

PLANNING CHALLENGES

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CHAPTER

The Laramie Comprehensive Plan is designed as a blueprint for the growth of the City and its one-mile planning area over the next 20 years and beyond. The plan's focus is on preserving the assets that contribute positively to a recognizable image for visitors while enhancing the western character valued by community residents. These attributes, coupled with the strong presence of the University of Wyoming, significantly enhance quality of life and the City's ability to expand existing, and attract new businesses, and offer gainful employment to residents. As stated in the introductory chapter the Vision is the preferred future derived from citizen comment. The plan's essential value is in its ability to succeed in achieving this vision through a proactive and thoughtful program of implementation.

PURPOSE

The City is settled within the highly attractive Laramie River Valley, has near access to recreational resources, and greatly benefits from having a major university, all of which enhance its attractiveness for new businesses and residents. Realizing the possibility of preserving the Western environment that has not yet become part of a sprawling metropolis, as have the front-range cities of Colorado, is a challenge. Even without nearby cities, sprawl is, nonetheless, a threat to the charm and character of Laramie. There are a myriad of challenges present, each of which threaten the ability to realize the City's potential. The City of Laramie is confronted with considerable challenges in managing its character, creating good jobs, sustaining a sound tax base, and overcoming its housing constraints in the coming years.

The purpose of this plan is not only to comply with State Statutes which require a comprehensive plan or master plan to guide a community in land use decisions (i.e. zoning) but more importantly establish a vision that residents, business and land owners, the University, and public officials prefer and will support through action over the next 20 years. The plan must go beyond general and lofty sounding goals like "provide affordable, quality housing for all residents." While everybody may agree with this statement as a goal of the community, in order to achieve it, the plan must establish the policy framework and

Planning is about implementation. The costs of implementation and the community's willingness to pay for them will be at the heart of this plan's success.

Albany County has an important role to play in the planning process. Planning and Development in the County has a direct impact on the city. Services such as parks, schools, business, trails, fire and police are affected by County development and planning.

provide guidance as to how it is to be done. The goal implicitly recognizes that there is a problem. However, for the plan to be effective the problem must be researched and analyzed, solutions and alternatives evaluated, and a realistic and feasible plan of action put in place to overcome the deficiency. The evaluation of alternatives for resolving the problem and the selection of one or more strategies that are both reasonable and acceptable are essential elements of this planning process. All the alternatives will have costs, whether they are regulations that impose costs on developers, future businesses, and homeowners or are increased taxes borne by the entire population. Once the costs associated with such strategies become clear, the community must then reach agreement through cooperation and collaboration on the best way(s) to implement the plan in a fair and equitable manner. It is possible that the process of selecting the best implementation strategy may warrant modification of the original goal to tolerate the associated costs.

Ultimately, there is no reason to create a Comprehensive Plan unless it serves as a policy framework that allows the City to achieve what is envisioned for the future. In order to achieve success, there must be not only an understanding of the City's assets and strengths, but also an honest assessment of its problems and challenges. The intended vision is to build on the assets while mitigating the liabilities.

While this is primarily a plan for the City, the plan's influence spans to land in Albany County, within one mile of the City's corporate boundaries. This is an area, where by State statute, the City may exercise its subdivision authority. Hence, it is vitally important for there to be close coordination between the City and County within this area. The importance of this has been recognized by the County with their contribution of funding for the plan. Better coordination and joint planning will be of great benefit in the future. While there is a clear political boundary, it has little real meaning from a perspective of future planning as the economy, housing needs, and environment are not influenced by this boundary.

WHY PLAN?

Development in and around Laramie is undertaken by individual landowners, the City, University of Wyoming, Laramie Community College, WyoTech, State, County and Highway Departments among others. For the City to realize its vision, a plan is needed to coordinate the activities and investments of these and other groups. If each group continues to make its own decisions without due consideration of their influences and impacts on the others, it forces each into a reactive rather than proactive mode. Can water and wastewater be provided to a site to achieve the service required by development? If the facilities are not of adequate capacity or designed to an acceptable standard, either the developer cannot build what is desired or, alternatively, the level of service may be reduced. For instance, reduced water pressure will affect new development and existing residents, as well as fire fighting capabilities. There would also be other implications such as increased insurance rates as a result of insufficient fire flows. Virtually all development depends, to some degree, on one or more services offered by the City, State, other governmental agencies, or service providers. Governments have limited financial resources, increasingly so in recent years. It is always more expensive to react to development than it is to plan and prepare for development and guide it to appropriate areas. Furthermore, government may not be able to react quickly. While adding an

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additional school bus stop is easily accomplished, extending a sewer line or upgrading road or utility capacity has a lag time of several years.

Problems or liabilities do not cease to exist on their own. Wishing that a problem or issue was corrected simply means it will persist and possibly worsen over time. Without plans, the forces that created a problem will remain. Therefore, a plan with foresight and preparedness can respond to such forces and find solutions to resolve long-standing issues. The task of attracting good, new jobs, for instance, has much support; however, aspects of the City that are unattractive to businesses provide an obstacle. These situations have appeared, not because there was intent to harm the City's economic development efforts or create problems for their neighbors, but, rather, because there was a lack of sensitivity to the impacts of their actions on the community at-large and its physical or economic attractiveness. In other cases, there are divergent interests and motivations. Only by developing a plan can local government eliminate the problems that are constraining growth from taking place in a desirable and cost-effective manner.

Main elements of the plan include:

- A **realistic vision** of the City's future; what it will be like in 20 years. This must be both textual and graphically illustrative.
- Specific **goals and actions** to be achieved during the planning period. Goals and actions are intended to be broad, while implementation is more measurable.
- Maps that illustrate the City's vision and provide guidance to **coordinate capital investments and provide adequate facilities and services**. Such exhibits must address future land use, community character, and locations of major infrastructure.
- **Establish priorities of both programmatic improvements and capital investments**. Capital programming is important, but departments must also address and allocate operational and maintenance costs.
- **Recommendations on regulations**. A significant portion of implementation will be achieved by regulations -- zoning, subdivision, building codes, and code enforcement.
- **Public-private partnership** to allow governments to work cooperatively with the private sector, often achieving objectives that neither can achieve alone. Affordable housing and redevelopment strategies are frequent examples requiring both government and private sector participants.
- **Intergovernmental cooperation** between the City, County, University, and State agencies to enable coordination of actions and, in some cases, share resources.
- **Governmental programs** of acquisition and renewal spanning a wide range of areas from acquiring land for parks to establishing redevelopment and reinvestment programs.

Historical Timeline

Below are key dates in Laramie's history. This summary provides a snapshot of historical events that have shaped the community and surrounding area.

Pre 1800 The Laramie Plains served as migratory routes for an abundance of animals as well as hunting grounds for Indian tribes such as the Shoshone, Cheyenne, Teton-Dakota and Arapahoe.

Early 1800's Jacques La Ramie, a local trapper on the North Platte & Laramie river was killed by Indians while building his cabin. His name was given to many places such as Fort Laramie, Laramie County, Laramie Peak, Laramie River and of course the Town of Laramie.

1860 First settlements near Laramie were stage stations for the Lodgepole, Cherokee and Overland trails.

1866 Fort Sanders is established to protect stage station operators, emigrants, railroad workers and Laramie due to the hostility that existed between the white man and Indians.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

1868 Union Pacific Railroad arrived in Laramie. This site was chosen due to its distance from Cheyenne (50 Miles), a major spring that produces millions of gallons of water and timber for railroad ties.

This process was initiated in 2001 and resulted in a vision statement being approved by the Planning Commission and City Council in 2003. For unforeseen and unavoidable reasons, the process slowed and was temporarily halted until it was restarted in October 2005. The City solicited proposals for professional assistance and selected the national planning firm of Kendig Keast Collaborative. A Citizen’s Project Advisory Team (CPAT) who led the initial visioning efforts agreed to continue in their capacity to complete this plan. Their involvement, in addition to the number of public persons who participated throughout this process, is essential to the success of planning. The process was re-started with an intensive three-day reconnaissance and public input process where the consultants and staff met with a large number of special interest groups and toured the City to understand

and appreciate the community's assets, constraints, and different community types. A Citizens' Congress was held, which offered an opportunity for approximately 65 citizens to discuss their concerns about Laramie's future. The issues and comments received during these meetings and observations of the consultant are presented in the section of this chapter entitled "Focus of the Plan." This section summarizes the results and preliminary findings from the initial input of the community.

Citizen involvement has continued throughout the process, offering an ongoing forum for residents to participate in forming the plan and its recommendations, to respond to concepts and ideas as solutions to the identified issues, and



Sound support for the plan was exemplified by the participation at the Citizens' Congress on October 13th, 2005.

to remain diligent in ensuring the plan accurately reflects the values of the community and its residents. The numerous public outreach meetings held provided an opportunity for citizens to participate in planning for the City's future and having their individual concerns heard and taken into account.

For each of the issues, and most importantly, for the key issues, the draft plan documents were made available for public comment on the alternative methods of addressing the issues. This was an important step toward consensus-building since, in most cases, there were a number of solutions available and a range of opinions as to how best to accomplish the vision of Laramie. The meetings were used to inform citizens and officials of the consequences associated with the different options, the likely outcomes for achieving the goals, and probable impacts on individual areas of the community. This provided an opportunity for residents to discuss and debate the alternatives and seek those that best meet the goals while, at the same time, ensuring that no area solely bears the costs or undue burdens.

1868 Along with the arrival of the Union Pacific Railroad, investors, gamblers, workers, hunters, shop and saloon keepers, prostitutes and settlers all arrived, purchasing over 400 lots within a week at prices ranging from \$25-\$260.

1870 "Grandma" Swain, becomes the first woman, to vote in a public election.

FOCUS OF THE PLAN

One of the most important tasks in developing a plan is to determine the issues that the community needs to address. The State of Wyoming’s planning enabling legislation provides guidance as to the general elements that must be in a comprehensive plan, but only identifies topic or chapter headings. More important and relevant are the specific issues within the framework of the State guidelines that the community wants to address. Setting priorities for government action is a vital task of this process, including preserving or enhancing community assets, resolving conflicts that make decisions difficult, allocating scarce resources, and seeking new funding or revenue sources.

The reconnaissance efforts early in the process provided an extensive amount of citizen input, which resulted in the formulation of a comprehensive list of community issues and concerns for the future. Although the issues cover a wide variety of topics the implementation of these issues is key.

Key Issues

The plan's vision must address these key issues. Because government resources are limited, implementation challenges government to continue to monitor progress and set priorities to implement the plan. See pages 1-5 thru 1-13 for discussion on these key issues. The key issues are as follows:

- **Community Character:** This section includes a plan as to the future character of the community. It is particularly important that the plan respects the City's compact form, recognizes the rural nature of the landscape, and preserves its unique qualities that distinguish its identity.
- **City Center:** The purpose of this element is to protect and enhance the existing downtown as an urban pedestrian environment, restoring its role as the economic center of town, and expanding its size. Finding new anchors to bring people to downtown is essential to this effort.
- **Transportation:** A plan must address the critical crossings of the railroad, interstate and river which divide the City. All modes of transportation must be addressed, including automobiles, public transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. In addition, other local issues such as congestion management and downtown access, circulation, and parking must be addressed.
- **Affordable Housing:** Affordable and quality housing is needed for the entire population - workers, elderly, and students among many others.
- **Growth Management:** This requires developing intergovernmental cooperation between the City, County, and University so that actions are reinforcing and conflicting policies are eliminated so as to effectively manage the community's growth.
- **Economic Development:** Provide new, well-paying jobs.
- **Infrastructure:** Provide adequate water, sewer, trash, schools, streets and other services or facilities needed by community residents.

1872 Railroad had 330 employees on its payroll and was the chief source of income in the City.

1886 University of Wyoming is established. One building, five professors and 42 students were the University.

1880's - 1890's A large amount of industrial development such as rolling mills, glass factory, tannery, brewery, stone quarries, flour mill, brick yard, cigar factory, lye producer and tie treatment plant shaped the City of Laramie.

1911 Transcontinental Highway was laid out and mapped the first automobile road across Wyoming.

1915 Laramie led all Wyoming cities in manufacturing.

1920's Laramie had the Nation's largest icing plant, large cement company and an oil refinery. Lumbering was second only to the railroad in importance to Laramie's economy.

1923 Lincoln Highway across Wyoming was graded and graveled, making automobile travel possible both east and west of Laramie. A dramatic increase in tourism was seen.

1966 WyoTech originated in a single 9,000 square foot building providing training in automotive and diesel technologies.

- **Parks and Recreation:** Provide adequate parks and recreation for all segments of the population.
- **Natural Resource, Environmental and Wildlife Protection:** Protect natural resources, habitat areas, and other sensitive lands throughout all facets of Laramie’s operations and development.
- **Development Review Process:** Provide a fair, thorough, and timely review process for development and redevelopment.



There is a definitive edge between the City and outlying areas, which is beginning to lose definition as rural and countryside development occurs on the community fringes.

KEY ISSUES

Community Character

The general public and elected officials are cognizant of the need to enhance the image of the City. Residents voice a myriad of concerns about Laramie's character and appearance, including its entryways and corridors, neighborhoods, public buildings and spaces, and the peripheral areas. Laramie, like many other communities, has developed using land use and density to plan and regulate community character. *Chapter 3, Community*

Character, will demonstrate that these are not effective tools to realize an attractive and desirable character. Therefore, this plan is based on a comprehensive approach to community character.

Laramie's compact community form and its unique character provide sharp contrast between the City and surrounding rural areas. This edge distinguishes it from the front-range communities in Colorado that have a more composite or blended character. The choice as a freestanding or composite community is one aspect of character. *Chapter 3, Community Character*, sets forth a community character and land use approach that provides the design provisions and tools needed to preserve the positive characteristics of Laramie that are being threatened by sprawling development around the periphery. Cheyenne, for instance, has already experienced this occurrence, which has led to serious constraints to urban development caused by sporadic and haphazard peripheral development. This is a significant community character issue for Laramie; it also is of significance from the perspectives of growth management and intergovernmental cooperation. The western character of Laramie and Albany County is not well-served by development sprawling in an uncontrolled manner across the landscape. Among other well-documented impacts, sprawl destroys community identity and sense of place, eliminates opportunities for creating formal gateways into the City, harms natural resources and wildlife habitat and blurs the definitive edge, thereby confusing urban and rural environments.

The City character is compact in form, which is, in part, a result of the choices of community character types - urban, suburban, and rural. The current mix has enabled it to retain a sense of place. However, the City is composed of neighborhoods and areas with different character types. Making the correct choices concerning character type will be

Today Laramie continues to be a location with abundant wildlife, a western culture and a remarkable history. It has grown from a railroad town to a town with a population of 27,000. The University has grown to the largest employer with programs in Business, Engineering, Arts and Science and Law, among others.

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important in guiding future development and sustaining a sense of place. Also, the City's zoning ordinance is out-dated and is based on land use and density as a premise of managing development, neither of which are effective in addressing community character. Additionally, there are significant mismatches between uses. For instance, the University is a major feature of the City, but is zoned residential, even though most of the University land has a very different character than residential areas that have identical zoning. There is also an over zoning problem, where the permitted uses and intensities are much higher than the existing development. Mismatches between existing character and zoned character can create severe issues dealing with infill development or redevelopment. The most common indication of this is when citizens voice their concern as to a proposed use damaging the character of their neighborhood.

Community character focuses on the differences in design that distinguish urban, suburban, and rural types. Currently, there are two character types of commercial use within the City. An urban commercial character is present in downtown, whereas all other commercial areas have an auto-urban character. The residential areas range from a very dense urban character on the University campus to 35-acre rural development around the community's fringes. The plan must meet the market demands for each of these lifestyles and their respective character types. Community character and land use will be combined in a manner that permits a future community character map that achieves the allocation of land to residential, commercial, and industrial, while recognizing the University's unique situation, but additionally sets forth design elements that are essential in forming the individual character types.

Lastly, the entrances to Laramie warrant significant improvement and visual enhancement, which was clearly stated by residents through the public input process. Presently, they are rather non-descript in their identity and contain a broad assortment of strip commercial uses with an abundance of signs and minimal landscaping. Presently, there is nothing unique about the built environment at the entrances of Laramie that suggests that it is any different than most other communities across the U.S. This is the community's one and only chance to create a positive first and lasting impression on visitors, passers-by, and, perhaps most importantly, on business prospects and investors.

City Center

Downtown is an attractive urban environment. Its fringe areas, though, are a mixture of both urban and auto-urban characters, which have not shared in the economic health of downtown. The challenge from a design perspective is in bringing new businesses to the downtown area, while embracing and further emphasizing its urban character. Particularly in downtown areas, "front-door" parking offers an advantage over the big-box superstore. Parking in close proximity is considered highly important to most businesses.

Today continued In addition to the University, Laramie has become an education center with the addition of Laramie Community College – Albany County Campus and the expansion of WyoTech, which encompasses 3 campuses of over 298,000 sq/ft. The Medicine Bow National Forest, and abundant state lands provide a high quality of life sought out by many of Laramie's residents.



Development along 3rd Street reflects an auto-urban character as a result of its auto-orientation, multiple access points, parking along the street frontage, and signage.



Downtown reflects an urban character due to its enclosure of space offered by many two-story buildings built to the sidewalk line.

Surface parking is destructive of the urban character, even though it is less expensive. Therefore, creative solutions will be necessary to allow expansion of business in downtown while, at the same time, preserving its highly valued urban character.

Other than the character and design issues associated with downtown, there are also important economic development issues. For many years, the City has permitted development to occur on the edges of the community. Therefore, businesses that once anchored downtown were faced with the prospect of leaving downtown or being replaced by their competitors on the fringe. The economic focus of downtown must be firmly established. Currently, it is a specialty shopping and restaurant area. There are few, if any, anchor stores that attract customers who then routinely shop at other downtown stores. There are many questions to be answered by this plan. What types of anchors are available? What requirements

do they have for land and parking? Also of significance is if there are other land use decisions working for or against downtown. For example, several major new facilities were considered recently, including the recreation center and the conference center, neither of which were located in sufficient proximity to the City center to serve as an anchor use.

Because the land is largely developed, downtown planning will involve reuse or redevelopment. These are tasks that are much different and require strategies involving direct City intervention. Downtown will be addressed in *Chapter 3, Community Character*, and *Chapter 8, Economic Development*.

Transportation

There are a range of transportation issues in Laramie, as expressed by residents through the public input process. The most significant issue is constraint or barrier of the railroad, which physically separates West and East Laramie. The solutions for overcoming this barrier have major design issues, as well as substantial cost implications. There is also a varying range of issues associated with the different options for placement of the viaduct, such as traffic movement patterns, roadway and access spacing and personal property interests, as well as many others. The Laramie River is another barrier between West Laramie and neighborhoods east of the river. Together, the railroads, interstate and river form a formidable barrier. Currently, there are three crossing points; one is Interstate 80, which does not most serve local traffic circulation needs. The other two are the Curtis Street Bridge and Clark Street Bridge that serve all local traffic. One of the bridges is structurally sound, yet deteriorating.

The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) has expressed their willingness to construct one bridge, either replacing or relocating the deteriorating bridge. Many



Public Transit - Transit can greatly improve community mobility and economic opportunities for Laramie residents.

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residents expressed a desire for two new crossings to replace the single deteriorated structure. However, the costs of such a proposition are nearly prohibitive due to the length of span to cross both the railroad and river and the bridge height that is required for railroad clearance. It is not feasible for the City to individually bear the cost of paying for a bridge. This is a long-standing issue for which a final solution is warranted.

With a compact community form and large student population at the University and WyoTech, other modes of transportation, besides the automobile, need to be considered. Any number of trips that can be converted from an automobile to another mode will benefit residents with reduced congestion, increased mobility, and improved transportation choices. For downtown, there would be value gained by lessening the amount of parking needed, creating an opportunity for more buildings instead of parking lots and, hence, an enhanced urban environment. Public transit, in particular, is important because it would provide a year-round, all-weather transit choice, thereby adding value for residents without cars. Walking and bicycling provide both transportation and recreation benefits and, therefore, warrant integration and improved emphasis in the transportation element of the Laramie Comprehensive Plan. Transportation issues are addressed in sections *Chapter 3, Community Character, Chapter 4, Parks and Recreation and Chapter 8, Transportation.*

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is a common issue among communities of all sizes and across the nation. After a period of 15+ years of booming housing construction, the cost of housing has risen much faster than income. While Laramie and Albany County have not had a housing boom per se, they are particularly vulnerable since a large percentage of the workforce is in the government and service sectors with lower wages, thereby making much of the available housing supply unaffordable. The fact that the student population outnumbers permanent residents adds yet an additional dimension as a group of students can out-bid most working families for housing. Also, in recent years, more parents are buying houses for their student children, which are then sold after graduation. These factors contribute to a concern for the availability, affordability, and quality of housing in Laramie.

The City and County are challenged to enforce housing standards due to issues of staffing and inadequate codes. As a result, there are many substandard units. The combination of a shortage of affordable housing and poor maintenance and upkeep adds to the complexity of the issue and the difficulty in addressing it. There are likely a significant number of existing occupied units that warrant replacement with new construction due to a lack of code compliance, structural deterioration, or a combination that renders rehabilitation impractical.

At the root of the affordability issue is lower incomes and inflated construction costs. Housing materials and



Many of the newer homes are larger in size making them difficult to afford for working families.

land costs have all been increasing faster than the cost of living. As a society, Americans are seeking ever larger houses. The average house in 1950 was 950 square feet in size; in 2000, it had reached 2,265 square feet, an increase of 238 percent. Laramie has many smaller, older homes, while much of the new construction is at or above the national average. The result is that new homes are beyond the reach of many, if not most, working families. The public employers, service workforce, and tourism-oriented businesses all have a significant workforce at pay levels that make it impractical to afford the down payment and mortgage of new houses. The competition between students and working families for older homes and apartments further exacerbates the problem.

This plan must address three areas; wages, affordability, and housing condition. All are difficult for local government to address and require a period of time to overcome. Wages are especially difficult, but policies and lobbying must seek to address all three areas. The lack of decent, affordable housing makes the task of recruiting new businesses more difficult. Deteriorated housing also creates an image that makes job recruitment even more difficult. Affordable housing issues are addressed in sections *Chapter 2, Conditions and Outlook, Chapter 3, Community Character, Chapter 5, Housing and Neighborhoods and Chapter 9, Economic Development.*

Growth Management

The City and Albany County comprise a single economic unit. While there is some commutation between Laramie, Cheyenne and Fort Collins, these two cities are independent entities with limited competition from other cities or small towns in either Albany or Laramie Counties. As independent political units, the City and County often act as if they are independent, which is not the case. In economic development, a new business provides jobs for residents of both the City and County. If a business decides to locate elsewhere due to, among other reasons, a lack of community character issues, this significantly impacts both. Inadequate and unaffordable housing are also joint problems.

Since the rate of growth is not high, managing the extension of services is not a difficult task; nevertheless, resources are scarce and extending services in the most efficient manner possible is highly desirable. More importantly, because there is a desire to grow, effectively managing growth to achieve a desirable community character that helps to attract new business is an important goal. The influence of blight, whether located in the City or County, harms the image of the area and its ability to attract new businesses and residents.

There are significant differences in the regulatory approaches for the City and County. While it is clear that large portions of the County are in agriculture, with no market-driven demand for strengthened land use, zoning, or building regulations, there are other areas where such regulations are both valid and important. This plan must identify these areas and provide workable solutions to effectively direct development to appropriate areas and of appropriate character. Substandard housing can be a threat to the health and safety of families and children. The accumulation of junk and debris on properties within public view is a great disservice to the area's economy and attractiveness. It is also important that the area near the City have a uniform vision of the future.

Blight An area characterized by deteriorating and/or abandoned buildings; inadequate or missing public or community services; and vacant land with debris, litter, trash and junk accumulation, and impacted by adverse environmental nuisances, such as noise, heavy traffic and odors.

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State statutes provide for a one-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction around the periphery of the City limits. In some areas, this distance is adequate, such as to the east where the Casper Aquifer and Medicine Bow National Forest and Mountains make development difficult. As a result of annexation, the City has control over the area to the west, extending out to the airport. One mile is probably not adequate to the south and north where the vistas extend well beyond the one-mile area, making unincorporated development quite visible, particularly to the south. The City and County need to work together to develop a comprehensive approach for managing growth that works for the betterment of the community as a whole. Growth management issues are addressed in sections *Chapter 2, Conditions and Outlook, Chapter 3, Community Character, Chapter 5, Housing and Neighborhoods, Chapter 6, Public Utilities, Chapter 7, Urban Growth and Chapter 9, Economic Development.*

Economic Development

With low-paying jobs dominating the employment of Laramie, economic development is an important goal. Simply enhancing the entries to Laramie will immediately make the community more attractive, which makes it easier to convince business prospects that the City is a good place to locate. Similarly, if new jobs are to be created, the business must be convinced that its workers can find decent housing at affordable and reasonable prices.

The area that is perhaps the most difficult is the improvement of wage levels for the full-time workforce. The Laramie Economic Development Corporation (LEDC) has set a target minimum wage for new jobs. This is important because it begins to address the high percentage of lower-wage jobs. Even though housing choices for the target wage earners are limited, increasing the level of pay will be a major contribution of the ongoing economic development efforts toward solving the housing problem.

A second reason economic development is listed as a topical issue is that the City and County, through the Laramie Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), has developed a good strategy for economic development. While the task of attracting new business remains a significant challenge, the LEDC is aware of the difficulties and has developed a sound strategy and approach. This plan will utilize the good work of the LEDC and supplement it with related strategies that, together, will serve to accomplish the overall goal. The LEDC is aware of the problems and is committed to improving the image and other constraints that make the City and County less competitive.

There are several areas where economic development needs additional effort. For instance, the City has several brownfield sites. These sites are situated within the City, which is land that should be made available for development. Reclaiming these properties is an essential first step. The reclamation would also assist in improving the west side, while removing possible threats to the quality of the Laramie River.

The One Mile Extraterritorial Jurisdictional Boundary is the distance the City of Laramie can impose regulation, based on State Statutes, upon areas within the County that are developing based on the Comprehensive Plan.



Business retention and attraction are high priorities for the community and its plan for the future.



Wildlife viewing is one of the City's attractions.

Infrastructure

Providing adequate water, wastewater, solid waste, schools, and other services and public facilities needed by community residents remains a challenge. Providing adequate infrastructure is a two-pronged effort. One task is to adequately forecast where new development will occur so as to have infrastructure in place in advance of ensuring development or prohibiting it to restrict growth. An equally important effort is the maintenance of existing infrastructure and strategic replacement of obsolescent infrastructure. A careful assessment is needed to ensure sufficient capacities as the community grows. *Chapter 6, Public Utilities*, is vital in the provision of adequate infrastructure.

Parks and Recreation

Providing adequate parks and recreation areas and facilities for all segments of the population is an important goal. The City's current system of parks appears to be well maintained and an asset to the community. The challenge of this plan is to ensure that there is an adequate distribution of parks across the planning area, thereby providing reasonable and convenient access to all persons. At the same time, there must be facilities and improvements within each park that meet the needs and demands of residents. This plan must, therefore, evaluate the inventory of parks and plan to meet or beat national standards for communities of this size. This too, is a benefit for economic development.

In some cases, parks and open space could be used to protect aquifer recharge areas, which are important, while limiting the improvements, development or usage during certain times of the year. An element that is missing is increased access to the peripheral rural areas via extended trails and linkages. The greenbelt along the Laramie River is exemplary of good use of linear greenways. There is an opportunity to extend it further to the south and north that will provide connections to the rural environment. Linear corridors like the greenbelt give access to natural areas and offer opportunities for non-motorized recreation.

Natural Resource, Environment and Wildlife Protection

Whether this is really a separate issue from parks and open space needs to be further explored. In many cases, the two will be compatible, although active recreation areas are not compatible with all natural and wildlife needs. The similarities and differences noted will be further explored in the future *Chapter 11 -Conservation*. Careful planning of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, what is now often discussed as sustainable development, has many environmental and quality of life values. Ensuring that drainage runs where nature has established floodplains and wetlands can greatly reduce the cost of storm water infrastructure. It also provides views of open space that bring a premium to the developer. Some types of wildlife may need to be actively discouraged; larger animals, for example, can create problems near roads. Environmental protection and awareness is

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an important facet of the community that should be considered when making decisions about issues ranging from development to open space protection.

Development Review Process

One problem area cited by developers and economic development personnel was the development review process. The complaints indicated that proposals are submitted with no timeline for the review or consideration of approval. If the City desires to attract new business, it must be keenly aware that, for many potential new businesses, a rapid decision may be the difference between their location here or elsewhere. The plans and codes of the City should be written such that developers know what is expected. If a project cannot meet the required standards, the application should be promptly denied. Most developers are willing to work toward compliance. Word of such process can frustrate achievement of economic development objectives. While old and obsolete ordinances bear much of the responsibility, a sufficient level of staffing may also an issue, especially when extensive review may be needed.

While complaints about regulations and the process are common, most applicants are willing to meet the requirements if there is an increased level of certainty that their plans will receive rapid review and approval if they are compliant. The problem for new businesses is even more acute. Most are considering several municipalities as possible locations for their business. Communities that are able to provide quick response and work diligently to gain compliance and approval are those that are more successful in their economic development programs.