

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



CHAPTER

Laramie is situated in an attractive setting, boasts small-town values and a special quality of life, and offers great economic development potential. The approach taken to seize its potential and to enhance its attractiveness as a place to live and work will greatly influence its ability to achieve its vision. This economic development element of the plan is written to capitalize on the community's assets and both strengthen and stabilize its tax base. To do so, it must add value to its existing businesses, attract new businesses and industries that complement its assets and workforce, foster an entrepreneurial spirit, and take steps to enhance its living environment.

Introduction

Over the course of the last three decades Laramie has had stable population growth, amounting to approximately 0.5 percent annually. The local economy has grown at a steady, albeit modest rate as well, as reflected by several economic indicators¹ for the City and County. While this reflects positively on the local economic environment and the community's success in its development efforts, there must be continued diligence to both sustain and grow the economy to meet the needs of its residents and businesses.

The purpose of the economic development chapter is to provide the City with a framework for economic growth. Laramie's location along the Interstate 80 corridor and the presence of the university, and technical and community colleges among other strengths, offer significant opportunities. The strategies in this plan will help define Laramie in the minds of businesses and residents throughout the area. Sound economic development policies will enhance the community's ability to capture job growth and business expansion, while maintaining its capacity to provide public services for current and future residents.

The essence of this plan element and the reason for its existence is to provide the necessary policy direction for the community to act in its best long-term interests by making strategic

¹ Economic Indicators for the Laramie Area, 1990-2003 Annual Trends



Laramie is engaging in this economic development planning process as a means to increase its population and employment, strengthen its tax base, and create improved opportunities for its residents and businesses.

decisions as to how it strengthens and grows its economy. The future land use plan, thoroughfare plan, and urban growth policies, together with this economic development plan, establishes the vision of the community, as expressed by its citizens, and the recommended actions for achieving the intended outcomes. Use of these plans is, therefore, essential in the community's ultimate success.

A common understanding of economic development helps clarify intent and purpose. With this in mind, we encourage a definition that acknowledges the importance of collaboration and partnership. Economic development is the use of public resources to stimulate private investment. In other words, effective policy for Laramie should be judged by how well public resources can create a response from private investors. This response can certainly be measured in jobs, but also in capital investment (land and buildings), technology, and spin-off (cluster) benefits.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS OF THE COMMUNITY

An economic development Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis (SWOT) was conducted for Laramie, which was based on a review of economic and demographic characteristics, discussions with area residents and representatives of local organizations, input of the CPAT and LEDC, and the consultant's experience working with communities across the country. Displayed in *Table 9.1, Laramie SWOT* are the primary findings of this analysis.

Laramie is positioned well in relation to many other small communities in that its indicators are all on an upward swing and, thus, generally favorable. For instance, sales and use tax receipts have gained each year since 1990, generally doubling between 1990 and 2003.² The total number of employed persons increased in the City and County, while the unemployment rate remained steady at just under two percent.³ The number of employers⁴ and proprietors⁵ increased, and per capital personal income also increased over the same time period.

As displayed in *Table 9.1, Laramie SWOT*, the community has many assets and offers advantages, each of which is and must remain central to its competitiveness as a place for conducting business. Among the primary advantages are the University of Wyoming and its business incubator, WyoTech, and Laramie County Community College (LCCC), which contribute to the availability of an educated workforce and offer training and higher education for employees, as well as their spouses and children. The K-12 education program, including the Lab School and Snowy Range Academy, is also noted for its quality, which is an attraction to the community. The stable population growth and ongoing development activity is also a strength as it shows confidence and bolsters the area economy. This growth has resulted in the development of new retail businesses and expansion of the hospital, both of which encourages local spending and result in increased

² Wyoming Department of Revenue and Taxation

³ Wyoming Department of Employment

⁴ Wyoming Department of Employment

⁵ U.S. Commerce Department, Bureau of Economic Analysis

Expectations for Quality of Life

In a highly competitive environment, businesses are seeking communities that offer an enhanced quality of life, including:

- ♦ Well paid jobs with benefits offered to employees
- ♦ Educational opportunities for all, including lifelong learning
- ♦ Medical facilities
- ♦ Quality and affordable housing
- ♦ Low pollution / environmental damage
- ♦ Public amenities, including public school systems
- ♦ Low crime
- ♦ Recreation, entertainment, shopping, and intellectual stimuli
- ♦ Low cost of living / low taxation and
- ♦ Aesthetic built and natural environments.

Table 9.1, Laramie SWOT

Strengths	Opportunities
<p>Population/Workforce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stable population growth - Educated population - UW, WyoTech, and LCCC <p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retail growth - Engineering/technology companies - UW Business Incubator - Downtown businesses/restaurants <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Airport - Interstate 80 - Rail - Available/quality water supply - Good Aquifer protection <p>Livability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UW education, events, and activities - Accessibility to public lands - Ridge and rangeland views - Tree area - Quality of healthcare - Quality of K-12 education - Small-town values 	<p>Downtown</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expansion and revitalization - Mixed use, including residential living - University leveraging <p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partners in Progress Initiative - Airport related businesses - Healthcare/medical expansion - Educational Opportunites (Hathaway Scholarship) - Tourism <p>New Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New conference center - Turner Tract/Grandview Heights - Reynolds Crossing - Coughlin Pole Mountain - South Gait property <p>Redevelopment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - North of Downtown - "Tired" neighborhoods <p>Livability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trail expansion - Recreation Center - Resource and view/ridge protection
Weaknesses	Threats
<p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordability - Availability - Rental vs. owner occupancy <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water transmission and distribution - Aging conditions of wastewater mains - Storm drainage <p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low wage levels - Lack of employee benefits - Tax exempt properties - Timeliness of development review/approval - Shortage of trade labor <p>Appearance and Image</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of identity and gateways - Corridor aesthetics 	<p>Housing/Neighborhoods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrity of well established neighborhoods - Declining housing conditions <p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - West Laramie's Standards - Aquifer vulnerability - Requisite funding for reconstruction <p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued rising energy prices - Recruitment/Retention of physicians - Lack of quality office space - Workforce shortage <p>Transportation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of air service - Increased congestion

Trends in Business Attraction

- ◆ Site selection is the process by which businesses seeking to invest a large amount of resources seek out a new location for their facilities.
- ◆ Financial incentives almost always influence the site selection process for medium- and large-sized businesses.
- ◆ Communities are trying to focus their recruitment dollars using cluster analysis to target their marketing and recruitment efforts towards specific kinds of businesses.
- ◆ Workforce development incentives have become an important business attraction tool.
- ◆ Quality of life attracts businesses and workers because a business wants most of its workers to move with it.
- ◆ Successful campaigns involve prominent politicians and business figures, as well as economic development practitioners.
- ◆ Well benefited jobs.

tax revenues. Additionally, Laramie benefits from its location along I-80, the presence of the airport, Turner Tract Area, UW Business Incubator, the amount of land that is serviceable by utilities, and a high quality water supply. Its livability is commonly cited as the reason they have chosen to live and work in the community. In addition to the strengths, there are also several opportunities, including economic expansion of Downtown through location of an anchor or a major investment, or reinvestment decision, arising from the opportunity created by the final outcome of siting the railroad overpass. The presence of UW provides the community with a unique economic development opportunity to position itself for research activities and associated funding, which has the potential of reaping long-term economic benefits for the entire community. This is particularly important because University research is now recognized as a key driver for local economic development due to the potential commercialization of research, spin-off start-ups, and associated wealth creation throughout the community. The developing Turner Tract, potential for development of an airport business park, UW Wyoming Technology Business Center (a business incubator) and the continuing development of Reynolds Crossing and the Laramie River Business Park provide opportunities for business location within attractive settings. The positive planning steps Laramie has taken in developing its river trail and its potential for City-wide expansion, as well as the measures taken to protect the aquifer are also opportunities for enhancing and sustaining community livability.

Like any community, though, there are also weaknesses or obstacles to overcome. As addressed in *Chapter 5, Housing and Neighborhoods*, the median house value has outpaced the increase in median income, meaning that affordability is becoming an increasing concern. There is also aging infrastructure (outlined in *Chapter 7, Urban Growth*) that requires reinvestment and a significant annual commitment of capital funds. A low median household income relative to other communities in the State and a high rate of impoverishment as discussed in *Chapter 2, Conditions and Outlook*, also present challenges. Lastly, there are opportunities to build upon the attractive features of the community to further enhance its visual image and physical identity, making it more appealing to those considering a move or major investment in Laramie. Although UW provides many positives to Laramie's economy, its tax exempt land creates obstacles, such as loss of revenue and expanded infrastructure that must be maintained. Recognizing the City's financial impacts, in 2006 and 2007, UW worked with the City of Laramie to obtain financial support from the State Legislature. Through a complex formula, the State recognized that some communities, including Laramie, cannot generate revenues at the same level as other communities with similar characteristics. As a result, the City of Laramie was appropriated additional funds from the State to off-set the financial impacts.

Threats are also present, meaning those known or unknown occurrences that may negatively impact or influence the economic growth of the community. While many are external to the community, such as the national economy, interest rates, rising energy prices, increasing healthcare costs, etc., many are subject to the community's control through advanced planning and pro-activeness. For instance, the condition of housing will emerge as an increasing issue in the future, as structures and neighborhood infrastructure age. Issues such as these are within the realm of decision-making process of the community that can positively affect change. Successful protection and conservation of the aquifer is also within the parameters of management of the City and County through

effective and responsible land development practices. These and other circumstances must be continually monitored and addressed to guard against their potential impacts.

Small communities across the nation are confronted with circumstances similar to those in Laramie as they seek to address the stability and strengthening of their tax base. The difference between communities who are able to sustain themselves and those who will face decline lies in their ability to adapt to a rapidly changing national and international economy. Each community has its own uniqueness and set of attributes that offer competitive advantages over other communities and regions. The key to success, then, is uncovering and strongly promoting these attributes and capitalizing on them in a way that benefits the local economy and, at the same time, adds to community character. To strengthen and secure the City's competitiveness, the City must regularly evaluate itself by assessing a range of business factors against previous years, as well as other peer cities. Such an approach will shed light on those for which the City offers an advantage, but, more importantly, those that add costs or may present concerns to businesses considering a local investment decision. A willingness to alter the course, adapt new ideas and strategies, and commit to invest the necessary resources is a prerequisite for success.

This chapter expands upon the community's opportunities to retain and support existing businesses, attract and grow desirable new businesses, and adequately train and educate youth and the community workforce - all while sustaining, protecting, and enhancing the characteristics valued most by those who live in Laramie. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance to the community as to how it can be proactive in its economic development and achieve its vision without compromising character or quality of life.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Easing the Site and Community Selection Process

There are widely varying criteria that are used by businesses to select a site, which are unique to different businesses and between businesses depending on their needs. Some require location near an interstate highway or a major metropolitan area, while others rely on the existence of other industries or the expertise of a local technical college or university. The criteria differ, yet they all generally relate to the expectations that one location will offer an advantage over another relating to business factors, such as development and operational costs, business efficiency, and community acceptance.

Costs include initial start-up costs, as well as the operating costs over the life of the business. Start-up costs include all those things that contribute to the up-front costs of doing business, such as the price of land, length of development reviews/approvals and permitting, amount of time to have a building open for business, local construction costs, and the investment in employee hiring and training. In addition there may be regulatory provisions that have the unintended effect of increasing land and development costs, such as overly restrictive building footprint requirements without due consideration of floor area ratio provisions or other measures that more effectively manage building bulk and scale. These direct and indirect costs can vary greatly between communities. The longer

term operating costs that are of the most importance are those associated with carrying on the business operations, such as wage rates, state and local taxes, impact fees or assessments, and the costs related to complying with local and other regulations.

The efficiency of operations relates to the amount of time it takes to bring the facility to full operating capacity. As other costs have risen, time has become one of the more important factors in the site selection process. Therefore, delay caused by lengthy development approvals and permitting has a fiscal consequence on companies in terms of lost sales, loss of an otherwise competitive edge for reason of timing, and loan interest.

Each step in the process, from zoning and site plan approval to building design, permitting, and inspections, affects the way a project can affect the community. More and more communities are beginning to streamline their development approval process to combat the timing problems of businesses and, particularly, to gain a competitive edge over those who have a delayed and more difficult development process. In other words, they are structuring their ordinances to encourage compliant applications by expediting the review and approval process for those that meet the objectives and standards of the ordinance. These changes many times come in the form of a Unified Development Code (UDC). Generally, a UDC merges all development functions thereby simplifying the procedures and use of the code. It also helps to avoid duplicative and conflicting provisions within the code that are confusing and often cause delays. Among other benefits, a UDC allows simplification and streamlining of the development review and approval processes by coordinating the review and permitting functions. Streamlining may be accomplished by consolidating districts and establishing strict performance standards, which both improve development outcomes and limit the number of zoning amendments and, thus, application submittals, review time, and public hearings. Portions of the existing ordinance requiring substantial review and negotiated approvals, such as conditional uses⁶ and planned unit developments,⁷ may be permitted as of right, subject to applicable conditions and standards.

These and many other ordinance modifications greatly aid economic development by expediting approval of compliant applications and shortening development time. The experience has been that even though the standards are increased, businesses are willing to comply in exchange for increased certainty in the zoning process and reduced time for receiving approvals and permits. In the end, there is a gain and benefit to the community and its businesses. Recently, the City has focused attention on the development process to find ways to improve its efficiency. It is also approaching the process of updating and amending its zoning ordinance to begin implementing this plan. Therefore, proactive steps are being taken although they will take time to integrate and implement.

It is now commonplace for prospective businesses to request meetings with local employers to gain insight as to the business climate in the community and their relationship with the City, utility providers, and other regulatory agencies. From a business perspective, they are interested in knowing the impact of the City practices on

Telecommunications is fundamental to service industries, as well as to rural economic diversification strategies. Telecommunications can provide communities with an opportunity to compete in the fast-growing service sector. It represents a tool with which rural businesses and citizens can directly participate in national and global economies. As an electronic highway, telecommunications allows urban-based industries and customers to access rural products, services, and markets more easily. Without a modern telecommunications infrastructure, however, rural communities may be left behind and denied the economic and quality-of-life opportunities new technologies have created.

Source: The Role of Telecommunications in Rural Economic Development, AeRie Applied Rural Telecommunications, Colorado Rural Telecommunications Project (CRTP).

⁶ Chapter 17.09, Conditional Uses, City of Laramie Municipal Code

⁷ Chapter 17.38, Planned Unit Developments, City of Laramie Municipal Code

their operating costs. Instances where tax increases are often without proportionate services or where there are burdensome regulations are telling of the local business environment. Therefore, prospective businesses are interested in the history of the community regarding the addition of operational costs to the business community. They also consider the extent to which the cost of basic services gets shifted from the residential community to the business community.

This highlights the role of the economic development corporation in a cooperative effort with the City and a full-time professional who can facilitate this process, acting in the interest of both the prospect and the community. Organization of local business owners and groups, into a representative group, can promote and “sell” the City to potential new business, based on good sound information collected from all the parties involved. Other programs, such as an active business retention program also demonstrates the community’s interest and ongoing support of its employers. The acceptance of the community and its excitement for the company is also a factor in the site and community selection process. Companies make location decisions based upon the communities that want them and work to solve any barriers to making the location decision.

Infrastructure Condition and Capacity

Laramie, like many smaller communities, is increasingly challenged by limited fiscal resources. While it benefits from its location along I-80, the presence of UW, WyoTech, and LCCC, and its picturesque setting nestled adjacent to the Laramie Mountains, the local economy is sustaining itself and growing modestly, but not at the preferred level of healthiness. Laramie recognizes the importance of their infrastructure to the success of their economic development program. It is, therefore, essential for the community to make efficient use of its infrastructure, which is affected by its pattern of growth and coordination of infrastructure. It is, thus recommended that the City remains mindful of its fiscal responsibility for managing growth, particularly as it relates to the provision of adequate facilities and services.

Laramie has and continues to invest millions of dollars in their public infrastructure in recognition of the improvement to the local business climate. While it annually replaces water distribution lines the revenue flow does not cover the costs, leaving a funding deficit. Therefore, line replacement is occurring although at a slower than preferred pace. There are also revenue shortages to cover the costs for sewer line expansion and maintenance. Maintenance of the storm sewer system is also not meeting the preferred schedule, which may compromise drainage capacity and result in increased costs over the long term. Funding is also needed for street repair and reconstruction. Consequently, the aging and deteriorating condition of the infrastructure system may limit the City’s access to economic opportunities without proactive measures and near-term action.

Capital programs that are planned to construct new streets, provide sufficient water capacity, treat wastewater, and expand telecommunication services all contribute benefits for business creation and retention. Upgrading public facilities and municipal infrastructure also have the added benefit of improving the character and image of the immediate area and community as a whole. Therefore, investments made in public

Trends in Workforce Development

- ◆ Developing advanced skills training meets needs for skilled workers in regions with high-tech industries.
- ◆ Public initiatives try to help small businesses gain access to previously unaffordable training.
- ◆ Business partnerships pool and leverage a range of financial, physical, human, and intellectual resources and provide a collective voice for workforce development funding.
- ◆ Businesses’ employee retention efforts focus on accommodating differing needs and lifestyles of workers.
- ◆ Cities are establishing programs to retain local university graduates who possess needed skills for high-tech firms or to attract graduates to move back home.
- ◆ Integrating the curricula of community colleges

improvement projects, while not seemingly of direct impact to the infrastructure system, have an indirect influence on the character and assertiveness of the community. Capital improvements are not the only option municipalities have. Many different and creative strategies should be used to maximize the benefit of any funding received for these improvements. Consideration of tax increment financing (TIF), to fund infrastructure improvements for new nonresidential developments, pay-as-you-go or perhaps use of sales tax as possible means of funding should all be evaluated. Such actions and projects serve to benefit economic development through their contributions to the community and its observed or perceived livability.

Businesses are now operating in highly competitive markets, thereby demanding the need for faster, more reliable, and cheaper means of communication. Now more than ever, companies are reliant upon technology for their everyday operations and communications with suppliers, distributors, associated companies, and clients. For this reason, it is essential to the efficient operations of local businesses and the competitiveness of the community to offer advanced telecommunications infrastructure. Doing so requires telecommunications companies to have the ability to handle the growth in demand, especially as the Internet becomes an ever important tool in the world of business. Companies of varying levels of technology are all seeking reliable communication service. To aid in the provision of this highly valuable service, Laramie must be creative in their financing of technology infrastructure.

The difficulty in the investment of infrastructure in the local economic development program is that its direct benefits are difficult to measure. Without question, though, infrastructure creates jobs and stimulates new business development. However, its impact may not be recognized or attributed to such investment for several years. Moreover, infrastructure installation may have negative impacts on the community initially, such as the inconveniences of construction, before any benefits are realized.

Training and Workforce Development

Companies that are looking to locate in an area are interested in the labor force that is available for them to employ. Depending on the nature of the business, whether it is salary or non-salaried workers, they evaluate such measures as the percent of unemployment, the ratio of those employed who are available to be in the workforce, the educational attainment of persons, and the existence of training facilities and educational institutions in the area. Generally, they are interested in the skill sets of individuals that may give one community a competitive advantage over another. From this perspective, Laramie is very well positioned relevant to other communities of similar size or even larger.

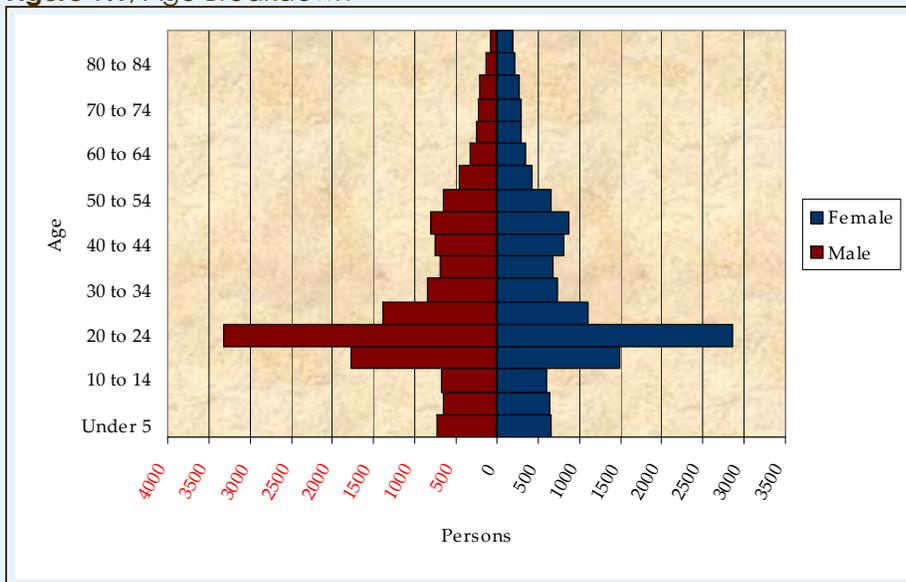
The presence of UW, WyoTech, and LCCC places the community in a very competitive position. The importance of the local school system cannot be understated. For the City's workforce program to be highly competitive and successful, employers want assurance of their access to trainable workers. At the same time, company executives and rank-and-file workers alike, place emphasis on their own access to training and higher education, as well as the quality of education for their children. Both home buyers and the development community recognize their investments are affected by the quality of schools and the availability of higher learning. As a result, it is imperative that Laramie remains supportive

of the local school district, University, WyoTech, and LCCC and establishes excellence in education and workforce training as long-term goals. Communicating the community's economic development goals with the education and training institutions will enable business to be responsive to the changing needs of the existing and targeted businesses and future employers in the community. In other words, the coordination of institutional programs with the target industries can provide a key competitive advantage for the community.

In addition to educated workers from the schools, the unemployment rate has been held at or below two percent each of the last 10 years, meaning that over 98 percent of the labor force in the community is employed.⁸ Also, Laramie has higher rates at most educational attainment thresholds in comparison to several other communities in the State. Therefore, there is a larger pool of trained and talented persons available to the workforce. Albeit much of the workforce is only available as part-time employees and their employment is relatively short term while they are attending school, there remains an opportunity to capitalize on this human resource.

It is incumbent upon the leadership of Laramie who is actively promoting its economic development to become highly familiar with the programs that are offered through each of the institutions ranging from basic skills such as literacy, to technical training like carpentry or electronics, and to higher education degree programs. This is highly valuable information that is of great interest and may enhance the competitiveness of the community for attracting prospective businesses. These learning and education facilities are attractive to businesses since they offer specialized training opportunities to their employees, but also because they offer higher learning institutions for the spouses and children of their employees. Opportunities for higher education contribute to area quality of life. Additionally, if the types of local businesses are well matched with the education and skills of graduating students there is an increased opportunity for their retention in the community. Laramie is fortunate to have a major university, technical

Figure 9.1, Age Breakdown



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Sex by Age, STF 1

⁸ Labor Force Averages for Wyoming, Albany County, and Laramie, 1995-2003, Economic Indicators for the Laramie Area, 1990-2003 Annual Trends.

training school, and community college, which offer higher learning opportunities for community residents and training for local employers.

The Laramie Employment Resources Center is also a benefit for providing employment assistance to residents and assisting employers in their staffing needs. These facilities greatly improve the competitiveness for attracting technology-based businesses. As shown by *Figure 9.1, Age Breakdown*, an issue for the future of the community is the retention of its youth. Currently, there is an influx of college-age students attending each of the three institutions, some of which are local students who grew up in Laramie and attended UW, WyoTech, or LCCC. However, there is a significant decline in the age cohorts beyond graduation age, meaning that many graduates leave Laramie following graduation to seek higher paying jobs, more employment opportunities, and more cultural amenities within a larger metropolitan area. Creating strategies and opportunities for these students to remain in Laramie to attend higher schooling and stay upon graduation is essential to sustaining the economy.

Image and Community Character

With improved technology and advanced means of communication, companies now place an even higher priority on quality of life in choosing their business setting. Therefore, while the availability of sites and buildings, adequate infrastructure, skilled labor force, and incentives remain vitally important to the location and investment decision, factors such as housing availability and affordability, quality of schools, proximity to higher learning institutions, recreational opportunities, access to medical services, and community appeal have become increasingly important. As Laramie continues to grow, there must be plans, policies, and ordinances in place to effectively manage its appropriate placement and quality.

The appearance of Laramie is formed by many factors. First and foremost is the quality of its natural areas and views, which are highly regarded by both residents and visitors. Also important, though, is the design of public spaces, government buildings and grounds, and infrastructure, while also having a proactive stance to ensure the land use standards deliver quality development outcomes. Without focusing attention on the quality and sustainability of physical development, character is left to chance, leaving little opportunity for the community to control the destiny of its appearance.

The emerging pattern of development is along the frontage of each major corridor, as has and is presently occurring along 3rd Street, Grand Avenue, and increasingly along other arterial streets. This pattern of strip development lends itself to the concerns expressed by residents, including a proliferation of signage; multiple driveways; limited green space and landscaping along the streetscape; buildings situated to the back of sites with a view from the street across large expanses of concrete and parked vehicles; wide street sections needed to accommodate higher traffic volumes, multiple turning movements and vehicular acceleration and deceleration; and, generally, an unappealing corridor environment. Instead, the public would like to see shopping districts with enhanced standards that achieve a development character that reflects positively on the community and its identity. New development standards that address these amenities issues must be

available to developers.

The character and appearance of Laramie are of top priority according to a broad cross-section of the community that participated in the public comment process. Residents recognize the importance of quality of life in the success of their economic development and, therefore, both desire and expect quality new development and redevelopment. There is a strong desire to protect and preserve areas of distinction, such as Downtown, the tree area, the ridge north of Indian Paintbrush Elementary School, aquifer protection area and along the Laramie River. In addition, residents voiced their desire to improve the entrances to the community with distinctive gateways, enhance the roadway environs with streetscape improvements, increase the amount of green space adjacent to the rights-of-way and throughout the community, add more landscaping and screening of parking and storage areas, control the size and location of signage, incorporate more public displays of art and community history, better manage the appearance of structures and vacant properties, and diligently enforce the City's codes.

Community design and appearance are essential components to providing a positive visual perception of Laramie, making it more attractive to prospective residents and endearing it to current ones. In other words, community design should no longer be considered only as amenities. Instead, it should be considered a critical factor in selling the community to skilled and talented workers that will make local employers more competitive. Unfortunately, community design and aesthetic features are often the first to be compromised during periods of constrained budgets. Budgets must be in place to enforce and review projects where design guidelines must be followed. Also, community and design features should not be compromised due to opposition, based on cost factors. They must, nonetheless, be maintained if the City is to cast a positive first impression on visitors and potential residents and investors.

Achieving Quality, Affordable Housing

Without a sufficient supply of housing, including within different neighborhood environments, varying styles and sizes, and at variable price ranges, the ultimate success of the community's economic development program may falter for reason of an inadequate or poor supply of housing choices. When business owners are looking to relocate or establish a new branch, there are multiple variables that factor into the decision, one of which is the availability, adequacy, affordability, and quality of housing. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to Laramie and its economic development program to devote resources toward implementation of this plan, as well as the Housing Study and Action Plan.

Available and affordable housing are also key factors in the attractiveness of a community as well as the quality of life of existing residents. The presence of an adequate, available housing stock is imperative to meet the needs of low-, moderate-, middle-, and upper-income households. Market conditions will determine the quantity and price of new residential units, as well as resale and rental housing. It is sometimes necessary for public agencies and nonprofit organizations, though, to take steps to encourage housing



Housing – urban and rural, large and small, attached and detached – is important as to acceptable price and preferences of consumers.

construction or rehabilitation or to assist lower-income buyers or tenants to find adequate, affordable shelter in the community.

As outlined in detail in *Chapter 5, Housing and Neighborhoods*, as well as within the Laramie Housing Study and Action Plan, there are existing and increasingly emerging concerns with respect to the condition and affordability of housing, particularly for the very low- and low-income population. In addition, the availability of housing is also an issue as the vacancy rates have declined steadily since 2001, from 6.25 percent to 2.84 percent in 2005.⁹ A vacancy rate of five percent is considered the minimum desired

rate to ensure an adequate supply of housing at various price points to satisfy demands and allow sufficient mobility within the market. Since the vacancy rate is well below the five percent threshold, there is a shortage of available housing, particularly from an economic development perspective.

Beyond livability and economic development concerns, local government also has an interest in the sustainability of new residential construction and the condition of the existing housing stock since market and assessed values directly impact the tax base and resulting revenue potential. Areas that are in need of revitalization and redevelopment, such as those to the north and south of Downtown and within West Laramie, should be the target of public and private funding and assistance efforts to preserve the integrity of these existing neighborhoods and prevent future decay and deterioration.

There continues to be construction of new homes in the community, amounting to 538 residential building permits since 2000. However, much of this is due to the increased demand caused by fewer persons per household, a smaller population living in University dorms, and a larger percentage of non-family households. Therefore, the homes that are being built are largely accommodating the current population and, thus, meeting only a small portion of the total demand. At the same time, newly constructed homes are not affordable for the average citizen.

For the community’s economic development objectives to be met there are a wide range of variables to be considered and adequately addressed. For instance, while the Partners in

⁹ Wyoming Community Development Authority

Partners in Progress, a public-private economic development partnership for Laramie, Albany County, and the surrounding areas has forged a five-year strategic plan focusing on job creation through industry analysis, marketing, and an entrepreneurial environment, plus community enhancement, with plans for community development, beautification, and communication and reporting.

Progress initiative has shown strong results since its inception in 2005, if the housing situation is not remedied, it has the potential to retard business growth for a lack of housing for new employees and residents. Therefore, housing is of utmost importance in the overall economic development program, similar to the timely and adequate provision of infrastructure, incentives, and quality of life.

ECONOMIC GOALS AND ACTION STATEMENTS

In this section the goals and action statements for each element of the plan are set forth. The goals and action statements are to be used as a starting point to achieve the overall vision of this plan.

Economic Competitiveness Goals and Action Statements

1. Assemble and consolidate all development-related codes into a unified development Code (UDC). A UDC is a code that consolidates all development related ordinances, i.e. zoning, subdivision regulations, landscaping, sign controls, etc. into a single bound document.
2. Conduct a comprehensive management and organizational study, customer service training, process and systems analysis, work flow analysis, and management training for the City's development review function. The study's is to comprehensively review and critique each individual function, as well as the system as a whole, identify needed policy changes, procedural modifications, organizational adjustments, and technical revisions in an effort to maximize efficiency.
3. Consider establishment of a one-stop-shop development review, processing, permitting, and inspections center, whereby all functions associated with development are highly coordinated and handled by a single project development coordinator from the initial inquiry through to final inspection and issuance of a certificate of occupancy.
4. Develop a marketing plan, survey and information database for the City. A plan such as this would be used to help promote development and aid potential business in there decision to locate here and would include:
 - a. Full and regularly updated base line data on the City, such as business costs, land costs, building values, construction costs, transportation costs, labor rates, taxes, permit and fees, development times,
 - b. Identify criteria and issues that business use when making a decision to locate in a community (alternative site evaluation).
 - c. Regional market reports with minimum market criteria, e.g. market area population, income, and educational limits, as well as anecdotal support to identify key intangible considerations, for potential business comparing our city to others in the region.
 - d. Prioritize improvement project or other capital investments identified that will aid in promoting the City.

The Primary Target Industries report of Albany and Carbon Counties (Zone 9), dated April 2005, was the product of a contract between the Wadley-Donovan Group and the Wyoming Business Council. The Primary Target Industry selection was based on the findings of the Locational Assessment Reports, which examined such topics as labor, real estate, infrastructure, training, and quality of life issues. The primary targets include:

- ♦ Sensor-Based Companies
- ♦ Educational Software and Archival Services
- ♦ Back Office Accounting and/or Payroll Operations

Source: Primary Target Industries: Wyoming Zone 9 – Albany and Carbon (eastern) Counties, Wyoming Business Council, April 2005

5. Promote and support the efforts of property owners and the City of Laramie, who own property within the Turner Tract area due to the residual economic activity this area will generate.
6. Organize a group of local business owners to act as a coordinating committee with officials of the City, Laramie Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), and Chamber of Commerce.
7. Promote and support the efforts of the University of Wyoming and their plans with the business incubator. The business incubator can serve as primer for good economic development for the City of Laramie once these “incubated” business look for permanent facilities.
8. Work to attract an anchor to Downtown and seize the opportunities for redevelopment in the northern and southern fringe area.
9. Promote and support business and new development with strong environmental ethics to re-locate or develop in Laramie.
10. Target tourism in the strategy for expanding the local economy. Tourism should be used to not only promote the community but to help promote economic development.

Infrastructure Management and Readiness Goals and Action Statements

1. Utilize the policies and recommendations of *Chapter 7, Urban Growth*, to refine the limits of future urban development.
2. Seek ways to narrow the funding gap for infrastructure improvements, through different funding sources identified potentially by a municipal financing specialist.
3. Identify specific deficiencies in certain locations through small area utility service studies that would improve capacity and make land available for development. Work closely with the Laramie Economic Development Corporation (LEDC) to prioritize the areas and the timing and staging of improvements, where the highest possible cost benefit will be realized.
4. Adopt criteria and a policy for financially constrained maintenance whereby cost efficiency is maximized for the minimal maintenance required to sustain the useful life of the infrastructure systems. A structural integrity process may be used to guide maintenance resources into financially viable repair and replacement strategies.
5. Amend *Laramie Municipal Code 17.80, Wireless Telecommunication Towers*, to allow expedited approval subject to increased performance standards relating to allowable heights in specified locations, appearance and buffering of equipment buildings and cabinets, and electrical and mechanical equipment, landscaping, fencing materials, signage, illumination, noise of equipment, and the location and appearance of accessory support facilities.
6. Consider the use of incentives for developments to encourage new technology like wireless or fiber optic communication networks, including density bonuses, property tax abatements, grants, low interest loans, preferential fee structuring, rebate or payback programs, cost sharing for on-site or off-site improvements, priority status for development review, and flexible facility standards.

The Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP) is a competitive grant program to help public broadcasting, state and local governments, Indian Tribes, and nonprofit organizations construct facilities to bring educational and cultural programs to the American Public using broadcasting and non-broadcasting telecommunications technologies.

7. Seek out Federal funds, such as grants through the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP), that are designed to assist with public and nonprofit communication technology services or Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.
8. Promote interconnection and common carrier collaboration among technology service providers and the City. Joint ventures should also be encouraged to maximize the value of communications technology information to resident and business consumers. The City should also support coordination of a shared common grid of communications technology systems for education, health care, public agencies, social services, justice, and economic development.

Training and Workforce Development Goals and Action Statements

1. Fully embrace and support the enrollment growth of UW, WyoTech, and LCCC through the Statewide, legislative level, and at the local level. The City and educational establishments should work together to secure legislative assistance when possible, all avenues should be explored that promote the University and the City in a cooperative manner.
2. Create a career education program through the school districts and other educational institutions where information about local career opportunities, speakers from local business and industry, career matching, and curriculum planning will occur.
3. Establish a career apprenticeship program whereby students can train on the job for a local career, while receiving work credit at school. A partners-in-education program may also be considered to facilitate tutoring of students by community leaders, members of the business community, and retirees.
4. Seek to leverage the graduate and research programs and faculty of the University to expand upon current, and identify additional opportunities for long-term economic diversity and vitality.
5. Coordinate with the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) to administer local education and training programs, such as basic education, apprenticeship utilization, career aptitude and exploration, employment, and training for self-sufficiency.
6. Continue cooperation efforts with existing or new businesses to access Department of Workforce Services Business Training Grants, New Hire Economic Development Grants, Wyoming Business Council, including Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Job Training Grants and the Business Ready Communities Grant & Loan Program.¹⁰ Also, assist in providing access to the Wyoming Business Council's workforce training programs, including Quick Start and Development Dimensions International (DDI).¹¹
7. Periodically conduct a comprehensive survey among local employers and the target industries to identify their labor needs and minimum skill requirements. Utilize the findings of the survey to coordinate with the local educational and training institutions

The Department of Workforce Services (DWS) is focused on delivering comprehensive and effective services that build a workforce to meet the changing demands of Wyoming's diverse businesses, citizens, and economy. The Agency's mission is "linking human and economic development for Wyoming's future." DWS is comprised of four divisions, including the Business Training & Outreach (BTO) Division, Employment Services (ES) Division, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Division, and the Office of the Director.

Source:
<http://www.wyomingworkforce.org/>

¹⁰ Wyoming Business Council, <http://www.wyomingbusiness.org/community/workforce.aspx>.

¹¹ Wyoming Business Council, <http://www.wyomingbusiness.org/business/workforce.aspx>.



The roadway environs are within the purview of the public sector as to their design, appearance, and maintenance.

to refine existing or craft new programs directed at addressing the identified skill needs.

8. Continue to offer scholarships funded by the Laramie business community, in addition to the Hathaway Scholarship Program, to reward outstanding and deserving students with college financial assistance.
9. Establish a forgivable loan program for students meeting specified criteria who remain in Laramie and agree to work in the community in their respective field for a certain period of time after graduation.

10. Develop a “Return Home to Laramie” promotion for the children of parents who reside in the community. Such program may highlight local employers and career opportunities, competitive wage rates, cost of living index, and other factors that may lead to a decision to return to Laramie.

11. Continue the Leadership Laramie program to identify, train, and motivate prospective and current community leaders, with the intent to promote local economic development objectives.

Image and Community Character Goals and Actions Statements

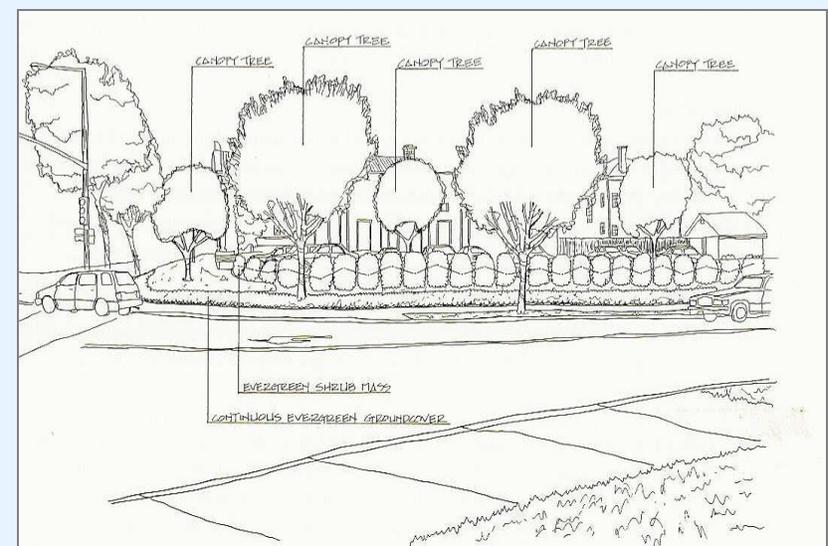


The unique lighting standard used in Downtown could be extended elsewhere in the community, with variations as to the height and necessary light output. This helps to form an identity and a unifying theme throughout the community.

1. Coordinate with WYDOT to prepare special area corridor revitalization studies and plans for U.S. 287/3rd Street, Highway 130 & 230 and U.S. 30/Grand Avenue. The studies should include and consider:
 - a) Redevelopment and enhancement projects at the entrances to the community, including public infrastructure improvements and strict enforcement of code violations. The areas should be prioritized according to traffic counts at each location.
 - b) Inventory and assessment of existing conditions, including land use and zoning, building footprints, numbers and locations of driveways and parking lots, numbers and locations of signs, trees and vegetation, power poles and overhead lines, street cross-sections and rights-of-way, sidewalks and pedestrian improvements, pervious and impervious surfaces, and general visual

characteristics.

- c) Inclusion of a raised medians, which breaks up the wide expanse of pavement by creating space for grass, groundcover, shrubbery, trees, xeriscape and other amenities.



Sufficiently screened parking areas form an edge between the public and private realms and create an attractive streetscape environment.

- d) Street trees within the median and the outer streetscape buffer areas abutting the roadway, allowing a canopy to be formed over the roadway (similar to the Tree Area), which significantly alters the driver’s perspective of the roadway environs. This area creates separation between the public and private realms and provides space for more “green” adjacent to the roadway.

- e) Limit the number, width, and location of new driveways, consolidating existing driveways, and defining the edges with curb cuts and patterned crossings helps to create a more appealing pedestrian environment.
- f) The use of neighborhood standards, such as decorative street lamps, help form a unique community identity.
- g) Require underground utilities similar to requirements now. Also examine methods of relocating already existing above ground utilities underground or out of sight.
- h) Traffic control devices and signage also contribute to the appearance of the road environs. The condition of road sign poles and faces, as well as their placement and proximity to other public and private signs, has a significant visual impact. Consolidating signs onto single poles where applicable or relocating signs are options for enhancing the appearance of corridors.
- i) Timelines and cost figures for the implementation of the goals and action statements.

2. Prepare an urban design plan that identifies the design characteristics of individual areas, such as the Downtown, Turner Tract, Tree Area, etc., with defined limits of individual framework areas. Framework areas should identify the improvements and enhancements that will exploit and perpetuate its unique features to form a special sense of place. Standards may also be established within developing areas, as well as future development areas, such as along the extended 30th Street corridor.
3. See recommendations found in *Chapter 3, Community Character*.

4. Update subdivision code to incorporate and address issues of newly designed buildings and sites such as building design, floor area ratio, building materials, footprint, elevation, architecture and placement. Landscaping (xeriscape), parking, lighting, streetscape design, impervious material and signage should also be addressed by the update.
5. Improve outdoor lighting standards as not to contribute to the nighttime appearance of development. Without regulations to ensure an appropriate light intensity, light pollution will diminish the quality viewing of the nighttime sky, light spillover will impact adjacent properties, and light glare may create harmful conditions along the adjacent street.
6. Organize a public education campaign regarding property maintenance and environmental codes and establish an annual amnesty program for code violators. Volunteer to assist property owners in identifying violations and conforming solutions.
7. Amend the design standards of the rights-of-way for arterial and collector roadways to acquire sufficient additional lands to include increased green space and buffer zones from adjacent land uses. Refer to *Chapter 8, Transportation*, for more information.
8. Adopt tree protection and preservation standards, including the establishment of tree protection zones during construction, and standards relating to grade changes, dumping, and unauthorized pruning.

Quality, Affordable Housing Goals and Action Statements

1. Establish and maintain relationships with area builders and financial institutions to determine interest in assisting in development of affordable housing through programs that allow builders to share responsibility for creation of affordable housing and financial institutions to establish a revolving loan fund for pre-construction loans to area builders in development of affordable housing.
2. Consider development of a HOME Investment Partnership Consortium with areas surrounding Laramie, including Albany County.
3. Review the possibility of application for a Homeownership Zone from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to reclaim vacant and blighted properties, increase homeownership, and promote economic revitalization.
4. Seek funding sources for housing from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that serve specific households that historically require affordable housing, such as the elderly and persons with disabilities.
5. Coordinate with local financial institutions to establish a down payment and closing cost assistance program for those households in need.
6. Utilize Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to leverage other funds and to implement projects and programs, such as infrastructure repair, park development, or removal of unsafe structures, aiming to improve neighborhood conditions in areas of low- to moderate-income and in efforts to eliminate “slum and blight.”

7. Revise local health and building codes, as needed, to streamline the process to address unsafe or dilapidated structures and other potential health and safety risks, such as weeds, tires, and heavy trash.

