

The interview below appeared in the February 27, 2002 issue (the third issue) of the Cheyenne Herald. It is repeated here because it tells about the condition of the downtown and the empty and broken promises made for the downtown parking garage. The interview was conducted seven years ago - one year after Jack Spiker became mayor. After that interview and the resulting article, Jack refused to sit for another interview with the Cheyenne Herald. He demanded questions in writing to which he could respond after soliciting answers and help from staff. The Cheyenne Herald refused to surrender and would not accede to that demand.

-Dave Featherly-

# In the Mayor's Own Words

January 24, 2002

**On January 24th (2002), Mayor Jack Spiker sat with the CHEYENNE HERALD for a tape-recorded interview on a number of subjects. Much of the time was spent on subjects having to do with downtown Cheyenne.**

**"-----" indicates that the subject changed and is not relevant to this article. "Edited" indicates that reference to persons by name have been omitted or that the exchange was on another subject.**

CHEYENNE HERALD: Do you have a financial interest in Jim Wood's project? (Village West)

MAYOR JACK SPIKER: No. We share grandchildren, that's it.

CH: Why did you abstain from voting on that project if you have no financial interest?

JS: Purely perception.

CH: Do you still have a financial interest in Bedder Sleep?

JS: Oh, yeah.

CH: Why did you not abstain from voting on the depot and the parking garage projects?

JS: Parking garage does ... my customers are not going to walk down to the parking garage. I'm too far away ... Depot project ... I don't know how that benefits my business. Benefits the downtown. No reason to abstain. ((Note: Bedder Sleep is at 17th and Warren - the garage at 17th & Carey, about 3 blocks away.))

CH: When did you change your position on using public money for a depot project?

JS: After I was in office ... let's see - I suppose February, March. I don't know, Dave.

CH: When did you change your position on using public money for a depot project without a public vote?

JS: ((long pause)) Well, it would have been at the same time.

CH: When did you change your position about the need of a downtown parking garage?

JS: Ah, I've never opposed a downtown parking garage.

CH: A newspaper editorial in March of last year said that you did oppose it and you favored the satellite lots that we always talked about.

JS: I've always favored satellite lots ... I still favor ... favor is not the right word - I like satellite lots. And we're still looking at satellite lots - that's not out of the picture. We still ... I still think there's a need for satellite lots. As I mentioned earlier, my customers from my store on the east end of 17th are not going to walk down to the west end of 17th to use that parking lot (sic). People at that end of ... 17th would certainly use that but the people at the east end are going to need some sort of parking of their own unless we can get enough employees off the streets to free up short-term parking for my customers. That is part of the hope ((unintelligible)) that will happen.

**CHEYENNE HERALD NOTE:** In addition to a WT-E March, 2001 editorial stating that Jack Spiker did not support a downtown parking garage, the Casper Star-Tribune reported, the morning after the televised debate between mayoral candidate Jack Spiker and then Mayor Leo Pando that a caller had asked the question "Do you support a downtown parking garage?" Pando replied, "yes," Spiker responded "no," according to the Casper Star-Tribune reporter, Joanne Bowlby.

CH: Do you have any knowledge of any currently empty properties in the downtown being occupied in the next year?

JS: There's been a lot of talk about the Hynds Building. In fact, I had one person call me who asked me to keep his name confidential ... who is very very well to do. Wanted to rent the Hynds Building and was interested in 250 parking spaces.

CH: Any word on Mossholder's?

JS: I haven't heard anything although I saw a sign in there the other day ... some ... I want to say a candle shop, but I'm not sure that's right - on the 17th Street. ((unintelligible))

CH: Commercial Office Supply?

JS: I haven't heard that, no.

CH: Not Commercial Office Supply ...

JS: Oh, I thought you meant Commercial Office Supply moving in there.

CH: Their building next to Cheyenne Light, Fuel & Power.

JS: Is it empty? I haven't heard anything on that.

CH: Nelsons' buildings at 216-218 W. 17th St.?

JS: Well, ((edited)) told me he was buying it.

CH: Frontier Printing?

JS: Haven't heard anything.

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CH: Are there any binding commitments from the Plains Hotel owners to lease spaces in the new downtown garage?

JS: No, not binding commitments. I do know that they ... they're going to have 110 rooms. They need 110 parking spaces for customers. Somewhere. And, they're going to have about 40 to 50 employees. They're going to need parking for them.

CH: Are there any binding commitments from the Hynds Building owner to lease spaces in the new garage?

JS: No. Just that phone call I mentioned to you earlier where they ... the person that was interested in buying or leasing the Hynds Building had to have 250 parking spaces to make that happen. And, if he couldn't get the parking, he wouldn't come downtown - he'd go somewhere else.

CH: Are you familiar with the Walker Study?

JS: A little bit.

CH: Do you know that their study showed that if it were 90 percent occupied, it would have a need for 120 parking spaces?

JS: If what was 90 percent occupied?

CH: Hynds.

JS: No. No ... I didn't know that. All I know is this guy that called me wanted 250 parking places - for employees.

CH: Will he sign a contract and pay the rent, regardless of whether he fills the space or not?

JS: If he comes downtown, he's got to have the parking.

CH: Will he sign a contract and pay for it?

JS: Um, I assume. I don't know. I mean, he called me - I didn't call him.  
((edited))

CH: What if you build a garage and none of those things happen?

JS: You mean the Plains ... the Hynds never happens ...

CH: The Hynds. Frontier Printing. The Plains, of course, that's the same participant ... the same principal that has the Hynds that has sat empty for so long.

JS: My guess is that if we don't build the garage, that development will never happen.

CH: Do you think that they have a way out of that purchase?

JS: The Plains?

CH: Yeah.

JS: Oh, I don't know anything about it. I mean, I don't know the details.

CH: They announced it as though they own it. There doesn't appear to be a fall-back position that if you didn't build the garage that they could get out of it.

JS: I don't think they want out of their deal. I don't know if that's what you're asking me.

CH: I thought that you just said that if you didn't build the garage, they wouldn't develop it. (The Plains Hotel)

JS: Oh, I mean the Hynds Building ... things like that. ((edited))

CH: If you build a parking garage, when do you think the downtown will be full? Full developed? All those empty buildings full to capacity?

JS: I don't know that they'll ever all be full at the same time. No more than the Mall. The Mall always has some vacancies but the majority of the Mall is full.

CH: So, there is really no assurance that building the garage will result in anything downtown? It's a risk?

JS: It is somewhat of a risk but I think you have the assurance that if you don't have the infrastructure in place, you'll never have the development.

CH: Are there any binding commitments for any use of the garage from people who do not now park at the City Center lot?

JS: No, there's no binding commitments - other than the DDA said they wanted to commit - and I don't even remember how many spaces they want. They want to commit to "x" amount of spaces, but it's not binding in the sense that it's in writing.

CH: They're just giving back money that you gave them - the excess money that the City gave them last year from the TIF district ... they're paying some of that back to the City.

JS: They're giving us TIF money. Or, property tax money. I'm not sure what.

CH: Some of the excess money that they got. They went from like \$80,000 to \$200,000 - now, they're talking about providing \$50,000 for seed money for the garage.

JS: Yeah. I wouldn't call it excess money but they will give us either TIF money or property tax money.

# The shape of the downtown today - January, 2009

It's no laughing matter, folks.

The downtown is now in the worst shape it's been in for decades. Probably ever.

And the solution isn't a task force comprised of members of the same organizations that have been asleep at the switch while the destruction of Cheyenne's downtown has taken place.

Building after building. Storefront after storefront. Empty. Empty. Empty.

The Downtown Development Authority has been provided obscene amounts of money. The Chamber of Commerce is unwelcome in all other areas of Cheyenne. LEADS and the Wyoming Business Council have bigger fish to fry - but all they're doing is drowning nightcrawlers. We are on the pace of one new large employer choosing Cheyenne every four-six years. And only promises for the downtown. Broken promises.

Some Sunday morning, drive slowly up and down and across the downtown. I did. You will reach the same conclusion. Except for churches, banks, tattoo parlors and fraternal organizations, our downtown is virtually deserted. Thankfully, some of Cheyenne's favorite restaurants are still downtown. But the furniture retailers have gone or downsized.

The largest empty storefronts and buildings are obvious.

The Hynds Building, of course, has been empty since 1986 and not a factor in downtown since 1981. But so many more major properties have joined the roster of empty and abandoned buildings in the last eight years.

Frontier Printing (by then, Vision Graphics) packed up a whole plant and moved it to Loveland. Dinneen's is gone and except for a rendering on windows, nothing is happening nor likely to happen in the near future. Grier's Furniture is gone - after decades at the same critical intersection in our downtown. Mossholder's closed and that corner is now "executive suites" - a non-traffic draw. Z's moved out of the downtown after the construction of the unwanted and unused parking garage destroyed their business. The Tivoli was sold so the Chamber could move into a hidden office in the old depot. Roedel's closed and the building was remodeled for offices. P.S. Cook, a staple in downtown for decades, closed there.

The big ones you know about. But there are countless little shops and businesses that have also closed in the downtown in the last eight years. Some spaces have had multiple tenants turn-over in the space - with none successful.

Yet, the best that the one now responsible can come up with is yet another "task force." That's a New Age term for a committee. And a committee is defined as: **"A group of the unwilling, picked from the unfit, to do the unnecessary."** A committee is also a group **"that keeps minutes and wastes hours."**

A task force of those who dug the hole is similar to Einstein's definition of insanity: **"Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."**

Solutions to the myriad of downtown problems won't come from consultants or committees made up of serial failures. As someone once reminded us: **"Remember, amateurs built the ark - Professionals built the Titanic."**

Revitalizing the downtown starts by dissolving the DDA. It has been ineffective and now has become unaffordable. Use the millions that will go there in the next four years and strive for real accomplishment downtown. Don Pierson threatened such action in the past - let him do it.

The City has spent like drunken sailors in the downtown - to no real avail. The parking garage goes unused. The paver patio in front of the depot benefits the downtown very little - the same events could have been held at City Center Parking Lot.

The majestic UP depot was transformed into a tavern, picture gallery and publicly-funded and business-dues paid offices that had been in other downtown spaces. We gained nothing by their moves.

Many places downtown appear occupied due to signs remaining on and above abandoned spaces. But they're empty.

Do you think the new mayor took the same slow trip through the downtown that I did a recent Sunday morning? If he did, he has to be asking himself what he got himself into. And if he believes that using retreads who are responsible for the bleak condition will get us out of the quagmire they caused, he still has a lot to learn.

In addition to the larger entities already named, a number of smaller spaces/buildings have emptied since 2001. The former Coldwell-Banker building (and Bresnan space) now has a "For Lease" sign for 6,500 sq. ft. Most of the small shops carved out of the Frontier Printing space are now empty. Sue's Gifts, a mainstay of downtown for years, is gone. At many, if not most, intersections of downtown's busiest streets, the spaces are empty - including the office recently used by the Enzi and Barrasso Senate campaigns. And the hole that was to become a Marriott franchisee hotel remains but a hole. Jack's own space is half empty.

## Anti-church? Anti-Catholic? Me?

If you're going to criticize me or the way I state my positions or report on the facts, you should get it right. It behooves you.

Go ahead and take shots at me. That's your prerogative. Fire off your Nastygrams. But don't think that I will back down or back off because someone comes on loud at me. That doesn't affect me in the slightest. I can't let it.

In the last issue, I was very critical of the design of the new Catholic School. It is not logical to have an elementary school's playground across a city street from the school building. And for the city to approve such a design is even more wrong.

There could be only one explanation for doing this. That was that the Church was promised that a subsequent vacation of the street would be approved and then the playground could be made contiguous to the building. But, school officials had told neighbors that they had no intention of requesting such action - that they might in "50 years," but not now.

In that story, I also challenged why the Church didn't have the playground, even though dangerously accessible, fenced for security reasons.

A few days later, I received an e-mail with a subject of: **St. Mary's Article Fact Check.** It was from a man who may be a St. Mary's Catholic School official as well as a parent of a student(s) there.

He first informed me that the children had not been allowed to play on the playground until fencing went up. By the time of his e-mail, but after my article appeared, a temporary "fence" of sorts *had* been placed around both playgrounds. The fence is not chain link and it is not a security fence. It is a brightly-colored boundary fence.

My concern was not about the playground area - that is obvious by the cleared area. It was, and is, about the lack of safety for children playing across the street from the school. An colored 30" tall snow fence will not eliminate the danger to children there - either from people or vehicles careening off 22nd St. or O'Neil Avenue.

Don't those parents share my concern?

He went on to write that "there is a drive up drop off area to unload the kids off the Street of St. Mary's (sic)." That's an unfortunate exaggeration of the facts and does not reflect my stated concern. The tiny drop-off area cannot accommodate but a small fraction of the vehicles dumping children and picking them up in the afternoon. "Many parents, including myself, park on the street and walk the kids in by choice." While that may be happening in the first few days of the new school, it will not last forever. And, whether it's a student alone or with a parent - walking diagonally across an unprotected street will not have a happy ending. A child is going to get badly hurt.

"Bush league journalism from a bush league fish wrap newspaper ..." he wrote.

I hope that parent is not a product of a parochial school. He then went on:

"There's obviously and (sic) underlying issue that this reporter has with the Catholic Church which led to this horrible article." Self-pitying from a member of the largest religious body in the USA is unseemly. Now that he brings it up, I am upset by Catholic priest's repeated molestation of children which the Church denied, concealed and now is paying dearly for. I also don't like the behavior of non-Catholic clergy like Haggard, Swaggart, Bakker, Gorman, Jeffs, Alamo and Phelps.

I would object to a school and its playground being built across a street from each other whether it was Lutheran, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon or atheist. It was wrong and could lead to disaster. And he used a lame argument - to oppose, one must be prejudiced or biased. Do better!

Finally, he admitted something denied by others of his Church. "St. Mary's has tried to get the street between the school and playground closed, and it's been an ongoing issue." Someone's lying. Is it this guy (who used his name) or the Church?

*The Church has claimed exclusive parking on the west side of O'Neil all the way south to the City Building and also has two improper "No Left Turn" signs.*

## Temporary Certificates of Occupancy

Thanks to those who called the Cheyenne Herald or e-mailed us after an earlier story about the unresolved temporary certificates of occupancy still outstanding for residences in Cheyenne.

It was not possible to finish that story until the new mayor had named his department heads and now that has been done.

Contacts have come from all parts of Cheyenne. How many of the newer subdivisions have unresolved problems that have prevented certificates of occupancy from being issued has to be identified. Then, it will be up to Rick Kaysen to do something about the matter.

If you live in a house, apartment or twin home which was built in the past 3-4 years, you probably should inquire about whether your structure has a certificate of occupancy. Some may not have even a temporary certificate of occupancy.

In the past, City officials have told the Cheyenne Herald that it was up to the contractor to make the corrections ordered before a certificate could be issued but, often, that contractor has more profitable things to do than go back to a house or housing unit he's already sold. It relies on an honor systems. It doesn't work. Call us if you have questions. 637-2879.

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