

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."

# THE CHEYENNE HERALD

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## \$90,000 for that piece of dreck? The DDA's "Market-Based Downtown Plan" is a joke!

by Dave FEATHERLY

First of three installments

I was recently asked if I would give further scrutiny to some issues about the downtown's continuing problems toward tenancy redevelopment, revitalization and to its future.

My background includes a decade operating large retail stores in the downtowns of St. Paul and Minneapolis and having served for a time on the Executive Board of the St. Paul Downtown Council. I understand the difficulties in saving downtowns from irrelevance - almost extinction. Since the advent of strip shopping centers, then enclosed malls, freestanding discount stores - then "price" clubs and America's version of the French hypermarkets which became our "big boxes" that incorporate all product categories under one roof - including groceries and specialized leased departments - with gas stations in the parking lots.

Most "market plans" are rehashes of those done by the same paid consultants in other markets. You expect to see a previous city's name left inadvertently in the report for Cheyenne. Another problem with marketing and revitalization plans for downtowns are they are usually obsolete by the time they're completed. The one for Cheyenne is no exception.

Before going further on this "Plan", now might be a good time to interject comments from my review of the DDA June 2007 payables. There are major expenditures that should raise eyebrows. One is to a vendor called "Cherek Group." In a single month, payables totaling \$14,188.17 were listed, including over \$11,550.00 as "personal salary." Christian Cherek is the name of the person hired to be executive secretary of the DDA in 2000 at about \$40,000.00 a year..

Another intriguing vendor on the list of payables is "Creative Dimensions." They have 13 payables totaling \$54,720.00, much of the amount is for "Marketing Contract" and \$15,625.00 for "Banners."

The next time the WT-E feels the urge to throw out a reference to "spending like drunken sailors," this might be a place to target. The DDA also paid the Cheyenne Depot Museum \$5,000.00 for "Plaza Events." That goes down a little hard. It was public funds - every penny - that built the paver patio in front of the Depot. Rent seems a tad high.

This silly little "Plan" is the handiwork of, among others, an outfit from Colorado called Progressive Urban Management Associates, Inc. (P.U.M.A.) I have been reliably informed that PUMA was Ms. Cherek's employer before she was hired by the Cheyenne DDA.

Some of the statements made in the "Plan" are laughable. To begin with, it says that they did an "extensive market analysis" that was "completed in late 2005 and early 2006." Obsolete already.

"Implications for downtown Cheyenne," include, they write:

**Downtown is being rediscovered.** They claim that the "city's stable economy plus growth pressures" from the south, "are placing the central business district on the Front Range investment map."

Come on!

Grier's Furniture is in the final throes of failure. Dinneen's closed after nearly a hundred years and left a city block and a half empty. Their hopes for redevelopment have been stalled. The Hynds Building was sold to the Foreclosure King and he now will not begin remodeling unless a skywalk from the unused downtown parking garage to those offices is provided at public expense. Ditto the announced but stalled Marriott TownSuites.

The beautiful and impressive Tivoli Building sits empty and abandoned.

**Downtown stakeholders are in alignment on new priorities for the future.** That's not true, either. Right now, those stakeholders are fighting like hell about the goofy, unnecessary and unenforceable downtown building design standards that are being foisted on those who have invested money in the very area these consultants claim everybody is holding hands around the campfire and singing "Kumbaya." Ain't so and won't be so in the foreseeable future, Denver consultants.

A conclusion of the Plan has some promise but there's no way to get there.

"Downtown Cheyenne should position itself as a unique, vibrant urban experience that celebrates its western heritage and advances its New West future."

Don't know what "New West" means but that must be Denver-Speak for something. One problem with achieving that objective is that the WT-E will fight tooth and nail in opposition. They hate the fact that Cheyenne is a traditional western city.

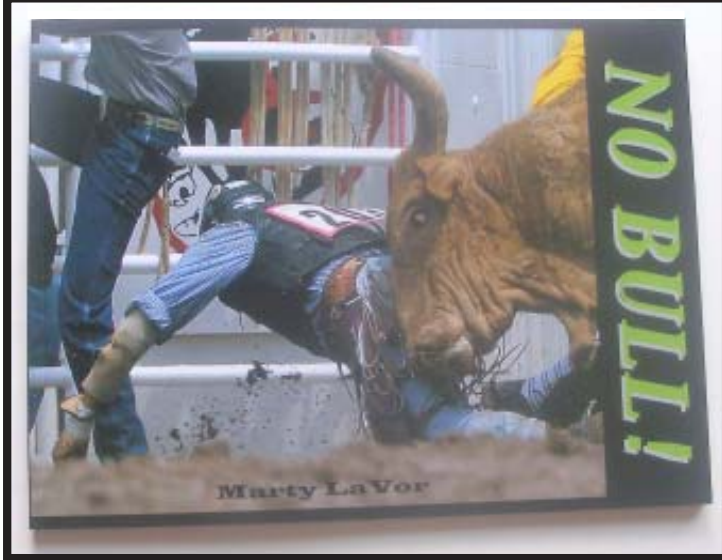
The "Plan" claims that Cheyenne has a "pull factor" wherein it not only captures local spending but an **additional** 41% net sales from beyond its borders. I'm gonna have to have Dr. Wenlin Liu convince me of that outlandish representation. He's the only reliable source for data like this.

It gets better. Remember that the DDA boundaries are House Avenue, Snyder Avenue, the UP tracks (not 15th Street) and 22nd Street. The "Plan" claims: "Many of Cheyenne's major employers are located downtown, including the State of Wyoming, federal government, United Medical Centers (sic), and the Union Pacific Railroad." They claim that eight of the city's largest 20 employers "with a significant downtown presence" account for more than 10,000 jobs in the community.

When you read that kind of exaggeration or downright misrepresentation, other claims in their "survey" lose credibility. They also claim that downtown accounts for "more than 8% of retail sales in Laramie County." Not just Cheyenne, but all of Laramie County, which includes South Cheyenne. Downtown hasn't done 8% of the retail sales in decades and the loss of major retailers Grier's and Dinneen's will drive that number to 3-5%.

Finally, in this installment: "Downtown's existing retail strengths include its restaurant, home furnishing and apparel niches." Can you say, "What a crock!"

AN INCREDIBLE COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY FROM CFD'S PAST - DETAILS IN THE NEXT ISSUE



I have been asked why I don't put my picture in the paper so more people will know who I am - what I look like. Responding to those requests, I will forthwith publish my likeness in each issue of the Cheyenne Herald. Each issue, of course, until I change my mind and stop doing it.

Dave Featherly



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