

**Downtown Cheyenne Development Authority
Strategic Action Plan Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 27, 2021**

Board Members: Anthony Ortiz, Craig Kerrigan, Bruce Heimbeck, Jonathan Savelle, Breck Collier, Sara Weber, Katherine Brady, Jeff White, Steve Borin, Astrid

Staff: Amber Ash, Haylee Chenchar, Holly Scheer

Economic Development Partners: Dale Steenbergen, CEO/President Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce; Domenic Bravo, President/CEO Visit Cheyenne; Betsey Hale, CEO Cheyenne LEADS; Kayla Kler, Project Manager, Wyoming Main Street; Eric Fountain, Chief of Staff, City of Cheyenne; Pete Laybourn, Cheyenne City Council; Jim Walter, CDME Visit Cheyenne

Public: Margaret Austin, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

The meeting was called to order at 9:03 am by Bruce Heimbeck.

Snow Plan: Jeff made a motion for to approve the snow plan which was seconded by Anthony. Amber noted that everyone was sent the adjusted budget and that five snow events can be covered without going into the reserves. Motion passed unanimously.

Strategic Action Plan: The economic development partners introduced themselves and briefly described their organization's primary purpose. Amber began the Strategic Action Plan 2021 Presentation.

Organization

Developing stable, long term funding: The first strategy is restoration of the TIF which was Councilman Laybourn's idea. Amber explained that the original district was far larger than today's boundaries. This would be expanding from 22nd to 23rd to bring Black Hills back into the District. She stated that we should explore bringing other businesses that would benefit in simultaneously, like DeSelms Fine Art and Epic Egg. She noted that property owners needed to agree and that she is currently working with the City Attorney's Office on logistics.

Katie asked why the size was decreased and Amber said she doesn't know but she is looking into it. Anthony asked how it works if some businesses say yes and some say no. Amber noted that when the District was reduced, 25% of the businesses had to agree but the Statute doesn't define this benchmark. She will need to work through this with the city attorney. There are a lot of hurdles with this. The DDA will need to talk to all of the property owners and Black Hills. City Council will have to approve the expansion by petition. There was support for this idea with council but there are obstacles to overcome.

Astrid asked if CRMC was in the boundaries originally. Amber stated that it was along with the State Capitol, the museum, and the Supreme Court. Jonathan asked if this would need to go to a special election and Amber clarified this is a petition.

Dale said that he doesn't think there will be pushback from Black Hills but if consumer advocates think people's electric bills will go up, the DDA will face public opposition. Dale will get contact information to Amber. Amber will also follow up with the Public Services Commission to determine if the additional Mill Levy is recoverable by Black Hills.

Astrid asked if we could consider going back to original boundary including the Capitol which is a feature of the downtown. Amber stated that we can look at expanding the boundary however we would like; however, property owners have to agree. She noted that government buildings don't pay property taxes and therefore, created additional liabilities without generating any offsetting revenue. Amber noted that, in spite of this fact, they should be considered and that most people think the Capitol, State Museum, etc. are in the DDA boundary. Astrid asked if the hospital pays property tax. Amber stated that she would double-check but that the hospital is owned by the County and therefore, it isn't likely.

Amber pointed out that items in red on the strategic plan are contingent on the TIF being reinstated so that reserves can be utilized. If the DDA is unable to reinstate the TIF, the Connex Container Project would be an alternative option. She noted that the city has indicated a preference for infrastructure rather than revenue generation. However, the mill levy is only expected to generate \$356,000 which isn't enough for operations and if our revenue isn't diversified, we draw down reserves in 3-4 years. While we can cut programming, it's better to utilize the reserves to generate funding will support the DDA for years to come.

Anthony asked what the timeline for reinstatement of the TIF is. Amber stated that it depends. We received an email from Alessandra that said the TIF is on hold pending direction from the governing body. Amber has forwarded them additional information she's discovered in the old files. Domenic asked if this project could be placed in the hole. Amber stated that we could explore a 6th Penny project but that the connex containers wouldn't be appropriate. Katie stated that the parking lot was a great concept.

Amber said that she thinks there is a lot of potential and need for something like this something for small starts for businesses to get their foot in the door and then expand. There is potential for USDA funding if there is an agricultural component. Katie said that while this is still undeveloped, it is a great start and excellent idea. Domenic suggested possibly putting it on an elevated platform to retain parking underneath. Katie asked if we got the TIF could we still move this project forward. Amber stated that her preference would be to focus on infrastructure improvements.

Improved communications with properties and businesses: Amber noted that there is a disconnect between what the businesses want and what the DDA is designed to do. We have obligations as well to Main Street and the City of Cheyenne. While we try to help where we can, it is not realistic for the DDA to market for 600 businesses. Potential opportunities for education include open houses and continuing to mail the annual report out. Anthony said that he loves the idea of open houses as it puts some of the responsibility back on the businesses/property owners. Betsey said that Derrek hosts a monthly call with all the real estate brokers and that Amber could present to them. Sara asked if there is a one page handout about the DDA and how it benefits the property owners and businesses. This would be really helpful when she is talking to businesses. The DDA will work to develop one.

Steve noted that we need to go back to the basics. He said it's harder to loan money to the people downtown. He's been fighting for his tenants and suggested that maybe we could get lower rates from Black Hills downtown? The pizzeria had to do an \$1,800 deposit. He was able to intervene on their

behalf. Maybe we could come up with ideas to help them come downtown. Amber explained that Black Hills goes through the Public Services Commission to set utility rates.

Katie suggested that the board members could get a list of businesses to check in with and hand them the pamphlets.

Eric said that people he has talked to state that the only time they hear from the DDA is the mill levy. He asked if we had surveyed them to see what they want. Amber responded that they didn't have a current survey but there may be information in archives. She noted that we have to balance the City expectations, Main Street requirements, and purpose of the DDA as outlined in State Statute. Bruce suggested focusing on education before asking what they want. Eric concurred with this.

Foundation: The DDA is quasi-governmental organization and doesn't have the same opportunities as the Foundation does as a 501c3. Amber thinks that there are some opportunities to enhance their fundraising capacity like Amazon Smile, Day of Giving, a donation page on the DDA website, grants and applications to Foundation. Once these are in place, they will be passive for the DDA. They will just need to remind people about them. They will probably hit the \$50,000 threshold that will trigger an audit for the DDF and Wally is aware of this.

Anthony still wants to do the golf tournament again. We had all local sponsors and raised just under the amount CRMC did in our first year. These funds could be utilized for other things like snow removal once the planters are funded. Steve noted the foundation was grateful. Amber said that there is potential for two flights since the first sold out so quickly. It would be helpful to have contact information for each player. She noted that while other sponsor slots filled, we struggled to obtain gold sponsors and that was an opportunity for improvement.

Board education and training: Linda noted that Wyoming Main Street and some other western states will have a training soon. Kayla said that it will be a webinar on "Elevating Your Executive Team" and will be offered in April. In addition, we are working on the required HP101 training for the board. Bruce suggested adding "ongoing opportunities as required to build the strength of the board" to the plan.

Katie noted that a sheet of commonly used acronyms would be helpful. Amber will work on this.

Promotion

Wayfinding Program: Amber would like to utilize the banners downtown as wayfinding to improve downtown navigation, with logos and store names. This would involve Trophy Creative. Banner arms, except along 17th Street, can be moved as needed. Unfortunately, some places like Warren Avenue don't have anything to attach the banner arms to.

Amber noted that the banner arms on 17th are really expensive, around \$240 for each ball and arm set. This is a specialty product that you can't just buy from anywhere and the wind has broken several.

Amber said that in the future, she would like to expand this further to add a directory board similar to Cherry Creek Mall and a community messaging board. This could help decrease all the bandit signs on light poles.

Social Media Policy: Amber reviewed the highlights of the social media policy. She noted that #WyoWednesdays will continue as well as coverage of opening days, grand openings, and highlights as

time and resources allow. This policy provides us a fair mechanism by which to evaluate requests and allocate our time.

Betsey suggested a social media firm. Amber noted that the DDA doesn't currently have funds. She said that while we could evaluate this, Haylee has done an amazing job and she doesn't want to undue Haylee's progress. Anthony says he tries to like and share things to help boost them. Domenic works with Simple View for aggregation.

Events: Amber discussed the events outlined in the strategic plan. She noted that items in blue are major events hosted downtown by partners like the City. These events should be included in DDA promotions. Amber has marked Super Day in yellow. Even though it isn't downtown, this large event has a huge draw to Lions Park and we shouldn't compete with it.

Katie asked about Cowboy (Old West) Christmas and Domenic confirmed they will work on it again. She proposed a train day which Domenic noted. Astrid suggested the Cross Roads of America theme and he liked this as well.

Graffiti Removal: Astrid asked about the graffiti removal. Amber noted that this process is by request and needs a waiver since there can be damage to the building. The company the DDA uses does power washing and some businesses don't want this utilized on their historic buildings. Amber also noted this information was in the annual report that was sent out to all building owners.

Downtown Directory: Amber stated that the goal is to have 100 businesses listed by April. Businesses must submit their own information via a Google form to make sure it is updated and correct. Occasionally, the businesses have conflicting information posted on social media, their website, and/or Google and this ensures that the DDA is accurate when posting their listing.

Visitor's Guide: Amber explained that the Visitor's Guide wasn't produced last year because of COVID. People like this and it's important. Amber is working with Blue Pig Entertainment on distribution. Amber is exploring the possibility of selling advertising.

Dale said that advertising needs to be evaluated because he believed that the DDA's quasi-governmental status would prevent the DDA from competing on this. Amber will reach out to DAPCPA and MHP to get clarification. Dale suggests using the Foundation.

Additional discussion was held around on the size of the guide and whether QR codes should be added. Amber and Haylee added that an app is being made for online integration which should also decrease printing costs.

Additional Ways to Share Information: Amber stated that she attends events by invitation as the opportunity arises. This includes organizations like the Rotary and Lions. She will continue to look for other opportunities to talk about the DDA.

Economic Vitality

FIP and CIG: Amber explained that the Façade Improvement Program was temporarily suspended due to the lack of sustainable funding. If the TIF is reinstated, the FIP program should also be reinstated. If the TIF isn't viable, the DDA could explore expanding the Capital Improvement Grant. Amber is currently working on the CIG for FY22 and making a list of opportunities for expansion and enhancement that will benefit business owners and Downtown.

Business Attraction Program: Amber explained that the DDA is limited by the Constitution since we are considered a governmental organization. She said that incentives that benefit a single person (business) are unconstitutional. That is why the CIG and FIP program focus on public right of ways. She noted that the FIP grant requires the owner to sign an easement and there is a public benefit to it. Even so, the DDA should look at additional potential incentives to attract businesses downtown. When the next mill levy comes up the language will need to be updated to include allowances for incentive programs.

Amber explained that downtown has limited power availability and that to attract high power users, the DDA will need to work with Black Hills Energy. This would benefit all future businesses and be a good opportunity to attract industries that are currently unable to locate downtown.

Betsey suggested that fiber expansion downtown may have a greater return on investment than power capacity. Amber and Dale explained the controversy from the private sector when the Bison Ring was installed. Amber will look into this further. Perhaps we can offer incentives to existing companies since everyone downtown would benefit.

Dale noted that there are already a lot of governmental workers downtown and they don't come the extra three blocks to shop and spend money. He said that careful evaluation needs to be done on what type of businesses are being brought to the downtown. He cited Washington DC as an example, where the downtown has a lot of fast food and dry cleaners because of the industry that moved in. The economic development partners need to have a larger conversation with the Community.

Betsey asked if there had been a retail leakage study to see what people want and what is missing. Dale said the last one was done in 2008 by the DDA. Astrid said we also need to look at what needs to be subtracted from the downtown. Amber and Bruce agree this study sounds helpful.

Betsey said that her board is committed to addressing the hole downtown. Its high-profile location is boarded against the street. Right now, the police need to be able to see what is going on down there. The LEADS board needs to look at both short term and long-term solutions for the hole and the Hynds building.

Real Estate Listings: Amber discussed the real estate page that the DDA is developing for its website. This will provide a service to property owners, expanding the demographic that we're providing services to. Furthermore, it will assist Amber in helping businesses locate downtown. Amber will follow up on the ability to charge for this service pursuant to the earlier discussion.

Provide support to entrepreneurs and innovators startups: Amber would like to create a list of services provided by other organizations. She handles a lot of phone calls from interested parties. Dale does a lot of work with startups through the Chamber. They have a fund to send people through the Princeton course at no cost to them. The Small Business Development Council is another great resource. Creating a list prevents duplication of services, builds on others' strengths, and makes us stronger as a community.

Craig provided information on financing projects, particularly in areas like the Reed Ave Corridor and the West Edge. There can be environmental issues that make this complicated and there are phases. Discovery can find costly fixes, for example Cheyenne Steam Laundry where Security First/First State Bank now took a million dollars to remediate. There are similar chemical plumes all over downtown.

Betsey concurred and noted that if we are going to have downtown catalyst projects, we need to know where we have resources to address these things. Developers want predictability. Brownfield development is so unpredictable compared to greenfield. There needs to be political will to do this and there hasn't been.

Dale stated that Main Street did a bunch of work 25 years ago to get different requirements implemented for development downtown. He said the City hasn't been willing to advance this but that's how downtowns developed - by reducing regulations.

ArtSpace: LEADS and the DDA have been working on this. It will create 37 units of live/work housing in the Reed Ave Corridor. This will help increase Cheyenne's creative economy and is within \$1.2 million of being financed (not including site acquisition), with the potential of reducing those margins. One of the unknowns with this is whether Brownfield funding might be an option. The DDA also needs the property owner to sell at a reasonable rate. Other funding sources might be the 6th penny and the Economic Development Joint Powers Board. If they can get a committed business this may be able to get funding from the Business Council. Betsey agrees that this could be good for the community and is also tax generating. She also noted that with so many properties downtown are tax exempt which exacerbates the funding situation for the DDA. Betsey echoed Craig's concerns over plumes and how difficult and expensive these can be to remediate.

Design

Lincolnway Placemaking Plan: Amber is exploring the Lincolnway Placemaking plan to address pedestrian safety and improve Lincolnway's infrastructure. There are deferred maintenance issues that need to be dealt with in addition to the speed of the cars. Amber will be meeting with WYDOT this afternoon to discuss this further with the board. Lincolnway is the gateway to downtown and this is really important. Astrid and Katie agree about the importance of addressing this.

**Due to time constraints, discussion on the strategic planned ceased to allow for public comment.*

Public Comment: Pete asked Amber to clarify where the board is with the TIF funding. He feels that now is the time to address city council and many things in the Strategic Plan are reliant on this funding. Amber noted that the TIF is on hold pending further clarification from the governing body. The DDA will need a special session, hopefully next week, to vote on this and then they can have a work session on the TIF. Pete felt that there is a good response from Council on this idea during the goal setting session and that this is the time to move forward on it. The board needs to recognize Amber's work on this and that there must be board action to get the city attorney to move forward on this. A work session with City Council needs to be scheduled. Bruce thanked Pete for his work on this and agreed that without funding it's difficult to plan.

Discussion followed on when the next meeting could be to discuss the TIF and finalize the Strategic Plan. To ensure that enough time for proper notice was given, the meeting was set for Tuesday, at 1 pm.

Dale mentioned that he deals with many similar political issues and one thing to keep in mind is that if there is a potential rate increase associated with Black Hills moving in District, that AARP could get involved and due diligence must be done. If this is handled wrong, it will not move forward.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.