

Downtown Bozeman Alley Sketchbook



**Prepared by the
Downtown Bozeman Partnership**





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The two alleys flanking Main Street—to the north and south—in Downtown Bozeman provide a tremendous opportunity to create unique shared public spaces. The alleys incorporate a mixture of public access and private setbacks. While the alleys must serve as utility right of way, emergency vehicle access and delivery routes, they can also be urban shared use paths. As such, alleys are an extension of downtown's sidewalks and streets. They are pedestrian thoroughfares. They lead to customer entrances for a variety of businesses. The opportunity lies in enhancing alleys to be more aesthetic, safer and pedestrian friendly.

The purpose of this "Downtown Alley Sketchbook" is to showcase possible improvements that can be implemented organically as property and business owners fix-up the rear facades of Main Street buildings. Other aspects may possible to incorporate as public projects led by the Downtown BID and TIF Districts. Some still may require embarking on public-private partnerships to be implemented on a larger scale.

The 2010 Downtown Bozeman Improvement Plan (DBIP) establishes the following guiding principles which directly apply to transforming downtown's alleys:

"All streets, sidewalks, and alleys in downtown should be designed to make the experience of pedestrians and bicyclists safe, comfortable and visually appealing. Public spaces – both large and small – should be enhanced and made active through programming or adjacent uses that can animate and oversee them." [DBIP p. 22]

The Downtown Plan outlines a strategy to "create a network of open spaces" which includes pedestrian-friendly alleys:

"Downtown would benefit from the thoughtful integration of plazas and courtyards, the creation of pocket parks along Bozeman Creek, and the greening of streets and alleys surrounding Main Street. This Plan outlines a strategy to "green" Downtown Bozeman through the careful integration of street trees and the introduction and improvement of public spaces. Plazas, courtyards, and alley improvements will require careful sighting and attention to solar access, and would be enhanced by creative lighting and seating solutions in order to maximize the use and comfort of such spaces throughout the year." [DBIP p. 23]

TRANSFORM ALLEYS

"Alleys are often an underutilized, forgotten part of the city. While they still need to provide service, delivery and emergency access, they remain unused except for a few hours a day. Many cities have recognized this and have begun to give alleys a civic or ecological function. The alleys that wrap around Main can be planted with greenery, provide natural drainage, create a unique pedestrian network, and provide usable outdoor spaces for residents and businesses.

When and where possible widen sections of the alleys to improve functionality and consider adding bicycle amenities. In greening these areas, natural drainage features could be utilized, and small plazas and pocket parks tucked along the edges. These improvements would serve to provide a new, unique connection between downtown businesses and residences, and reinforce the finer scale of the downtown area." [DBIP p. 23]



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Alleys are vital public spaces that are the transition zones between buildings, streets, businesses, people, bicycles, and vehicles. The goal is to integrate and concentrate a variety of uses in and along the alleys.

The Downtown Improvement Plan specifically targets the alley to the north of Main Street because most of the public parking facilities are located north of Main. Improved alleys would provide an important pedestrian link between the parking facilities and the businesses along Main Street. The graphic below is a rendering of an improved alley north of Main Street between Bozeman and Rouse Avenues.



Depending on the public right-of-way widths and the relationship between the alley and the adjacent private property, some of the alley improvement elements might need to be located on private property. In particular, hardscape and landscape elements may need to be integrated into available spaces on private property which could be coordinated with the owners in advance as part of a larger effort to transform a given section of the alley way.

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Pedestrian Scale Lighting

Lighting is critical to add 24-7 safety and vitality to the alleys. Properly lit alleys will invite pedestrians to comfortably use the alleys year round. Pedestrian scale lighting in the alleys is paramount to establishing them as places of business and as safe pedestrian corridors. Beware of too much light—a uniform standard of more than 1 candle but less than 5 candles should be appropriate (such a standard needs to be vetted with lighting professionals in advance of any fixture installations).





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Landscaping Enhancements

Landscaping can be accomplished in a variety of ways: trees, planters, hanging baskets, stonework. Setback areas and courtyards provide more opportunities to add green elements. Greening the south (alley) aspect of the Bridger Park Garage has been discussed and should be seriously pursued. Great examples of “urban planted walls” include the Vancouver Airport and the Bradley Museum in Paris. Efforts to green the parking garage wall would inspire voluntary plantings by other property/business owners. A guideline document with recommended planting practices would encourage others to incorporate landscaping on or adjacent to their properties.



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Courtyards, Pocket Parks and Patios

Courtyards, pocket parks and patios should be developed in the alleys where possible. Spaces set back from alley right-of-ways present opportunities to create relaxed “public” places. Whether restaurant seating or a landscaped nook, people are attracted to outdoor areas. Often these spaces are more calm than similar amenities located adjacent to a street.

Plonk’s alley courtyard is a prime example of using a private setback area to create an attractive space where people can meet and relax.





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Connectivity & Identity

Alleys provide a unique transition between land uses and valuable opportunities to establish well functioning connections between public facilities and private businesses. Downtown's alleys should be integrated with the public surface parking lots to provide not only better vehicular flow and access but also improved pedestrian connectivity.

One interesting concept is that alleys could serve as urban shared use paths because they are not designed or constructed to favor one user over the other. To explore this concept further, downtown alleys could be considered east-west components of GVLT's Main Street to Mountains "trail" system.

Alley connectivity could be greatly enhanced by better identifying them as important parts of downtown's "multi-modal" transportation system. Entry signs or bollards (think urban versions of GVLT's trail markers). Alley specific wayfinding signs could also indicate what businesses have customer entrances along the alley. Alleys could be further identified with some sort of pavement markings across the bisecting streets, perhaps similar to the stamped, colored cross walks along Main Street.





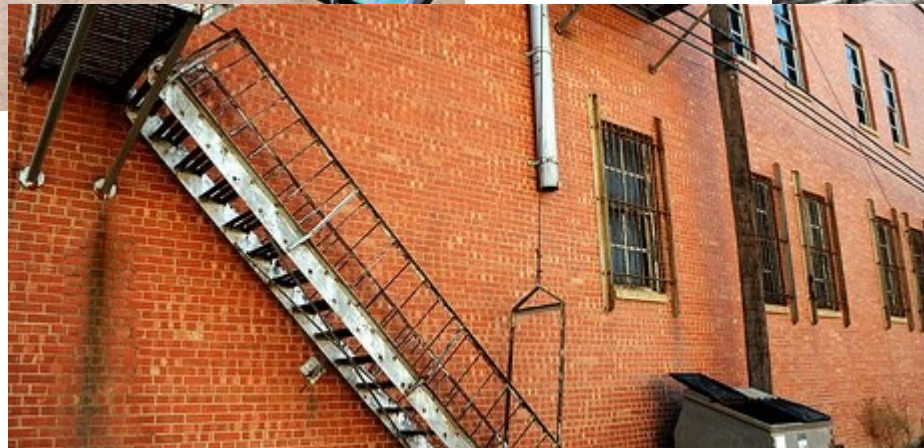
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Gritty Vitality

Alleys must retain their gritty vitality mean they should not be overly codified or sterilized. Part of the allure and “beauty” of alleys are their messy, gritty, random nature as amalgamations of dumpsters, power lines, utility boxes and fire escapes.

All of the improvements being suggested should be incorporated in and among the more raw elements inherent in alleys.

For example dumpster enclosures may be applicable or preferable in some areas, but should not be required or expected.





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Specific Code Revisions

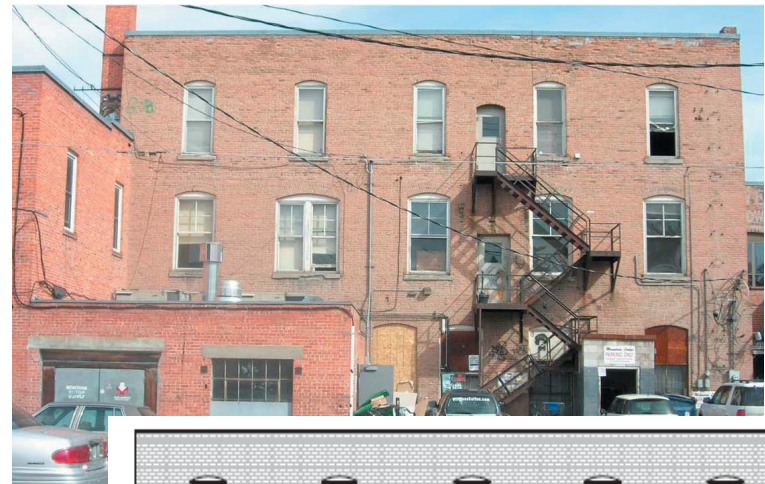
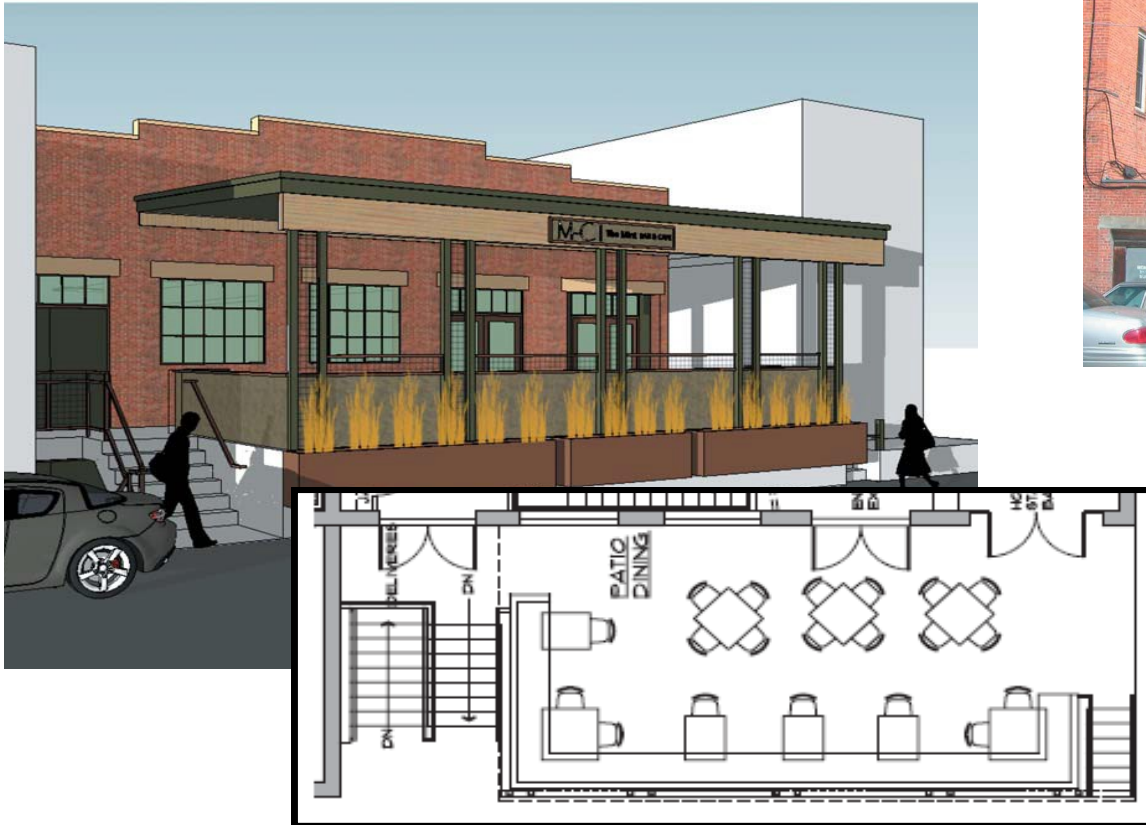
Alleys provide the perfect opportunity to remedy one of downtown's architectural challenges. Most of the historic buildings downtown necessitate "shotgun"—30'x150'—commercial spaces which are extremely inefficient as retail spaces. Property owners and tenants could remedy this problem by being able to divide long and narrow spaces into separate units—one fronting on Main Street and the other having a primary entrance off the alley. To facilitate this type of better space utilization, the Bozeman Unified Development Code revision to allow more varied uses in spaces located off the alleys. The UDC will also need to be revised to include alley sign allowances that currently are not provided for in the code.



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Façade Improvements

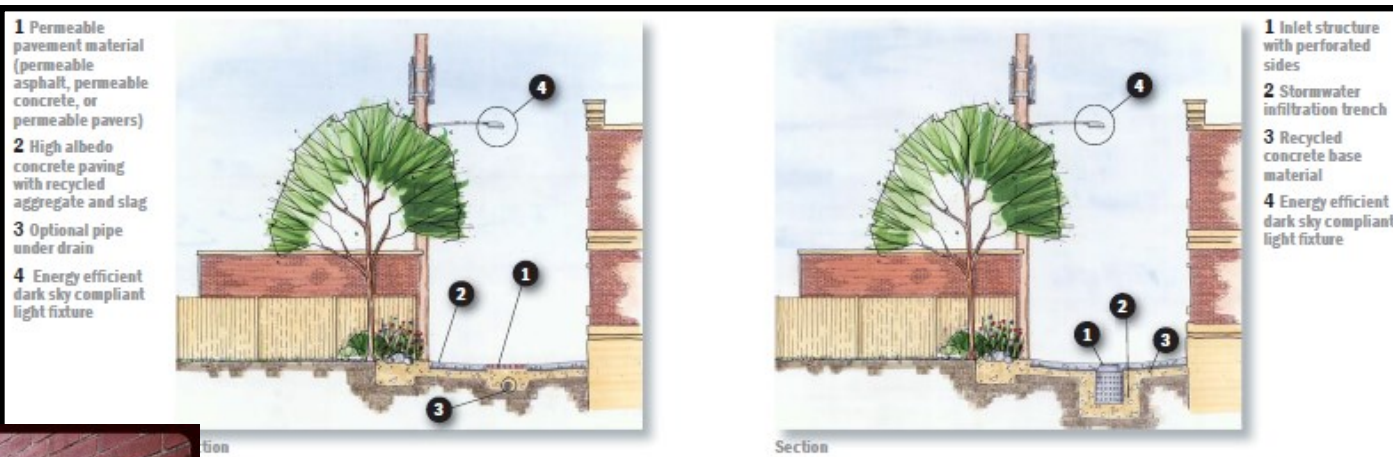
Enhancements to alleys will inspire and incentivize property owners to make improvements to the back building facades. Many of downtown's buildings adjacent to alleys are in need of gentrification ranging from a simple cleaning to complete restoration. If the alleys are enhanced and back entrances are activated some building owners will be able to justify making an investment in their alley facades. The Downtown Technical Assistance Grant Program provides planning funds to assist property owners consider façade improvements.



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Other Alley Opportunities

Downtown Bozeman's alleys have limitless potential as places for bike parking, public art, special events and environmental sustainability. The Downtown Partnership is coordinating with the Gallatin Art Crossing to explore the potential of installing public art along downtown's alleys. During the spring, summer and fall months hundreds of downtown employees and patron ride their bikes downtown and the alleys could provide pockets of bike parking thus reducing the demand along the sidewalks. Many commercial districts have utilized alleys as special event space whether hosting music, movies or art shows. Alleys play an important role in collecting and mitigating stormwater. Places like Chicago have converted their alleys into highly efficient stormwater treatment facilities by using permeable pavement and other innovative technologies.



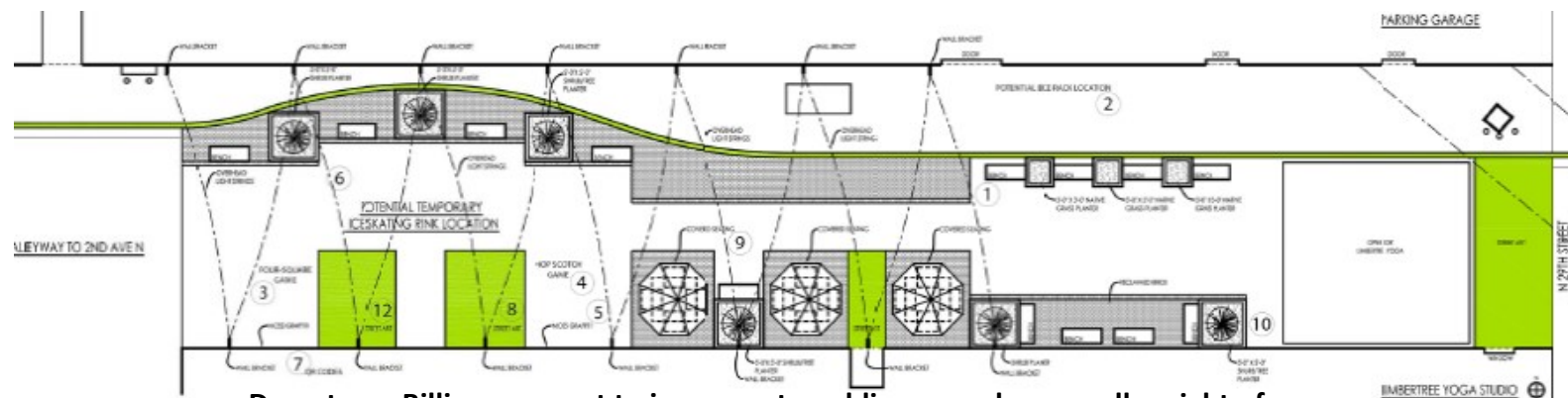
Community Alley Improvement Examples



Downtown Fort Collins developed an alley master plan



Downtown Longmont CO alley improvements incorporated parking lot access



Downtown Billings concept to incorporate public space along an alley right of way



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Resources

Downtown Bozeman Improvement Plan <http://www.downtownbozeman.org/downloads/DBIP%20Final%2012-14-09%20SM.pdf>

Downtown Fort Collins Colorado Alley Master Plan <http://www.downtownfortcollins.org/docs/alley-plan.pdf>

Downtown Longmont Colorado Alley Improvement Plan <http://www.vizhen3d.com/portfolio/longmont-downtown-alley-improvement/>

Integrated Alleys Blog <http://integratedalleys.tumblr.com/>

Alleys of Seattle Blog <http://alleysofseattle.com/>

Transforming Alleys into Assets <http://alleynetworkproject.com/>

Activating Alleys for a Lively City http://greenfutures.washington.edu/pdf/ActivatingAlleys_2011.pdf

Temporary Alley Activation http://www.artallianceaustin.org/projects/20ft_wide



Alley Improvements...before and after

“Alleys are a relatively simple way of creating unique public spaces without needing to purchase expensive land. They are also opportunities to demonstrate cutting-edge principles of social, economic, and environmental sustainability.”

Mark Hinshaw www.crosscut.com

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