

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

Key to the future — communicate, collaborate

Communicate and collaborate — or not?

One of the challenges that was identified in both the 2003 Community Assessment and again in Forward Sheridan's strategic planning process is the need for better communication and collaboration between the city and the county.

Communication can be surprisingly difficult even when those involved are speaking the same language and live in the same community; and collaboration can be even trickier.

We have all experienced it. We talk to a good friend or family member, someone whom we've known for a long time. We discuss a subject and think we understand each other — only to learn later that we were not "on the same page."

Because we are close, it is usually easy to figure out where the misunderstanding was and straighten it all out.

Now, imagine two government entities with different legislatively mandated responsibilities, different governing approaches, and funding challenges. It is easy to see how communication might indeed be a challenge.

Then, nearly every election cycle, you change a few of the players; and those new to the game face the challenge of learning about the process and integrating their efforts into ongoing

projects and discussions.

In April and May 2007, the Government Subcommittee of the Forward Sheridan Economic Development Strategic Planning Task Force surveyed appointed and elected boards and officials to

gauge their perception of communication between the city and county.

The survey indicated that most respondents felt they were in contact with other government boards and commissions; however, all believed more could be done to engage elected and appointed officials to communicate better and collaborate on common issues.

It is not easy, but there are opportunities for better communication and collaboration.

We first must ensure that everyone is "on the same page." Or, in other words, we must educate not just the public, but also appointed boards, commissions and all staff on the delineation of the roles of the various entities in the city and county.

Who, or what group, has what

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Planning for Sheridan's economic development



responsibilities? Information must be shared among the individuals involved and also with the community at large.

Forums for government boards and commissions to share information, and the media as well as Internet, to get the plans and

dates out to the public are avenues worth consideration.

Collaboration may be more difficult but also holds the promise of significant benefits. County and city officials must work to find common issues and pool funds to maximize the benefit to the entire county.

Both city and county should adopt common, unified governing documents when necessary. When possible, these documents should be vetted through public forums.

Resulting master documents with consistent building codes, uniformed subdivision codes, coordinated comprehensive plans (two plans, one vision), compatible master and design plans, as well as implementation guidelines and planning and zoning documents will provide clear and

mutually acceptable guidelines for growth.

Taking the time to work together and keep all entities educated as to what is going on is not easy, but it is possible. If we are to enjoy the kind of community we optimistically envision, we must rise to the challenge.

Forward Sheridan's Economic Development Strategic Plan for Sheridan County addresses the issue of communication and coordination between the city and the county.

As a member of the Strategic Plan Task Force, I know that we can succeed, because I have seen efforts and commitment from all the right players to make everything that was mentioned in this article come to fruition in the near future.

Sheridan County native Bob Rolston returned to Sheridan in 2005 after retiring from a career in cattle-associated businesses throughout the West. He is serving his first term as a Sheridan County commissioner.

"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. Philippe Chino is president/CEO of Forward Sheridan.