



Connecting Community West Bench Neighborhood Boise, Idaho

ULI Technical Assistance Panel

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About The Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a multi-disciplinary organization with more than 48,000 members in private enterprise and public service. Members are dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission: to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

The extraordinary impact that ULI has is based on several factors: The Institute is on the forefront of research. Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of gatherings each year and through the Institute's research and publications. Through outreach programs, including Technical Assistance and Advisory Services panels, members lend their expertise to communities in solving their most intractable issues.

About Technical Assistance Panels

Technical assistance panels (*TAPs*) are an offshoot of ULI's notable Advisory Services program. Both *TAPs* and Advisory Services panels offer expertise and technical assistance for communities and organizations facing land use challenges. Panels rely on volunteers who combine their individual expertise with the resources of ULI to provide unbiased, neutral perspectives on land use and real estate issues.

About ULI Idaho

ULI Idaho is the regional district council of the Urban Land Institute with 300 members in Idaho and Montana. Through its outreach efforts, the organization promotes the mission of ULI by providing leadership in the responsible use of land, and in creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout Idaho and western Montana. ULI Idaho provides education on best practices, cutting-edge research that serves the needs of the region, and technical assistance services throughout the district.



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Plus: Public comment from sixty (60) community members via a virtual survey.

Introduction

The West Bench neighborhood is one of Boise’s hidden treasures. Tucked between Fairview Avenue, Maple Grove, Cole Road, and the Boise Bench rim, it has long been valued for its quiet, tree-lined streets, strong schools, and sense of community. Many families have lived here for generations, while others have only recently discovered its mid-century character homes, large parks, and proximity to both downtown Boise and the western suburbs.

But like many neighborhoods in Boise, the West Bench is experiencing the challenges and dynamics of growth. Its core infrastructure — from busy arterial streets to aging retail centers — was built for a different era, when car travel dominated and neighborhood identity mattered less. Today, residents want safe streets that welcome walkers and cyclists, local businesses where neighbors gather, and parks and cultural spaces that feel like the “downtown” of the neighborhood. As growth in the area continues to increase pressure to move traffic quickly and accommodate housing demands, the neighborhood understands the necessity of a roadmap for the future that will shape and build their collective vision.

The Technical Assistance Panel (Panel) for the West Bench neighborhood was convened to identify practical, near-term strategies to improve walkability, local vitality, and the quality of public spaces within this central Boise community. The Panel brought together multidisciplinary



experts in planning, urban design, development, and economic development to develop actionable recommendations aligned with the City of Boise’s goals and the West Bench Neighborhood Association’s vision for a more connected and livable neighborhood.

The recommendations focus on achievable, high-impact improvements — coordinated investments in streets, parks, and local hubs that can be implemented in partnership with the community, City of Boise departments, Ada County Highway District (ACHD), and other stakeholders.

Demographics

The West Bench area is home to approximately **10,000 residents** and around **5,000 households**, including about 17% of all households with children. In 2025, total school enrollment across the five schools in the area totaled 4,745.



Study Area in Context

Geography & Boundaries

The West Bench is one of Boise’s most centrally located neighborhoods, bounded roughly by Maple Grove Road to the west, Cole Road to the east, Fairview Avenue to the south, and Chinden Boulevard to the north. Ustick Road bisects the area east-to-west and serves as its principal commercial corridor. Major destinations include the Cole & Ustick Library, Idaho Capital Asian Market, Cole Village, Ustick Town Center, Spaulding Ranch Park, Capital High School, several churches, and multiple elementary and middle schools.

This roughly two-square-mile area accounts for about three percent of

Boise’s total land area. It is part of the city’s “West Bench Planning Area” and sits at a crossroads—literally and figuratively—between Boise’s older urban core and the newer Boise suburban neighborhoods and Meridian.

The West Bench neighborhood is bordered by other neighborhoods; the Winstead Park neighborhood to the east, West Boise to the south, and West Valley to the west; and Garden City to the north. Major roadways like Ustick Road and Cole Road serve as both connectors and barriers. These streets conveniently link residents to downtown Boise, the Boise Towne Square retail corridor, and Interstate 84. Yet many residents also recognize that the edge between quiet residential streets and heavy traffic corridors are increasingly challenging to cross on foot or by bike.



Historical Development Pattern

According to sources provided by the West Bench Neighborhood Association (WBNA), the area grew primarily during Boise's post-war expansion period between 1950 and 1980. The neighborhood reflects the optimism of that era: modest ranch homes, residential streets, and small commercial centers anchored by stores or pharmacies. Like many neighborhoods of that area, a defining characteristic of the development pattern are curvilinear streets with singular connections to the nearby arterial, creating an auto-oriented transportation network.

Many early subdivisions were served by the Settlers Canal, which remains a defining feature of the neighborhood. The canal provided irrigation for agriculture before the area urbanized and now serves as a natural corridor that can serve

as a link between parks, gardens, and walking trails.

The Spalding Ranch—one of Boise's oldest farmsteads—sits at the north edge of the neighborhood and is being preserved as a park and cultural landmark. It's both a reminder of West Bench's agricultural roots and a central piece of its emerging community identity. Towne Square retail corridor, and Interstate 84. Yet many residents also recognize that the edge between quiet residential streets and heavy traffic corridors are increasingly challenging to cross on foot or by bike.

By the 1970s, Ustick Road had evolved into a commercial corridor, hosting small retail strips and service businesses that catered to the growing population. As Boise continued to expand westward, however, many of these centers became overshadowed by larger regional retail destinations along Fairview and Eagle Road. Today, some of those mid-century shopping centers still serve the community, while others struggle with vacancies, restricted access or outdated layouts.

“It's still a little gritty and rough around the edges and I love that.”

Land Use & Zoning

Land use in the West Bench is characterized by a balanced mix of residential, commercial, and civic functions, which are discussed in greater detail below. The area's zoning pattern reflects Boise's mid-century planning

framework, which emphasized single-family neighborhoods connected by arterial roads lined with small commercial centers.

Zoning

The bulk of the neighborhood is zoned R-1C (Residential: Traditional), R-2 (Residential: Compact), and A-1 (Open Land Very Low Density). Along Fairview, the main commercial corridor, zoning is predominately zoned MX-3 (Mixed Use: Active). Other key corridors—Ustick and Cole—include a broader mix of zones ranging from R-1C to R-3 (Residential: Urban) on the residential side to MX-1 (Mixed Use: Neighborhood), MX-2 (Mixed Use: General), and MX-3. This allows for a wide variety of development opportunities. In addition, Boise’s recently adopted Modern Zoning Code option for Neighborhood Café uses in any zone under certain requirements opens additional opportunities for small, pedestrian-scale development throughout the West Bench area.

Residential Land Uses

The residential core of West Bench is predominantly composed of single-family homes, many of them built between 1950 and 1980. Single-family homes make up around 53% of total land use. These homes, often single-story ranch or split-level designs, reflect the post-war boom in Boise’s suburban growth and remain stable in both ownership and upkeep. Mature trees and established landscaping lend many of these streets a comfortable, lived-in quality that the panel heard cited as one of the area’s defining characteristics.

Although single-family neighborhoods are the majority, there is growing diversity in housing types. Infill projects which include duplexes, triplexes, and small multifamily developments, and several examples have appeared in recent years on underutilized lots. Scattered throughout the neighborhood are several mobile home communities and small apartment complexes that provide naturally occurring affordable housing. These sites, though often overlooked, play a vital role in maintaining socioeconomic diversity within the area.

Commercial & Mixed-Use Land Uses

Commercial activity in West Bench follows the city’s classic mid-century pattern: small strip centers and service businesses lining the arterials. Fairview Avenue, Ustick Road, and Cole Road serves as the neighborhood’s commercial spine, hosting a variety of commercial uses from a grocery store and fast food restaurants. Many of these centers date to the 1960s and 1970s, and while some





remain vibrant, others are struggling with declining tenancy or outdated site layouts that prioritize parking over pedestrian access.

There are several commercial and civic uses which attract significant traffic and function as key neighborhood gathering places. A couple of examples are the branch library at the intersection of Cole and Ustick and Common Ground Coffee Shop at the intersection of Ustick and North Esquire Drive. The library is discussed in more detail under Civic and Institutional Uses. Common Ground in particular was referenced multiple times during interviews as an example of the type of business the neighborhood wants to see more: locally-owned, pedestrian-scale gathering places where neighbors can meet and support community businesses.

Contrasting the success of Common Ground is the Asian Plaza, which shares a parking lot with the library. Once home to popular businesses, most of the buildings are now either vacant or underutilized. Although efforts have been made to locate new business or establish community events like a weeknight farmer's market, the plaza continues to deteriorate. This has been a frustration

for the neighborhood association and many of those interviewed. It is hoped that with the amount of available space and its location at in the center of the community there can be tools found to encourage revitalization of the plaza.

Fairview Avenue provides a more traditional, auto-oriented regional commercial corridor. Its scale and traffic volumes make it less suited for small neighborhood retail, but there may be opportunities for larger mixed-use or multifamily projects that could introduce housing closer to transit.

Across all commercial corridors, there is a growing consensus—expressed repeatedly during stakeholder interviews—that commercial renewal should focus on quality rather than quantity. The goal is not simply to attract more retail space, but to curate a mix of locally owned restaurants, small shops, and services that create reasons to stay within the neighborhood rather than drive elsewhere. Boise's emerging "Neighborhood Café" zoning tool could be particularly effective, allowing corner-scale businesses such as cafés, bakeries, or childcare centers to locate closer to residents without requiring major rezonings.

Civic & Institutional Uses

Civic and institutional uses form an essential layer of the West Bench neighborhood, shaping its identity as much as its physical layout. While the area is primarily residential, it is also home to a network of schools, libraries, churches, and community-serving institutions that provide the social and cultural framework for daily life, as well as opportunities for partnerships and development.

The most prominent civic landmark is the branch library (Library!) at Cole & Ustick, which has become an anchor for both education and community connection. Built in 2009 on the site of a former grocery store, this branch was Boise's first "neighborhood library," designed to bring city services closer to residents. The library's bright, open design, flexible meeting rooms, and consistent programming make it the city's busiest neighborhood branch. In a sense, it performs double duty—serving not just as a lending library but also as a civic commons for meetings, classes, and cultural events.

Educational uses are another major civic presence within the West Bench. The neighborhood is well served by three elementary schools—Valley View, Morley Nelson, and Mountain View—each rebuilt or modernized in the past decade. These schools are positioned as neighborhood anchors, often paired with adjacent parks or playgrounds that double as informal gathering spaces outside school hours. Fairmont Junior High and Capital High School continue that network at the middle and upper grades, forming an educational spine that stretches across the community.

Religious institutions also play a visible and perhaps underappreciated role in the neighborhood's civic fabric. A diverse mix of congregations—including Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, and Latter-day Saint churches, as well as smaller community and faith-based organizations—are scattered throughout the residential areas, typically located on quiet collector streets rather than along major arterials. These sites frequently serve more than a purely religious function: they host food drives, community meals, and neighborhood events that help sustain a sense of belonging. The Methodist church on Ustick Road, for instance, sponsors a



monthly community dinner and neighborhood block party, open to all regardless of affiliation. Such activities have made the churches an integral part of West Bench's informal social infrastructure. Substantial landholdings are also associated with the churches. In at least one instance, vacant church property has been made available for community gardens.

In addition to schools and churches, the neighborhood includes a range of smaller civic uses—childcare centers, postal facilities, and the occasional community-serving nonprofit—woven unobtrusively into the residential grid. The Global Lounge, located inside the Asian Plaza, is one such space. It provides an international cultural venue that celebrates Boise's growing diversity through music, art, and events.

Taken together, these civic and institutional uses help the West Bench function as more than a collection of houses and shopping centers. They provide the neighborhood's social backbone—places where people meet, volunteer, celebrate, and learn. Their presence reinforces the sense that West Bench is not just a place to live, but a community that takes care of its own.

Public & Open Space Land Uses:

Public and open spaces are among the defining assets of the West Bench. They not only shape the neighborhood's physical environment but also serve as touchpoints for identity, recreation, and community life.



At the heart of this network is Spaulding Ranch Park, a 20-acre historic farmstead now being reimagined as a heritage and education site. The ranch offers one of Boise's most unique public spaces where open fields, historic structures, and modern park design intersect. As the city restores and programs the site, it will become a living classroom that celebrates the area's agricultural roots while providing opportunities for community gatherings, urban agriculture, and hands-on learning.

The Settlers Canal Path along West Goddard Road is a unique open space to the neighborhood. It is located beside the Settlers Canal across from Capital High School and includes a 10-foot multi-use path, plantings, seating, lighting, and a pavilion. The path along Settlers Canal traverses along the north edge of the neighborhood with commanding views of the Boise foothills

to the north. It also has the potential to be extended to provide connections to multiple open spaces.

Mountain View Park is an 8-acre neighborhood park near the Cole and Ustick intersection and adjacent to Mountain View Elementary. It is a more traditional park, with playground equipment, open lawn, and sport courts. Its location close to housing, schools, and the Ustick corridor make it convenient for much of the neighborhood.

The West Bench neighborhood is a well-connected community, but its transportation network reflects decades of gradual suburban evolution. A handful of major arterials—Cole Road, Ustick Road, Fairview Avenue, and Maple Grove Road—form the boundaries and central spines of movement through the area. Between them, a patchwork of curving local streets, collector roads, and older

mid-century blocks create a network that works well for vehicles but remains challenging for pedestrians and cyclists.

Residents repeatedly described the neighborhood as “ten minutes from anywhere,” a testament to its central location within Boise’s west side. Yet that same convenience also means that most daily trips are made by car, even for short distances. Sidewalk coverage is inconsistent, and bike infrastructure is limited to a few short segments and recreational routes. Major intersections such as Ustick and Cole, located at the heart of the neighborhood’s commercial core, are designed primarily for vehicle

“It’s 10 minutes from anything you need.”

throughput, leaving people on foot or bike to navigate long crossings and narrow refuges. Goddard Road, which lies at the northern part of the West Bench provides a key connection to other areas to the north and provides pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

A more complete network is beginning to take shape, thanks to recent and planned projects by the Ada County Highway District (ACHD) and the City of Boise. The reconstruction of Cole Road north of Ustick, identified in ACHD’s five-year plan, could add pedestrian and bicycle improvements from Ustick to Kettering Avenue, improving access to Spaulding Ranch Park and Capital High School. On the east–west axis, the new Settlers Canal Path along Goddard Road provides a continuous, off-street segment of what could grow to become



a larger greenway system across the West Bench. Together, these projects begin to define a safer, more comfortable walking and biking backbone through the neighborhood.

Despite these advances, much of the area still lacks a connected pedestrian environment. Sidewalk gaps are common on interior streets and within a few segments of the north side of Ustick, and the few existing bike lanes often end abruptly or transition into shoulder space. Residents voiced frustration that while arterial roads move traffic efficiently, they create barriers between the neighborhood's internal pockets of activity such as schools, parks, churches, and local businesses. Crossing Ustick and Cole, for example, was a frequent concern mentioned in the interviews.

Transit also plays a role in the transportation network, albeit a limited one. Valley Regional Transit operates a bus service along Fairview and Cole, connecting the West Bench to downtown and other major destinations. However,



bus stops are often separated from residential areas by wide arterials and incomplete sidewalks, discouraging ridership.





Panel Assignment

The City of Boise and WBNA, as the project sponsors, asked ULI Idaho to assemble a TAP to explore strategies for improving walkability, neighborhood vitality, and placemaking across the West Bench Neighborhood. The full panel assignment and scope of work is included below:

Purpose

To support the City of Boise’s vision of fostering stronger, more connected communities, this project aims to develop actionable strategies for transforming the West Bench into a more walkable, bike-friendly, and vibrant neighborhood. The focus is on identifying barriers and opportunities for development and redevelopment, with an emphasis on attracting quality retail, restaurants, and services, and enhancing placemaking at key nodes such as Cole Village, Asian Plaza, and Ustick Town Centre.

“Focus on what’s strong, not what’s wrong.”

Objectives

- Understand the current market potential and demographic trends in the West Bench.
- Identify physical, financial, and social barriers to attracting and sustaining quality retail and services.
- Explore best practices and successful models from other communities.
- Recommend strategies for engaging property and business owners, and empowering residents to influence neighborhood development.
- Identify possible financial and implementation resources to support long-term success.

Key Questions to Address

01 Market Potential & Barriers

What are the current demographics and commercial characteristics of the West Bench?

What are the key barriers—financial, physical, planning, or perceptual—to attracting and retaining quality retail, restaurants, and services?

How can these barriers be addressed through policy, design, or investment?

02 Stakeholder Engagement & Development Strategies

What are effective strategies for engaging stakeholders and encouraging their investment in the community?

How can residents and neighborhood groups influence leasing decisions and support a more strategic retail mix?

Who are the key stakeholders currently missing from the conversation (e.g., non-engaged property or business owners)?

03 Planning, Design & Placemaking

What successful strategies have other neighborhoods used to create walkable, vibrant commercial areas?

Are there unique neighborhood attributes or themes in West Bench that could be leveraged for placemaking and branding?

What design interventions could enhance walkability, safety, and the overall experience of public spaces?

04 Implementation & Resources

What financial tools, grants, or public-private partnerships could support implementation?

What other resources (technical, organizational, community-based) are available to sustain momentum and ensure long-term success?



Panel Recommendations

Over the course of 2.5 days, the TAP interviewed over 40 stakeholders and heard from over 60 community members. They also toured the neighborhood and reviewed data provided by the City of Boise and WBNA. This work culminated in the panel's theme titled, "A Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework". The following sections explain the overall concept and expand upon the eight major components of the framework. Each section represents a building block of the overall vision which presents a distinct opportunity to create the identity of the West Bench Neighborhood as an ecological, cultural, and civic destination. Working to implement the Framework will address the needs expressed by community members, leading with a compelling vision for the area's future.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework

The Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework establishes a unifying vision

for how the West Bench can evolve as a healthier, more connected, and more resilient neighborhood. It weaves together the area's physical, ecological, and social systems—its parks, canals, schools, and streets—into an integrated network that supports both people and nature. "Green" refers to the landscapes, trees, and community spaces that cool and define the neighborhood, while "blue" highlights the canals and water systems that have long sustained the community. Together, they form a living infrastructure that captures stormwater, provides safe routes for walking and biking, and creates spaces for gathering, learning, and recreation.

This framework is not a single project but a coordinated approach to incremental transformation. It focuses on making the most of existing assets—like the Settlers Canal, Spaulding Ranch, and Goddard Road—while introducing new layers of connectivity and identity through ecological design, public art, and

community programming. Each recommendation builds on ideas voiced by residents during the ULI Technical Assistance Panel, the neighborhood tours, and public conversations. The result is a strategy rooted in local character: practical, affordable, and achievable through partnerships.

The Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework invites residents, businesses, and city partners to see their neighborhood as a connected system where every sidewalk, garden, and gathering space contributes to a larger story of stewardship. It lays out the foundation for the recommendations that follow, translating the community's values into design principles, investment priorities, and a collective roadmap for the future of the West Bench. There are 8 core components and recommendations to the Framework:

- Settlers Canal Ecological Spine
- Goddard Road Youth Pathway
- Spaulding Ranch Living Heritage Hub
- External and Regional Connections
- Ecological Infrastructure and Productive Landscapes
- Cultural and Social Programming
- Walkability and Safe Routes Network
- Governance and Funding Model

Each of these will be explored in the sections below along with insights into neighborhood branding, economic development strategies, and critical partnerships.





Settlers Canal: From Utility to Identity

The Settlers Canal defines the geography of the West Bench, quietly tracing its way through neighborhoods, school grounds, and commercial centers. For decades, it has been treated as background infrastructure—functional but hidden, lined with fences and maintenance easements rather than paths or parks.

The Green and Blue Framework reimagines the canal as a defining feature of neighborhood identity: a continuous, shaded linear park that connects people, places, and ecological systems across the community.

Reclaiming & Redefining the Canal as Public Space

Recent projects near Capitol High have already demonstrated what is possible. Where the canal had previously served only a utilitarian purpose, the City of Boise and the West Bench Neighborhood Association have transformed adjacent remnant parcels into a new linear park segment with native plantings, pollinator gardens, benches, public art installations and a



paved trail. This change has created a safe and beloved route for students, walkers, and cyclists—a small but powerful preview of what the entire corridor could become.

The Framework builds on that success by extending the canal’s reach as both an ecological and social connector. The goal is to create a continuous, accessible greenway that links schools, parks, and neighborhood destinations while preserving the canal’s water management function. Pathway design should reflect the corridor’s varied character: wider, paved segments where space allows and narrower, natural trails in more constrained or environmentally sensitive areas.

To help establish the canal area as the neighborhood’s green infrastructure spine, the Panel recommends redefining and branding the concept as the West Bench Pathway. As future projects described in other sections below connect it and connected/adjacent pathways or low-stress routes to the larger Boise Greenbelt, this branding will make the transition more seamless.

“Build on the energy of the new linear park.”

Partnerships for Stewardship & Access

Because the canal system is owned and maintained by private irrigation companies, long-term success will rely on strong relationships and clear partnership

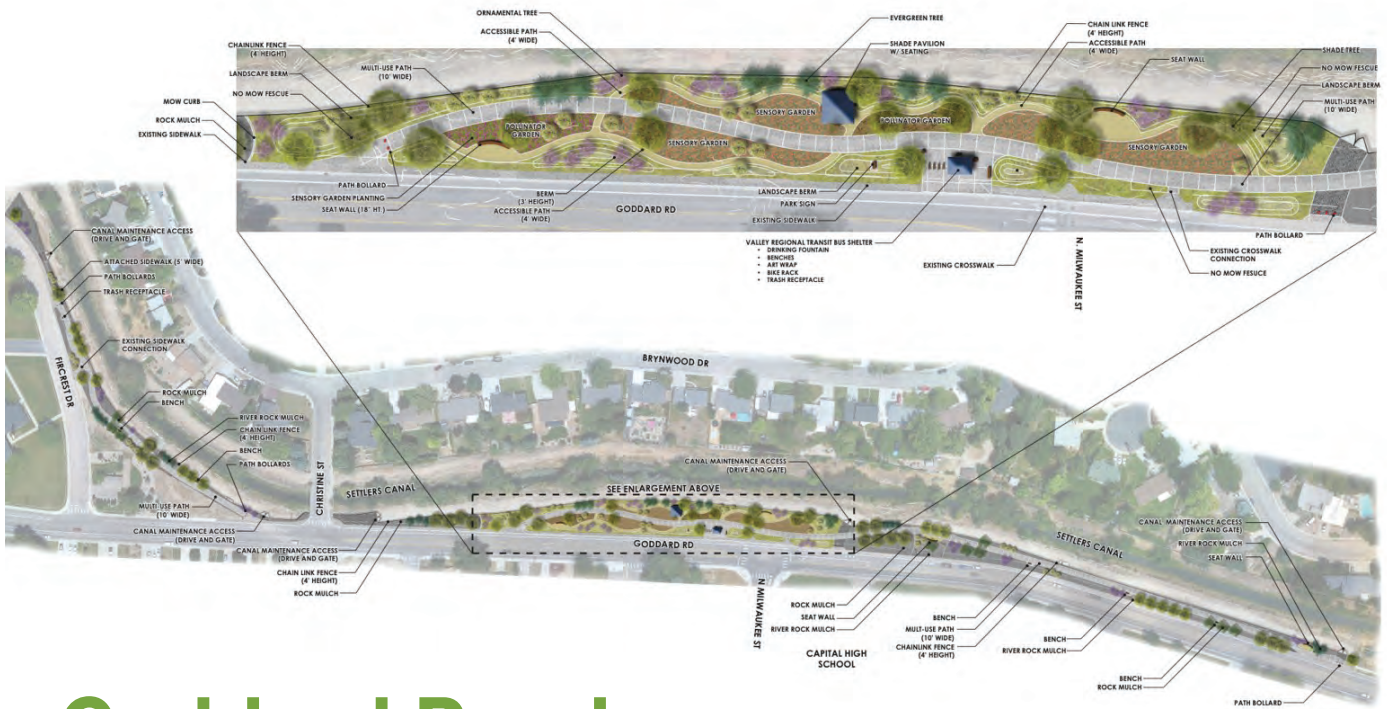
agreements. The City of Boise can take the lead in establishing memorandums of understanding for shared maintenance, safety, and liability. Neighborhood associations, schools, and community organizations can contribute through advocacy, adopt-a-trail programs, and volunteer events for planting, cleanup, and seasonal maintenance.

Interpretive signage should tell the story of the canal’s role in Boise’s history—how it once powered agriculture, shaped early settlement, and continues to sustain life in an urban landscape. These educational elements will help residents see the canal not as a barrier, but as part of their shared civic infrastructure.

Design Principles & Implementation

Pathway design should balance aesthetics, ecology, and safety. Plantings of drought-tolerant native species can stabilize banks and provide habitat for pollinators and birds. Shaded seating nodes spaced every few hundred feet offer rest points and gathering spots. Bridges, crossings, and small overlooks can become visual landmarks, reinforcing the idea of the canal as the neighborhood’s “green spine.”

Implementation should begin where momentum already exists: near Capitol High, Spaulding Ranch, and connecting streets such as Goddard Road and Milwaukee. Incremental extensions—completed one block or one node at a time—will build support and allow the continuous design process to refine details based on community feedback.



Goddard Road Linear Youth Parkway

Goddard Road serves as a social and educational spine of the West Bench. Running east to west through residential areas and past Capitol High School, it connects homes, parks, and civic facilities. It currently functions primarily as a car-oriented collector, with inconsistent sidewalks and limited visual character. The Green and Blue Framework envisions Goddard as a “youth pathway”—a linear park where mobility, learning, and community life intersect.

From Street to a Youth Focused Civic Corridor

The transformation of Goddard begins with redefining its purpose. Rather than a through-route for vehicles, it should become a safe and engaging street for walking, biking, and community events. Sidewalks and bikeways should be

continuous, separated from traffic, and shaded by a cohesive canopy of street trees. Pedestrian crossings at Milwaukee, Cole, and connecting neighborhood streets need enhanced lighting and curb extensions to ensure safety for children traveling to school. It should also include youth focused features such as appropriate skating elements or interactive street furniture, outdoor classrooms or interpretive elements and art.

As the Settlers Canal Path and Spaulding Ranch trails expand, Goddard and Glenwood Street will function as the connective seam between them. Wayfinding markers and small interpretive installations can guide people along the corridor, linking public amenities, parks, and civic spaces into one continuous learning environment. By creating a safe and enjoyable alternative to driving, the Youth Pathway would encourage more students and families to walk and bike to school and after-school events and activities at Capital High School and Spaulding Ranch.

Learning in Motion

The Goddard Youth Parkway can also serve as an outdoor classroom. Schools, civic organizations, and the neighborhood association can collaborate on student-designed art, interpretive signage, and landscape features that reflect local ecology and history. Murals, small play zones, and community garden plots along the route can celebrate creativity and stewardship while giving young residents visible ownership of their surroundings. Programming opportunities such as bike-to-school days, art walks, and student-led service projects will further embed the parkway in everyday life.

Implementation & Phasing

Improvements should start near Capitol High and adjacent parks, where student and pedestrian activity is highest. Temporary materials such as painted curb extensions, modular planters, and pop-up seating can be used to test design ideas before permanent construction. Future phases should extend the pathway westward toward Milwaukee and eastward toward Cole, gradually connecting residential areas with Spaulding Ranch, the library, and the Ustick retail centers.





Spaulding Ranch Park:

Living Heritage Hub

Spaulding Ranch is both a historical landmark and a catalyst for the neighborhood’s future. Its 20-acre site, with open fields, historic farm buildings, and newly developed trails, offers a rare opportunity to blend preservation, education, and recreation in one living landscape. The Green and Blue Framework envisions Spaulding Ranch as the “living heritage hub” of the West

“Spaulding Ranch is the downtown of the West Bench.”

Bench—a place where the neighborhood’s agricultural roots and its contemporary identity meet.

From Preservation to Participation

Rather than preserving the site as a static relic, the plan emphasizes adaptive reuse and active learning. Restored structures can host classrooms, artist studios, small events, and community workshops. They could also potentially support small retail or food service venues. The grounds can serve as a working landscape where residents, schools, and community organizations grow food, learn about long-lasting agriculture, and celebrate seasonal cycles.

These activities build on the partnerships already underway with Boise Parks and Recreation, the University of Idaho Extension, Global Gardens, and the Boise

Urban Garden School. Continued teamwork can expand programming in ways that reinforce both heritage and innovation—heritage through the restored farmhouse and barns, and innovation through community gardens, composting demonstrations, and pollinator habitat.

Concern was raised during Panel interviews and discussions about lack of funding to complete restoration. Public-private partnerships should be explored to bring in private funding to help accomplish these goals. Such partnerships could help not only with restoration, but also with programming, activation and revenue generation to help fund further improvements and expansion of the venue.

Design & Access

New pathways linking Spaulding Ranch to Capitol High and Milwaukee will make it a central node in the broader trail system. Parking and access improvements should be minimal and carefully integrated to keep the site's pastoral feel. Wayfinding and interpretive



signage should tell the story of the land's transformation—from irrigation-fed farm to public park—connecting it to the larger narrative of Boise's growth. In addition, connections to Spaulding Ranch should be in conjunction with the Safe Routes and Wellness network and ensure safe access and alignment with other corridors.

“Spaulding Ranch will become the West Bench's Central Park.”

Portions of the site can host small-scale events in keeping with the surrounding residential setting. Events such as outdoor concerts, farmers' markets, or harvest festivals can bring the neighborhood together as well and reinforce the neighborhood's sense of ownership while also attracting visitors from across Boise. The park's programming should be seasonal, evolving with the agricultural calendar, and work together through partnerships with local schools and nonprofits.





Ecological & Regional Connections

The West Bench is a critical piece of Boise's larger ecological and urban system. Its canals, parks, and streets connect upland neighborhoods to the Boise River corridor, serve as habitat for pollinators and urban wildlife, and provide vital pathways for residents to move through the city. The Green and Blue Framework recognizes there are opportunities to connect with a broader system and network.

Linking Local Green Space to Regional Systems

As the parks and networks described above develop, the neighborhood should advocate for connections to other important green and blue infrastructure in the City and not create dead-end pathways. These connections will provide a viable option not only for people to move across the neighborhood, but also to external destinations. Likewise, a well-connected network brings in residents from outside the West Bench to enjoy the neighborhood's amenities.

More specifically, green and blue infrastructure should connect these West Bench amenities with the Boise River Greenbelt via improved crossings at Chinden and 43rd, improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities on Glenwood Street and, although just outside the study area, Curtis Street connecting to Ustick, and as well as to Hyatt Hidden Lakes Reserve as an ecological anchor.

One of the unique opportunities mentioned by one of the interviewees is the use of an aerial tram to overcome the grade difference between the Bench and Garden City. Not just limited to ski resorts and amusement parks, aerial trams are increasingly seen as a legitimate form of transportation, and in many instances are more cost effective and efficient than traditional transportation modes.

To accomplish these connections, the City of Boise's Pathway Master Plan and ACHD's bike network already form the foundation of how the network can be brought together and implemented. For the neighborhood to effectively advocate for these projects to be prioritized, residents first need to be made aware of not only the plans, but their role in advocating for, funding and constructing important projects. As more residents become aware of the process and potential projects, they can more effectively mobilize as a grass-roots movement to build their desired future.

Transforming Ustick

An important opportunity for change is the transformation of Ustick Road from an auto-oriented corridor to a reimagined green and ecological connection. Its central location to the neighborhood and link to many key destinations make it an important piece of both neighborhood and regional connection. The intersection of Ustick and Cole is a logical potential starting point, as it already contains pedestrian infrastructure in good condition and potential opportunity for expansion. This short stretch could serve as a baseline for design to be extended west. With the current condition of Ustick, this should be viewed as a long-term project. Because Ustick is one of the region's longest continuous corridors over time, improving Ustick's sidewalks, bike lanes, and landscaping can evolve it into a neighborhood greenway first, and then a multi-community arterial green spine.

Regional Mobility & Access

Ecological connectivity must be matched by and can be implemented along with mobility connectivity. The West Bench lies between two major transit corridors—Fairview Avenue and State Street—that are designated for higher-frequency transit service and dense, mixed-use redevelopment. The neighborhood's internal walking and biking network can serve as the “first and last mile” system that links residents to these regional routes. Completing the Settlers Canal greenway, improving north-south connections on Cole and Milwaukee, and improving crossings at Ustick will make sure that residents can reach transit safely and comfortably.

These improvements will also strengthen economic connections. Visitors coming to the Asian Market, Common Ground, or Spaulding Ranch will find a neighborhood that is easy to navigate without a car, encouraging longer stays and repeat visits. For residents, better mobility options expand access to jobs, education, and recreation beyond the immediate area while reinforcing the neighborhood's identity as a connected, long-lasting part of Boise's urban fabric.





Ecological Infrastructure: Productive Landscapes

The West Bench's streets, parks, and open spaces form a hidden network of ecological potential. With careful design and coordination, these everyday landscapes can do more than look green—they can capture and filter stormwater, support wildlife, and improve comfort for residents. The Green and Blue Framework proposes an integrated approach to systems and spaces, where ecological function and civic beauty reinforce one another.

Turning Grey to Green

The neighborhood's wide rights-of-way with underused edges present opportunities for bioswales, rain gardens, and tree trenches that manage

stormwater at its source. By capturing runoff before it enters the storm system, these installations reduce flooding risk and improve water quality in the Boise River. Trees, planters, and native vegetation also provide shade, habitat, and visual identity.

Schools, parks, and faith-based campuses can serve as demonstration sites. Educational rain gardens, outdoor classrooms, and small native plant gardens can teach students and visitors about urban ecology while contributing to neighborhood resilience. .

Distributed Design & Maintenance

Ecological systems and spaces work best when distributed across many sites rather than concentrated in a few. A small rain garden in front of a church, shade trees along a block of Goddard Road, and bioswales near Spaulding Ranch each play a role in a larger system. The neighborhood association can host

volunteer planting events and create maintenance partnerships, supported by city technical assistance.

Coordination among city departments—particularly Parks, Public Works, and Planning—is essential to align planting standards, irrigation practices, and maintenance schedules. Over time, consistent materials and design details will create a recognizable identity for the West Bench’s green systems and spaces network.



Resilience & Identity

Beyond managing water, productive landscapes improve public health and comfort. Shade trees lower surface temperatures, making it more pleasant to walk or bike on summer days. Pollinator gardens and native vegetation strengthen biodiversity and improve the visual quality of everyday spaces.

Ecological systems and spaces should be celebrated, not hidden. Visible systems—permeable pavements, swales, and rain chains—help residents understand how their neighborhood functions and how their actions contribute to sustainability. Together, these elements form a living network that supports both people and nature, defining the West Bench as one of Boise’s most resilient and beautiful neighborhoods.



Cultural & Social Programming

Physical improvements alone do not create a thriving neighborhood. Culture and social activity are what bring it to life. The West Bench has a strong foundation of community activity—from Common Ground Coffee’s gatherings to the West Bench Farmer’s Market run by Global Gardens and Global Lounge, and future events at Spaulding Ranch. The Green and Blue Framework seeks to strengthen and expand these efforts, ensuring that each new space becomes a stage for connection. This builds on the neighborhood association’s current efforts with events such as Zook Fest and the Spring Egg Hunt.

Activating Everyday Spaces

The neighborhood’s plazas, parks, and sidewalks can be used and upgraded to

host small, flexible events: pop-up markets, outdoor art shows, performances, and seasonal celebrations. Lighting, movable seating, and simple power access can transform ordinary places into community venues.

Along the Settlers Canal and Goddard pathways, small-scale art installations and interpretive features can tell stories of local history, ecology, and culture. These elements support exploration and help residents see familiar places in new ways.

Activation and design improvements should build overtime and evolve together. The neighborhood shouldn’t wait for new elements to be constructed to start and expand on activation but should continue to host and support cultural events already happening and add improved supportive infrastructure over time. Today’s events can help inform, grow grassroots support and capacity, and fundraising for tomorrow’s improvements.

Building on Existing Strengths

Business Community: The success of Common Ground, Global Lounge, and the Catalyst Arts Collaborative shows that the West Bench already has a base of creative energy. These partners can play leading roles in shaping cultural programming—curating events, coordinating volunteers, and mentoring young artists.

Civic: The Library! at Cole and Ustick, already one of Boise’s most active neighborhood libraries, can continue to serve as a hub for educational workshops and public discussions. As noted above, Spaulding Ranch can host seasonal festivals and heritage events, connecting residents to the area’s agricultural past. The nearby schools can integrate art and design projects into the physical spaces of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework, reinforcing civic pride and place-based learning.

Institutional: Churches and other faith-based organizations within West Bench are among the neighborhood’s

“We need to develop a deeper sense of community and work together to celebrate.”

most consistent institutions. Many of these sites already function as informal



community centers, hosting youth programs, service projects, and outreach events. Their networks extend into surrounding neighborhoods. These institutions can play a key role in supporting the neighborhood’s placemaking and volunteer initiatives, from organizing cleanup days to hosting seasonal gatherings or public workshops. They also provide ready audiences for neighborhood events and can help promote activities that strengthen local identity and participation.

Celebration & Continuity

A consistent calendar of community events—art walks, farmers markets, film nights, and cultural festivals—will give residents a rhythm of gathering and renewal. These recurring activities help neighbors build relationships and create traditions that strengthen identity.

Cultural programming should reflect the neighborhood’s diversity. Events that highlight international food, music, and art reinforce the inclusive character that makes the West Bench distinct within Boise. Over time, these cultural expressions will knit together the neighborhood’s physical and social fabric.



Walkability, Wellness, & Safe Routes

The West Bench is defined by its proximity to downtown, Garden City, and surrounding cities via nearby interstate access. Nearly everything a household needs lies within a few minutes' drive. Yet paradoxically, many residents find that reaching even the closest destinations on foot or by bicycle feels uncomfortable or unsafe. During peak travel times, even driving becomes stressful and challenging. The neighborhood's mid-century layout, generous lot sizes, and arterial street pattern with limited access points to the internal neighborhoods have created a landscape where short distances can feel long, where pedestrians must navigate wide intersections, and where few visual cues signal that walking or biking are

expected. The Framework proposes to change that perception, building a visible, connected, low-stress network that makes walking and biking the natural first choice for local trips while supporting broader goals of public health, environmental sustainability, economic vitality, and neighborhood cohesion.

A Neighborhood Ready to Walk

Across the community meetings and neighborhood tour, residents repeatedly stated that the West Bench is close to everything but doesn't always feel that way. Many people drive less than a mile to reach familiar destinations such as the library, the Asian Market, or Common Ground simply because the walk feels uncomfortable or fragmented. Others expressed concern for school-age children navigating busy streets without protected crossings or continuous sidewalks. The absence of shade, benches, and visual interest further discourages short trips on foot, especially in summer.

Yet the building blocks of a walkable neighborhood already exist. The area's grid of neighborhood collectors including Goddard/Mountain View, Northview, Ustick, Cole, Milwaukee, and Maple Grove, creates predictable routes for movement. A strong network of schools and parks and neighborhood-scale businesses (Catalyst Arts Collective, Common Ground, Delsa's, Neighbor Tim's BBQ, Blondie's Way Coffee, and Reggie's Veggies) punctuate this grid, providing destinations spaced at ideal walking intervals. And emerging projects such as the Settlers Canal linear park and trail at Spaulding Ranch have begun to introduce safe, shaded, off-street connections that demonstrate what a neighborhood-scale trail system can reach. The challenge is not to invent new systems and spaces, but to re-stitch and close gaps in what already exists into a legible network of comfort, safety, and delight.

Creating a Connected, Low-Stress Network

The Framework envisions a hierarchy of routes that form the spine of everyday mobility. At the top are the east-west corridors—Northview, Ustick, and Fairview—that carry regional traffic but also host many of the neighborhood's commercial and civic anchors. Here, the focus must be on safe crossings and frontage improvements to incorporate

alternative transportation infrastructure. Near destinations such as the library branch, Ustick Town Center, Common Ground, and Morely Nelson Community Center the neighborhood's desire for a pedestrian-friendly experience can be realized through targeted interventions such as high-visibility crosswalks with median refuge islands, extended curb lines to shorten crossing distances, pedestrian-scale lighting, and landscaped buffers that create a sense of enclosure. Where multiple driveways currently interrupt sidewalks, the consolidation of access points and raised driveways can reclaim the pedestrian realm and signal continuity across retail frontages.

The north-south connectors—Cole, Milwaukee, and Maple Grove—offer different opportunities. Cole, slated for bicycle and pedestrian improvements through ACHD's upcoming projects, can serve as a demonstration of corridor retrofit adding protected lanes, narrowing curb radii, and creating safe mid-block crossings to Spaulding Ranch, schools, parks and adjacent neighborhoods. Milwaukee already functions as a calmer alternative to Cole and can be improved with consistent sidewalks, additional shade trees, and wayfinding to reinforce its role as a local green street. Maple Grove, which borders the neighborhood's western edge and links to the Hyatt Hidden Lakes Reserve, provides the bridge between suburban



residential areas and regional ecological assets. Trailheads and signage at Maple Grove could mark this interface, inviting walkers and cyclists deeper into Boise’s larger open-space system.

ACHD low-stress bike network identifies lower-traffic connections between the larger grid created by those main streets. Education about these routes, signage, and identifying potential similar ways to break down the larger grid can also help connect people on foot/bike more comfortably to their destinations on higher-traffic streets.

Health, Comfort, & Social Connection

Beyond safety, walkability is about wellness and social health—the everyday, low-threshold interactions that build community. Comfortable sidewalks and shaded trails support daily exercise and casual encounters. A bench under a tree becomes a place to rest, talk, or watch children play; a drinking fountain at a park entrance turns a short walk into a habit. As one participant described during the site tour, “it’s not that people don’t want to walk—it’s that we haven’t made it inviting.”

The Framework recommends a layered approach to comfort: expanding tree canopy coverage, targeting shade gaps on high-use routes, and incorporating small amenities—benches, bike racks, and lighting—at 400- to 600-foot intervals. Schools and civic institutions should be framed as daily wellness anchors: Spaulding Ranch for walking loops and outdoor fitness, the library for evening programs that extend pedestrian activity beyond daylight hours, and Capitol High or Valley View Elementary

for joint-use paths and community recreation spaces.

An expanded Safe Routes to School effort can reinforce and educate the neighborhood about these improvements. Working jointly with ACHD and the Boise School District, the West Bench Neighborhood Association can identify key hazard zones such as missing sidewalks, wide intersections, inadequate crossings, and prioritize them for near-term fixes. Pilot projects using paint, flexible posts, and temporary planters can demonstrate solutions quickly, gather feedback, and build support for permanent changes. By linking Safe Routes upgrades with the broader Green and Blue Framework, these projects will serve not only children walking to school but everyone seeking a healthier, more connected daily life.

Integrating Transit & Mobility Choices

As Boise expands transit along Fairview and State Street, the West Bench is positioned to become a linking neighborhood. Achieving this will require safe, intuitive connections between local paths and regional bus stops. Wayfinding signs, shaded waiting areas, and clear sightlines from sidewalks to shelters will make sure that first- and last-mile travel feels seamless. By combining active transportation with transit, residents gain access to the entire valley without depending on the car for every trip. A good example of how transit can connect people with the greater Boise area is the Valley Regional Transit stop at Ustick and Cole. This is part of Route 21 which connects riders with the Main Street Station downtown, the Boise Towne Square Mall, and Garden City.



Governance & Funding Model

The West Bench is a mosaic of jurisdictions, ownership patterns, and community interests. Streets and sidewalks are managed by the Ada County Highway District. Parks, libraries, and open spaces fall under the City of Boise. Canals belong to private irrigation companies. Retail centers have multiple landlords, many of whom live out of state, while schools, churches, and neighborhood associations each operate on their own calendars and budgets. This patchwork makes putting any plan into action complex, but it also creates a unique opportunity. If collaboration is effective, the West Bench can become a living example of working together as urban stewards, where civic partners, property owners, and residents each take on clear, complementary roles in shaping a shared public realm.

Aligning Public & Private Roles

The success of the Green and Blue Framework depends on a balance of leadership: public entities must set direction and standards, while private and nonprofit partners drive creativity, activation, advocacy and long-term care. In practice, this means organizing around the assets that are already working:

- The Library! at Cole and Ustick already functions as the neighborhood’s civic heart—its meeting rooms are consistently booked, its design established a model for sustainability, and its location anchors an area that once struggled for identity.
- The West Bench Neighborhood Association provides a trusted

“There’s no reason this neighborhood shouldn’t continue to get better.”

- platform for communication between residents, property owners, and city partners.
- Organizations such as Global Lounge and Global Gardens are demonstrating how small, mission-driven operators can enliven underused commercial plazas with food, culture, and enterprise.
- And new neighborhood businesses like Common Ground Coffee and Market and the Catalyst Arts Collaborative show that when local ownership and vision intersect, residents respond with loyalty and pride.

The Panel also recommends the creation of a “West Bench Greenbelt Trust” or a similar “Friends of Spaulding Ranch” organization to serve as a central convener, advocate, and fiscal agent for further planning and implementation of the Framework.

This entity could align neighborhood goals and investments with ACHD capital improvement projects, the City of Boise’s Pathways Program implementation, and private sector partnerships. Innovative funding models—such as “Adopt-a-Canal” or public-private leases for community activation—can sustain long-term maintenance and programming. Ultimately, governance is about empowering residents to take ownership of their neighborhood’s future while maintaining alignment with citywide priorities.

External Partnerships

Collaboration with key agencies is essential to aligning neighborhood



priorities with citywide efforts. The City of Boise remains the central partner for parks, planning, and community involvement. The City’s Energize Our Neighborhoods program is a key indicator that the City is committed to assisting neighborhoods to achieve their goals. Continuing to build this relationship, by regularly connecting with the City, understanding its budgeting process, advocating for neighborhood priorities, etc., will continue to build momentum towards the implementation of this plan. It will continue to provide important information and understanding between the two entities so advocacy efforts can be more thoughtful and, ultimately, successful.

Other external partners play important supporting roles. The Ada County Highway District oversees roadways, sidewalks, and crossings. The Boise School District manages facilities and Safe Routes to School programs. Together, these institutions shape the physical and social fabric of the neighborhood. The University of Idaho Extension can continue its involvement at Spaulding Ranch through agricultural

education and stewardship. Valley Regional Transit connects the West Bench to regional mobility networks. Nonprofit and cultural organizations such as Global Lounge and Global Gardens offer trusted access to diverse communities and can assist with programming, event coordination, and volunteer recruitment.

Engaging these partners early and consistently will make sure that the neighborhood's goals are built into broader funding cycles and work plans. The West Bench should be positioned as a pilot area for cross-departmental coordination, demonstrating how collaborative planning between the City of Boise, ACHD, the school district, and community organizations can deliver visible, place-based improvements that strengthen both local identity and regional connectivity.

Leveraging Internal Partnerships

Partnerships within the neighborhood are equally vital. Residents, faith-based institutions, schools, and small businesses each hold assets that can advance shared goals. Churches can provide space for meetings, markets, or community events. Schools can serve as hubs for family involvement and education around sustainability and active transportation.

The West Bench Neighborhood Association can expand its role as a convener by hosting quarterly gatherings that bring these groups together to work together events, share resources, and identify working together opportunities. For example, a joint effort between a



local congregation, a nearby elementary school, and the City could establish a shared community garden or small play area on underused property. Such visible successes help build trust and momentum.

Local businesses also play an important role in sustaining neighborhood vitality. Business owners can sponsor events, keep planters or parklets, and participate in joint marketing campaigns that highlight the district's unique identity. These efforts reinforce the neighborhood's commitment to teamwork and pride of place.

Faith-Based & Cultural Partners

Faith-based organizations and cultural groups are among the most consistent and visible presences in the West Bench. Their facilities often include large parcels of land, parking areas, and gathering spaces that remain underused during much of the week. By working together, these institutions can help address some of the neighborhood's needs for open space, event venues, and community services.

Shared-use agreements could allow public access to certain facilities for youth programs, weekend markets, or seasonal festivals. This not only maximizes existing assets but deepens relationships among diverse community members. The Green and Blue Framework supports viewing these institutions as partners in placemaking, not simply property owners or service providers.

“How do we leverage the churches’ assets during the week?”

Regional Collaboration

The West Bench’s proximity to Garden City and other west-Boise neighborhoods offers opportunities for regional teamwork. Joint events, trail connections, and shared branding efforts can strengthen the identity of the broader west-side community. Coordination on grant applications or systems and spaces funding can also improve competitiveness by presenting a unified regional vision rather than isolated proposals.

Leveraging Grants & Creative Financing

A deliberate focus on grant readiness will help sustain momentum. Programs such as Idaho’s Transportation Alternatives, Federal Safe Routes to School, and Community Development Block Grants can fund sidewalk and intersection improvements. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality offers resources for green systems and spaces and water quality projects. Private foundations may fund placemaking and urban forestry efforts that align with Boise’s climate and livability goals.

Longer term, a Business Improvement District (BID) or Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model could be explored for select commercial nodes. A BID could allow property owners along Ustick to pool small assessments toward shared amenities—landscaping, lighting, signage, or event programming—making the corridor more competitive and attractive to tenants. Public-private agreements might support improvements at Spaulding Ranch or other parks where educational or event facilities could host revenue-generating uses. The key is flexibility: the West Bench should pursue multiple small-scale funding streams rather than wait for a single large one.





Design the Future You Want

The Green and Blue Framework provides a foundation for how the West Bench can evolve physically and socially. The next step is for residents, businesses, and city partners to take ownership of that vision—to design the future they want, one project and one street at a time. This chapter outlines how the neighborhood can move from ideas to putting this plan into action by shaping the design of streets, public spaces, and destinations in a way that reflects community priorities.

Designing Major Streets

The above sections discuss many of the needs for design changes and elements on major streets within the neighborhood. Collaborating with the Ada County Highway District early in design stages will be essential to align community goals with roadway standards. The goal is not to impose a

single template but to create a consistent design vocabulary—lighting, plantings, materials, and signage—that signals to residents and visitors that they are in a walkable, cohesive district.

“I commute that road every day and say absolutely...not!”

-Interviewee on the idea of widening Ustick

Engaging with ACHD & Transportation Partners

Because streets are managed by multiple agencies, successful change depends on relationships as much as design. The neighborhood association and city partners can strengthen these relationships by approaching ACHD and Valley Regional Transit as collaborators rather than regulators. Sharing the outcomes of demonstration projects, collecting data on pedestrian and cyclist use, and documenting public support can all help advance future improvements.

Pilot programs such as “Safe Routes to School” or temporary curb extensions can act as test beds for longer-term systems and spaces investments. Maintaining a spirit of experimentation will allow the neighborhood to move forward even when funding or policy constraints are tight. Each small success, whether a single crossing, a new bike rack, or an improved bus stop, builds the credibility needed to pursue larger changes.

Wayfinding & Neighborhood Hubs

Consistent signage, trail markers, and small-scale wayfinding features can help residents and visitors navigate easily between major destinations such as the library, Spaulding Ranch, and Ustick Town Center. The goal is to create a visible plan of local “hubs,” each with its own personality but united by shared design elements.

“There was a time when people didn’t know they lived in a neighborhood called West Bench.”

Elevating Neighborhood Identity

The physical improvements described in the Green and Blue Framework will be much more successful if they are matched by a strong sense of shared identity. The West Bench has already begun to define itself through its community-driven spaces

like Common Ground and the arts working together at Ustick Town Center. These local examples demonstrate how branding and design can reinforce a sense of place without relying on large-scale redevelopment.

Simple design cues such as signage, consistent color palettes, and interpretive materials can link the neighborhood’s many destinations under one recognizable visual language. Events such as markets, Open Streets events, or seasonal festivals can reinforce that identity and give residents an ongoing reason to gather. Current and consistently updated information on the WBNA website can also serve as the go-to space for information on new businesses, current projects, and other important neighborhood information.

Bringing the Business Community Together

Local businesses are vital partners in shaping the future of the West Bench. Small, independent enterprises are what give the neighborhood its character and authenticity. Encouraging teamwork among property owners and tenants can strengthen their collective voice and make shared improvements more feasible. A business working group within the WBNA or West Bench Greenbelt Trust could work together to develop a program for façade improvements, outdoor seating areas, and joint marketing efforts that highlight the neighborhood’s diversity of offerings. Establishing a reputation for locally owned, walkable retail will attract both new customers and future investment.



Economic Development

The West Bench has the foundations of a healthy local economy: strong household incomes, central location, stable neighborhoods, and a growing collection of community-minded businesses. Yet its commercial areas have not fully realized their potential. Many of the retail centers built in the 1970s and 1980s have struggled to evolve, constrained by fragmented ownership, aging systems and spaces, and design patterns that prioritize cars over people. Revitalizing the West Bench economy requires not only better streets and safer crossings, but a collaborative strategy to attract the right businesses, cultivate local entrepreneurship, and position the neighborhood as a destination within Boise’s west side.

Creating a Destination in the West Bench

Economic development begins with a sense of place. The neighborhood’s most successful commercial nodes such as the library plaza, Reggie’s Veggies, Ustick

Town Center, and the emerging cluster around Common Ground Coffee and the Catalyst Arts Collaborative demonstrate that people are drawn to authenticity, activity, and comfort. Each of these places blends local ownership, walkability, and a sense of community pride.

The Green and Blue Framework envisions the West Bench as a network of small destinations rather than a single commercial center. Each destination can express a different aspect of the neighborhood’s character: local food and culture at the library and Asian Market complex, creativity and social gathering at the arts working together, and family recreation and heritage at Spaulding Ranch. Strengthening the pedestrian and visual connections between these destinations will make the neighborhood feel cohesive and support visitors to explore multiple stops rather than a single location.

“There are a lot of believers.”

Events and programming will also help define the West Bench as a place worth visiting. Seasonal farmers markets, art

walks, outdoor concerts, and cultural festivals can bring new energy to retail corridors while supporting local entrepreneurs. These activities do not require major construction; they rely on coordination, communication, and the steady participation of residents, property owners, and city staff.

Getting the Right Businesses in the Right Places

Attracting and retaining businesses that fit the West Bench's identity is essential to sustaining economic growth. The neighborhood's residents consistently express a desire for more restaurants, coffee shops, and locally owned retail that they can reach on foot. Rather than competing with regional centers or downtown, the West Bench can specialize in neighborhood-scale commerce that emphasizes authenticity, experience, and community connection. Common Ground, Reggie's Veggies, Delsa's Ice Cream are existing examples of concept that small businesses can succeed in the West Bench. These should be used as examples to other entrepreneurs the neighborhood wishes to attract.

“You can just feel the transition happening in the area.”

Encouraging the right business mix will require teamwork between the City of Boise's economic development staff, the neighborhood association, and property owners. A shared marketing strategy can

help recruit tenants whose offerings align with the district's goals such as small restaurants, art studios, or wellness services, while discouraging uses that detract from walkability. Property owners should be supported to offer flexible leases, shared outdoor spaces, and small tenant improvement grants to attract quality tenants and support start-ups. Over time, the neighborhood can build a reputation as a supportive environment for small businesses that value community involvement and design quality.

As noted earlier in this report, Boise's Modern Zoning Code includes a Neighborhood Café in all zones under certain conditions. This is an excellent opportunity to introduce the smaller, pedestrian-scale, accessible businesses the neighborhood expressed interest in. The Panel recommends, though, that the neighborhood be proactive in identifying the most desirable locations based on



Inventorying & Marketing Development Opportunities

Many commercial parcels in the West Bench have underused land or parking areas that could accommodate infill development. An updated inventory of available properties and redevelopment-ready sites would help match investors with local opportunities. Sites near transit routes, schools, and the new linear park system should be prioritized for mixed-use and small-format retail, allowing residents to access daily needs within walking distance.

Marketing materials should highlight the neighborhood's central location, diverse population, and growing community identity. With its proximity to downtown, easy access to major arterials, and established customer base, the West Bench offers strong fundamentals for reinvestment. A clear narrative that emphasizes authenticity, accessibility, and teamwork—will attract the right kind of investors: those who see value in long-term partnership rather than short-term turnover.



Housing as an Economic Catalyst

Expanding housing options near commercial areas is another key strategy for economic development. More residents living within walking distance of shops, parks, and schools create a reliable customer base and reduce the need for large parking lots. The city's zoning and planning tools support small-scale residential infill, accessory dwelling units, and upper-story apartments in appropriate locations.

Integrating new housing with the neighborhood's design and character will be critical. Rather than large, isolated projects, the West Bench should focus on gradual density increases and context-sensitive redevelopment. The goal is to welcome more people into the neighborhood while keeping its sense of scale and community.





Implementation & Phasing

Turning the Green and Blue Framework from concept to reality will require a clear sequence of achievable steps, built on visible progress and sustained partnerships. The proposed approach for the West Bench emphasizes early actions that build trust and momentum, mid-term projects that reinforce connectivity and identity, and long-term stewardship that make sure improvements endure. The phasing strategy aligns with existing agency capital plans, available grants, and neighborhood energy, allowing the community to move from demonstration to permanence in a practical, transparent way.

“It’s time to renew the vows between the city and its neighborhoods.”

Immediate Actions: **Start Building Powerful Partnerships**

Building internal and external partnerships is a no-cost solution that can be started immediately. WBNA can begin to:

- Assign a WBNA member to interact with ACHD as the Association’s Transportation Committee representative.
- Assign a WBNA member to interact with the City regarding the Spaulding Ranch and the Pathways Plan.
- Assign a WBNA member to serve as the Business Community Champion.
- Add Low Stress Bike and Safe Routes to School resources to the WBNA website.
- Begin to write a list of actions to be done in 2026.



Short-Term: Over the Next Six-Months

Design Your Future

Once assignments have been made, the WBNA can begin work on the next steps to focus on the projects and priorities that will implement the desired vision of the neighborhood. This phase focuses on information gathering that will assist in future project planning and implementation. During this phase the WBNA should:

1. Continue to develop a work program of the work to be done in 2026
2. Review and update the WBNA by-laws. Consider adding provisions that expands the board offices with representatives from the business community, more representative of the entire neighborhood, and HOA's.
3. Establish a list of businesses and commercial property owners. Update the City Services and Business Directory on the WBNA's website. Establish an efficient communication link to them and share the neighborhood's vision for the future.
4. Prioritize gaps in both the Low Stress Bike and Safe Routes plans and engage with the City and ACHD on next steps for future implementation opportunities.
5. Reach out to residents in the neighborhood and hold meetings on the neighborhood's ideas for programming of Spaulding Ranch.
6. Inventory and map existing assets. In coordination with the City's planning and GIS staff, digitally map the green and blue infrastructure that currently exists. Identify destinations accessible or not accessible on low-stress streets. From there, identify gaps and potential priority projects. This effort will help translate the plan into a visual tool.
7. Educate the WBNA on upcoming roadway projects and advocate for a preferred design. Get involved early—design feedback is most impactful in earlier design phases.
8. Continue to engage with cultural partners to identify ways the Association can support the West Bench Farmer's Market and other cultural initiatives.

Medium-to-Long Term: **Build It!**

Once plans are in place, the WBNA can focus the next one-to-five years on prioritizing, planning, and funding projects, recruiting businesses, and building the vision. This phase will also continue to work on expanding and strengthening relationships with key partners. The WBNA should:

1. Continue to strengthen and expand partnerships. Be the model of involvement for Neighborhood Associations.
2. Develop a section within the West Bench Neighborhood bylaws with the City on roles, relationships and expectations.
3. Gather consensus on what projects and properties are the highest priority for the neighborhood and assign a Board Champion for each project.
4. Facilitate the formation of a non-profit, “Friends of Spaulding Ranch” for gaining support and resources for the future programming of the property.
5. Consider the development of a public-private partnership for the operation of Spaulding Ranch. Research models from other communities. Develop a Request for Proposals for a public-private partnership for the rehabilitation and operation of the property.
6. Develop a brand design, program and funding for wayfinding.
7. Educate and gather input on transportation plans (ACHD, VRT, City) affecting the neighborhood.
8. With partners, undertake planning and programming for history, culture and arts.
9. Support formation of a WBNA Business Association which could in the future lead to a business or community improvement district.
10. Encourage local business owners to create a forum to share information.

Ongoing: **Celebrate!**

Planning and visioning is a relatively short process. Building the vision can take years or even decades. To help keep momentum, celebrate each success. No completed project or strengthened relationship is unimportant. They all contribute to the development of the larger vision. Simple, trackable indicators such as crossings improved, trees planted, new events hosted, participants engaged should be reported annually. Public dashboards, community meetings, and neighborhood newsletters can share this information, helping residents see their contributions reflected in visible results.

Equally important, each completed segment should be celebrated. Ribbon cuttings, community walks, or volunteer appreciation events reinforce civic pride and remind everyone that the Framework’s success is collective.

Summary of Recommendations Addressing the Key Barriers

Financial

The West Bench has the foundations of a healthy local economy: strong household incomes, central location, stable neighborhoods, and a growing collection of community-minded businesses. Even with these assets, the neighborhood has never reached its full potential. Recommendation for overcoming the barriers that limit the area's potential are:

1. Creating authentic, active, and comfortable places that are easily accessible, and which build on the success of existing places such as Common Grounds, Reggie's Veggies, and Delsa's Ice Cream.
2. Supporting events and programming of seasonal farmers markets, art walks, outdoor concerts, and cultural festivals.
3. Getting the right business mix in the right places that support the neighborhood's objectives.
4. Inventorying under-used or re-development-ready parcels and marketing development opportunities to the right investors.
5. Supporting additional housing and the population that would patronize local businesses.

Physical

The Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework vision and recommendations break down the physical barriers which impede social interaction and physical connections between parks, canals, schools, and streets. Within the eight components of the Framework are recommendations that address physical barriers:

1. Reclaiming and redefining the Settlers Canal as a public space.
2. Transforming Goddard Road as a multi-modal Youth Pathway.
3. Repurposing Spaulding Ranch as a Living Heritage Community Hub with non-motorized connections to the community.
4. Strengthening external and regional connections for all modes of transportation.
5. Creating a dispersed system of ecological infrastructure and productive landscapes in which grey physical spaces become green.
6. Breaking down the physical barriers to social interaction through cultural and social programming.
7. Creating safer walking spaces and connections to major destinations, such as schools and parks.

Planning

Planning for the Neighborhood is constrained by the complexity of public and private entities that have a role in determining the future of the area and the resources to see it happen. The neighborhood can take a role in being an advocate for and caretaker of a vision for the future. The report offers these recommendations for better planning:

1. Developing a governance and funding model for overcoming the complexity of overlapping jurisdictions through partnerships, collaboration, and involvement of fresh players.
2. Creating a “West Bench Greenbelt Trust” or a similar “Friends of Spaulding Ranch” organization to serve as a central convener, advocate, and fiscal agent for further planning and implementation of the Green and Blue Framework.
3. Supporting development and infrastructure proposals that further the neighborhood’s vision.
4. Being active participants in the development of plans and projects that support the community’s vision. Build strong partnerships and political support for such proposals that are in the community’s interests.
5. Developing knowledge on the neighborhood’s existing assets and gaps to influence future planning efforts.

Social

The physical layout of development, the impact of regional arterial highways that bisect the area and the lack of common spaces are all barriers to a sense of community identity. In addition to the recommendations overcoming the physical barriers, the following recommendations are included in the report for creating a greater sense of shared identity:

1. Creating wayfinding with consistent signage and trail markers.
2. Elevating neighborhood identity through branding and marketing.
3. Supporting the small-scale community gathering places as now allowed by the Modern Zoning Code.
4. Supporting the creation of a West Neighborhood Business Association.
5. Expanding the membership and specific roles within the WBNA; developing stronger internal partnerships with other neighborhood organizations and reaching out to under-represented community members.

Additional Resources



To support the implementation of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework and broader revitalization goals, the following Urban Land Institute (ULI) resources are available. These guides offer practical strategies, case studies, and tools for creating resilient, walkable, and vibrant communities.

ULI Toolkits & Guides

1. Building Healthy Places Toolkit

Purpose: Offers 21 evidence-based strategies to enhance health through design and development.

Use for WBNA: Apply recommendations to improve walkability, access to healthy food, and public space design. Use the toolkit to guide enhancements to Settlers Canal, Spaulding Ranch, and Goddard Road. <https://bhptoolkit.uli.org/>

2. Creative Placemaking: Recommendations from Six Advisory Services Panels

Purpose: Demonstrates how integrating arts and culture into development can spark community identity and economic growth.

Use for WBNA: Use this guide to plan cultural programming along the canal and in parks, support youth-led art projects, and activate public spaces with events and installations.

<https://knowledge.uli.org/reports/research-reports/2022/creative-placemaking-recommendations-from-and-impact-of-six-advisory-services-panels>

3. Building Healthy Corridors: Transforming Urban and Suburban Arterials into Thriving Places

Purpose: Provides strategies for redesigning auto-oriented corridors into vibrant, health-promoting places.

Use for WBNA: Use this guide to inform the redesign of Ustick Road and other arterials, ensuring they support safe walking, biking, and community gathering.

<https://knowledge.uli.org/reports/research-reports/2016/building-healthy-corridors>

4. ULI Knowledge Finder Platform

Purpose: A searchable library of ULI's reports, webinars, case studies, and tools.

Use for WBNA: Explore additional resources on housing, mobility, economic development, and sustainability. Use it to stay updated on best practices and connect with similar neighborhood initiatives. <https://knowledge.uli.org/>

5. Utilize your local Urban Land Institute Chapter: ULI-Idaho

Purpose: ULI Idaho will remain on hand to help facilitate continued implementation and progress as needed. This can be in the form of presentations, workshops, continued roundtable/community discussions, check-ins for progress, etc.

Use for WBNA: You have momentum right now that can be leveraged to help continue the positive growth and impact you are looking to make in your community. <https://idaho.uli.org/>

How to Use These Resources

Strategic Planning: Use the toolkits to inform WBNA's work program, especially around infrastructure, placemaking, and governance.

Community Engagement: Share relevant guides with residents, schools, and faith-based partners to build shared understanding and support.

Grant Applications: Reference ULI resources in proposals to demonstrate alignment with national best practices.

Partnership Development: Use case studies to inspire collaboration with the City of Boise, ACHD, and local nonprofits.

Design Implementation: Apply design principles from the toolkits to guide improvements to parks, pathways, and streetscapes.

Resource: ULI Implementation Strategies for the West Bench Neighborhood Association

This section includes several additional ULI resources that would be highly relevant to the West Bench Neighborhood Association (WBNA) and its Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework. These go beyond the initial toolkits and offer deeper guidance on suburban retrofit, resilience, placemaking, and technical assistance.

- Key ULI publications on suburban retrofit, resilience, and ecological infrastructure.

- Direct links to each resource.
- Suggested uses tailored to WBNA's Green & Blue Recommendations Framework.

Suburban Retrofit & Infrastructure

Shifting Suburbs: Reinventing Infrastructure for Compact Development

Focuses on transforming suburban areas into compact, walkable communities through infrastructure reinvention.

Use for WBNA: Inform long-term planning for Ustick Road and suburban-scale redevelopment. <https://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/Shifting-Suburbs.pdf>

Placemaking & Community Identity

A Sense of Place: Smart Placemaking for Downtown

Explores how placemaking can revitalize urban cores and foster community pride.

Use for WBNA: Inspire cultural programming and branding for neighborhood hubs. https://urbanland.uli.org/a-sense-of-place-outlook-for-placemaking%22%20/t%20%22_blank

Ecological Infrastructure & Resilience

ULI Developing Resilience Toolkit

Offers over 140 strategies for climate resilience in buildings and landscapes.

Use for WBNA: Apply to Spaulding Ranch and Settlers Canal for stormwater, shade, and biodiversity improvements.

<https://knowledge.uli.org/-/media/files/research-reports/2023/uli-developing-resilience-toolkit.pdf?rev=ac65c0a32a17484eae2b0e687fcd3756&hash=E675D62C7A1FE04EAB930E2B4E2F38EA>

Green Infrastructure Collection

Case studies and best practices for integrating nature-based solutions into urban design.

Use for WBNA: Support ecological corridors and pollinator gardens.

<https://developingresilience.uli.org/themes/green-infrastructure-collection/>

Non-ULI Resources Worth Sharing:

Retrofitting Suburbia

A series of books and case studies on redesigning dead malls, office parks, and strip centers into vibrant, sustainable places.

Use for WBNA: Guide redevelopment of aging commercial sites like Asian Plaza.

<https://retrofitting suburbia.com/>

The City Repair Project

City Repair is a non-profit that works with local residents and leaders to turn ideas into action. Their projects honor the interconnection of human communities and the natural world through artistic and ecological placemaking.

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/11/fixing-broken-neighborhoods-happy-city-by-charles-montgomery.html>

Technical Advisory Panelists



Diane Kushlan

FAICP | TAP Chair

Diane serves as the TAP chair. She has a passion for planning the future of communities. After working as a city planner for local governments in California, Washington State, and Idaho, she started a consulting practice in 2002. She also served as the District Council Coordinator for ULI Idaho for over a decade.



Clay Carley

Clay Carley is a fifth-generation resident of Boise, Idaho and has been developing mixed-use projects in downtown Boise. Clay is past Board Chair of the Downtown Boise Association. He served as Chairman of the Parking Task Force for the Capitol City Development Corporation. He served on the Boise city Historic Preservation Commission from 20002-2006. Clay was a member of the Steering Committee for the Blueprint for Good Growth. Clay is past Board Chair for the Treasure Valley Family YMCA and current Chair of the Endowment Trustees Committee and a member of the Strategy and Community Planning Committee. Clay is the past Chair of ULI Idaho and past Chair of Boise Elevated.

Building a more sustainable downtown Boise is Clay’s development passion. Clay and his family have been redevelopment downtown properties since 1974.



Emiliano Espasandin

Emiliano Espasandin is an architect and urban designer focused on inclusive public space and innovative city-making. He is the founder of PALO Arq, CEO of UI—Urban Innovation Office, and a professor at the University of Idaho. He also co-founded UrbS_LA, a platform dedicated to advancing research on public space, mobility, and urban innovation in American cities.



Brad Cramer

Brad Cramer is the report writer for this TAP. He is a certified planner and owner of Perspective Planning and Consulting, a firm focused on making professional planning services accessible to communities of all sizes. With nearly 20 years of experience in land use planning—including roles with the City of Idaho Falls and Idaho National Laboratory—Brad brings a practical, grounded approach to community development. He has worked on multiple award-winning plans and projects. He is also an adjunct faculty member at Boise State University. He holds degrees from BYU-Idaho and Idaho State University.



Jace Perry

Jace Perry, CPA, CGMA, AMR, MAP currently serves as the COO and a licensed Municipal Advisor Representative for Clearwater Financial, LLC, a municipal advisory and consulting firm. Jace's 21-year career in public finance and accounting has spanned time as the Executive Director of the Idaho Bond Bank Authority, CFO for NexTitle, A Title and Escrow Company, Deputy Treasurer at the State Treasurer's Office, and Auditor of many municipalities with Eide Bailly. In addition, Jace holds certifications as a Certified Public Accountant, Chartered Global Management Accountant, Registered Municipal Advisor Representative and Municipal Advisor Principal.

In his spare time Jace enjoys the outdoors including camping, backpacking, and fishing whenever he can.



Patricia Nilsson

Patricia Nilsson retired in 2021 after a 30+ year career as a public sector planner in Virginia, Pennsylvania and Idaho. She is a past president of the former Idaho Planning Association (predecessor of the Idaho Chapter of the American Planning Association) and is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. She received a B.A. in Political Science from Virginia Tech. She is currently serving as an Ada County Highway District commissioner.



Alexandra Monjar

As a senior project manager in property development at Capital City Development Corp., Alexandra works to catalyze private development through public investment in infrastructure, collaborating with developers to ensure Boise's built environment is attractive, accessible, and sustainable. Before joining CCDC, Alexandra managed the ULI Idaho district council where she brought together developers, government agencies, and individuals to share best practices for building thriving communities. Her previous experience also includes stints with Idaho Smart Growth, PCS Edventures, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, and Salt Lake County Zoo, Arts & Parks. Alexandra has a bachelor's degree in arts administration from Westminster University in Salt Lake City and a certificate in commercial real estate from eCornell. In her free time, Alexandra enjoys spending time outdoors; advocating for housing and transportation options; and fostering orphaned kittens.



Jay Story

Jay Story is a seasoned commercial real estate broker, developer, and community advocate with over two decades of experience in the Boise market. As founder of Story Commercial, he has built a boutique firm known for its hands-on approach, deep local knowledge, and creative problem-solving in both brokerage and redevelopment. Jay's career spans strategic planning, acquisitions, and sales, with a focus on delivering tailored solutions for clients navigating complex real estate challenges.

Beyond brokerage, Jay has played a leading role in shaping Boise's urban fabric through infill and adaptive reuse projects that breathe new life into underutilized properties. His work—from transforming gas stations into neighborhood retail hubs to converting warehouses into vibrant restaurants—reflects a passion for sustainable growth and thoughtful design. With a background in planning and zoning, and leadership roles in the Downtown Boise Association and Boise's Planning & Zoning Commission, Jay brings a unique blend of market savvy, civic engagement, and long-term vision to every project.



Dr. Jake Clark

Dr. Jake Clark is Vice President of the Great Falls Development Alliance in Great Falls, Montana. Experienced in community building and non-profit management, Jake is passionate about growing access to the mountain west way of life including all forms of outdoor recreation and supportive community engagement. Most recently Jake is applying his skills and expertise to economic development for the Great Falls, Montana region and is focused on workforce housing production and the growth of the health, education, and bioscience sector of the Great Falls economy. “I believe that a thriving and diverse economy is the best tool available improve the lives of people in Montana and to preserve a way of life and freedom of being that has always called people to the west.”



Karlee May

Karlee May is the Executive Director of the Urban Land Institute’s Idaho & Montana District Councils. As director, Karlee oversees the ULI program of work in both states, ensuring alignment with ULI’s initiatives and mission priorities, with a focus on regional priorities. Karlee works with communities, members, and stakeholders to grow engagement and membership in both regions, and partners with both local and national councils to provide valuable impact throughout.

A Boise, Idaho native, Karlee has experience working in both nonprofit and public spheres around community building, public events, placemaking, and outreach, and has shared that experience through leadership roles in her community for many years. Karlee has a passion for people and places, emphasizing forming connections and developing mutually beneficial partnerships while organizing public and private events. Throughout her career Karlee has served on various boards and committees with local nonprofits and community groups.

APPENDIX A:

Additional Site Photos



