

Market-Based Downtown Plan

Third of 3 installments

The inch-thick Plan (Final Draft May 23, 2006), was obsolete the day the ink dried on it.

As though to suggest that thickness represented thoroughness and worth, the consultants included the 1/4" thick Downtown Cheyenne Design Guidelines (dated 5-15-2007) as though that were part of their work also. The fact that the completion date is a year after their own Plan date didn't seem to concern them.

Do you think all these Denver-based outfits that ride into town in their new Hummers and out with a satchel full of our money laugh all the way to the bank? Why is it human nature that strangers can always determine what's best for you better than you can yourself? How would you like to have a grand for every one of these dust-gathering "Plans" generated by those with green license plates?

This Plan, like others before it, was developed by interlopers who know only where the local bars and restaurants are and talk to a handful of people who know little more. Then they generate another "Plan," get into their gas-guzzlers and get back to Highlands Ranch before dark.

For \$150 an hour, they visit Cheyenne three times and conclude that the city has a rich western heritage. Good Lord, anyone who has every read a book or watched a movie knows Cheyenne has a rich western heritage. And it's not the buckboard rides in summer that brought that reputation to Cheyenne.

The outlandish conclusions of this Plan are laughable. "Investors are intrigued by downtown's remarkable collection of historic buildings," they proclaim.

Then where in the hell is their investment? The Hynds Building has been locally owned since the days of the S&L scandal, when Resolution Trust ended up with the Broward County S&L mortgage and it was bought by local people. It has set empty at one of the downtown's strongest intersections since 1986. For the math-impaired, that's over 21 years. No child in school in Cheyenne (nor most in Laramie) has ever seen a tenant in the Hynds Building.

A California "investor" bought the former

Fowler's department store building (more recently, Z's Home Furnishings) and put it back on the market almost immediately. He must have become un-intrigued about something.

When the Foreclosure King bought the Hynds Building, grand plans were announced. See much happening at the old building? Now, he has added a caveat of "build a skywalk from the garage and I'll move ahead."

Ditto the Marriott franchisee who has misrepresented corporate demands.

According to this latest "Plan," people would flock to the downtown if they but knew what events were being held down there. The WT-E, to their credit, promote the Friday night music paid for by the City (you) with full color ads in their paper. Those ads reach about half of the homes in Cheyenne - where are the throngs?

As though to legitimize their efforts, they tag names on the various areas in and near the downtown. Catchy little ditties like "Downtown Employment Zone," and "Dining & Entertainment District," and "Downtown Live/Work Zone" and "West Edge," and "South Gateway." Boy, if they could have thrown "Fisherman's Wharf" or "Faneuil Hall Square," "The Battery," or another grabber, we couldn't keep the visitors away with a stick.

They don't need names downtown. They need tenants.

And they won't get them by enacting more restrictive ordinances about what can be done to remodel long abandoned and to-be-abandoned downtown spaces.

"The Plan," "The Plan" - reminds one of little Tattoo on Fantasy Island. This Plan has as little chance for fruition as that fictitious offering had to fail. Everybody got their dream. Their fantasy.

By the time this "Plan" was first cracked, many of the representations were flawed or false. For example, they claimed that "building permit activity in Cheyenne has steadily increased since the year 2000."

Oops! Not so fast, pilgrim. Building permits have been on the decline since the consultants penciled that on a page.

One of their silliest, and most farfetched, representations is that Cheyenne not only "captures" ALL of the local spending but another "41% of net sales from beyond its borders." That just cannot be.

The leakage to northern Colorado and Denver is huge. Much Laramie County money is spent at Cabela's in Nebraska. Their clever claim does not mention that 35% of Laramie County population resides outside "Cheyenne," including the perimeter population around Cheyenne. South Cheyenne alone has 8,000 residents spending money in Cheyenne.

But it sounds better the way they put it. Misleading, but better.

We covered the false claim in this Plan about downtown employment and their slyly claiming eight of Cheyenne's largest employers have "a downtown presence."

Individual elements of employee (almost all public employees) responses can bring a guffaw or two. 19% said they'd live downtown - of those, 57% said a loft would be fine, but 34% prefer a single family home. Excuse me, where in the real downtown is there room enough to build single family homes? Sometimes, respondents just want to torment or toy with survey takers and provide goofy or unfathomable answers to goofy questions.

To "tease" the DDA and mayor, the survey (with a 19.2% response rate which is more realistic than the mayor's own citizen survey) 60% of those responding said they visit downtown twice a month or more. They might. There are usually two paychecks a month which they take downtown to deposit in their bank and there are four Sundays a month of which they might go to church downtown. Retailers trying to make a buck downtown would like to see that claimed level and frequency of resident visits downtown.

"Downtown is being rediscovered" read this illegitimate Plan. Unfortunately, too much of the rediscovery is by transients and the homeless.

The Plan also claims UMC as a downtown draw. They might want to figure out how to deal with the loss of the hospital because sometime in the next decade or so will operate from Nob Hill. The Denverites don't quite know where that is but suffice it to say it's west of downtown by a long ways. It is so remote that CFD uses barren land for distant parking and shuttles attendees to Frontier Park from there. You can re-draw the downtown boundaries all you want but you ain't gonna reach Nob Hill. In fact, that is in the County. At present time, that is. You know UMC will want to be in the City for cheaper water and sewer service.

As "suggested prototypes," the Plan names Pizzeria Venti, the Capitol Grill and Snake River Pub & Grill. None have been open five years and Snake River from Jackson pulled their name and the place goes by another name now.

Some of the more radical elements of the Plan: They want more liquor licenses. At the same time the State is trying to take alcohol away from drivers, Denver consultants are adamant they need more.

The Plan demands stricter enforcement of the two-hour parking limit on streets. Duh! It hasn't been done, won't be done and can't be done. They also propose bringing back parking meters and building another parking garage on the east edge of downtown. Oh, yea, the other downtown parking garage is working so well, we should build a chain of them downtown. That's the advantage of sleeping in Highlands Ranch. You aren't bothered by the things tried and failed already.

They see Dinneen's, all of 15th St., the Steam Plant, Idelman Hotel, Wortham Machinery, and the FCS property at 17th and Pioneer as becoming lofts. Sure. The lofts in the old Montgomery Ward building was in such great demand.

To prove they are familiar with New-Age gibberish, the Plan-ers offer the boilerplate: "A collection of activities that together creates a multidimensional experience;". I have a ten-spot that says that language, or similar, is in every one of these NCR paper Plans they produce.

Their "Action Plan" has already sprung leaks. First, of course, Grier's has sold out to a liquidator who will someday end the ceaseless going-out-of-business sale. The Plan requires "retaining downtown's primary employers." See previous comments about UMC abandoning the fringe of downtown. Those employees buy a lot of sandwiches, Starbuck's and other products. Hundreds of them. Employees, that is.

The Plan has Chipotle opening downtown. Evidently, no one told the consultants - they're in the process of opening on Dell Range. Same for Olive Garden.

The Plan calls for Farmer's Market to run from May to October. Maybe in Denver they don't know about the growing season around here. Even though it's become a Colorado Farmer's Market, produce doesn't ripen in May, guys.

The Plan wastes some space on the latest incarnation of a downtown merchant's association. Those come and go, come and go. 'Nuf said about that. The Plan does recommend a new, more experienced and professional head for the DDA. That is a good suggestion.

The Plan also recommends that the DDA stop paying on the parking garage - the parking garage that was built at DDA's insistence. The parking garage that is a drain on the City's federal mineral royalties and would be \$147,000 more of a drain without the recycled public funds from the DDA and CACVB. Now is a helluva time to withhold those funds. That suggestion should go nowhere.

The Plan should go on the shelf with the rest of them. Makes a taller stack.

CHEYENNE'S ORIGINAL STEAK HOUSE

T-Joe's



Has Your Favorites Every Night
Walleye, Grilled Chicken,
Pork Chops, Steaks, More!

New!! Blackened Prime Rib

Marinated Rib Eye

Cold Stone Creamery® Petite Cakes

Nightly Specials!

Fresh Hand-Cut Ribeye Steaks

Pete's Pickle Parlor

STEAKHOUSE AND SALOON

12700 E. I-80 Service Rd.
Dining: Mon-Sat 11 am - 10 pm / 4-10 pm Sunday

SMOKE-FREE DINING ROOM
SMOKING (AND DINING) IN BAR

5 miles east of Cheyenne - Hwy 30 / Pershing / I-80 at Archer (Exit 370) / 634-8750