

Design Planning—Downtown and Entryways

January 25, 2008

Forward Sheridan Conference Room

Welcome—Jeff Fuller: Forward Sheridan’s strategic planning committee has been instrumental in creating and presenting the Economic Development Strategic Plan; everyone present should be familiar with the strategic plan and its initiatives. It’s now time to address the challenges laid forth in the Economic Development Strategic Plan, one of which is design planning. The strategic plan lists specific initiatives to address this challenge—the first action to address Sheridan’s design planning challenge is to hire an urban design consultant. Forward Sheridan has been facilitating conversations with Urban Design Associates (UDA) and the City of Sheridan Planning Department to negotiate an estimate and specificity of a scope of work for design plans for the downtown and entryway corridors. There have been several teleconferences, revising the scope of work and cost estimates associated with the work; however, hiring UDA is not within the city’s budget.

Purpose of the Meeting: This group has been brought together to discuss funding for this initiative. Those invited to this meeting have a vested interest in design planning as a strategic initiative. Forward Sheridan has received a \$10,000 donation from Homer Scott, Jr. to be used toward economic development—Forward Sheridan is prepared to contribute these funds toward the costs to hire UDA. However, the estimated cost to hire UDA is \$140,000—this group was brought together to brainstorm ideas to fund this initiative—grants, donations, etc. Tim Green asked that Mr. Fuller or Philippe Chino provide details of the scope of work for the group.

Mr. Chino replied to this request. Through the strategic planning process, the community identified design planning as one of the top ten challenges to economic development in Sheridan. Citizens want a comprehensive design plan for the look of the city, complete with design standards. The city planning department has asked for comprehensive design guidelines for the city, along with pattern books to illustrate these design standards. All of the organizations and businesses represented in this meeting have plans, buildings, and development—design planning will impact everyone as we plan for Sheridan’s future. In the design planning process, specific design guidelines and architectural standards are based on community and stakeholder input. Developers look for planned cities—developers want to know not only where they can develop, but also what the design standards are. Through the design planning process, the city will receive pattern books for specific areas of the city, architectural standards, and comprehensive design guidelines.

Mr. Green pointed out there are a number of great plans out there; the point of UDA is not to replace everything that has already been done by different organizations, but to incorporate all of these plans with stakeholder input into comprehensive design planning for the city. Mr. Chino reminded the group that the community called for design planning; this is not a Forward Sheridan initiative, but a community initiative.

Support to the City: Mayor Kinskey volunteered to update the group regarding the City’s status on design planning initiatives. Sheridan County has started their comprehensive planning process with Clarion to create a zoning and land-use plan. City staff wanted to go through the RFP process to hire a company to create a comprehensive zoning and land-use plan for the city; however, the Mayor has been impressed by Clarion’s work within the County, and asked that Clarion be hired, as they are already working with the County. The City has signed a contract

with Clarion to create a comprehensive zoning plan for the city. Mayor Kinskey asked if Clarion could incorporate design plans into the comprehensive planning work they will be completing for the city; however, Clarion's focus is zoning and land-use planning, not specific design standards. Clarion has worked with UDA on projects to complete comprehensive land-use plans with design standards; however, one entity cannot complete both projects as a single scope of work. However, by partnering UDA with Clarion to discuss both plans, it may be possible to reduce the fees for UDA if there is work already being done by Clarion that can be incorporated by UDA.

Commissioner Rolston pointed out Sheridan is currently in a great position to begin a comprehensive design planning process. The historic downtown district provides a great base to begin the design planning process—Main Street looks the same as it has for 50 years; facades have changed, but the buildings remain the same. John Smith mentioned currently, any developer can come into Sheridan and do almost anything—Sheridan has potential for a development disaster. City planning staff said they want a comprehensive design plan and pattern books; however, Mr. Smith has not heard of any recent meetings with Robert Briggs or Elizabeth Wood in the planning department, probably because they are busy with other projects within the City.

Jim Wilson mentioned the importance of political backing for this process—Sheridan can have the most beautiful design plans; however, without the political backing and enforcement of the City Council, this design plan will end up on a shelf. Mayor Kinskey stated there are strict entryway corridor design ordinances and standards, but there are complaints about the strictness of these standards. However, there is no pattern book. Bruce Pryde mentioned a pattern book should help in creating buy-in to the design plan and standards. You'll never reach a point of 100% agreement, but a pattern book can be instrumental to encourage the desired development. Mr. Wilson concurred; if developers don't have a clear direction for what is expected, they will cut corners everywhere they can. However, if developers have a finite number of design choices, then they will develop within those parameters. Mr. Fuller and Mr. Rolston reiterated the stronger the standards, the more buy-in will be required from the community to accept and meet those standards.

Mr. Green mentioned the urgent need to hire UDA; there are many big development projects in the works in Sheridan—the Master Transportation Plan and the Childcare Center are both major projects upcoming in Sheridan. By working with UDA now, we can make sure these projects are addressed in the design planning process so we don't end up with an eyesore to be corrected later. One of the components of the scope of work with UDA is the creation of design guidelines that can be incorporated as city ordinances. UDA facilitates the public process to gather data from stakeholders and residents, and they incorporate this information in design guidelines. Right now, funding UDA is a concern; there needs to be a public/private partnership to provide initial funding and support efforts to find additional funding to move this project from the downtown to the rest of the community.

Mayor Kinskey suggested the city build design standards based on the existing entryway corridor standards; if a pattern book could be created for these standards, there would be a visual guide showing developers design expectations. Mr. Wilson stated developers will fight standards if those standards are vague or require interpretation. Mr. Chino mentioned more and more developers understand the creation of design standards is not a process that can be created internally; the Planning Commission and Design Review Board are volunteers—they are not trained to create comprehensive design plans with pattern books. UDA will need to be hired to create a comprehensive design plan for Sheridan; developers are asking when this will happen; developers want to know what is required and do not want those requirements to be subject to interpretation or subjective standards.

Action Items/Summary: Mr. Fuller mentioned during discussion, it seems like everyone is on board with the idea to hire UDA; now the group needs to brainstorm funding ideas.

Jay McGinnis suggested that there may be grants from foundations that could be used for this project. However, the project must be presented in terms of community development, not economic development, to have the best chance of receiving funds. If we present the hiring of UDA and the creation of a comprehensive design plan for the city in terms of enhancing the vibrancy and vitality of the community, we may be able to find funding through a variety of foundations.

Mr. Chino suggested applying for EDA grants and funds; however, UDA must first be hired. Once UDA is hired, Forward Sheridan can write grant proposals and seek funding from EDA grants and planning-only grants; however, the process needs to be started first. UDA needs to have a guarantee of payment when they enter into a contract—if we can find the funds to hire UDA initially, then the group can work to secure grant funding to expand the design planning process from the downtown area into other areas of the city. Grant funds may even be found to reimburse the city for their initial outlay of funding. Once the design planning process starts, it builds momentum—we can start downtown, and then move into each ward of the city. Mr. Chino emphasized the urgency of this project—UDA needs to be hired now.

Mayor Kinskey stated there are no funds left in the 2007-2008 budget to hire UDA. If hiring UDA is a priority, it can be included in the 2008-2009 budget; however, there are no funds available now to hire UDA. Mayor Kinskey asked Commissioner Rolston if the County could help fund UDA; Commissioner Rolston replied that the County can't contribute to hiring UDA right now—the County will have to look at their 2008-2009 budget.

Roger Bent mentioned the Downtown Sheridan Association's master plan, adopted by City Council in 2001. In 2005 when Mayor Kinskey was elected, the plan was updated (Whitney Benefits also had a plan; DSA worked with Whitney Benefits to incorporate both plans). When Rod Liesinger was hired as public works director, he wanted to update the transportation plan for Sheridan. The transportation plan affects the DSA master plan—everything is tied together. A decision was made to wait to update the DSA master plan until the transportation plan was completed. Mayor Kinskey interjected he felt both plans should have been updated simultaneously. The transportation plan should be part of the overall plan; the transportation plan shouldn't drive the DSA master plan. Mr. Wilson asked how neighborhoods will be impacted by the transportation plan; will homes need to be torn down to expand roads and transportation arteries? If so, would UDA look at the transportation plan as part of the design planning process? Mr. Fuller and Mr. Chino both mentioned UDA can incorporate the transportation plan into a comprehensive design plan; however, this must happen now.

Mr. Chino mentioned currently, a design plan for the downtown area could be a lot of different things. The downtown of Sheridan is one of the most visible areas of the City; to start a design planning process there would help build momentum to expand the design planning process to the rest of the city. Design planning would revitalize the community. Design planning could also help address some of the other challenges in Sheridan. For example, Forward Sheridan recently partnered with SHAC to sponsor Dan Hoffman, an affordable housing consultant with EA Housing, to visit Sheridan. Mr. Hoffman has reported on several strategies to address Sheridan's workforce and affordable housing issues; one strategy would be to identify areas to be in-filled with workforce housing or to identify potential unused space for alternative housing options. Downtown Sheridan has unused or underutilized space in the upstairs of buildings; UDA could

not only identify these spaces, but create design standards for development so this space can be used to address another challenge in Sheridan. Grants could be found for this strategy.

Mr. McGinnis agreed foundations and grants can be viable funding sources; however, he reiterated this project must be proposed as a project to revitalize the community, not as an economic development initiative. Mr. Chino is concerned this project may be delayed by those foundations we are approaching for grant funding; Mr. McGinnis stated if the project is presented to the foundation audience in terms of community development, hiring UDA is an appealing process. Mr. McGinnis believes several local foundations, like the Scott Foundation and Whitney Benefits, could provide an outlay of funds quickly. The person presenting this project to the foundation could also impact the speed in which we can receive funding; Mr. McGinnis suggested the group create a list of potential contacts for foundations when requesting funds.

Commissioner Rolston mentioned Forward Sheridan has \$10,000 that came from Mr. Homer Scott to be used for economic development; this money came out of Forward Sheridan's strategic planning process, not economic development. Mr. Wilson asked the group if there were other community members or organizations willing to contribute funds toward this initiative. Mr. Chino asked if the groups represented in the room would be willing to provide even nominal funding for this process to show their commitment to the initiative. This would show community input, which would strengthen grant proposals and solicitations to foundations and organizations. Jim Schellinger mentioned comprehensive design standards and pattern books would be beneficial to foundations; foundations have a stake in this initiative, as design planning will impact their philanthropic endeavors.

Mr. Chino suggested developers be asked to contribute toward UDA; after all, developers are looking for pattern books and specificity in city ordinances. For example, Mr. Chino had a conversation with Don Roberts, a developer. Mr. Roberts told Mr. Chino a comprehensive design planning process is exactly what he needs to be able to develop effectively—without precise standards or a pattern book, he cannot develop properties quickly or efficiently. Mr. Smith reiterated the pattern book is perhaps the most important thing to come out of a design planning process.

Mayor Kinskey stated the commitment for this project is there; City Council will need to take hard votes to find the funding for this initiative. Currently, the city is cancelling projects that have not started so funding that has been allocated to those projects can be redirected to keep existing projects funded and on task. For example, funds have been reallocated from many smaller projects to keep infrastructure projects on task and in progress. The city budget operates within 1% of its estimates; there is no more estimating high on project costs and estimating low for revenue intake. It was mentioned by the planning department that there were funds in their budget to contribute toward hiring UDA; however, those funds had been reallocated to the transportation plan, Clarion, and other planning efforts. Mr. Chino asked if it was possible to allocated funds in next year's budget, but spend those funds now. Mayor Kinskey answered this is not an option—the Wyoming Fiscal Procedures Act prohibits this. However, with the optional 1 cent tax, any unanticipated overage can be allocated to projects. Right now, those overages are being allocated to infrastructure projects. Mr. Chino mentioned if the County is contributing funds for this project, the City must also contribute funds. The County needs to see a benefit for this project; the County is interested in assisting with funds for this project, but must be cognizant of how this project is being funded.

Mr. Fuller summarized the funding ideas presented for the group. The commitment to hire UDA is there; however, funding must be secured so that a contract can be signed between the City and UDA.

City staff can review the scope of work with UDA and Clarion to see if any work can be combined or if any work falls under the scope of the Clarion contract to see if we can further reduce the fee for UDA. Mayor Kinskey said he will have Robert Briggs contact Clarion to ask this question. Mayor Kinskey wants a seamless transition between the city and county's comprehensive land-use planning processes and a comprehensive design planning process; Robert Briggs can confer with both UDA and Clarion to ensure a smooth planning process. There may also be potential to reduce the fee by examining some of the plans already in place—there may be a foundation for design planning already in place that would reduce the scope of work and subsequent fee structure.

With the right framing and the right contact, the foundation sector could be a viable funding source for this project. The group needs to explore this option; Jay McGinnis would be the contact for this.

Developers could be approached for funding. The Big Horn Homebuilders Association was not mentioned as a group to solicit for funding; Mr. Chino said they may be interested, but have other issues that they are working out. Mr. Schellinger recommended this group invite the Homebuilders Association to future meetings and keep them informed.

There is potential to coordinate with UDA and dovetail the DSA master plan with UDA's design planning work; if the DSA would like to dovetail the two plans, then DSA could potentially contribute the funds earmarked for master plan updates to hiring UDA.

Organizations represented in today's meeting could contribute funds, adding toward the \$10,000 contribution of Forward Sheridan toward this initiative. Input of funds from other organizations would help strengthen the cause for hiring UDA, showing a community support of this initiative. Mr. McGinnis asked if there was a lead organization for this initiative; Mr. Chino replied Forward Sheridan is the lead organization, as this initiative came from the strategic planning process. However, the City is the entity that must enter into contract with UDA; the city must control the design planning process.

Commissioner Rolston will check into the County budget for unallocated funds from the optional 1 cent tax. This may be a funding source the County can use to contribute toward UDA's fee.

Mayor Kinskey stated he will investigate the City budget—if there are funds that have been allocated to projects not yet started, he could potentially reallocate those funds to hiring UDA. However, this is a tough decision to make; the support for hiring UDA must be there for this to be a viable option.

Adjourn

UDA Action Outline

I. Scope of Work/UDA Estimates

II. Potential Funding Sources/Contact

A. Foundations:

B. Grant Sources:

C. Local Organizations:

D. Developers:

E. Government Entities:

III. Level of Commitment to This Project

A. Personal Commitment

B. Organizational Commitment

Proposed Organizational Flow Chart:

