

If the downtown gets much better, there won't be a business open down there.

There are those who think they can escape criticism by passing themselves off as "glass half-full" personalities.

What that means in their minds is that they are positive about things and anyone who does not share their fantasy world is negative. "Glass half-empty" sorts.

Over the last five years, the downtown business district of Cheyenne has fallen on harder and harder times. A family business that has been in the downtown for almost a century is closing.

In 2000, the only major building in the downtown that was empty was the Hynds Building. Even the depot had some activity as the failed corporation board tried different events to raise money to keep the lights and heat on.

Yet, although business after business has failed and building after building has been abandoned, the glass half-fullers continue to reside in their delusional world. When a little honesty would do, they present every failing and every abandonment as an opportunity. "No problem, be happy."

Sometimes they go so far as to say a catastrophe like the fire that took out Mary's Bake Shoppe and Wyoming Home, was "an opportunity."

Fellas, it was a catastrophe. It was a catastrophe. It didn't take a financial disaster to a couple property owners to create an opportunity. That could have come from the Marriott Hotel chain purchasing buildings that were standing and occupied. They didn't need a fire to build.

The city shouldn't need disasters to provide opportunities.

The empty depot building for years presented the glass half-fullers with an opportunity. They grasped that opportunity by accepting the donation of the building - after voters said "no thanks" to the Union Pacific Railroad in 1989. But the delusionals saw an opportunity.

For over a decade, the depot drained donations and misdirected public funds - only to remain basically empty and unwanted.

After objecting to public money being used to remodel or operate the depot building, the current mayor flip-flopped when he took office and the city regained ownership of the depot and spent millions in remodeling it. It now is home to public and quasi-public offices which vacated other downtown buildings to move into the depot.

The majestic old structure also now is home for a tavern and a photo gallery.

That is what the glass half-fullers think is taking advantage of an opportunity. A bar.

They also thought that replacing a surface parking lot which was underused with a parking garage that was unwanted (by neighboring businesses) and unneeded (by residents) was also an opportunity.

The former parking lot in front of the depot was replaced by a fancy patio - a nicer and more attractive location for the farmer's market and three pancake breakfasts a year, but not a place that draws throngs of locals into the downtown for a new event. The farmer's market and pancake breakfasts had been conducted on the aforementioned City Center lot for years. Not as attractive but just as functional.

The mayor opposed using public funds to pave the long expanse west of the depot building. But it has been done on his watch and that opportunity now sits virtually empty everyday. A stable coming?

The Hynds Building, owned by a downtown insider since 1998, has sat empty at one of the downtown's critical intersections for twenty years. Yes, since 1986. An opportunity that has gone without fulfillment.

Notice the pattern? The only "opportunities" that have been acted upon in the downtown are those which have been funded with public money. No one has stepped forward to make major investments in the area - with the notable exception of the McMurry money from Casper that went into the Plains Hotel. But that doesn't seem to have panned out very well and has seen an ownership change.

It is fine to be positive and optimistic about the future of the downtown. But it would help if the glass half-fullers were also realistic.

Since the election of 2000, several of the larger downtown properties have emptied and others are in the process now.

Mossholders, which had been Albert's Telesonic before that and has been known by oldtimers as the Montgomery Building, emptied and stayed empty at street level for several years. That opportunity was capitalized on by a non-draw real estate company. There is nothing wrong with real estate companies, but to use a prime downtown corner for an office is not going to rebuild or revitalize the area.

Not only has the Hynds Building seen ownership changes since the RTC sold the place for a song after the S&L scandals, but there has been no real positive news about its occupancy during the two decades it has remained empty and abandoned. The one possibility - having the Wyoming Business Council move into it and pay for the renovation - went south when the new Freudenthal administration got wind of the plan. With space available in the state-owned Herschler Building, the new governor showed the foresight of ending that attempt to help a friend at public expense. Other than that, there has been no construction activity or real rental efforts toward re-opening a downtown landmark that is described as having a beautiful interior.

While the coals were still hot at the fire along 16th Street, the mayor and his minions were talking about it being an opportunity. Never considering the crushing disappointment and hurt being experienced by the businesses destroyed, their answer to that opportunity was an ill-conceived and laughable skywalk between the unused garage and equally unused Capital Avenue.

Most of a city block emptied out after the mayor took office and that opportunity wasn't quite as interesting. The Frontier Printing operation closed in Cheyenne and relocated to Loveland and the opportunity for urban renewal was met by opening a series of small, unique shops. Again, there is nothing wrong with small specialty shops but downtowns are sustained by those, not revitalized or reinvigorated by them. The recent past, present and future of downtowns will hinge on the

willingness of local entrepreneurs opening the small retail and restaurant operations in the downtown.

The glass half-fullers will continue to delude themselves - and try to delude others - into believing that discount stores, department stores and national chain store operations will choose downtown Cheyenne for an outlet. They will not. What they drink from those glasses still half-full may not be water.

When Dinneen's started to divest new car dealerships and then announced that they would close after nearly 100 years in the downtown, the dreamers once again saw the opportunity - not the loss. Half-full.

As Z's Home Furnishings wraps up its moving sale, the dreamers will again see an opportunity in having still another major corner building empty. Not the loss.

What they're avoiding in all of these closures is asking the question: Why? Could the city have done anything to have kept the business that helped the downtown survive? The focus is always on the one coming - not the one there or going.

The problem in the downtown right now is that there aren't enough coming to replace those going. Grand Avenue Restaurant just closed. Many in town didn't even know they were open. Empty storefronts are everywhere. The DDA receives several hundred thousand dollars a year but does almost nothing to promote the area.

There is a story elsewhere in this Herald about the aftermath of the fire that took the property of Mary Coonts of Mary's Bake Shoppe. Nothing was offered, attempted or done to assist her in reopening or relocating her popular downtown business. Nothing.

The downtown has been a nightmare to traverse since 2001. Streets are torn up to be replaced and then torn up again to be redone. Corners are redesigned to take away parking spaces and create hazardous walkways and intersections.

The major attractions downtown are banks, brokerage houses and offices. Grier's and The Wrangler are important retailers but consumers can buy those wares elsewhere - including Colorado. Put down the glass. Half-full or half-empty, downtown is disappearing. You're not half-fullers. Maybe you're all-fullers.



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