixed-use area it once was.

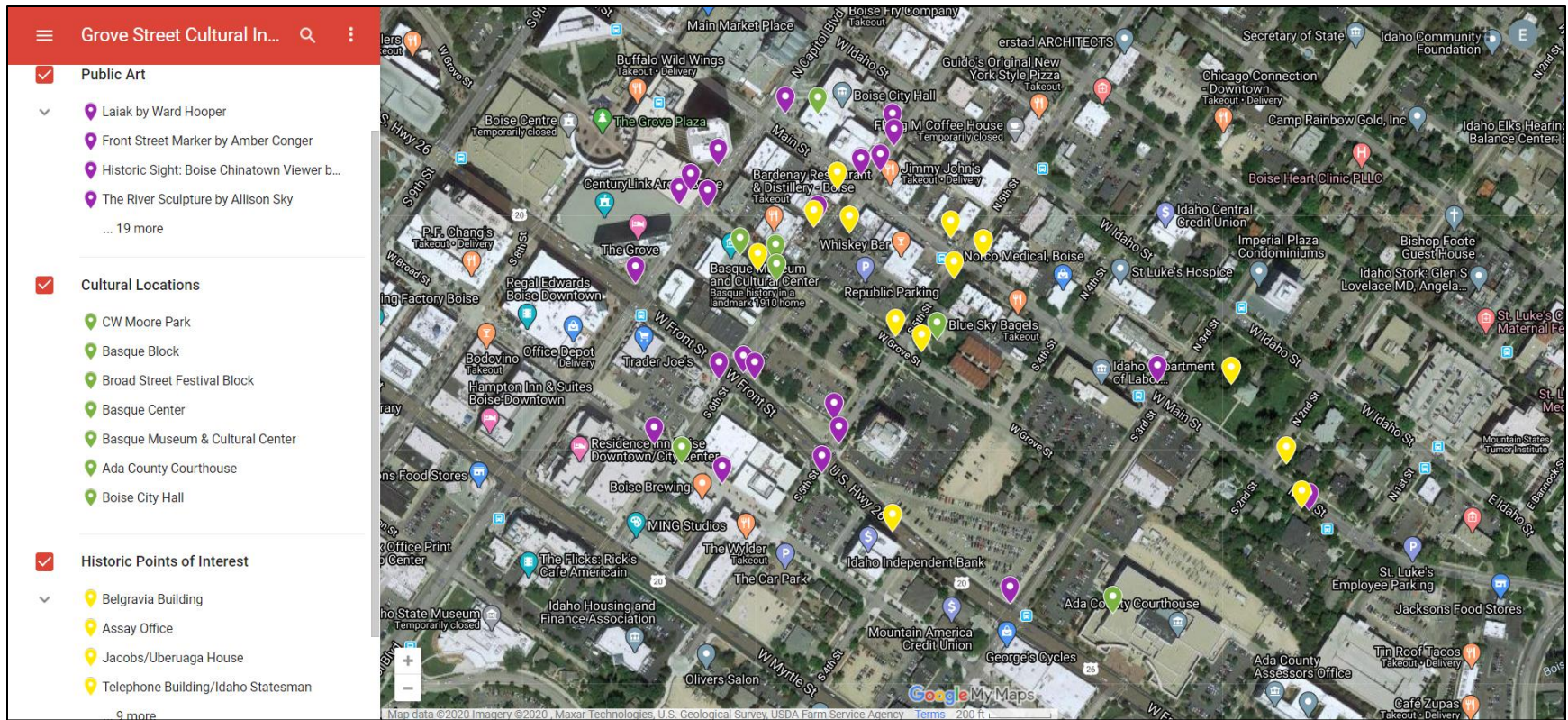
Changes over the years have been captured partly through cultural investments in the area. Figure 3 below illustrates the cultural inventory in and around the project area. Placemaking efforts in the area are intended to build from and add to this inventory.

abide by cultural norms, called the street home, too, including Dr. Addie Kester, a female physician who resided at 1109 Grove. Kester specialized in diseases that afflicted women and children. The mix of residents on the street indicates the extent of the economic, cultural, and ethnic mosaic that Grove Street represented in its early history.

A Mixed-Use Cycle Modernizes

The overarching theme that ties together the history of Grove Street is its cycle of mixed land uses. Early historical records indicate that the street, particularly the eastern blocks situated between 3rd and 7th Streets, hosted beautiful residences as well as a variety of businesses. People’s fondest memories of the street were of those early years, which seemed to be waning by 1920, when the Idaho Statesman commented that, “the beauty of Grove Street, which was well named, has about gone now...” Describing those early days, the Idaho Statesman said: “for many years Grove Street was unique in the world, with its open irrigation ditch, filled with creaking, moss grown water wheels, the banks abloom in June with briar roses...” But it was during those same years that

Figure 3. Screenshot of City of Boise's Cultural Inventory within the Project Area



3. Initial Stakeholder Interviews

Overview

Below is the list of key stakeholders identified through the preliminary scoping phase of the project that were invited to participate in an interview during the scoping phase of work. The preliminary list of interviewees was generated through an analysis of private and public property owners within or immediately adjacent to the project area; public entities with jurisdiction over or providing services to the area; and citizen or business interest groups focused on downtown.

Each interviewee was provided a general overview of the project concept and process and asked about their particular interests and their investment or development intent within the project area. The intent of the interviews was to conduct fact-finding about the project area and to gauge general level of interest in conducting a collaborative visioning process for the area.

Interviewees were invited to participate in future collaborative visioning work sessions; to date, all interviewees have expressed willingness and interest in participating in such as process. These smaller-group stakeholder visioning work sessions are intended as part of a fuller outreach process that will include opportunities for the general public to be engaged in and influence the visioning for this area. More interviews may be scheduled as additional stakeholders are identified.

To date, interviews of approximately 20 people have been conducted, representing more than 12 different property owners or entities; some additional agencies and interviewees have been identified and are pending. A list of interviewees as well as a brief summary of key findings from each interview are included here.

Interviews

Ada County

Commissioner Kendra Kenyon and
Meg Leatherman, Planning Development Services Director (*resigned*)

Ada County Highway District (*interview pending*)

Basque Block representatives and businesses

Boise Canal Company

John Robles, Board President
Mike Harrison, Executive Director

City of Boise

Councilmember Jimmy Hallyburton
Daren Fluke, Deputy Director for Comprehensive Planning
Jennifer Tomlinson, Parks and Recreation Department, Parks Superintendent
Karl LeClair, Department of Arts and History Public Art Program Manager

Downtown Business Association

Karlee May, Events Program Manager
Heather Lile, Business Relations Manager

Downtown Neighborhood Association

Tim Flaherty, President

Idaho Power

Karl Adamowicz, Senior Real Estate Specialist

Private property owners

- on the south side of Grove Street (Wilcomb, Kissler, Heath)
- on the north side of Grove Street (Carley)
- of smaller-scale residential, east of 4th Street (*interview deferred*)

State of Idaho – Department of Labor/Administration (*interview pending*)

State of Idaho – Idaho Transportation Department (*interview pending*)

Interview Summaries

ADA COUNTY

Potential for parcel assemblage, redevelopment and partnership projects

- Embarking on an assessment of all County properties and prioritizing uses. This may mean a potentially significant shift in the location of some of their existing services and property uses and could present an opportunity to change use or even ownership on some of the County's parcels in this area. This will also have implications for parking demand.
- Currently, Ada County owns several parcels including the courthouse campus, "the triangle" parcel (used for surface parking) and is buying 220 parking spaces in nearby parking garage.

BASQUE BLOCK

Confirmed cultural partner

- Very happy for the opportunity to participate, and supportive of reinvestment on these blocks. Would like to see it return to the beloved street it once was, and that many still remember.
- Complimenting and enhancing the design and uses on the Basque Block is important. See an opportunity to celebrate more of Boise's cultures and history. Interested in updating/improving elements of the Basque Block through this process, if possible.
- Mixed support for additional linear (street) festival space, as it can have limited usefulness for many types of gatherings; closing intersections has proven difficult, so a multi-block area could be difficult to cohere.
- Have learned relevant lessons from management of the Basque Block, including the need for public restrooms, parking, enclosures and street closure equipment, where most event patrons come from, etc. that they look forward to sharing.

BOISE CANAL

Potential for public/private investment and partnership projects

- Board excited about celebrating the canal, daylighting areas when they can.
- Interested in expanding to interested shareholders
- Have water rights for irrigation which can be incorporated into sustainability initiatives downtown to reduce use of treated water for irrigation, and for creation of "amenities"

CITY of BOISE

Confirmed public partner

- Arts and History – can provide technical support and advice on historical uses and cultural assets; the water wheel and canal are authentic to C.W. Moore Park (remnant of original “Jacobs Ditch”) but other pieces in the park have been moved in from other areas of downtown.
- Parks and Recreation – needed upgrades and ADA investments in C.W. Moore Park, very popular, quiet downtown park; interested in addition of park/play amenities for children in the downtown; important linkage to Greenbelt on 3rd Street; intentions for additional small or “pocket” parks in this area; protect existing old trees and expand tree canopy.
- Comprehensive Planning – creation of a 4th Street connection or pathway is a City priority; conversion of surface parking to higher uses is desirable in this area; important to connect with ACHD as a partner in the project.
- City Council – expressed that the City is generally supportive of the overall project concept and that the City of Boise would like to see development of the tree canopy and bike/mobility included where possible in the project area.

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION (DBA)

Confirmed business member partner

- Most of the project area is outside the Business Improvement District (ends at 5th Street), but DBA would potentially service the area through agreements and inclusion of associate members, in partnership with CCDC and/or the City.
- High demand for public event space and “festival street” areas downtown; members would likely support redesigning street to support this type of use (e.g., include electrical hook-ups, wifi, rolled curb, etc.); important to design area so that brick-and-mortar businesses are easily accessed during public events.
- Members would likely be generally supportive of redevelopment in this area as well as contributing to a distinct “brand” for these blocks that’s compatible with Old Boise Blocks. Other desired amenities include bike parking, green space/park area.
- Can help get the word out and encourage involvement from downtown businesses.

DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Confirmed neighborhood partner

- Very interested and active in discussing the future of this area and appreciate being involved in the process; very involved Neighborhood Association that takes care to be representative of the interests of downtown.

- Supportive of public event space and “festival street,” extending the Basque Block feeling and use into this area – have lots of ideas about how this space could be used, including seasonal covered space. Also very supportive of daylighting the canal in this area.
- Other desires identified by downtown residents include small green spaces and areas for dogs, spaces for kids to play, resident parking rates, public recycling program.
- A high priority for downtown residents is slower streets, more walkable areas that feel safe and protected from cars.

IDAHO POWER

Potential for partnership projects

- Unlikely that the footprint of the substation could be reduced; Idaho Power has built fence line to allow for needed clearances, so any changes or activity outside of the fence is likely compatible (e.g., building a pathway connection atop the canal).
- Open to ideas on fence treatments; any maintenance and contraction costs would need to be identified and agreed-to ahead of time. While check on standards for fence design and possibility of alternative fence design (e.g., “green wall” outside of chain link)

PRIVATE PROPERTY OWNERS (Heath, Wilcomb, Kissler, Carley)

Potential for private investment and partnership projects

- Most owners either open to the idea or actively interested in investments and further development of their properties.
- Open to a mix of potential uses, including residential and commercial/retail, but also community-focused uses such as plazas or other cultural/event space.
- Access and circulation are expected parts of upcoming conversations. There is not yet clear understanding or agreement on circulation needs (specific routes for pathways, roads, two-way conversions). There is potential for some type of connection along 4th Street through to Front Street, but a full road connection may not be agreeable/possible.
- Seems to be a general agreement that additional parking is likely needed and could be designed and incorporated in a more compact way. One property owner expressed interest in structuring a parking agreement with CCDC that would replace surface parking with a shared structure.
- Currently no intention to discuss redevelopment of other existing residential in the area; in particular, there is no intent to change or approach property owners of existing housing on the south side of the east end of Grove Street at this time, as these are seen as compatible existing uses.
- Interviewees indicated that they would like to see a coherent theme that compliments the Basque Block.

4. Development Potential and Considerations

CCDC Strategies

CCDC operates under five key strategies that will help define potential development and projects in this area. The key strategies are:

1. **Economic Development** – Cultivate commerce and grow resilient, diversified, and prosperous local economies.
2. **Infrastructure** – Improve public infrastructure to attract new investment and encourage best use of property.
3. **Mobility** – Expand mobility choices that include parking and multiple transit modes to enable universally accessible urban districts.
4. **Place Making** – Develop public spaces and energized environments where a blend of cultures and concentrated mix of uses create a valued sense of place.
5. **Special Projects** – Invest in projects that respond to emerging revitalization opportunities including public amenities, historic preservation, and support of local arts and culture.



Existing residential

Potential Projects

Below is an initial list brief summary of identified desires and needs in the downtown that could be addressed through this project:

- Preserve and add residential, at a mixture of price points
- Neighborhood and downtown-serving commercial and retail
- Public event space and/or festival street
- Kids play areas
- Interactive public art, water feature
- Small green areas for dogs and dog waste stations
- Bike and pedestrian connections and pathways
- Bike and (consolidated) car parking
- Tree canopy preservation and expansion
- Recognition of area history and additional cultural asset investments
- Tie into surrounding blocks and uses/reduce isolation of this area from the rest of downtown

Areas of Opportunity

The Old Boise Blocks on Grove present many areas of opportunity. The list below enumerates aspects of a placemaking and reinvestment strategy for this area that should be considered through and can be influenced by a collaborative visioning process. These are categorized below as considerations that build “feel” for the area, and elements that contribute to better “function.”

Feel

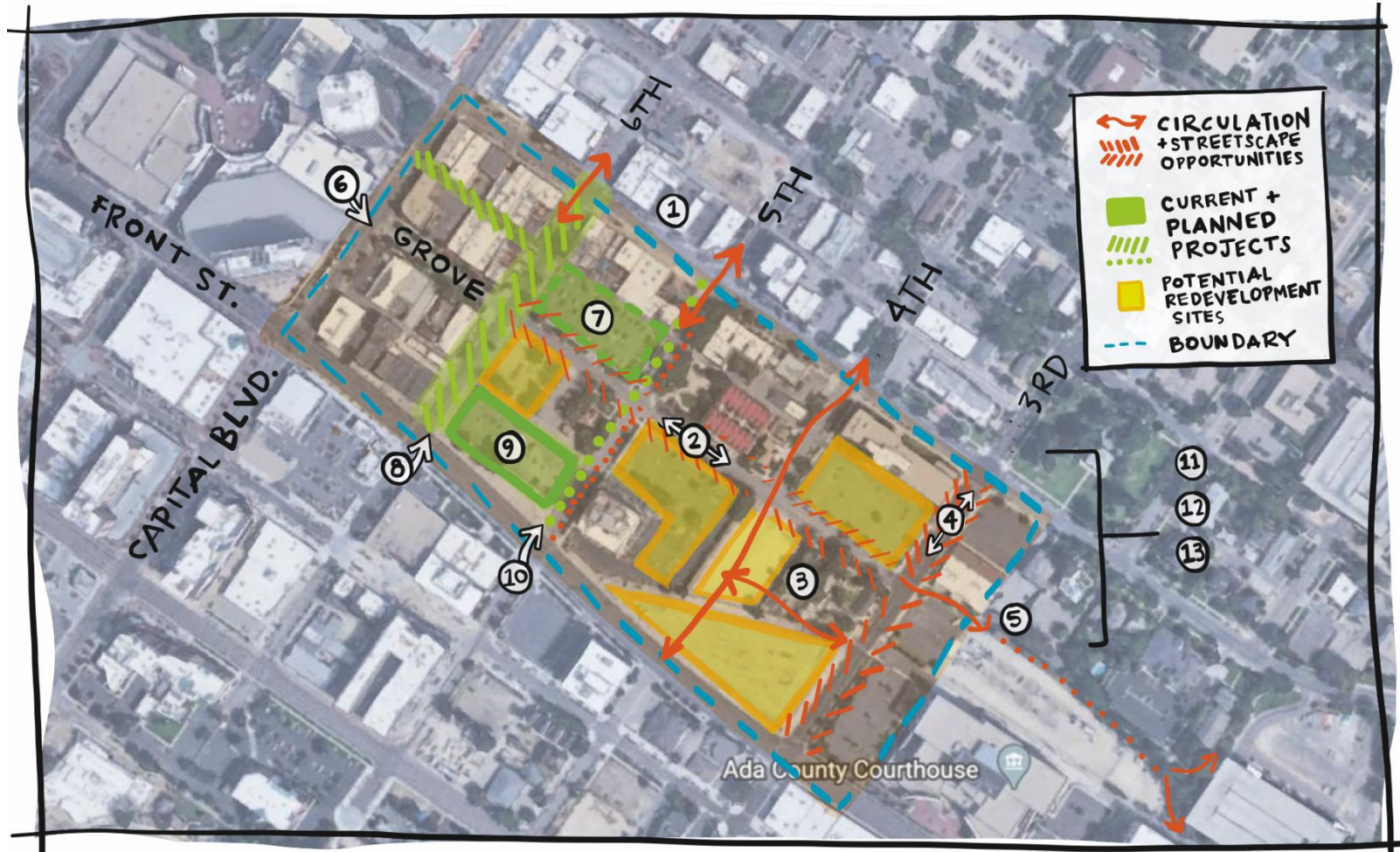
1. *District identity* – Articulating a consistent, meaningful feeling, look and atmosphere that redevelopment should cohere around, and that differentiates the area from other downtown places.
2. *Historical and cultural interpretation* – Identifying who, how and what stories and elements should be celebrated.
3. *Programming* – Accommodating and encouraging various types of behaviors, activities and events.
4. *Design* – viewsheds and line of sight, landscaping and building form and design principles.

Function

5. *Infrastructure investments* – Inclusion of forward-thinking functions, including green infrastructure investments, use of Boise Canal for irrigation, energy efficiency and dark sky principles.
6. *Mobility and circulation* – Expanding Bike BOI, building missing pieces of the street grid and creating needed linkages to pathways and bike/ped routes, car parking management and facilities.
7. *Public spaces* – Street space and character, as well as park, plaza or other public space amenities and improvements.
8. *Activities and Uses* – Identifying types and locations for desired uses, building types, and converting surface parking to other uses.

Figure 4 illustrates some of the current and potential projects and areas of opportunity within the Old Boise Blocks Grove Street area that should be discussed and further elaborated through the process.

Figure 4. Current and Potential Projects and Areas of Opportunity



- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5th and 6th Streets two-way reconfiguration
\$250,000 identified in 5-Year CIP 2. Grove Street improvements
\$3.85M in FY22 3. 4th Street and alley connections 4. 3rd Street improvements
\$2M in FY25 (\$50,000 FY 24, \$50,000 FY23) 5. Pathway to Broadway connection
\$3-4M in FY22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Block 7 Alley
\$550,000 FY20 7. 512 W Grove Street MXD Apartments
Type 2 Agreement 8. 6th Street improvements
\$1.45M FY20 9. 502 W. Front Street Parking Garage
\$395,000 FY21-25 (annually) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10. 5th Street utility underground
\$532,000 FY19-20 (Complete) 11. Parcel Acquisition/Redevelopment
\$5.8M FY21 12. Downtown Urban Park/Development Catalyst
\$2M FY25, \$300,000 FY24, \$50,000 FY23 13. Future parking garage and parcel acquisition
\$8.5M |
|---|---|---|

What's Next?

The next immediate steps in the process include:

- Convene stakeholders for a series of initial visioning conversations to share information and background about the project area and to discuss and evaluate the “Areas of Opportunity” topics, above;
- Expand the visioning process to the general public and any additional key stakeholders identified;
- Summarize and package the input received to be incorporated into further steps of the placemaking and redevelopment strategy.



C. W. Moore Park and Plaza