



Cheyenne, WY MPO:

Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health

Report and Suggested Next Steps

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program

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Introduction

Pursuant to our technical assistance award with the Cheyenne MPO, this Memorandum constitutes Smart Growth America’s final report summarizing the workshop on Planning for Fiscal and Economic Health and suggesting possible next steps the city could take to craft a vision for Cheyenne’s future development.

Representatives from Smart Growth America (SGA) met with municipal leaders and residents on April 21 and 22, 2015 to provide assistance under the Planning for Fiscal and Economic Health tool, supported by a grant from the U.S. EPA’s *Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities* program.

The first day of the workshop featured a presentation open to the public that provided an overview of the fiscal and economic impacts of different development patterns, focusing the fact that some development patterns do a better job of supporting community economic development goals and can be served more efficiently by local government.

The second day of the workshop brought together an invited group of over 70 stakeholders. The group included diverse representatives from the city, county, nonprofit and private sector. Several county commissioners attended. Leadership from the following city departments and agencies also attended:

- Engineering Department
- Parks and Recreation Department
- Planning Services Department
- Public Works Department

Other key stakeholders with leadership in attendance included:

- AARP
- Catholic Charities of Wyoming
- Cheyenne Depot Museum
- Cheyenne Downtown Development Authority
- Cheyenne-Laramie County Corporation for Economic Development (LEADS)
- EPA Region 8
- Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce
- Laramie County School District
- Laramie County Community College
- Laramie County Planning and Development Department
- Local business community
- Local real estate developers
- United Way of Laramie County
- Visit Cheyenne, the Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT)
- Wyoming Institute of Population Health
- Wyoming Interfaith Health Ministries
- Cheyenne Regional Medical Center, Population Health Institute
- Prevention Management Organization of Laramie County

The invited group viewed additional presentations and also participated in facilitated brainstorming sessions to identify challenges and opportunities associated with encouraging the development and redevelopment of key sites in the city.

Through the two-day program, city leadership was able to engage community stakeholders around the ways in which development patterns, design and strategic infrastructure investments can make Cheyenne more competitive and reduce taxpayer burdens. The intent of the workshop was neither for Smart Growth America to create a plan nor bind the community to any particular course of action, but to assist ongoing community efforts to create a more vibrant, successful region, consistent with the goals of their adopted plans.

Need for assistance

Cheyenne applied for assistance from SGA to explore how smart growth strategies could help them achieve synergies in planning for anticipated residential growth and encouraging economic development. They indicated a need for “a unified vision to support, incentivize and implement smart growth policies that conserve resources and promote sustainable growth.”

“The community and the decision makers need to understand the benefits of expanding the tax base inside the incorporated boundaries and economic revitalization that comes with creating an attractive community with a strong sense of place.

- “1. Develop understanding of the economic benefits of smart growth

- Infrastructure costs are less when a community invests in mixed use, compact development, and serving the community with less lineal feet of infrastructure
2. Create housing and transportation choices
 - Shortage of affordable housing
 - Inflated real estate prices
 - Transit Program focused as a social service agency
 3. Strategize solutions to local issues so that it benefits the community while protecting the environment and preserving a sense of place. Challenges are:
 - Urban sprawl through ranchette style development breaks up prairie habitat and helps deplete aquifers
 - Access to services can be challenging for those without transportation
 4. Create local smart growth strategies that make sense for Cheyenne. The general public:
 - Dislikes government regulations
 - Favors driving culture
 - Dislikes density”

Specific strategies to be explored included **the City’s goal of revitalization of downtown and the West Edge**

The built environment and fiscal and economic health

Communities around the nation are always concerned about their fiscal and economic health. By *fiscal* health, we mean a local government’s bottom line: Does the life-cycle cost of new development—upfront infrastructure, ongoing service provision and eventual repair and maintenance—cost more than it brings in tax revenue? By *economic* health, we mean the general economic well-being of the community: How does new growth and development add to or detract from the creation of delivery of services, economic competitiveness, fiscal efficiency and sustainability, jobs, jobs access, retail sales, and wealth?

In approaching these questions in Cheyenne, as in any part of the country today, it is important to bear three trends in mind:

Our nation’s demographics are changing in a way that is profoundly affecting the housing market.

Demographic trends are moving the housing market strongly away from conventional suburban housing.ⁱ The two biggest demographic groups in the nation – retiring Baby Boomers and so-called Millennials (18- 30-year-olds) are both expressing a strong preference for a more walkable, urban/village lifestyle, as we found in Cheyenne. Indeed, a growing percentage of Millennials prefer to live without cars altogether or to live a “car-lite” lifestyle. The vast majority of net new households being formed have no children at home, and most of them are one and two-person households – which are much more likely to prefer a walking lifestyle.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has fallen below population growth, while the demand for public transportation has been rising steadily. These trends are a complete departure from those experienced for decades in

the 20th century.

The formula for economic growth is changing.

Business growth used to be driven by large corporations that operated in a fashion that was both private and linear. In the past, new research breakthroughs occurred in sealed research laboratories controlled by the companies. Manufacturing and other business processes occurred in assembly-line situations. These conditions led to communities that featured large, sealed-off campuses and tended to be linear in their arrangements.

Today, business growth is driven by collaboration among many types of entities – private companies, research institutions, universities, and others – that must interact frequently and work together creatively. This trend requires cities and communities that encourage interaction and collaboration – the opposite of the older model just described. How communities are designed directly impacts their ability to create interactive and collaborative environments.

Most significantly, the “Knowledge Economy” depends heavily on skilled workers. The companies that are driving innovation are pursuing highly educated talent, especially among the ‘Millennial’ generation. Increasingly, companies find it necessary to locate in places that the work force wants to live in; and this means walkable communities.

Similarly, the market for retail is changing. The suburban shopping malls and “power centers” that thrived for decades are struggling as a result of oversupply, and a shift in preferences. With online buying playing a bigger role for consumers (especially for bargain hunters), many are looking for a more “authentic” experience when they shop in person. This is bringing new value to traditional walkable Main Streets.ⁱⁱⁱ

Suburban development patterns are making it more difficult for local governments to balance their budgets.

Suburban development patterns require extensive investments in capital infrastructure and on-going service delivery. Low-density development requires more infrastructure to serve fewer people and requires service providers such as firefighters and school buses to travel farther. More compact development patterns reduce both life-cycle infrastructure costs and operating costs.

A 2013 study by Smart Growth America, *Building Better Budgets: A National Examination of the Fiscal Benefits of Smart Growth Development*^{iv}, concluded that, compared to conventional suburban development, smart growth patterns can save up to one-third in upfront infrastructure cost and 10% annually in ongoing operating expenses. Smart growth development patterns can generate approximately 10 times more revenue on a per-acre basis.

Not all of these trends will be completely relevant in every situation. But it is important to bear all three in mind in considering the fiscal and economic health of any community.

Participant viewpoints

The concepts described above were elaborated upon in the presentation portion of the workshop, which was followed by a general discussion session among all participants.

Participants engaged in a robust dialogue and offered their thoughts on opportunities and obstacles that may impede progress in the region. Discussion occurred first in plenary, followed by small-group brainstorming.

Among the issues raised in the general discussion were:

- How to meet the market demands of Millennials and Baby Boomers, and to compete effectively with Ft. Collins.
- The “Jobs – Housing balance”: Lack of high-paying jobs in downtown areas desired for growth, and an inadequate residential mix, especially a lack of downtown housing.
- Attracting private investment and overcoming obstacles to new investment in downtown Cheyenne, including economic hurdles, procedural impediments, and inadequate infrastructure.
- The need to engage developers, council members, the general public; and to “get everyone on the same page.”

There was extended discussion around the question of Cheyenne residents’ complicated feelings about Ft. Collins, a community with which Cheyenne competes in the greater north Front Range region. Participants noted that, while it is often said, “We don’t want to be Ft. Collins,” many people in the community do like Ft Collins, indeed many choose to live there and commute to Cheyenne for work. According to a study, about 22% of Laramie workers live outside of Laramie County. (See, “Cheyenne LEADS Workforce Study” <http://cheyenneleads.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Cheyenne-LEADS-Workforce-Study-Combined-Report.pdf>)

As a result of the plenary discussion, 5 topics were identified to be the focus for the small-group discussion:

1. How to leverage heritage. (Historic preservation and heritage – interpreting Cheyenne’s heritage in a 21st century context.)
2. Reducing entrepreneurial risk.
3. Bringing residential into downtown.
4. Attracting the “22 %”.
5. Marketing. Image/branding. (How to tell your story.)

These topics were divided among the tables; there were 10 tables, so 2 tables per topic. For their topic, each table was given three tasks:

- Define the Challenge.
- Identify opportunities.
- “What are 3-5 things we could do?”

Across the tables focused on each target area, a number of issues and possible action plans emerged.

Table reports and possible action plans

1. How to Leverage Heritage

Challenges:

- Restoring and preserving the vision of our heritage
- Pulling our heritage to the 21st century
- Identity is confusing
- What does “Live the Legend” mean?
- Tourism message – Frontier Days versus the rest of the year

Opportunities:

- Government
- Open Spaces
- Welcoming to newcomers
- Opportunity is what made America great
- Branding - Leveraging the negatives, controlling message, unified vision
- Frontier Days & other events
- Two interstates
- Heritage tourism
- Educate

Action Items:

- Opportunities to learn about heritage (Events)
- Visualize our heritage with signage, walking/trolley tours, mobile apps, statues
- Identify why millennials choose to live here
- Look for creative ways to redevelop vacant properties
- Ask the 22% that live elsewhere – why?
- Foreign development
- Design standards, two tiered building codes
- Unified image, vision & message
- Unifying calendars (Visit Cheyenne, Chamber) – have one central place so people can find ALL events in Cheyenne, a clearinghouse for information/events
- An events coordinator for the City
- Celebrate heritage

Additional Comments:

- Interesting subject- women’s suffrage (CLIMB Wyoming is a great resource) is part of Wyoming’s heritage

2. How to reduce Entrepreneurial Risk

Challenges:

Simplifying, streamlining and educating:

- Financial (efforts on making investment work downtown)
- Regulatory (Provide regulatory incentives for downtown, consistency)
- Marketing (which organizations take a leadership role, finding the right market and targeting them to come downtown)
- Legislative and constitutional restrictions. For example, the State of Wyoming only allows TIFs in downtown
- Regulations – zoning & planning – how the code is interpreted and inconsistencies

Opportunities:

- Property availability and inventory
- Viable plans have been developed with West Edge and Lincolnway Pedestrian and Urban Design Plan
- Strong organizations to facilitate development in place
- Large Downtown Workforce
- Wyoming Business Council Grants, Mill Levy (DDA), Additional Sales Tax, other grants
- An ombudsman to help entrepreneurs so everyone gets consistent answers
- Improve dialog between planning staff and developers
- Opportunity for the city to add some certainty to the West Edge project (show developers that the city is taking an actual lead on the project)
- Consistency throughout city (City Manager?)
- The city is handcuffed to provide incentives to developers due to state regulatory hurdles

Action Steps:

- Stabilizing, simplifying and educating development process
- Marketing to entrepreneurs
- Parking incentives and management
- Leveraging pPublic investment to help private investment
- Have a liaison committee with city planning to talk about these issues? City Manager vs. Mayor has pros and cons.
- Focus on certainty and less unpredictability for investing downtown. Advanced communication so people can make smart decisions off the bat.
- Creating "Business Incubators"

3. Bring Housing Downtown

Challenges:

- Capital- people are not spending money downtown
- Need infrastructure – like a grocery store – to have new developments
- Security and Safety
- Parking, long term parking
- Need for gym, grocery store
- People do not know what properties are available downtown, realtors are not marketing what is available downtown
- Redevelop commercial into residential is a hard task
- Appearance and safety

Opportunities:

- Plentiful space
- Business community will do developments
- Momentum

Action Items:

- Fixing safety and security
- Different building codes for redevelopment- make it more economically feasible
- Cost of business and redevelopment downtown
- Possibility of offering financial incentives for all the non-resident owners to either sell or redevelop their property
- Work with LEADS to help do something similar to what is being done in the fringe business parks
- Reduce/eliminate monthly rate to park in the garage, dedicated on street spots with parking permit
- Work to bring a small grocery store or co-op downtown
- Work to get properties for rent or sale more widely known
- Entice developers to do residential projects- rehab an older building into residential
- Events to show people what is downtown and possibilities (showcase of downtown lofts on June 13th)
- Messaging downtown living (perhaps **develop ad campaigns that promote downtown living**)
- The DDA will support a police officer being present in the downtown every day, all day

Additional comments:

- Need to change the perception of public transit. Have people become "Car light."
- Downtown lighting- make sure they are always working
- Downtown parking audit- how much parking is available and how is it being used? Need a convenient way to go downtown and spend the day without getting a parking ticket or move your car every 2 hours.
- Downtown safety is all relative- some people find it very safe
- Review case studies of the process to rehab a residential space

4. How to attract the 22% to live here

(4 of 8 people at this table live in Fort Collins and work in Cheyenne)

Challenges:

- Fort Collins is close- many more amenities and opportunities
- Healthy lifestyle
- More affordable housing
- Education facilities within Cheyenne
- Qualified people
- Walkability
- **Lack of vision**
- Engaging younger people
- Cliques- hard to find people in Cheyenne with similar interests
- Negativity/too conservative
- Housing/Rentals (slim pickings)

Opportunities:

- Wonderful Community (good neighbors), know our needs, great school system, healthy economic environment
- Create something to help find careers for spouses
- Engaging people once we have them here
- Electoral patronage
- Lots of untapped opportunities in downtown

Action:

- Start a forum or focus groups and talk to the 22% that commute here, talk to LCCC students (how do we keep them here)
- Baby Boomers vs. Millennial's- if each came to the table and listened to each other, there would be more understanding
- Focus on branding and marketing
- Follow through on existing projects downtown
- Ask the 22% what's missing, conduct an actual survey
- Educate people on the benefits of being progressive and redevelopments
- Do quick pilot projects
- Encourage leadership and regulatory bodies to allow creativity

Additional Comments:

- Same concerns with public-private partnerships and military relations
- Get together a group of millennials that are interested in politics to engage them in local decisions
- What are some things that teens can do? If they have more opportunities here- they will be more likely to stay here.
- More health options

5. *Imaging and Branding***Challenges:**

- Defeating negative things (Wind), using the negatives to leverage a positive message
- Controlling the message
- Having a uniform image, uniting the different organizations
- Uniting County & City on issues that affect regional growth and competitiveness
- Conservative vs. progressive
- What is the image? Progressive western?
- Creating buy-in

Opportunities:

- Focus on quality of life
- Recreational opportunities
- Civic Center
- LCCC (perhaps do more to encourage and advertise wind energy programs)

- Bring all parties to the table (Millennial, GenX, Baby boomers, military, government, business owners)
- Story telling

Action Items:

- **Identify focus groups**
- Research and surveying of focus groups
- Community buy-in: media, digitally- get the message and story out
- Have a good community plan
- Learn from others

Additional Comments:

- Positive wind- brand new air every time you breathe!
- Branding events and areas differently- make it a big deal so people will want to experience and see it.

6. Final Thoughts:

- Make Downtown safe
- Create a “sense of place”
- There are always things you can do
- Cheyenne does have a lot of resources- lots of ideas
- Focus on the positives and build on it
- What is your parking strategy?
- Greater diversity (not all middle aged-white men) in the room
- Carry the message to non-attendees
- Plan Cheyenne is a great plan-many community’s look to us to see what to do. That is a starting point
- It all becomes successful when people work together, collaboratively

Recommendations

Officials indicated in their application for assistance, “Cheyenne could benefit from a fresh approach to aid infill and redevelopment within the urban core.” The workshop discussion recounted above generated a lot of thoughtful ideas. As noted in the workshop, much of what needs to be done can be found in the existing “PlanCheyenne”, which should continue to be a guide for the city going forward.

Cheyenne has many strengths on which to draw in planning for future growth and development. As the state capital, and with a military base, the city’s economy starts with a stable employment foundation. Downtown Cheyenne has “good bones”: a pedestrian-scaled grid of streets, and legacy buildings that provide character and can be useful assets in revitalization. And it already has a pretty vibrant downtown quarter, centered on West Lincolnway. But, clearly downtown has tremendous potential that is only just starting to be realized. Unlocking that potential will require purposeful action. Following are some recommendations that may be part of an action plan.

Create a focus for downtown revitalization efforts.

As described in the workshop presentations, economic development is increasingly about place making. A key to creating a successful downtown is engendering a sense of place associated with a specific area. From a relatively small kernel much more can grow. The challenge is to have enough activity concentrated within a walkable area, to create a “critical mass.” (One rule of thumb is to get a minimum 4-block sequence that is continuously engaging to people walking along the sidewalk.) The overall level of new investment can be positive for many years without fostering any perception of change or excitement, if activity is too dispersed to generate synergy. Thus, in the early stages, it is important to work to help a “hot spot” emerge. A strategy can include a number of steps:

1. Identify an area with promise; focus on a sector of, say 25-75 acres, and work to make it a near-term success.
2. Give it official designation (perhaps on the city’s comprehensive plan).
3. Assign a staff person to be liaison/coordinator/point of contact.
4. Designate, or create, a place management organization (private or quasi-private).
5. Work with all stakeholders to create an action plan with specific objectives (short-term, mid-term, longer-term).
6. Channel resources toward objectives. This includes any funds available for economic development incentives.

In devising plans for implementation, get more information.

Conduct an inventory of vacant or underutilized parcels in the downtown area. This can mean plots that are literally vacant, but it should also include all surface parking, and any sites that are clearly functioning below ‘highest-and-best use’ levels for an urban setting (such as single-story drive-through buildings). An analysis of County Assessor’s data about land values and improvement values is one way to identify financially underperforming uses. Land that is worth more than the improvements upon it is often seen as a redevelopment opportunity.

Many cities of comparable size have substantial stocks of unused and underused real estate. (As noted in the workshop presentation, in the City of Macon, Georgia, vacant parcels identified within the downtown amounted to 207 acres, or more than 9 million ft². This obviously represents a tremendous amount of development potential.) These can be prime targets for synergy-generating development. On the other hand, while vacant they can be a drag on economic momentum (even a source of blight). Knowing what you have is an important first step.

Conduct a parking audit (precursor to a parking strategy). As discussed by workshop participants, downtown business may be hampered by a perception of insufficient parking. In reality, there is often an ample supply of parking, but it may not be available, or drivers may not know about it. Many places are able to improve the attractiveness of their area to shoppers, businesses, and potential residents with coordinated management and better communications. Some find they need to provide municipal parking. But first, you need to get a handle on what the supply of parking in your downtown really is. Again, knowing exactly what you have is essential for good planning.

Commission a fiscal analysis. Consider commissioning a fiscal study to analyze the relative

contribution to revenues of different areas of the city, and the relative cost of providing services, in order to better inform policy and investment decisions. An analysis of this type will often reveal tremendous disparities in “return on investment” of tax dollars. It can show the potential fiscal benefits of greater downtown development.

Closely examine processes and requirements with a view to making it easy for businesses and developers to do what you want done.

Wherever possible, simplify processes for desired outcomes. This means looking at administrative processes, local development codes, and related ordinances. Consider whether process re-engineering for things like permit-approval might expedite actions, without jeopardizing the legitimate goals of regulation.

Start by engaging all those involved in development and investment in a dialogue about the obstacles that they perceive.

Implement Complete Streets policy throughout downtown.

Sidewalks are relatively consistent in downtown Cheyenne, but streetscape could be enhanced, and most importantly, bicycling could be encouraged much more by improvements to the street environment. While increased bicycling brings many benefits, it is particularly important as part of a strategy to attract more residents to downtown, especially among Millennials.

Utilize events to create excitement and draw people.

This can include both leveraging existing activities (e.g., “Frontier Days”, heritage tourism), and new events. Street festivals; outdoor movies; music and other live performances; sporting events and competitions: Coordinated, promoted, and packaged, they help contribute an identity for the community, and help to support larger economic development goals. In partnership with local businesses, they can help to boost sales. Support from the city is almost always necessary, particularly to use streets as event spaces. (Municipal regulations, and sometimes outdated permitting requirements, can often be an obstacle to conducting events in public spaces, especially on downtown streets. Many cities have found it advantageous to implement more flexible and efficient requirements, so as not to intimidate small grassroots groups from organizing such events.) Having a day or weekend when a major street is closed to vehicles, and turned in to a big event space can be a great catalyst; not just bringing people into downtown, but helping them to see it in a different way. A regular schedule of such events throughout the year can make the experience habit-forming, and stimulate new market demand for the long term.

Maintain on-going dialogue among stakeholders.

Cheyenne has made significant effort to engage the community. For long-term success, engagement must be a continuing process. It may be worth considering whether there needs to be a permanent organization dedicated to the tasks of fostering dialogue among stakeholders and performing some kind of place management functions.

A partnership institution could be established (or an existing organization designated, and given enhanced functions) that would bring together business and government, private agencies and non-profits, and citizen representatives. (This could be designated for the downtown generally, or for a defined sub-area.) Place management services includes staging and promoting events

(weekend festivals, lunchtime concerts, evening open-air movies, etc.); sponsoring ongoing activities (like farmers' markets, "first Fridays", etc.); and supporting cleanliness, maintenance and security within the district.

A comprehensive range of organizational types are found in communities around the US, from small downtown revitalization organizations run as non-profits (typically with some kind of joint sponsorship by government and the business community), to business improvement districts (BIDs) that have access to dedicated revenue sources (which may be derived from local taxes, such as a property tax add-on, approved by property owners within the district). Such groups help to bring focus to a downtown or main street district, ensure that its needs receive consistent attention, and help to provide a sense of identity for the target area. This can be a way to ensure that there is someone who has full time responsibility for being concerned about safety and cleanliness, marketing, generating excitement, and placemaking.

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ⁱ See; “The Changing Shape of American Cities,” Luke J. Juday, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, March 2015.

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ⁱⁱ “Suburbs Try to Prevent an Exodus as Young Adults Move to Cities and Stay,” Joseph Berger, New York Times, April 16, 2014 (on-line at, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/17/nyregion/suburbs-try-to-hold-onto-young-adults-as-exodus-to-cities-appears-to-grow.html?_r=0.)

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ⁱⁱⁱ See: “Business Performance in Walkable Shopping Areas,” Gary Hack, Robert Wood Johnson, Technical Report, November 2013 (available at

http://activelivingresearch.org/files/BusinessPerformanceWalkableShoppingAreas_Nov2013.pdf).

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^{iv} The full report can be downloaded at, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/building-better-budgets>.