

City Council Retreat Paper

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

This topic was recommended for discussion by the City's Human Relations Commission and selected by the City Council for the purpose of examining what more can be done to revitalize downtown Longmont. To assist the Council in addressing this question, this paper includes background information summarizing what has been done over the past 20 years regarding downtown revitalization.

I. BACKGROUND

A. DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was established in 1982 for the purpose of preparing plans that encourage and support increased economic activity in downtown Longmont. The board is appointed by the City Council for four year terms and reports to the Council annually regarding its activities.

B. DOWNTOWN LONGMONT MASTER PLAN

The Downtown Longmont Master Plan was prepared by the Longmont Downtown Development Authority (LDDA) and adopted by the City Council in 1995 as an amendment to the City's Longmont Area Comprehensive Plan (LACP). The following information is taken from that Plan and also includes details from the DDA regarding its specific efforts to implement the Plan's strategies for downtown revitalization.

Implementation Strategies¹

The strategies of the Downtown Master Plan are oriented toward public and government policies and actions which, in conjunction with the private sector (e.g. property and business owners, developers, investors, etc.), will develop a framework for redevelopment of the downtown. It must be emphasized that no single strategy or recommendation will act as a panacea for downtown redevelopment. Some recommendations may have a more noticeable impact than others; however, all the recommendations have a degree of interdependency and are equally important to the overall success of the plan.

The plan recommends that an annual mission and goal statement be devised, adopted and implemented by the LDDA which addresses the priority problem areas, which, if resolved over time, should provide a healthy, safe, secure, prosperous, and convenient downtown. Such an annual mission and goal statement shall be based on projected available funding, and shall acknowledge forecasted projects and funds of succeeding years. Each annual mission and goal statement shall provide flexibility, allowing inclusion of unexpected opportunities which may arise. Blighted areas and deteriorating structures shall be identified and the mission and goal statement shall include methods of halting and preventing such conditions.

¹ *Downtown Longmont Master Plan of Development, 1995.*, pg 66.

Each year, the City, through a team of its professionals and the LDDA staff, prepares for Council's adoption a 5-year capital improvement program (CIP). Contained within the CIP are projects being pursued by the LDDA which are intended to carry out the goals, policies and strategies of this plan. Those projects should be reviewed annually by the LDDA to ensure they continue to reflect the plan and the goals, policies and strategies therein.

By bringing together the various assets of people, properties, and financing, the goals of this plan can be met which should ensure the gradual improvement and revitalization of Downtown. The use of yearly mission and goal statements updated monthly in tandem with annual budgets creates a step-by-step methodology to carry downtown revitalization forward over time.

Financing resources are an extremely important aspect of implementing any improvement program. The LDDA has access to tax increment funding, as well as other sources available through the City more specifically identified below.

DDA has had two tax increment bond issues totaling \$4.15 million. The proceeds of the 1986 issue (\$1.55 million) have been used for projects including the rehabilitation, construction, and installation of certain streetscape improvements, pedestrian passageways, alleys, parking lots and the "original" street lights.

The proceeds of the 1998 (\$2.6 million) issue were used for traffic improvements including landscaped bulb-outs at intersections, landscaped mid-block safety islands with crosswalks, downtown parking lot upgrades and improvements to sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, street furniture and walkway connections.

The DDA also used \$350,000 of TIF revenue for infrastructure at the 6th Avenue Plaza/Village Place development.

Beginning in 1986, a Development Incentive Program (DIP) was initiated where an amount equal to certain City permit fees, paid by any developer, is deposited to a fund specifically for upgrading of public improvements within the district. Projects funded by this method are ongoing rather than part of a specific annual work program. Since its inception, over \$900,000 has been provided to the LDDA to be used to assist in financing revitalization efforts. In 1993, the LDDA established the "Façade Renovation Design and Cost Estimation Program" which pays for the time of a downtown architect to work with a building owner/tenant to prepare design and cost estimates for renovation of the building façade. Forty three properties have benefited from this program ranging from the Our Center's landscaping, Park Hotel's façade improvements, and Roosevelt Place's streetscape improvements. A complete list can be obtained by contacting the DDA office.

Additionally, since 1984, over \$320,000 of Community Development Block Grant money has been used for commercial revitalization in the form of loans to businesses to assist in eliminating specific areas of slum or blight as well as improving building facades in downtown Longmont.

C. Hyett-Palma Downtown Plan-Overview²

Through the National League of Cities (NLC), and in order to assume a more aggressive role in the area of downtown enhancement, the City Council, in 1997, retained the consultant Hyett-Palma group to prepare a plan to guide the LDDA and the Council, working in partnership with local business owners, property owners and concerned citizens, in rethinking ways to “rebuild” the downtown.

The Action Agenda for Downtown Longmont includes two sets of recommendations. These recommendations were specifically designed so that the community’s vision and downtown’s market opportunities may be attained.

The first set of recommendations is a *Development Framework* that should be used to guide the overall revitalization and development of Downtown. The second set of recommendations offers a *Course of Action* for local implementation. It is anticipated that the *Course of Action* will be implemented by a variety of existing downtown organizations, agencies, and constituents.

The primary emphasis, prior to 1997, in the Downtown Longmont enhancement effort has been placed on infrastructure improvements, including streetscape, traffic calming, parking and pedestrianization. As a result, the private sector has been responding by investing more in Downtown Longmont’s businesses and buildings. Recent building improvements and business openings have been substantial – much more so than in the past.

In 1997, lender confidence was very strong in Downtown Longmont. The local lending institutions in the community generally believed that Downtown Longmont was a good investment and were more than willing to lend funds for the acquisition of real estate and improvement of properties in Downtown.

In 1997, the LDDA began to move in a new direction. The LDDA started being pro-active in marketing available financial incentives and, thereby, stimulated further private sector improvements throughout Downtown Longmont. The Hyett/Palma plan recommended that this approach be continued.

The Hyett/Palma plan stated that “the time has come to redirect the emphasis of the LDDA by focusing on the areas of economic development and marketing, and stressing a stronger partnership to implement the recommended Action Agenda.”

Top Priorities – Action Agenda

The following projects were recommended in 1997 by the Hyett/Palma plan to be undertaken at the earliest possible date in order to enhance Downtown Longmont. Without the implementation of these projects, Downtown Longmont’s economic future will be severely impaired.

1. Pro-active business retention, particularly one-on-one counseling;

The LDDA Board of Directors agreed with this goal however did not feel this was a top priority. The direction in the first five years was to design and build a new streetscape and to work on creating a better mix of businesses downtown. In 2000, there were four tattoo parlors on Main Street. In 2003, there is only one and it is not located on Main. New restaurants and a larger mix of shops have moved in to downtown like August Morning Coffee House, Abbandanza Pizzeria, Pinnocchio's, Aveda Spa, High Gear Cyclery and Crackpots to name a few. There are several businesses that cater to our Hispanic population that are very successful in the downtown. Downtown Longmont does address the cultural diversity of our community. Front Range Community College

² *Downtown Longmont Market & Analysis & Action Agenda, 1997, Hyett-Palma, National League of Cities.*

provided a business counselor that held an office in the Chamber of Commerce building. This service was free and beneficial to the downtown businesses, but due to budget reductions, this service is no longer offered.

2. ***Aggressive marketing of Downtown and the overall enhancement effort.***
The marketing efforts are limited by the operating budget of the LDDA. In better budget times it is the hope of the LDDA to create a marketing package similar to the Longmont Area Economic Council's brochures in recruiting businesses to come downtown. The document could be used by the LDDA office and commercial realtors. Again, the incentive programs help with the marketing efforts. The DIP (Development Improvement Program) doubled in requests since the streetscape project was underway. The LDDA has awarded over 200,000 in mini grants since 2000, and \$900,000 since 1986.
3. ***Completion of physical streetscape improvements in the Downtown Core District;***
The streetscape was completed in 2001 with traffic calming devices including bulb-outs, medians and mid block crosswalks. It also included new lamps, benches, trash receptacles and flower pots. Downtown Longmont received a national award from the American Landscape Architectural Society for its streetscape design.
4. ***Completion of traffic, parking, improvements.***
All recommended changes from the Ballofet traffic study were completed. The City also created a special Downtown Parking Task Force that recommended several improvements to the parking meter arrangement that has assisted in addressing a few parking problems.
5. ***Aggressive recruitment of additional businesses.***
The LDDA Executive Director works closely with commercial realtors in assisting interested businesses to locate downtown. Again, an active marketing campaign would help in this area. The Executive Director is not a licensed realtor and therefore can not represent a specific property. The role of the Director is to provide information and assist interested parties.

Current City Actions—In addition to the above items recommended from the Hyett/Palma plan the City of Longmont has also initiated several efforts that complement the DDA's efforts in downtown revitalization.

1. Flour Mill Redevelopment-The City Council approved a redevelopment plan prepared by the Buchanan/Yonuszewski Group that called for a mixed use, transportation oriented development for the 3 acre site that is owned by three different individuals. The City Council asked staff to identify all available incentives and discuss with the property owners what would be necessary to begin recruiting developers to implement the plan. This information is now available and will be reviewed with the property owners in January to determine if a redevelopment project will be pursued.

Future Actions

1. ***Urban Renewal Authority***-This issue is the subject of another retreat paper that investigates the advantages and disadvantages of reviving the existing Longmont Urban Renewal Authority (LURA) to be used as another technique to accelerate redevelopment of blighted areas within Longmont.
2. ***Main St Redevelopment Planning***—This project is also being considered by the Council for its 2004 work program. While the scope of this effort has yet to be fleshed out, it could include about a two block area on either side of Main Street from Highway 66 South to Pike Road and could cost about \$100,000. Some of this cost may be offset by using University of Notre Dame students to perform an evaluation of redevelopment opportunities for a small portion of the area. A Notre Dame School of Architecture professor has indicated that students would conduct meetings with downtown business owners and prepare renderings of what is envisioned by the participants. While this may have some appeal and cost less than using an experienced consultant, we may end up with something that reflects the relative inexperienced students' level of expertise. The City would be expected to pay for all costs of transporting students to and from Longmont and paying for all living accommodations as well as costs associated with preparing and printing the renderings and report.
3. ***Longmont Area Comprehensive Plan (LACP) supports mixed use development.*** The updated LACP along with the new development code encourage mixed-use development along Main Street and allows significant flexibility to accommodate such development.

Discussion Questions

1. Given the above information, what does the City Council think should be done in addition to continuing its cooperative efforts with the LDDA to improve conditions in downtown Longmont?
2. Does the Council or LDDA require any information to assist each group in assessing how well we are achieving the goals identified in the Hyett/Palma and LDDA Master plans? Vacancy rates, available space, new space constructed etc., are examples of such information.
3. Should the Council and LDDA collaborate on the mission and goal statements that are prepared annually as a way to discuss the future years work program?