

SECTION 4

Central Business District

Downtown Moscow is thriving, busy, and vibrant. It covers an area several blocks wide and several blocks long and centers on Friendship Square. It contains a variety of establishments including government and private offices, banks, retail establishments, and numerous restaurants and cafes.

The success of the central business district can be attributed to many factors. One key is compactness. Downtown includes a wide variety of businesses within a relatively small area. The area is a healthy mixture of office, retail, and service businesses. This encourages interaction between the different public and private enterprises downtown. For instance, downtown government and private office employees become customers for downtown service establishments, particularly during lunchtime.

The compactness of the downtown area and the variety of businesses there also encourage people to make the trip to downtown. Many different consumer needs could be met in the space of a few blocks. This is one of the reasons the central business district has been able to compete with the Palouse Mall. One of the main advantages of enclosed malls is the customer's ability to walk to a variety of establishments. The design of Moscow's central business district gives downtown that same advantage.

A central business district is dependent to a great extent on pedestrian traffic within that area; however, few central business districts are designed to facilitate pedestrian movement. The current trend in downtown planning is to give priority to pedestrian traffic within the central business district core, the area of most intensive commercial use. The construction of Friendship Square has taken Moscow's central business district a step closer to pedestrian orientation by eliminating the street crossings between two intensive retail blocks. The one-way couplet system has greatly reduced the traffic volume on Main Street within the downtown area; however, considerable auto movement will continue on Main Street. This traffic represents a danger to shoppers crossing Main Street within the downtown area.

The central business district is well suited for pedestrians who have either walked downtown or have parked their cars and are doing errands on foot. The Main Street area is easily walked and includes many benches. This pedestrian friendliness is an important advantage, which needs to be kept in mind as the downtown area grows. Eventually, a pedestrian walkway may be needed over Jefferson and Washington Streets if the downtown core extends past Main Street.

Another crucial key to the success of downtown is its proximity to the University of Idaho. Students and staff can easily walk to downtown from the university. This puts nearly half of the city's population within walking distance of the retail stores each day.

Sixth Street, which connects downtown and the university, is a logical direction for downtown to expand.

Westward expansion in general is also encouraged. The area to the west of downtown is an older residential district in somewhat deteriorated condition. Because it is located directly between the university and downtown, this area is well suited for both downtown expansion and high-density residential use.

The central business district could also grow to the south, although it would ultimately be limited by Highway 8. Currently, several older homes just south of downtown have been successfully converted for health-related services. This is convenient due to the location of the hospital on the south side of downtown.

The area north of the central business district could be more dense. Strip commercial areas are not desirable because it becomes difficult for pedestrians to walk from one establishment to another. This causes more traffic as customers drive from one destination to another.

If an effort is not made to provide additional land for commercial growth in the central business district, new businesses will be forced to locate in motor business areas, even though these businesses may be better suited to the central business district and pedestrian shopping. This would stimulate strip commercial development along arterial streets. This causes traffic congestion, increases noise and air pollution, wastes customers' time, and is a safety hazard due to the number of drives off of arterial streets.

The flow of traffic through the downtown area between eastern residential areas and the university and other destinations on the west side of town creates a problem of access to the central business district. Third and Sixth Streets carry a majority of the east-west traffic in the city, in addition to providing major access to the central business district. Distribution of a portion of Third and Sixth Streets' traffic to other streets is needed to eliminate congestion on these streets and to facilitate access to the central business district.

Locating a parking space within reasonable distance of a specific business can be difficult in the Moscow central business district. At times, parking within the entire downtown area can be limited. Inadequate parking increases traffic and congestion as drivers search for vacant spaces. Shortage of convenient parking is one of the largest factors that leads shoppers and businesses away from the downtown area to peripheral centers, where substantial parking close to the stores is available. Without sufficient parking, the central business district cannot remain a viable shopping area. Loading is also a considerable problem in some areas, with trucks blocking alleys or streets while loading and unloading. New commercial structures in the city must be designed with loading access removed from the public rights-of-way.

The optimal location for downtown parking lots is along the periphery of the core of downtown to maintain the convenient compactness and pedestrian-oriented atmosphere

yet still provide close parking. This arrangement would encourage the cohesiveness of the core downtown without limiting its accessibility.

Parking for the University of Idaho and for the central business district overlap. When the street parking within the residential section between the university and downtown is full, students have been known to park as far west as Jefferson Street. This suggests student parking all through the downtown section. Therefore, any increase the university makes in available parking, especially on the west side of the university, would open parking in the central business district.

The largest and most convenient parking lot to the central business district core is the Jackson Street lot. However, it has no convenient pedestrian access to Main Street between Fourth and Sixth Streets without walking through a business.

The appearance of downtown is also important to its success. An attractive and interesting downtown can make a substantial difference in the number of people who come to an area to shop. An attractive setting can also draw new businesses that are looking for a place to locate. Several historical buildings have been rehabilitated. Several businesses have also replaced large, obtrusive signs with handsome smaller ones. Landscaping on streets and in parking lots is also important and should be increased.

The addition of Friendship Square has been important. Not only is it visually attractive, it also gives the downtown area a focal point. An image of unity is growing within the central business district, which helps make "Downtown Moscow" a concept in people's minds, rather than only a vague location.

Goal

Maintain a viable central business district that serves as one of the city's major shopping areas, provide a pleasant environment for shopping and working, provide an opportunity for socializing, and act as a focal point for the community.

Objectives

1. Maintain the central business district as a principal retail shopping area in Moscow.
2. Maintain the concentrated nature of the central business district in order to facilitate and encourage pedestrian movement within it.
3. Improve access to the central business district for all modes of transportation.
4. Decrease noise and traffic congestion within the central business district.
5. Provide adequate parking in the central business district for shoppers and employees.
6. Improve the general appearance of the central business district.
7. Create cultural interest in the central business district.

Implementation Policies

- 1. Future growth of the central business district should occur to the west, between Third Street to the north and Sixth Street to the south, from the existing western edge of the central business district toward the railroad tracks.**

In order to maintain the concentrated quality of the central business district and to take advantage of the proximity of the university, a western direction is most desirable for central business district growth. The newer apartment structures in the area would be reasonably compatible with central business development, although attention should be given to the site design of buildings locating adjacent to residential structures. In order to encourage commercial growth in this area, the city must be prepared to participate in the collection and acquisition of parcels for redevelopment. Motor business zoning in area of the community must be restricted in area to discourage location or relocation of intensive retail businesses away from the central business district. Types of uses permitted in motor business district zones could be limited.

- 2. The City Council should investigate the possibility of using limited function streets in the central business district for other purposes.**

Construction of new buildings, mall areas, or parking areas could feasibly be accomplished on shorter streets, which currently serve only as local access to adjacent properties. Care must be taken not to impede pedestrian movement by such development.

- 3. Access to the central business district area should be improved by redistributing heavy traffic loads on Sixth and Third Streets onto other streets.**

- 4. While vehicular traffic should be permitted, major through traffic in the central business district should be discouraged.**

An arterial or collector street should be planned to connect Sixth and Third Streets to the west of the central business district.

- 5. New commercial structures should be designed with loading space removed from the public right-of-way where feasible.**

Staff should review site plans for new commercial structures for adequate loading areas before building permits are issued.

- 6. An extension of Friendship Square should be constructed from Jackson to Lilly Streets between Third and Sixth Streets if the central business district develops to the west. A pedestrian overpass should connect the two sections of the central business district separated by Jackson Street.**

With no public access running east and west between Third and Sixth Streets in the area of projected downtown expansion, pedestrian flow between the areas east and west of Jackson Street would be severely hindered. A pedestrian mall should be developed from Jackson to Lilly Streets at a point as nearly equidistant between Sixth and Third Streets as possible. At the intersections of the mall with Asbury, Almon, and Lilly Streets, a raised crosswalk would continue the pedestrian route across the streets. This area would increase frontage opportunities for businesses and develop a strong east-west orientation in the business district.

7. The city should accommodate bicycle traffic to and through the central business district, and it should be separate from pedestrian areas.

Designation of bicycle ways in areas of heavy traffic would increase the ease and safety of cycling to and within the central business district. (See Section 10, Transportation, Transportation and Circulation.) Because of the incompatibility between pedestrian and bicycle traffic, bicycles should be separated from pedestrian areas within the core of the central business district. Bicycle parking should be located as close to stores and other facilities as possible.

8. A shuttle system between the central business district, outlying shopping centers, and the university should be tried on an experimental basis.

A shuttle service could encourage shopping between centers and the central business district. A stop at the university could increase riders substantially.

9. Additional parking in the central business district area should be provided in off-street lots, generally locate on the periphery of the central business district core. Automobile access to these lots should be from arterial streets whenever possible.

The majority of shoppers to a central business district come here to shop in more than one store. The majority of parking in the central business district, therefore, could be located in an area generally accessible to more stores rather than adjacent to each individual store. Location of off-street parking on the periphery of the central business district would ease access to parking, would keep vehicular traffic out of the core area, would keep the core area stores compact for easy walking, and would make the downtown area more attractive.

Properties near the arterial streets bordering the central business district should be investigated for acquisition for permanent parking purposes. Financing of property acquisition and improvement could be carried out by a local improvement district and by use of parking funds generated from new businesses. Additional parking is needed in the southern portion of the central business district during late afternoon and evening hours when taverns and theaters attract large numbers of people to the area. Private parking areas of daytime operations should be investigated for general use after business hours.

The effort to improve the esthetic aspect of the central business district cannot be successful without giving some attention to the appearance of the parking lots. Paving of lots and a certain amount of landscaping would improve their appearance immensely. An entrance sign advising drivers that lots are open to the public would maximize their use.

10. Parking structures should be considered within the central business district in the future to make maximum use of available land for parking.

Parking structures have become popular in cities of varying size in recent years because they offer many advantages. The cost of such a structure is offset by the advantage of providing parking for a great number of cars in a small area of land, which in turn, could keep parking closer to shopping, could keep downtown businesses concentrated, could keep more land on the tax rolls, could decrease maintenance and operational costs, and could provide more land for business development.

The city's existing lot on Jackson Street is well situated to serve as a site for a parking structure. It is central to the business core and takes access off a primary arterial street. It could also direct commercial growth to the western expansion area. Other possible sites in the western expansion area might also be investigated.

11. New facilities constructed within the central business district should provide off-street parking, or they should contribute to the efforts of the city and the central business district merchants to provide more spaces centrally located.

New facilities in the central business district are the major benefactors of the parking space and are responsible for generating its need. Therefore, downtown businesses should provide the majority of this parking space or contribute to a fund to provide parking space.

12. Downtown businesses, developers, and property owners should be encouraged to work toward compatible building designs within the central business district, enhance existing buildings, and preserve and restore historic and architecturally significant buildings.

Many of the buildings in downtown Moscow contribute substantially to the character of the central business district. Many of the buildings are the original structures on the site, and some are considered historic. They are generally compatible in design.

Owners of historical and architecturally significant buildings should maintain the design integrity in the central business district. New buildings, and remodeling of old ones, should be compatible in bulk, exterior materials, and general style as existing buildings.

- 13. Landscaping should be expanded throughout the central business district. Consistency in landscaping, lighting, and street furnishing will develop and enhance the identity of the central business district.**

Consistency in landscaping and in the design of street furnishing, which includes lighting, benches, drinking fountains, trashcans, signs, etc., could develop unity within the central business district. Landscaping could improve parking lot appearance.

- 14. Signs within the central business district should be compatible with one another.**

- 15. A service center should be developed in a central location to provide restrooms, telephones, rest area, and pedestrian loading access for shoppers.**

Service facilities for shoppers are limited in downtown Moscow. Although several restrooms and public telephones are available in businesses, a central facility should be provided, possibly located within a parking structure.

- 16. Areas should be made available in the central business district for special events such as exhibits, farmers' markets, bazaars, etc.**