

Economic development: a historical perspective

Yes, we're all in this together. Each of us contributes to the economic development of our community.

But where are we regarding this issue, and why are we here?

The history of economic development in Sheridan County is one of fits and starts. This past work has neither been lost nor ignored; rather it is serving as a foundation for Forward Sheridan's work today.

In 1979, the Sheridan County commissioners adopted a Comprehensive Plan, which was updated in 1982 and established a basic plan of development.

The city designates land for business and residential purposes. A clear plan for land use is important for healthy economic and community development.

When Big Horn Coal lost its contract with Con Edison in the mid-1980s, Sheridan County lost substantial tax revenues.

In response, a group sought to have Sheridan declared as one of the state's five Main Street programs. This successful effort was designed to spark economic development in downtown areas.

The Main Street program became the Uptown Sheridan Association, whose goal was to revitalize the downtown area and capitalize on the area's tourist economy. A streetscape master plan was one of its significant accomplishments.

The Uptown Sheridan Association is

now the Downtown Sheridan Association, which supports the economic health of our downtown businesses through multiple venues.

In 2000-2001, the Sheridan County Growth Management Plan (Vision 2020) was prepared with a mission to "Create an achievable plan to

meet the city's and county's shared vision for the future, respecting community values and enabling the area to thrive on growth and change through innovative, aesthetic land use and responsible development."

Hundreds of individuals worked on this plan, investing their energy to identify elements necessary for a quality future for our community. But the plan failed to provide a clear plan for implementation and accountability.

From the late 1980s through the early 2000s, economic development was a function of the Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce.

Late in 2001, the Chamber's economic development committee hired a director to promote the county's economic development.

A Community Affair

Cissy
Dillon

Planning for Sheridan's economic development



In 2002, this evolved into the Sheridan Area Development Alliance. SADA worked to raise public awareness around the issue of economic development as a community endeavor.

It assisted in the creation of the business park at the airport and, collaborating with the Daniels Fund, was primarily responsible

for bringing the 2003 Wyoming Rural Development Community Assessment to Sheridan.

The Community Assessment involved over 800 community members who identified community strengths and weaknesses, as well as projects that participants wanted to see implemented.

As a result of this assessment, efforts began to meet such challenges as affordable housing, day care, work force recruitment, preservation of open spaces, and others.

But once again, accountability and implementation were not directly addressed.

Meanwhile, SADA's board, with the encouragement of the Wyoming Business Council, realized the need to fully fund an economic development program that would make Sheridan County competitive with other Wyoming communities.

A yearlong funding campaign with a four-year plan was developed. Forward Sheridan was the name given to this effort and then later was adopted as the organization's name as well.

Forward Sheridan believes that community and economic development must proceed hand in hand.

Forward Sheridan, with a multitude of community partners and with implementation and accountability as primary goals, is building on the foundation laid by earlier efforts, as well as looking for new and innovative avenues to enhance the economic well-being of our community.

If you are interested in participating or have questions, please call Philippe Chino of Forward Sheridan at 673-8004.

Editor's note — "A Community Affair" is a weekly column from citizens who support Forward Sheridan, a professional business organization of invested partners whose purpose is to develop and maintain a sound economy in Sheridan County.

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