

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CIRRUS SKY TECH PARK

Updated 1-3-13

**Laramie is home** to a sizeable and growing technology cluster of more than 60 companies. These tech firms project conservatively they will add more than 100 new jobs over the next five to eight years. This economic activity isn't limited to Laramie - a strong regional synergy has developed in the last four to five years between our burgeoning technology cluster, the University of Wyoming, and the NCAR super-computing center and Microsoft data center located near Cheyenne. This unique palette of amenities has culminated in southeastern Wyoming becoming a desirable environment for data centers, information technology businesses and research and development firms.

**The Cirrus Sky Technology Park (CSTP)** is the first phase of a major economic development effort undertaken by the City of Laramie, Laramie Economic Development Corporation, and UW.

**CSTP will capitalize on assets** unique to Laramie as a university community, including the Wyoming Technology Business Center and university-developed, patented technologies which are being placed through licensing into technology-related businesses. CSTP will become home to the growing number of businesses with technology and data-management at their core, who want to be where the action is - in Laramie and southeastern Wyoming!

**This document** was developed to address frequently asked questions, and specific questions, raised at public meetings and submitted in writing to both the City of Laramie and LEDC. Specific questions are quoted in italics.

**To submit a question** not contained in this document, please email the Project Team at [CirrusSky@cityoflaramie.org](mailto:CirrusSky@cityoflaramie.org).

## 1. HOW CAN I BE INVOLVED IN PLANNING FOR THIS PROJECT?

A grant application was submitted on September 1<sup>st</sup> to help pay for infrastructure, and the development and planning review process for the project commenced simultaneously. The City routinely submits grant applications months (or years) in advance of the start of construction.

To recap what has already occurred, there have been a number of public discussions of the development of this area over the past two years following Verizon's announcement of their intent to locate a data center just north of the proposed CSTP site. City Council's Adopted Goals for the past two years have identified the use of this particular area for economic development as a high priority.

Both the City and County held public hearings last year during consideration and approval of mirror Comprehensive Plan amendments. Public discussions on CSTP were advertised and took place at Planning Commission and City Council meetings on May 1<sup>st</sup>, June 25<sup>th</sup>, June 26<sup>th</sup>, August 7<sup>th</sup>, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, September 10<sup>th</sup>, September 27<sup>th</sup>, Oct 2<sup>nd</sup>, October 8<sup>th</sup>, November 20<sup>th</sup>, and January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. LEDC and the City hosted additional community meetings in response to concerns raised by neighbors in August and September. Personal invitations were mailed to households in the north Laramie area and more than 100 residents attended the meeting.

CSTP development will be regulated by the City's Unified Development Code (UDC) after the property is annexed into the City. (The UDC is available on the City website at <https://wy-laramie.civicplus.com/index.aspx?NID=444>). The process outlined in the UDC includes all of the standard requirements for public notification and public comment and participation. The timetable for Cirrus Sky Technology Park development review and consideration will occur over 4 - 5 months between September 2012 to February 2013.

In addition to attending public meetings, you may wish to subscribe to automatic updates on the development process, and the project generally, through the City website at [www.cityoflaramie.org](http://www.cityoflaramie.org).

**2. WOULDNT IT BE BETTER FOR THE PROJECT AREA TO BE DEVELOPED INTO RESIDENTIAL HOUSING?**

The subject property will not remain undeveloped forever...change, as we all know, is inevitable. The real issue is how - not whether - this land will be developed. There are pros and cons to every type of development. In this case the CSTP project is preferable to residential development in a couple of ways.

If the property were developed as residential homes we need only look down the ridge east of 30<sup>th</sup> Street for a good example of how the development would appear. Most potential homebuyers will want to build houses as close to the edge of the ridgeline as possible and there is no prohibition in City or County codes against doing so. These homeowners are unlikely to incorporate or allow a public trail through their yards.

There is also no requirement that residential developments be annexed into the City, or that they come under City zoning or building codes. While Albany County land-use regulations are appropriate for large-lot, low-density rural development, we believe most citizens (City and County) will agree: this land is not well-suited for houses on individual wells and private septic tanks. In addition, the traffic generated by residential development is likely to be much higher in terms of trips per day than the proposed use of the property.

With CSTP, the City will own and develop the land. As the developer the City has the authority to ensure reservations for public trails and green space in perpetuity for future generations. This will be unlikely, if not impossible, if a private land owner developed this property for residential or any other purpose.

**3. I'M CONCERNED ABOUT VISIBILITY OF DEVELOPMENT ON THE RIDGE - SIZE OF BUILDINGS, LIGHT-POLLUTION, ETC... IS THERE ANYTHING THE CITY CAN DO TO ADDRESS THIS?**

Yes. Specifically with the CSTP in mind, the City is creating a new zoning district (the Technology-Office, or T.O. District) within our Unified Development Code. The staff has incorporated International Dark Sky (IDS) development standards in the District's draft language; one feature is a requirement that illumination at any

property line be held to zero – the strictest lighting limitation possible. It would be wrong to suggest that no light at all will be visible in Laramie below the ridge, but the T.O. District requirements will minimize light pollution as much as possible.

Another key feature of the T.O. District is an enhanced setback from the trail corridor along the ridge. The regulation requires that taller buildings be set farther away from the ridgeline trail, according to a sliding scale, so that a 45-foot tall structure (the highest allowed in the district) will be at least 200 feet from the ridgeline.

#### **4. WHY IS THE CITY MASTER PLANNING SUCH A LARGE AMOUNT OF ACREAGE?**

Laramie has seldom, if ever, had a development project of this scope – geographical, financial, or logistical. However, it's been well-publicized that Laramie in general, and the CSTP area in particular, are the subject of significant interest from data centers and technology enterprises since Verizon announced they had optioned property in this area in January 2011. It would be short-sighted and poor practice for the City to ignore this genuine, persistent interest in the community from international corporations like Microsoft and Verizon. The master planning process should look not only at the particular area of interest, but also to the surrounding area, and really evaluate the 'big picture' of land-use and economic or community need. This type of comprehensive master planning provides for measured, purposeful development that will complement the community as a whole, and adjacent areas that may already be developed.

In April 2012 the City began work in tandem with a consulting firm to conceptually master plan 2400 acres north of the current city limits from roughly 45<sup>th</sup> Street west to the Laramie River. This action was undertaken purposefully to keep the community in the 'driver's seat.' When the City and community plan in advance for growth we influence the outcome and future direction of the community, rather than being 'along for the ride' while private development determines our future for us.

**5. WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED TIMELINE FOR THE PROJECT? CAN THE CITY REGULATE HOW THE DEVELOPMENT LOOKS SO THAT ISN'T AN EYESORE?**

Yes, the City can apply standards - but we need your input! Laramie's development review and approval process is quite thorough. Assuming the property is zoned to the new T.O. District upon annexation, the UDC will require compliance with strict criteria, including landscaping, parking, and high-quality building materials. The T.O. District as drafted specifically requires large setbacks from the ridgeline trail corridor - approximately two hundred feet for a three-story building - and outdoor lighting requirements are very strict as noted. Staff expects the T.O. District will be considered by City Council in October; if you are interested please plan to attend, or you may submit written comments to the Council as well.

In addition to UDC standards, property covenants and restrictions will be mandatory. If UW purchases property they will have their own additional standards, probably including qualities parallel to those in the University's Long-Range Development Plan (See UW website at <http://www.uwyo.edu/facilitiesplanning/lrdp/>). The rest of Cirrus Sky Tech Park will also be covered by covenants agreed upon by the City and LEDC. All commercial development in Laramie requires approval under Design Review. International Building Code and International Fire Code requirements also apply. Specific information on site designs is always available by contacting the City planning staff.

Construction could begin as early as March and it is feasible the property could be shovel-ready by the end of October 2013.

**6. "ISN'T THERE POTENTIAL FOR WATER RUNOFF PROBLEMS FROM PARKING LOTS AND OTHER CONSTRUCTION ON THE RIDGE?"**

Storm water management is a serious concern in north Laramie, and the proposed development is uphill from that area. The City Engineer and our engineering consultants have conceptually designed the project to *over*-detain runoff on the ridge site. Over-detention means that volume in detention ponds and swales or pipes will be increased to hold more water, and to release it more slowly. Designing a large area like CSTP is actually the best opportunity we have to

achieve this effect; the project's size is an advantage here. In any event, the UDC would not allow development on the CSTP site, or anywhere else in the City, without engineering review of plans including drainage design. These plans are always available for review by the public on request. Fortunately, most data centers require large undeveloped buffer areas around them so the percentage of property occupied by impervious rooftops and parking lots is typically quite low, compared to other commercial projects.

7. *"I LIVE AT THE END OF 22<sup>ND</sup> STREET AND AM REALLY OPPOSED TO MORE TRAFFIC ON MY RESIDENTIAL STREET. HOW WILL THE CITY HANDLE TRAFFIC ISSUES ON REYNOLDS, 22<sup>ND</sup> STREET, AND 30<sup>TH</sup> STREET?"*

Data centers are typically low-volume traffic generators (not many employees per shift, few deliveries, etc.). Technology businesses that would occupy CSTP might generate slightly higher traffic volumes. The City is sensitive to the concerns of neighbors who may have lived quietly on dead-end streets for years. Undoubtedly, the extension of these streets will create change as these streets are used for the purpose and capacity to which they were designed and built. However, mitigating negative effects is a standard component of City planning processes. We review traffic patterns and plan to regulate accordingly through various means, including the installation of appropriate traffic control devices and the lowering of speed limits in appropriate areas. Two recent examples are the new traffic signals on Grand Avenue at Boulder Drive, and at Grand Avenue and Vista Drive. Both signals were installed by WyDOT in coordination with City-approved development in that area.

As designated in the *Major Streets and Highways Plan*, Reynolds and 30<sup>th</sup> Streets are both minor arterial streets, and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street transitions at Reynolds from a minor arterial (south) to a collector (north). Those street categories are the City's highest traffic-level designations other than interstates like I-80. These streets were built to carry sizeable volumes of traffic. The master plan for the area takes into account the need to disperse traffic among multiple roadways and to move it to major highways by routes that are not through residential areas. We expect the next phase of Cirrus Sky to include building Asphalt Lane and connect it to Roger

Canyon Road (9<sup>th</sup> Street). At a later point, 15<sup>th</sup> Street will also extend north and connect to Asphalt Lane.

**8. SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT NOISE FROM THE DEVELOPMENT?**

CSTP is designed to accommodate smaller projects, such as co-locate data centers, research and development firms, and technology-based companies that equally require the highly sought after redundant power that is abundant in area.

Most data and technology businesses conduct their work entirely indoors. We do understand larger data centers usually have backup power generators that they test run on a regular basis but to address this, data centers require a large-acreage area partly to allow buffering of this noise by both sheer distance and especially by berms that attenuate sound. The ridgeline itself will also serve as a natural sound barrier for those directly below.

**9. *“THE CITY IS PUTTING THE GREENBELT TRAIL ALONG THE RIDGE AND I SHOULDN’T HAVE TO DEAL WITH LITTER AND TRESPASSING CAUSED BY TRAILS RUNNING NEAR MY PROPERTY. WHAT WILL BE DONE ABOUT THIS?”***

Litter and trespassing are concerns along any public trail corridor, worldwide. The Greenbelt trail along the ridgeline will be operated and maintained by the City Parks and Recreation Department and the City will maintain it in the same manner as other community trails, keeping it clean and safe.

The CSTP site is currently undeveloped, but an informal trail network has crossed the property for years. Trespassing and litter are current, not future, concerns. City ownership of the trail is a much better guarantor of proper maintenance than illegal, uncontrolled access. The current owner has stated his intention to fence off and post no-trespassing signs on the land in the spring if the City does not acquire the property and build the technology park.

**10. WON’T THIS PROJECT HURT WILDLIFE AND IMPACT SENSITIVE SPECIES?**

The City is not aware of any sensitive species in the vicinity. If and when development plans indicate the potential for wildlife concerns, they will be addressed per Federal and State requirements.

**11. COULD THIS PROJECT HAVE NEGATIVE EFFECTS TO THE ENVIRONMENT? WON'T OIL AND ANTIFREEZE FROM VEHICLES ON THE RIDGE POLLUTE THE AREA?**

As with public trails, these issues are present everywhere there are vehicles. The only way to prevent all transportation contaminants is to prohibit development altogether, which is rarely if ever an option for private property. Controlled, careful development is a much better method to minimize these concerns than leaving this land open to four-wheelers, dirt bikes, and people looking for a secluded spot to change their oil or coolants - all of which are known activities on this property at present.

The CSTP development area is not within the Aquifer Protection Area and is not identified as containing any geographic features that constitute a point of vulnerability where pollutants could rapidly infiltrate the aquifer. The City's nearest Aquifer Protection Overlay (APO) boundary is almost one mile due east of the subject property; the County's APO boundary is even more distant. In the unlikely future event this area should become part of the City APO, a Site-Specific Investigation (SSI) would be required and appropriate mitigation measures taken before a project received final approval.

**12. THIS PROJECT WON'T GENERATE PROPERTY TAX BECAUSE UW DOESN'T PAY TAXES, SO WHAT IS IN IT FOR THE COMMUNITY?**

The singular purpose of the CSTP is to generate revenue and jobs. The City and LEDC intend to sell this property to businesses that want to build facilities to house job-creating businesses. Each time an entrepreneur buys property and builds a business new tax revenue results. If Laramie had been selected as the site for Microsoft, Albany County and Laramie would have become home to a \$120 million taxable facility. 60 new jobs would have been created, forty-five (45) of which pay at least \$65,000 per year and these workers would have also paid taxes, bought homes and cars, purchased products from local retailers, and added additional benefit to the community as a whole.

The University of Wyoming has voiced support for the project and expressed strong interest in possible purchase of some of the property if Cirrus Sky Tech Park is developed. In discussions among UW, the City and LEDC, the University has consistently stressed that they intend to sell property to research and technology enterprises, after initial infrastructure makes tracts available. Real estate owned by UW is of course exempt from property-tax; however, land sold to private enterprises will be subject to taxation. The timing of land sales is unknown and certainly some property may remain off the tax rolls for a time, but that is neither planned nor expected to be permanent.

Through the CSTP development process, the project brings additional (significant) public benefit such as a maintained greenbelt that protects the ridgeline and provides an opportunity to address storm water runoff and enhance water/sewer service in the area.

**13. THERE ARE MANY OTHER BUSINESS PARKS WITH AVAILABLE SPACES. WHY DO WE NEED A NEW BUSINESS COMPLEX ON EMPTY LAND?**

The City's Turner Tract in the southeast area of town and LEDC's Laramie River Business Park in west Laramie both have available land with most infrastructure installed, or nearby. Some technology enterprises would find those locations suitable, and indeed, they are regularly shown to prospective technology businesses that want to grow, or relocate, in Laramie. However, most data centers need larger lot sizes and more buffering distance.

WyoTech purchased the majority of Laramie River Business Park II in late 2008. The majority of the lots remaining within the Laramie River Business Parks I and II in west Laramie are parcels intended for smaller commercial and light manufacturing projects. In a nutshell, Laramie has no place already developed that would meet the criteria for many data centers and technology firms.

**14. WHY MUST WE DEVELOP THIS PARTICULAR LOCATION?**

The Verizon site-selection team made Laramie aware of a stunning asset in our area, our area, whose importance we did not fully realize: the Western Area Power Administration's (WAPA) regional switchyard, directly adjoining the Cirrus Sky Sky property. The WAPA facility may look like just another electrical substation, but in substation, but in fact it's the focal point for four separate, independent regional power regional power transmission feeds. An electric consumer with service from the WAPA the WAPA switchyard could have power interrupted from one, two, or even three three different parts of the grid, and still remain in operation. A data center cannot cannot afford to lose power for even a microsecond. The guarantee of consistent power consistent power is extremely important to their business and the clients they serve.

serve.

In addition, companies find it desirable to locate as close to the switchyard as possible because of power loss over transmission distance and the vulnerability that a long transmission line creates. The further the technology park is developed from the switchyard the less desirable it becomes to the businesses that rely on consistent data transmission. The WAPA station is a rare and irreplaceable asset to Laramie - and the closer a data center can get to it, the better.

The CSTP proposed site is located within an easily accessible distance of the ten long-haul regional fiber optic lines that pass through our community. Companies value proximity to redundant fiber optic lines.

**15. DON'T DATA CENTERS DISLIKE LOCATING NEAR RESIDENTIAL AREAS?**

It's true that *mega*-data centers (like the one proposed by Verizon) look for locations that are away from residential development - sometimes a half-mile or more. But that factor is critical only to the largest centers; however, even for the mega-data center distance isn't essential if other buffers, such as natural features,

are present. One reason for being distant is that the centers can be noisy. Natural barriers such as the ridgeline reduce noise concerns.

The CSTP site is designed to accommodate medium-to-smaller projects, including data centers, research and development firms, and technology-based companies, all of which will benefit from the redundant power provided through the WAPA substation.

The larger parcels of land that "mega" data centers would require are north of the Phase I site that is currently under discussion, which further buffers residential areas. The full development area creates distance from residential areas by placing other commercial areas between the data center lots and neighborhoods. So, residences will be buffered by distance, landscaping and other uses.

**16. "I'M CONCERNED ABOUT A) WATER & SEWER DEVELOPMENT, B) TRAFFIC ON ALL THREE STREETS LEADING INTO AND OUT OF THE AREA, C) RUN OFF FROM THE AREA, AND D) BLASTING EFFECT ON HOUSING BELOW THE DEVELOPMENT."**

Water, sewer, traffic and run-off are all addressed in the development review process and through City code requirements in the UDC. You may wish to review the answers to questions 1, 6, and 7 as they are similar to your question.

The City has no indication that blasting will occur at the site.

**17. "WE HAVE FOUR COMMERCIAL INDUSTRIAL PARKS/INCUBATORS NOW AND NONE HAVE A SUCCESS STORY AND ALL JUST HAD TO BE BUILT. SO, NOW WE HAVE ANOTHER FULL OF PROMISES AND PROBLEMS. THERE IS AN ATTEMPT TO PUT AN INDUSTRIAL PARK ON A VERY VISIBLE RIDGE RIGHT NEXT TO WHERE THIS CITY IS GROWING. HAS THIS CITY EVER HAD A RATIONAL, VIABLE LONG TERM PLANNING PROCESS THAT CAN BE POINTED TO AFTER A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM?"**

In 2002 the Turner Tract Area Plan was developed to create a live/work environment with lots available for office space that didn't exist at the time. The first tenant, Farm Bureau, felt it was so important that they supported development of the Turner Tract Plan. Since that first tenant located in the

Turner Tract area the City has continued to utilize revenue generated from land sales to extend infrastructure. The Turner Tract Plan was incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan. A full chapter of the Comprehensive Plan is dedicated to economic development.

The Turner Tract is the home of several solid companies that have expanded or chose to locate include Intertech E&E, Medicine Bow Technologies, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services. Additionally the public benefits provided by the Recreational Center and Laramie County Community College - Albany County Campus make the Turner Tract a success to many residents and employees of Laramie.

The City has successfully worked with LEDC to apply for grants to develop facilities that were not available at the time. The City and LEDC used grant funds to assist Trihydro Corporation and Basic Beginnings with expansion of their local operations. Both firms continue to provide professional opportunities for workers in our community. The Laramie Technology Building (originally built for Well-Dog Corporation) is occupied by a growing technology company, Happy Jack Software. Happy Jack Software is a graduate of the Technology Business Incubator.

LEDC's Laramie River Business Parks I & II are successful for a variety of businesses and their employees, which include BioLife Plasma, WyoTech, Fremont Electric, Allsop, Trihydro Corporation, Happy Jack Software, and Bright AgroTech. WyoTech purchased the majority of Laramie River Business Park II in late 2008 for their future expansion plans.

The majority of the lots remaining within the Laramie River Business Parks I and II in west Laramie are parcels intended and zoned for smaller commercial and light manufacturing projects. The CSTP proposal is the product of years of planning by the community, both within the context of local, City plans and studies, as well as with consideration given to state and regional studies including the Statewide Assessment of Infrastructure for Data produced by TMNG Global.

**18. CAN ANYTHING BE DONE ABOUT HEAVY TRUCK TRAFFIC ON 22<sup>ND</sup> AND 30<sup>TH</sup> STREETS DURING CONSTRUCTION?**

The City will engineer and oversee construction of CSTP and will do everything possible to limit heavy truck traffic in residential areas.

**19. DOES THIS PROJECT ALLOW GOVERNMENT TO COMPETE UNFAIRLY WITH PRIVATE ENTERPRISE?**

The City has worked with LEDC on the CSTP project with the goal of participating only where there is little likelihood of private sector investment. The CSTP project site has never developed specifically because the cost of extending infrastructure is quite high relative to the demand for residential or commercial lots. The City and LEDC believe the public benefit that will accrue to the community from this project is high, in terms of both jobs and tax revenue. The City's involvement will last only through the construction of the infrastructure to ready the land for development; thereafter LEDC will own and manage the property as a tool for attracting and growing business.

CSTP will fill an un-served need by accommodating large lot developments that are not available in other areas of the community. Ultimately this will support business expansion and it is likely that smaller technology firms will continue to utilize the smaller office and manufacturing spaces available in privately-owned properties throughout the community.

A quality workforce for Laramie's future will be low-carbon footprint, knowledge-based technology jobs.. These "green" jobs are highly sought after by every community in the country. The competition for these jobs is always strong and many times fierce. Utilizing the existing highly-qualified workforce, in Laramie and the future workforce graduating from the University of Wyoming, it is more than prudent for our community to prepare for those jobs to the best of our ability. The creation of the CSTP addresses the needs of businesses who would hire our outstanding workforce.