

GET THE FAQs!

WHY DOES HELENA NEED COMMERCIAL GROWTH? Besides the increase in sales-tax revenue, there are a number of other benefits. New businesses would stimulate the local economy by generating local employment, increasing available goods thus promoting competitive pricing and greater selection.

I'm watching my dollars & dimes and am looking for the best deal. Does it really matter where I shop, eat, or buy my gas? It really does! Consider this, every dollar that is spent outside of the city is enriching another municipality and funding their city services, road repairs, and budget increases. Money spent for comparable items such as gas, groceries, and merchandise puts money in our coffers and supports our police, fire, parks, library, and other city services.

There are already plenty of businesses in Helena, why don't their taxes support the city's budget? There are different categories of businesses, but in its simplest form there are Service Industry & Retail. Service Industry (dry cleaners, banks, salons) is typically a NON-REVENUE generating business. They usually do not collect sales tax, unless products such as shampoo, lotions, or polish are sold. Even with those sales, this is a relatively small amount in comparison to their overall income. Retail (restaurants, grocers, gas, stores) establishments produce income. 3% percent of the 8% sales tax a customer pays will go to the City of Helena. Therefore, spending more money here means it stays here.

If Helena needs more sales-tax generating businesses, why not require developers, speculators, and entrepreneurs to build/open certain businesses? This would be wonderful, if it were lawful. While it's always a welcome pleasure to receive new & different proposals, a municipality cannot select types of businesses. Nor, can it prohibit a business simply because other, similar types are already established. The city's concern, first & foremost, will be with Planning & Zoning Regulations. If a person/entity meets those requirements, then proper approval & licensing will follow.

Do all businesses need licenses? Yes. Service industry & Home-based businesses must procure a business license annually in order to operate. Retail establishments need them too, but are also required to collect sales-tax by the state. Builders/Developers must pay business license, permit, and impact fees in order to operate within the city. Call 663-2161 for more information.

Do all builders/developers pay the same amount for their licenses/fees? Yes & No. Yes, they pay the same amount for a business license, but each builder/developer's permit fees will be in accordance with the amount of square footage of the home(s). For example, a contractor who will build two, 1200 sq. ft. homes will not pay as much as a developer who will build 100, 2500 sq. ft. homes. Impact fees, set by the Utilities Dept., will vary based on the property's dependence on city sanitation service.

I PAY MY PROPERTY TAXES; DOESN'T THE CITY OF HELENA GET ALL OF THAT MONEY? That is a common misconception. Property Tax is divided between a number of entities: State (6.5 mills), County (7.5 mills), Schools (30 mills) & Municipalities (varies, see http://www.shelbycountyalabama.com/tax_collector_millage.shtm). Ours is presently set at 5 mills, one of the lowest in Shelby County. Let's say your annual bill is around \$600.00, the City of Helena would receive only **\$61.22**, per year, from that assessment. Here's how it's figured: \$600/.049 (factor) X 5 mills (.005) = \$61.224485. For further information about property tax & millage, please call the Tax Collectors Office at 669-3902.

Why is there a delay in certain infrastructure repairs, like roads and utility work? Many of the roads you travel within the city are owned & operated by state and county agencies and therefore under their control, budget & timetable. The city only "owns", meaning is responsible for, city roads, and those are usually located in subdivisions. All others, even though they may bear a street sign with a name, may belong to another entity. For example, "Helena Road" is actually, officially AL Hwy 261 and subsequently maintained by the Alabama Department of Transportation. Similar with Shelby County roads.

How do I know who "owns" what road? Both state and county roads will have sign markers periodically posted on the right-of-ways. A State Road will be white with the shape of Alabama outlined in black, and its numerical listing within the border. A County Road will have a blue background, with the county name & highway number listed in gold.

I see City of Helena people/vehicles doing work alongside these roads. Why/What is that? Occasionally, city water lines may rupture in these areas, and it will be the city's responsibility to repair those breaks. The city, as a courtesy to residents, maintains the appearance & cleanliness (mowing & trash pick-up) on these right-of-ways, these roads are still the responsibility of state, county, and other agencies.

What other agencies are involved? Companies such as Alagasco, Charter Cable, Bellsouth/AT&T, Alabama Power, etc have lines along these roadways and are responsible for maintaining their respective customers' services.