

What will be left of the downtown when this administration departs?

For more than four months, print ads and broadcast commercials screaming the failure of Grier Furniture were everywhere.

Coincidentally, at the same time, another longtime, family-named business pulled up stakes from the downtown. But, this one relocated to Vandehei Avenue.

Volk Cheyenne Real Estate announced to other Realtors, lenders and related persons that they were suddenly moving. "Effectively immediately," the notice read.

Month after month, another of the largest downtown businesses have closed or relocated.

Driving the numbered streets (15th to 22nd) and the north/south avenues (House to Snyder), businesses which were in operation in 2001 but are no longer present are numerous.

With Grier's now shuttered, and the Hynds Building remaining unoccupied and abandoned (since 1986), and the hole in the ground where Mary's Bake Shoppe and Wyoming Home were three years ago, the number of empty storefronts defies logic and imagination.

Going further out, to the north and east, the count escalates dramatically. With the temporary closing of the Supreme Court Building and earlier relocations of the Main Post Office on Capitol, remaining

downtown businesses deserve praise for simply surviving.

Some of the major losses in retail or service have been replaced with smaller, specialty businesses with many fewer employees.

In spite of the DDA's deceptive claim that thousands of employees from companies with little or no presence in the downtown work downtown, the situation has steadily deteriorated since 2001.

Along the "gateway" street through downtown - Lincolnway (16th St.) - and every other street within the DDA boundaries, major and lesser spaces are empty.

The last of the downtown new car dealers, Dinneen's, was dissolved as the family enterprise approached 100 years of operation. Dinneen's had absorbed other dealerships adjacent to their location on 16th St. but none remain. About a city square block and a half is virtually empty - with one office and an occasional parker.

The Hynds Building, of course, has been an eyesore on one of the two main intersections of the downtown - Capital Avenue and 16th St. - for 21 years and the vista from offices in the old depot, which was expected to impress visitors considering relocation to Cheyenne, cannot extend to the magnificent Capitol without noticing the long abandoned Hynds Building.

Grier's will add to the "blight." The City, in order to divert funds intended for the needy, a few years back deemed the area around the depot to be "blight" and the owners of Grier's fulfilled that prophecy.

Most of us have forgotten some of the businesses which operated downtown at the time the current Spiker/Collins/Segrave regime took power.

The downtown garage, supposedly a panacea, has been an albatross that may have contributed to the disappearance of all of the major businesses adjacent to it. Frontier Printing (Vision Graphics at the time it relocated to Loveland, Colorado), Z's Fine Furnishings and Dinneen's were there in 2001 - now they're all gone. Smaller operations like Whalen's Deli, book stores, candle and candy shops, and beauty shops moved or closed.

The depot remodeling, along with converting a convenient parking lot to an ocean of brick pavers, was supposed to attract business and create excitement. Events held on the patio were held in earlier years at the City Center Parking Lot, which was taken by the garage. The surrounds of the patio are more attractive but not a whole lot more functional. If the parking lot at Carey/Pioneer and 16th/17th had been resurfaced in the same manner, it could have served the same purpose.

What do neighbors think about the patio

in terms of what it has done to their nearby businesses? Many are unhappy. Their customers were inconvenienced or lost. Did that change contribute to the failure of Grier's? It must have. There is no major new competition in town that would have hurt Grier's business. In fact, with Mossholder's closing, Bedder Sleep downsizing by 60% and Z's moving and downsizing, Grier's should have been able to attract a bigger slice of the pie.

Several of the now-missing businesses have already been named in this story. Add to that list Bresnan Cable TV (then AT&T, later TCI), KKTU-TV, Fix 'n Mix Liquor, the Cheyenne Club, P.S. Cook, Roedel Drugs, Wortham Machinery, Ron Pretty and Bernie Phelan law offices, Focal Point, Medicine Shoppe, Lonetree Computer Internet Services, Frontier Boots, Tolerton Dance Studio, the Plains (Amtrak, Flower Shop and Wigwam Lounge), Perfection Muffler, KMUS radio, the Tivoli Building, Peel's, Mabel the Cowgirl, Java Joint, Rick's Barber Shop, and countless other very familiar businesses.

Some moved around - Turner Draperies, the Chamber, CACVB, Grandma's Attic, Grandma's Pickle Parlor, etc. Some went and came back - the Mayflower, Lexie's, La Costa, the Downtowner, etc. Some just outside the boundary, like All Around Cowboy and Botticelli (Whipple House), are gone. What will be left downtown in January of 2009? You tell me.

Go ahead. Put a new airport terminal on the ballot.

Sales tax collection in Laramie County, if the state continues to donate revenue lost from having no sales tax on groceries, will average \$18 million a year or more. For some reason, those charged with determining ballot projects have a mental fixation on collecting the cumulative 6th penny sales tax within a four year period.

State statute does not require that. If voters will approve the projects on a menu style ballot, it can take six years, eight years, or longer, to collect the total amount approved. In fact, Laramie County voters can approve up to a two cent (6th AND 7th pennies) specific purpose sales tax.

Once again, it appears likely the City of Cheyenne will dictate to the County Commissioners which projects will appear on the ballot, even though the County Commissioners and three county towns could force upon the City of Cheyenne what the four of them wanted on the ballot, regardless of City desires and demands.

The priority, if you accept the City's and their print lackey, the WT-E's, stance on the election next May, will be a \$50 million rec center. If they stick with wanting to collect the total amount in four years, that will leave only \$22 million for all other projects the City, County and towns want.

Now, the Airport Board is making noises about seeking \$8.5 million for a new terminal building. With the number of boardings out of Cheyenne, it seems the

three-sided bus shelter in front of the existing terminal should be large enough to accommodate air travel from here.

I suppose, though, with the unreliability of Great Lakes flight schedules and frequent cancellations, would-be travelers could queue up in what now resembles a Trailways waiting room.

The suggestion, even the audacious SUGGESTION, that Cheyenne might corral a second airline if a new terminal were built, is preposterous. What commuter airline would try again - as Air Wisconsin and Mesa have previously - to make a buck out of this market which is an hour and a half from an airport with countless flights and airlines from which to choose?

To fly out of Cheyenne, with a connection in Denver, is reckless. Not that your plane will spiral from the skies, but because you can't be sure of a departure time from Cheyenne - causing you to miss your Denver flight. Then you can't be certain that upon your return, the plane will fly out of Denver to return you to Cheyenne. You have almost as good of odds taking AMTRAK from DIA as Great Lakes from DIA - as far as getting home late on a Sunday night from Denver.

There is a \$1 million push going on to convince Wyoming travelers to "fly" rather than drive. Headlines boasting that air traffic is "soaring" hit both of the state's largest city's daily newspapers.

Cheyenne, according to published reports, has had 10,954 boardings through August this year. That would total 1,369 boardings a month, or about 45 per day. Great Lakes is supposed to be flying eight flights a day out of Cheyenne. That would be an average of six passengers per flight. There should never be more than two outgoing flights' passengers stacked up in the terminal at any time. So, the Airport Board has to convince voters that they need a new terminal to serve a dozen passengers. Good luck.

Cheyenne has fallen behind even Rock Springs and Sheridan for boardings. Of ten airports providing commercial flights in Wyoming, Cheyenne boards more passengers than only Worland and Laramie - and about the same number as Riverton.

An October 4, 2007 article in the *Wyoming Business Report* said increased boardings this year were up "a whopping 44.5 percent at Worland."

What does that mean in real numbers? Well, Worland boards about 295 passengers a month, on average. Call that ten a day. So, they went from seven a day last year to ten a day in 2007. Stop the presses! Air travel is soaring in Worland.

Basically, I don't care what is placed on a specific use ballot. But I will oppose this effort if they put a new airport terminal with such minimal need on the ballot and leave off money for the Botanical Gardens and a new fairgrounds. Otherwise, load it up! Let voters have a say as to whether and how much they'll pay. And for how long.

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