

# Volunteers, businesses made Sheridan's strategic plan happen

During the past 10 months, hundreds of volunteers put their heads together in an effort to guide the county in the right direction for economic growth.

This move was made to create a road map for the next five years, specifically focusing on developing and maintaining a strong and sustainable economy in Sheridan County.

Progress was made. Last week, Forward Sheridan's five-year Strategic Plan for Developing and Maintaining a Strong Economy in Sheridan County was unveiled to the volunteers who assisted in the creation of the plan that produced specific initiatives with achievable outcomes.

This strategic plan could not have happened without the help and guidance of more than 400 volunteers and 90 companies during this intensive 10-month process.

For the next five months, Forward Sheridan will present the strategic plan to all elected officials, investors, and approximately 100 civic organizations throughout the community.

This is more than just a list of goals. This strategic plan will build on Sheridan's strengths and create an environment citizens want.

It gives us, as a community, an approach to economic development that not only includes traditional business retention and attraction, but also work force and community development.

It's not just identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that make strategic planning valuable to communities.

It's implementation that matters. It's evaluating success and monitoring progress so communities such as Sheridan experience healthy, planned growth.

It sounds simple. It is. But it's also time-consuming and requires the efforts of a lot of people.

In the United States, strategic planning began in the early '60s, as the business environment became less stable and outside factors disrupted long-range plans.

Larger companies first used strategic planning to improve their ability to compete in the marketplace.

The strategic planning process started to make inroads in municipal economic development in the mid-'80s. It was focused on business-location decisions and "how and what we can do to bring new industries in the city, county, and region."

In the late '80s, strategic planning progressively was used for community development.

In larger municipalities with eco-

## A Community Affair

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Planning for Sheridan's economic development



omic and community development departments, strategic planning was used to bridge attraction of new businesses with fostering an environment that resulted in better lifestyle and earnings for citizens.

Larger communities realized

the importance of bringing together private and public organizations with citizens to identify common goals and implement programs and projects to improve the quality of life for community members.

More importantly, these communities also understood that by doing this, they would be able to attract new talent, as well as retain new generations that would make their communities more competitive with other cities that do not understand — or more commonly, plan haphazardly, because it's more comfortable to do nothing.

For the past 20 years, hundreds of cities with industrial infrastructures transformed themselves.

These communities became planned, attractive, re-energized municipalities with cultural activities and amenities that reflected the citizens' change in taste.

This transformation did not happen without community and economic development planning. It happened because strategic planning was the vehicle to address local economic challenges and to implement changes, rather than just set goals.

A truly effective community development strategic plan has to have at minimum a three-year span, and in general, a five-year span. And the design of the plan should be one-of-a-kind and responsive to the local economy and community.

That's what we have here in Sheridan County now: a one-of-a-kind plan that tackles the needs and wants of our community. We have strategies to meet all the goals set out by the people who live and work in Sheridan.

We have tactics in place to monitor our progress. We have set goals — yes. But even more, we will implement strategies to make sure our challenges are overcome and our strengths remain a foundation of our community.

This strategic plan will re-energize and guide our community to reflect exactly what you, as residents, want this community to be.

*"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*