Laramie Downtown

Revitalization and Development Plan

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Executive Summary

Revitalizing downtowns is gaining momentum nationally, reversing a half-century of suburban development. Thousands of towns across the country are renewing commitments to the success of their central business districts—Laramie is one of those towns. Laramie’s history provides a strong foundation on which to revitalize its Downtown. By embracing its historic qualities, while adding the best of modern trends, Downtown Laramie can thrive.

The City of Laramie Downtown Development Authority (DDA) authorized this Downtown Revitalization Plan to formulate a practical, realistic action plan with three primary purposes.

- Generate greater economic vitality for Downtown businesses.
- Recommend specific and focused actions to initiate the 1992 Streetscape Master Plan.
- Evaluate parking conditions and recommend improvements to traffic circulation and pedestrian safety in Downtown.

The DDA initiated the project after identifying a number of concerns, which must be addressed for the area to be more vibrant.

- Downtown businesses need to establish more effective public/private partnerships.
- Downtown businesses do not have strong connections with University.
- The 1992 Streetscape Master Plan has not been implemented.
- 3rd Street is a visual and pedestrian barrier to Downtown.
- The 3rd and Grand intersection experiences congestion and has geometric limitations which affect safety for automobiles and pedestrians.
- Narrow travel and parking lanes along 3rd Street create traffic conflicts.

Downtown is an important district to Laramie’s residents. Its inventory of historic buildings, especially restored properties, evokes interest and local pride, and its central location adds to its viability as a central business district.

Downtown Laramie Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

The character of Downtown Laramie is clear in the core area around 1st, 2nd, Ivinson, and Grand. The street scene here includes many renovated historic buildings, decorative street lighting, and an ambience reflecting its National Historic District status. Pedestrians can easily navigate Downtown, as can vehicles—though Downtown is not well marked, and 3rd Street is perceived as a barrier from the rest of town, including the University. Both Downtown and University interests acknowledged that business relations between these two Laramie fixtures are not particularly strong. Business conditions and practices in Downtown reflect an eclectic mix typical of a group of independent business and property owners.

Revitalizing Downtown should undertaken on several fronts:
- Improve gateway signage into Downtown,
- Coordinate collective retail practices through more consistent merchandising, attractive storefront displays, and entertaining signage,
- Develop an image for the district that complements merchandising with streetscapes, anchors, and a focal point Downtown,
address operational and safety concerns on 3rd Street, and
establish a sustained organization that represents Downtown interests.

Circulation

After evaluating four alternatives to improve conditions on 3rd Street, the LSA team recommends—with the unanimous endorsement of the project Steering Committee—that 3rd and 4th Streets be converted to a one way couplet from Custer through Lewis Streets, and that prominent gateway signage for Downtown be placed at Custer where traffic is diverted from 3rd Street east to the couplet. Diverting traffic on Custer is a key element of LSA’s recommendation, because diverting vehicles farther south on 3rd Street would eliminate the opportunity for a prominent gateway to Downtown at the beginning of the couplet. The couplet is illustrated at right.

The LSA team recommends 3rd/4th Couplet for several reasons. The couplet:

- improves vehicular traffic operations at 3rd Street intersections with Grand and Clark,
- allows standard widths for travel lanes and a buffer between the travel lanes and parking lanes on 3rd and 4th Streets,
- preserves on-street parking on 3rd Street,
- improves the pedestrian friendliness of 3rd Street by reducing crossing time from contracting 3rd Street to three travel lanes,
- provides for a prominent southern gateway into Downtown,
- may perceptually move Downtown closer to campus, and
- costs approximately $2.3 to $2.9 million to implement initially.
Implementing the Vision

Revitalization can be accomplished with grants, loans, tax credits, and other funding mechanisms available through local, state, and federal sources. Outside monies will complement the $750,000 that will be raised through the incremental sales taxes dedicated to Downtown streetscapes.

Revitalizing Downtown will be accomplished through the efforts of individual business and property owners, by informal associations or affiliations of the business and property owners, and with the backing of a formal entity such as a DDA or Urban Renewal Authority.

Working Together. Some actions may be more effectively implemented by an affiliation of Downtown interests, working in conjunction with the City or other local or state agencies.

- Cooperate persistently with the City and state agencies to obtain funding for Downtown improvements.
- Develop gateways to Downtown at the I-80/U.S. 287 interchange and along 3rd Street close to Downtown.
- Establish “anchors” and activity centers to draw shoppers through Downtown.
- Build an image around the historic qualities of Downtown. Some examples include creating an interpretive sign system and walking tour geared toward visitors interested in the National Historic District and cooperating with the Territorial Prison to jointly market Laramie as the historic old west town it is.
- Retain diagonal parking for its easy access and higher vehicle density.
- Improve travel connections with campus through a regular direct shuttle service between Downtown and the University, and extending on-street bike lanes between the two destinations.
- Work with the City to ensure adequate lighting, and street cleaning and striping for a clean, well-maintained look.
- Continue to seek funding for the remainder of the Streetscape Master Plan after the Phase I improvements are completed.
- Recruit key community leaders into an entity representing Downtown interests.

Darn Good Ideas

Individual business and property owners can take simple and inexpensive steps that will begin the revitalization of Downtown Laramie.

- Ensure the Wyoming Department of Transportation replaces the fallen National Historic District sign on I-80.
- Display merchandise tastefully in storefronts that are simple, lively, and clean. Create attractive projecting signs and awnings.
- Target the University and Wyotech in merchandising, marketing, and promotion.
- Sponsor events and programming Downtown that appeal to University faculty and students, such as weekly concerts.
- Maintain clean sidewalks and streets.

Formal Organization. Downtown interests should create a formal organization to represent the central business district. Several federal funding sources require a formal organization, such as a downtown development authority or an urban renewal authority, to obtain funding. This entity could undertake other more ambitious tasks.

- Hire professional, full-time staff to represent Downtown.
- Require a qualified group to review architectural renovations, signs, and proposed building demolition in Downtown to ensure they are appropriate for its historic character.
- Create a sub-area plan for the block between 3rd and 4th Streets to establish consistent land use standards and a uniform image with the rest of Downtown.
- Form public/private partnerships to promote funding of improvements that may otherwise be difficult to finance privately.
- Seek tax increment financing as a permanent revenue source for Downtown.
Introduction

Trends In Downtown Revitalization

Downtown communities in the United States thrived before World War II. Most residents counted on the downtown area for major goods and services. A trip to town was a big event because families not only purchased goods, but sought entertainment and social activities that were focused in downtowns. In the postwar era, the demographics and uses of downtowns began to change. With the implementation of the National Defense Highway Act in the 1950s, trends began to shift. The Interstate Highway system created a more accessible countryside and people began to be able to live farther from town and commute to work.

Businesses followed people to the new suburbs, creating suburban malls and strip centers. This new retail element allowed residents to live in a low-density area, and get goods and services without the long trip to town. As the trend expanded, downtowns began to decay because shoppers were staying in the suburbs. Cities developed ring roads and bypasses, and retail located on these roads. Downtown merchants, in an attempt to compete with the modern images of the suburban stores engaged in efforts to "upgrade" their storefronts. Their efforts took many forms such as metal sheathing, stucco, mansard roofs, large internally illuminated awnings and other incompatible forms that were added as tack-on solutions to building exteriors. Unfortunately, the act of changing the storefronts accomplished the opposite of the desired effect. By degrading the historic charm and continuity of the image of the downtown, shoppers were further deterred to the more contemporary images of the suburban malls.

Downtowns began to fight back in the 1970s. Fanueil Hall in Boston was the first urban renewal project that renovated a historic area with outstanding success. Fanueil Hall, originally constructed in 1742 by Boston’s wealthiest merchant Peter Fanueil, thrived until the mid 1900s. The hall was abandoned in the 1940s, and began to decay. It was slated for destruction until a group of civic-minded individuals stepped up to renovate the buildings. Beginning in the 1970s a massive revitalization effort was undertaken to bring the Hall back to life. In 1976, the Hall and an associated outdoor plaza space were reopened—and became an instant success. Fanueil Hall today is a highly successful urban space that attracts over 12 million visitors annually. Following the success of Fanueil Hall, there is a concentrated effort by towns all over the county to reclaim their historic roots. Some 1,600 American towns of all sizes are revitalizing their downtowns, bringing back their heritage, and creating new and exciting cultural and business centers.

The revitalization of downtowns has become a significant trend across America and has demonstrated a strong record of success. Statistics tracked since 1980 by the National Main Street Center show that more than $15 billion has been invested in the redevelopment of downtowns in communities ranging in size from 600 to 600,000. This investment has generated 52,000 new businesses and more than 206,000 new jobs. Each $1.00 of public money spent in this effort has generated private investment of $39.00.

The National Main Street Center studied communities actively pursuing revitalization, and found many positive trends that indicated revitalization efforts were showing success. The study was conducted to evaluate how business had changed recently in response to revitalization efforts. More than half of the respondents indicated ground floor occupancies had increased between 1999 and 2000. More than 60 percent of respondents reported that there were more retail businesses within their districts in 2000 than the prior year, and over three-fourths of the respondents reported that more people attended special events in their districts. In addition, almost two thirds of respondents
indicated increases in property values within the historic districts in 2000.

**Laramie History**

The history of Laramie forms a strong foundation on which to revitalize its Downtown. The town was formed in 1866 by settlers heading west on the Oregon Trail. One of the reasons for a settlement in this location was a small local spring called Spring Creek that ran year round. Soon after the original settlers arrived the Union Pacific made tracks for Laramie. In 1868, the tracks arrived and with them many of the railroad workers. Beginning at this point Laramie saw its true beginnings as a Wild West town. Throughout Laramie's early history lawlessness, drinking, and prostitution were more the norm than the exception. Main Street shootings ultimately resulted in the forming of vigilante committees and the hiring of lawmen. After several of the lawmen quit or were run off, the vigilante committee was successful in scattering some of the worst of the criminals.

Laramie did not settle down easily though. In the late 1870s, battle continued about laws requiring grogshops and bordellos to close on Sundays. The mayor at the time, Mr. Kramer, opposed requiring the closing of the shops, while the local newspaper and Rev. Anderson from the local Baptist church raised a daily verbal war in the Sentinel to require the mayor to obey the law and require the shops be closed. Ultimately law and order won out over lawlessness and the town began to settle down. Many of Laramie's historic buildings were constructed at this time. Today those buildings are the center of the National Historic District and Downtown Laramie. Created at the beginning of the twentieth century, Laramie developed a nice downtown. Focused on Front Street (now 1st), the town developed around the railroad. Buildings were oriented perpendicular to the tracks, and several notable buildings on 1st Street actually fronted onto the tracks. Downtown's historic core is 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Streets, including Ivinson Street and Grand Avenue.

Laramie also has the distinction of having three firsts in the arena of equal rights for women. On September 6, 1870, Louisa Swain became the world's first woman voter. In March of the same year Eliza Stewart had become the first woman subpoenaed to serve on a jury, and Mary Simon Boies the first woman appointed as a bailiff.

The historic past should be embraced in a revitalization plan for Downtown Laramie. In developing a marketing strategy that sets Downtown Laramie apart from other retail and commercial areas, the historic architecture and rich history provide a wealth of opportunities to distinguish the town and invite visitors. By embracing its historic qualities, while adding the best of modern trends, Downtown Laramie can be revitalized.
Why a Downtown Revitalization Plan?

The City of Laramie Downtown Development Authority (DDA) authorized this Downtown Revitalization Plan to formulate a practical, realistic action plan with three primary purposes.

- Generate greater economic vitality for Downtown businesses.
- Recommend specific and focused actions to initiate the 1992 Streetscape Master Plan.
- Recommend improvements for traffic circulation and pedestrian safety in Downtown and evaluate parking conditions.

The DDA retained LSA Associates, Inc. (LSA) to develop the Downtown Revitalization Plan. The LSA team also included BHA Design, Inc. and The Robert Steiner Company, to address streetscapes and economic development, respectively.

Laramie residents contributed significantly to development of this plan. A project Steering Committee was convened by the DDA, both groups are noted in the Acknowledgements, to provide local perspectives and insights. The Steering Committee met with the consultant team monthly during the study, and helped evaluate alternatives and recommendations. The many Laramie citizens who participated in the Open House offered invaluable suggestions that shaped the final recommendations presented here.

Downtown Challenges

The DDA initiated the project after identifying a number of concerns and problems in Downtown Laramie. These challenges must be addressed for Downtown to succeed.

- Downtown businesses want to establish more effective public/private partnerships. The success of the Downtown marketplace is dependent not only on individual businesses, but also on public investment in and management of facilities and infrastructure like streets, sidewalks, and parking in the Downtown area. The DDA, business owners, and City officials recognize the need for better coordination and increased partnering in improvement efforts.
- Downtown businesses do not have strong connections with University. The University is the city's biggest employer, and its employees and students represent a significant pool of potential customers. Though the campus is only blocks from Downtown, connections between the two are not strong. Downtown business owners recognize the need to strengthen ties with the University.
- The Streetscape Master Plan has not been implemented. An ambitious and costly plan to beautify 28 intersections in Downtown remains stalled a decade after it was published. The DDA recognizes the need to evaluate how to implement the Streetscape Master Plan in phases.
- 3rd Street is visual and pedestrian barrier to Downtown. This main thoroughfare defines the east edge of Downtown, carries more than 2,000 vehicles per hour in the peak period, and is perceived by many residents to isolate Downtown from the rest of the community. Pedestrians crossing the street, which is also U.S. Highway 287, feel hurried and exposed, and vulnerable to higher-speed traffic.
Parking conflicts and accidents occur on 3rd Street due to narrow travel and parking lanes. The design of 3rd Street provides four traffic lanes and two parking lanes in about 62 feet. A similar street cross-section today would be designed for a minimum of 68 feet (four 12-foot travel lanes and two 10-foot parking lanes). This width restricts lines of sight for drivers, causes conflicts with turning and parking movements, and provides narrow on-street parking at the cost of a few rear-view mirrors and car doors.

DDA is disbanding. This issue arose after the Revitalization Plan was commissioned, but is a relevant concern to the future of Downtown Laramie. Voters Downtown did not approve funding to continue the DDA after March 1, 2002. This leaves a leadership void in establishing effective partnerships, championing causes for Downtown businesses, and carrying through the recommendations set forth in this Revitalization Plan.
Downtown Laramie Today

Downtown Character

As part of the analysis of existing conditions in Downtown Laramie, the LSA team conducted a walking tour of the area. The purpose of this tour was to evaluate current streetscapes relative to the likely market acceptance based on the trends in Downtown Revitalization mentioned above. The findings of this analysis are described below.

1st Street

1st Street is perhaps the most historic street in Downtown Laramie. Originally called Front Street, this stretch houses significant historic buildings and is integral to the colorful history of Laramie. 1st Street appears forgotten today, not quite abandoned but not well tended either. As a major player in the history of Laramie, 1st Street should be capitalized upon to offer interpretation and viewing of the railyard.

2nd Street

This is Downtown Laramie's Main Street. It contains the largest collection of attractive historic buildings in one view, and has the most potential to serve as an organizing element for Downtown. Much of the original character has been preserved and many storefronts are in good condition, though the street environment has been interrupted in a couple of locations. "The Hole" is a notable break, as is the bank parking lot located between Ivinson and University. There is also a break where Jeffrey's Restaurant has bricked in and painted a restaurant window facing 2nd Street. This blank wall, coupled with the vacant Fox Theatre and the bank parking lot on the east side of the street, effectively terminates Downtown at Ivinson. On the south end of 2nd, Downtown effectively ends at Custer, where uses transition from retail to become service or residential uses.

3rd Street

3rd Street transitions from Laramie's historic Downtown to more recent construction to the east, and is the main north-south highway through town. Buildings from Custer to Clark reflect a mixture of historic buildings (late 1800s to early 1900s) and more recent construction (1940s to 1970s). Although the mixture of buildings creates an inconsistent street scene, several buildings help maintain the quality of the corridor, including St. Matthews Episcopal Cathedral and the Connor Hotel. Several other historic buildings retain their original facades.

The windows of several businesses on 3rd Street have been covered with reflective material. This storefront treatment makes Downtown less inviting to pedestrians and passing motorists, toward whom street level buildings should be oriented.

3rd Street is the gateway into Laramie from I-80—the importance of its character in attracting visitors Downtown cannot be overstated. One of the most important findings of our analysis is that Downtown is all but invisible to first-time visitors. A passing motorist can easily drive through Laramie and never be aware of where Downtown and the National Historic District are located. Addressing this weak identity is a key issue for Downtown.
4th Street

Most of 4th Street developed more recently than streets to the west, except older buildings such as the Catholic Church, Masonic Temple, and City Hall. The blocks from Custer to Clark contain a variety of building setbacks and types. For example, residential housing is mixed with commercial buildings, and building setbacks vary 20 to 30 feet among uses.

The development pattern appears to favor detached sidewalks with street trees, however, there are only scattered street trees and there is no consistent treatment of the area between the curb and the sidewalk. In a traditional downtown, these areas might be planted with street trees at approximately 40-foot intervals. The trees also would be planted in a formal tree lawn, in contrast to present 4th Street, which appears to have been either paved or covered with gravel or grass.

Parking areas also vary along this stretch of roadway. In some cases, parking is between the curb and the building fronts, while in other locations it is behind buildings or in the tree lawn.

An inconsistent development pattern creates a haphazard street image. Because of the way Laramie developed, 4th Street does not readily fit into the characteristic appearance of the historic Downtown. 4th Street reflects an automobile-oriented environment, in contrast to the historic Downtown originally that was planned around the horse-and-buggy. One difference between the two is the setback of adjacent uses. Contrast the zero-foot setbacks in Downtown, where buildings front directly onto the property line and there is only a sidewalk between the building and the street, with newer automobile-oriented areas, where a setback area is frequently provided to allow for parking lots.

4th Street has more civic offices and service-related uses than a retail establishments. Continuing these uses may be more appropriate for this block than adding or converting to retail businesses.

Fremont Street and University Avenue

Property uses on University and Ivinson transition from the retail district in the Historic Downtown to more industrial and residential uses. While west end of University is part of the National Historic District, there are few retail uses in this area. The bar at the corner of University and 2nd Street is a potential anchor. The building's exterior is not in good repair, however, but with facade renovation and an outdoor patio, it could become a destination along with a renovated Fox Theatre. Interestingly, the period light fixtures were extended into these areas, yet were not installed along some of the historic stretches of 3rd Street.

Ivinson Street and Grand Avenue

These two streets are the best for arrival into the historic area from U.S. 287 or U.S. 30. The buildings are relatively intact and the street scene and uses are fitting for a retail district. With the rail yards in the foreground and the backdrop of the mountains, the views to the west have significant potential to act as anchors to entice visitors into Downtown. Grand and Ivinson also have potential to create a provide greater connectivity between Downtown and the University of Wyoming, six blocks to the east.
Garfield Street and Custer Street

Garfield and Custer Streets offer good opportunities for expansion of the historic Downtown retail district. The condition of properties here are mixed, and do not create an inviting street scene, or characteristics that would invite pedestrians and shoppers. They are mostly older brick buildings, which could be enhanced and tied to the depot park. Through incorporation of awnings, display windows, and better street landscaping, these two streets could easily integrate into the fabric of the Downtown.

Talking About Downtown

Without question, Downtown remains an important commercial district to the citizens of Laramie. Its inventory of historic buildings, many of which have been restored, evokes interest and instills pride with locals. Its central location lends potential to its continued viability as a commercial neighborhood in the community.

During the many interviews the LSA team conducted for the study, nobody predicted the demise of Downtown Laramie. Some voiced concern about the competition emerging from other commercial areas in town, while others think the historic element of Downtown has been compromised in the strip-commercial character along the north and south ends of 3rd Street. But there were no expressions that Downtown was about to lapse into a blighted or ignored area. On the contrary, Downtown’s importance to the community was reflected in their interest in the development of this Revitalization Plan, the knowledge people had about redevelopment programs, and by the turnout at open house conducted for this plan.

Three issues emerged from our discussions with leaders of Downtown and the community:

- the need for strong Downtown leadership,
- the relationship between the entire community and the University of Wyoming, and
- parking and circulation (discussed in a separate section).

Downtown Leadership

Residents voiced uncertainty about the programs on which Downtown should focus, who should be the leaders of those programs, and how they should be implemented. The response to whether Downtown should be focusing on public or private capital investment, marketing, promotions, community outreach and education, better merchandising, or business recruitment varied widely. This divergence of opinion makes it difficult for any organization to lead. Specific recommendations about the focus of Downtown programs are provided subsequently in this Plan.

Downtown and the University

Whereas Laramie’s history and heritage is “wild and woolly,” its economy is driven by the most cultivated and intellectual institution in the entire state—the University of Wyoming. This inconsistency creates a certain amount of strain, but the relationship directly and significantly affects the future of Downtown.

This fundamental fact must be considered—the future of Laramie and the University are very closely linked. City officials estimate that 17,000 of the 27,000 people living in Laramie have some affiliation with the University. In grant and research funding alone, the University attracts $40 to $50 million into the community every year; its sustained programs exceed $140 million, half of which is in the form of salaries and benefits. The University attracts 10,000 students to the community. These students are like college students everywhere: they eat, drink, play, and buy clothes, music, and sporting equipment. That is, they spend money, and represent a major economic engine in town.

In addition to the obvious economic impact of the University, it also offers other resources that Downtown and the com-
munity could better capitalize on. The University is a source of sophisticated knowledge of business and finance, land-use planning, marketing and merchandising, politics, law, and the art of persuasion. The University also brings major sporting and cultural events to the City of Laramie. There is not another community in the state with the resources available in Laramie.

Getting Around Downtown

Transportation

Traffic conditions in Laramie's Downtown generally are good, with little congestion. An exception in both congestion and safety is the intersection of 3rd and Grand, which connects two federal highways—U.S. 287 and U.S. 30—and is the major entry into Downtown.

One measure of traffic conditions is "Level of Service" (abbreviated as LOS). Level of service is a grading system in which "A" is excellent and "F" is failure. In general, LOS C is the lower threshold of acceptance in the City of Laramie and with the Wyoming Department of Transportation. Based on current traffic volumes and lane configurations, the 3rd and Grand intersection currently operates at LOS C in the evening peak hour. Traffic operations at this intersection could deteriorate to an unacceptable LOS D as the City of Laramie grows.

There are a number of geometric issues associated with the poor performance at the 3rd and Grand intersection, as illustrated in the following figure. The primary issue is the lack of dedicated left turn lanes from 3rd Street onto Grand. Vehicles turning left along 3rd must make this movement from the inside through-lane, which can back up through-traffic.

The intersection design also results in an unsafe condition, evidenced by a high annual incidence of right angle, rear end and sideswipe accidents. The lack of a dedicated left turn lane results in a poor line of sight for turning vehicles to see around the opposing left turn vehicle. Vehicles that make this turn through the blind spot create a high incidence of right angle or "T-Bone" accidents, which can result in severe injuries. Vehicles that stop in the inside lane to turn left can also create an unexpected stopping condition for a following vehicle, which results in rear end collisions. These unexpected stops also result in sideswipe accidents from rapid lane changes to avoid stopped vehicles. The 3rd Street corridor is also the site of sideswipe accidents between through-traffic and parked cars resulting from substandard lane widths and relatively high travel speeds (3rd is posted at 30 mph).

In addition to the congestion and safety problems associated with the 3rd Street and Grand Avenue intersection, and along the 3rd Street corridor, congestion occurs at the intersection of 3rd and Clark Street. This problem is caused by a high a.m. and p.m. peak hour east bound traffic flow, where there is insufficient width to allow vehicles to separate into different lanes and properly discharge into the intersection. Although this intersection is outside the immediate study area, it is an important intersection for entry into the Downtown.

Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Pedestrian "friendliness" can be examined through both qualitative and quantitative measures. Quantitative measures of the pedestrian network include sidewalk availability and width, and street widths or crossing distance. Qualitative measures of pedestrian friendliness include separation from vehicle traffic and street improvements such as landscaping and lighting.
The quantitative elements of pedestrian facilities in Downtown are generally good. Sidewalks range from 9½ to 12 feet in width, and are attached to streets (that is, with no buffer between street and sidewalk). Pedestrians can move throughout the entire Downtown without encountering significant gaps in the sidewalk network, or having to take circuitous routes requiring excessive walking. Crossing the six lanes of 3rd Street, however, can test the capability of slower pedestrians, including the disabled or elderly. The relatively high traffic volume and speed add to safety concerns for pedestrians crossing 3rd Street.

The qualitative aspects of Downtown Laramie are generally acceptable as well. The pedestrian system provides visual interests through much of the Downtown, making it an attractive place to walk. One notable exception is along 3rd Street, where the pedestrian system is not particularly attractive or inviting.

The only posted bike lane near Downtown is along Ilionson Street. The bike lane is posted and striped east of 5th Avenue to the University campus. The lack of posted bike lanes and routes into Downtown does not keep cyclists from riding into the area, though, and bike racks are located throughout Downtown.

Parking

LSA conducted a parking study November 28, 2001, to evaluate Downtown parking conditions. The survey evaluated two elements. The first was an inventory of all available parking in the Downtown, categorized as to being on- or off-street. On-street parking was further identified as being a parallel or diagonal. Parking time restrictions were also noted. Off-street parking was categorized as being either public lots or private lots. The results of the survey are illustrated on page 11.

The quantity and availability of parking Downtown are good. The quality of parking is good throughout most of Downtown, except along 3rd Street where the proximity of the travel lanes to on-street parking is problematic, as are relatively high speeds and traffic volumes.

Downtown Laramie has an abundant supply of diagonal parking. Diagonal parking spaces are coveted in Downtown areas because they increase front door parking by up to 80 percent, relative to parallel parking. Diagonal parking also affects the travel speeds along the streets since vehicles slow and become watchful of vehicles that might back out into the travel lane. Finally, diagonal parking spaces exude the feeling of a historic and quaint Downtown, qualities of Laramie's Downtown that should be maintained.

The second survey was a mid-morning and mid-afternoon utilization survey. This survey identifies the total number of parking spaces occupied divided by the total number of spaces identified in the inventory. This work effort is conducted for each block face within Downtown.

Parking facilities must balance high utilization, which reflects activity and vitality, with enough turnover to provide availability for shoppers and visitors. In retail areas utilization should typically not exceed 85 percent except during the peak holiday season. The objective of this 85 percent utilization factor is that potential customers make discretionary trips to the retail shops and restaurants in Downtown. If fewer than 15 percent of the spaces are available, the driver might have to circle the block or park too far from the front door of their destination. Under these conditions, parking becomes a major inconvenience for those who work or shop Downtown.
conditions, a discretionary trip might be diverted to competitive shopping centers or other commercial centers within the area. In contrast to crowded parking conditions, very low utilization also could be deemed detrimental, as potential customers might perceive that Downtown activities are not vibrant or popular and they should shop elsewhere.

In the case of office and service uses, a higher percent of the trips are non-discretionary (i.e., people have to go to work). The typical maximum parking utilization for office and service activities is 95 percent.

The quantity of parking in Downtown was sufficient during both morning and afternoon surveys. Parking utilization was highest along 2nd Street, although empty parking spaces were available to allow Downtown visitors parking opportunities. In areas north of Ivinson and south of Garfield, utilization was much lower affording ample parking opportunities.

While the quality of parking is good, particularly providing many diagonal spaces, the signs can be confusing. Some blocks are crowded with signs; signs with a single message are posted in different colors; and several spaces in Downtown are restricted for use to individual vehicles, based on license plates designated on the signs. Several participants of the Open House commented that parking restrictions on some streets no longer seem appropriate, including 15-minute zones in front of restaurants and 2-hour zones in front of drop-in businesses such as florists and photography stores. Excessive, poorly marked, or inconsistent signs can clutter sidewalks, confuse drivers, and make Downtown a less inviting place for visitors.

As part of the inventory, LSA talked with the City's Police Parking Officer about his experiences and problems he has observed. He indicated a number of shop owners and employees park all day in front of their business or a neighbor's business and move their vehicles every two hours to avoid being ticketed. Comments from the Steering Committee and Open House participants corroborate his statements. One person mentioned that this has become an art form at one business in Downtown Laramie, where a "message window" pops up on employee computer screens every two hours reminding them to move their cars.

Parking "jockeying" to avoid being ticketed is not uncommon in many towns. It is a potentially serious problem, however, and will become more so as the attraction for Downtown Laramie grows and parking utilization increases. Ample surface parking is available for Downtown shop owners and employees.
Imagine Downtown Tomorrow

Management

An essential part of establishing and maintaining a vibrant downtown is competing effectively with suburban development. Growing suburbs often draw businesses and customers away from the central business district. Merchants in the central business district must continuously evaluate and update their position within the greater community. This means taking an active role not just in individual shops but in thinking as a whole and acting as a single business entity, much as the stores in a suburban mall might act in concert. Downtown merchants quite often operate the opposite way. Because of the widely varying types of businesses and ownership tenure, Downtown’s merchants often act independently and thus may not be taking actions that strengthen their collective market position.

One way to address this challenge is to employ a management agency. With a central management agency overseeing basic rules such as hours of operation, storefront design, and appropriate mixes of businesses, Downtown Laramie can incorporate successful marketing techniques that presently are lacking.

Storefronts

Key components to a good storefront include a sign, bulkhead, transom, shop front, and base. Retailers have only about 8 seconds to get the attention of pedestrians, and only 1-2 seconds to capture the interest of a passing motorist. This brief glimpse demands that merchandise be displayed to enable passersby to perceive the wares of the store. In this short time, merchants must convey their image, quality and timeliness of goods. Window signs can be an effective way to quickly convey that the store offers national brand names.

Windows should be kept fresh and displays rotated frequently to keep the storefront up to date and give a fresh appearance for potential shoppers. Many merchants rotate their displays daily, but window displays should be changed at least weekly.

Each block ideally creates a “scene” that will attract shoppers and encourage them to continue moving along the block. The overall look of the block is critical in creating the scene. Each merchant and storefront owner should be encouraged to keep a well-maintained façade. Shoppers will not believe a store has fashionable new products inside if it is outdated on the outside.

Signs

Signs can be the best or worst allies of a storeowner. A good sign system can convey an image of quality and depict merchandise that invites shoppers and encourages customers.

Projecting signs extending from the face of a store that are well proportioned and tastefully designed, and are mounted at a level to reinforce pedestrian scale can add a great deal to the street scene. Wall signs mounted on the face of a store can also be effective if tastefully constructed and if externally illuminated.

Signs should be in character and scale with the building. Placing a modern-style sign on a historic building detracts from the sense of quality. For example, cabinet signs and internally illuminated awnings do not usually fit the theme of a historic district since they were not available technologies when the building was constructed. Simple canvas awnings and projecting signs or externally illuminated building face signs are more appropriate for the historic storefront.

Merchants should display national brand name signs where possible on a building front. These signs may be on glass doors or be a part of a window display. By using national brand names, customers recognize that the store is marketing current brands that customers recognize. This approach also benefits from national brand advertising.

Signage and storefront displays should work together to draw people through the downtown. A continuous series of projecting signs encourages pedestrians to move down the street, whereas a single vacant storefront can cause a shopper to
cross the street or turn around. Even when a storefront is vacant, there should be some sort of display to help pull people to the next store.

**Pedestrian Circulation**

Pedestrian circulation is an important consideration in maintaining a successful retail district in Downtown Laramie. Shoppers have shown predictable behavior in a retail environment. A carefully designed street scene can increase the likelihood of customers staying downtown to spend time and money. With consistent and strong marketing strategies, shoppers can be encouraged to move through Downtown. Sample marketing strategies are listed below:

- **Anchor Stores/Features** – Malls know they need anchor stores, nationally known retailers that are destinations for consumers. Once in the mall, customers are drawn past smaller stores en route to the anchor stores. The same technique can be effective in Downtown merchandising. Anchor stores or features can attract shoppers along streets and past smaller stores, from one end of Downtown to the other.

- **Activity Centers** – Anchors can be destination-oriented activity centers. Movie theatres, athletic clubs, office buildings, and government offices can offer this type of attraction.

- **Edge Location** – The most effective anchors are located at the edge of a retail district. In Downtown Laramie, several existing features could be used to establish anchors. The Fox Theatre is an excellent example of Art Deco architecture that with proper renovation and an appropriate use can be a good anchor for the north end of 2nd Street. The Union Pacific rail yard at the west end of Downtown is another. The rail yard could be made an anchor by creating an interpretive walk where visitors could go to learn about the history of Laramie and the significance of the rail yard in its growth. The pedestrian bridge could be incorporated into a walkway system, as could the Depot and park. Another potential anchor could be created by establishing a restaurant or outdoor market by the tracks where visitors could view passing trains.

- **Central Focus** – A main shopping path that defines downtown serves as an organizing feature where people can anchor themselves mentally. 2nd Street is a solid candidate for this purpose. There also should be a prime intersection that is the central hub of Downtown. This may be the intersection of 2nd and Grand or 2nd and Inson. Special treatment should be given to the prime intersection—a significant sculpture, kiosk, or paving could be used to distinguish the site. This location should also act as center stage for special events. By creating a single focal point intersection, Downtown establishes an identity with which individuals can identify. It can be referred to as a meeting place and it creates a spatial location that visitors can use as a mental benchmark when moving through the streets. Visitors feel a greater sense of security and are more comfortable venturing out to new areas from a focal point.

**Strategic Tenant Mix and Location**

Tenant locations are important, as is critical mass. Clothing stores should locate in the same general area. By creating a "garment district" shoppers will be drawn to the area knowing they can go to one area to purchase clothing. Restaurants are well located on corners. By providing ample opportunity for diners to be visible in windows, there is the appearance of a lively downtown. Adding outdoor dining areas can even further enliven this appearance. Ample research has shown that the major attractor of people is other people. A popular location implies safety and attractions that potential shoppers will want to explore. By placing restaurants at corner locations shoppers then are drawn past other stores after they park and walk to dine.

The proper mix of tenants can augment the viability of the central business district. Retail should be balanced with eating establishments, for example, so visitors can stay longer in a given area without leaving. Destination uses are an-
other opportunity that bring people downtown and give them a reason to spend time. Government offices bring workers to the core area, for example, which may translate into staying for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Residential uses also help by providing a 24-hour environment. When people live downtown, they help with observation and reduce crime, and often spend their money close to home.

Maintaining a good mix of tenants can be difficult because of the number of individual owners and the lack of a single governing entity. One strategy used by many small towns is a single leasing agent. The leasing agent is responsible for locating potential tenants and then locating them in appropriate areas where they add to the overall character and marketing.

**Streetscape and Landscaping**

Outdoor spaces are most clearly perceived and appreciated when the streets have a ratio of 2 or 3 horizontal to 1 vertical. In other words for a building height of 20 feet, the street width would be no more than 40 to 60 feet. When the horizontal distance is much greater, individuals perceive parts rather than the streets and buildings as a whole. The streets in Downtown Laramie generally meet this criteria, and the National Historic District in particular meets the height-to-width ratio. Street trees at corners could provide a canopy that would soften the scale of the space and buildings.

Landscapes need not be overly ornate or expensive. The most important consideration is that sidewalks be kept clean and are wide enough to accommodate pedestrians. A well-designed streetscape can add to a sense of quality and help to give scale to a street.

It is important not to overdo street front landscapes. The key consideration is to not block building façades and storefront windows. If trees are located along the street fronts, they should be a species with a light canopy structure. Trees should also branch high enough, no less than 10 to 12 feet, that views to storefronts and signs are not blocked. Shrubs should be used sparingly and only low-growing species should be planted. The shopping window is all-important in a retail district, and must be protected. Store windows should not be blocked with above-grade large tree pots. These kinds of planters not only block store windows, they narrow the effective width of sidewalks.

Flowerpots with annual flowers can add a welcome spot of color to the street scene. Pots tend to be more easily maintained than planting beds, and give an air of quality and tending.

**Parking**

Convenient parking is one of the most important elements of a successful downtown. This is especially important for merchants with a high turnover of customers or who sell time-sensitive products. For example take-out restaurants, photo processing, and florists typically need to have convenient parking locations. Other uses require convenient parking but most shoppers do not object to walking a short distance.

Diagonal parking typically is the most convenient form of on-street parking. Motorists can easily pull into the drive lane from diagonal parking. Diagonal parking is also a relatively efficient form of parking and can provide up to 80 percent more parking in the same linear curb length, though it does require...
more street width or allow fewer travel lanes. Parallel parking, while not as easily used, is more common and can be used where diagonal is not feasible.

Surface parking lots should be encouraged where they do not interfere with the street scene. A preferred location is behind stores or at the ends of a major retail block. Parking lots should be landscaped and well lighted. Many jurisdictions require that 10 percent of parking lot area be devoted to landscaping to reduce the feel of pavement.

Parking should be free when possible, and on-street parking should be limited to customers rather than employees. A common approach to control employee parking is to limit parking duration to two hours. This approach makes sense, though its implementation must consider other surrounding businesses, which may have more short-term needs, as previously discussed. A periodic review of business needs should be conducted to make sure short-term parking is appropriately located. Parking restrictions must be enforced to be effective.

Parking garages can be useful but they are expensive—the parking structure constructed in 2001 in downtown Fort Collins cost $10,000/space. The best parking garages allow for retail uses along the street level and place vehicle parking behind the buildings.

Lighting

A well-lighted street is essential to promote a sense of safety at night. A common approach is to establish a redundant lighting system that incorporates high mast lighting with an on-street ornamental light. This approach works well because the high mast provides general area lighting while the ornamental decorates the street.

If ornamental light poles are used, bulb wattages should be low enough to prevent hot spots that hurt the eyes of pedestrians. A typical average minimum light level is 1 to 2 foot-candles. Ornamental poles must be sized to pedestrian scale, if banners or flags are to be used, they must not accessible for vandals.

Shop windows must be brighter than the streetscape and highlight retail displays. Halogen and incandescent lights provide the truest color rendition in store windows and allow the best appearance of merchandise.

Street lights must balance a useful lifecycle with true color rendition. The best source of lighting currently that meets both of these objectives is metal halide. Many urban streets are illuminated with high-pressure sodium lamps, which tend to have a red color shift. This shift makes colors appear warmer and it tends to wash out reds and make greens appear grayish or black. A few communities, including Aspen, Colorado, use incandescent lights in their ornamental streetlights. Incandescent has the shortest life cycle but provides true color rendition and tends to be easy to view.

Cleanliness

Visitors quickly assess the safety of a potential shopping district, including whether an area is well maintained. If it looks clean and well maintained customers will feel safe and be more likely to venture out to shop. Many malls steam clean their walks at least weekly. Storefronts should also be cleaned regularly, and not just with sweeping. There should be a regular washing of sidewalks and perhaps an annual steam cleaning to keep the streetscape appearing fresh and inviting.

The streets of downtown can add to a sense of cleanliness. Regular painting of parking stripes and divider lines can add to the appearance of a well maintained downtown.
Circulation Alternatives

The intersection of 3rd and Grand is an important component in the long-term transportation and circulation plan for Downtown. LSA evaluated several alternatives to improve operations and pedestrian mobility at this location.

Slow Traffic, Enforce Laws

Many Laramie residents voiced a preference to do nothing to the physical facilities along 3rd Street, but instead slow down traffic by lowering the speed limit, change the signal timing and provide better police enforcement. This may be more easily said than done. First, travel speed is a function of the driver’s visual impression of the roadway speed, traffic control devices, signal timing, and physical restrictions or conditions. Simply put, 3rd Street looks fast. There are few physical clues to tell drivers traveling through Downtown that they should do anything other than travel fast.

Second, while modifying the signal timing along a corridor to regulate and control speed has merit under certain conditions, there is not sufficient traffic on the side streets to reduce the green-light time dedicated to north/south 3rd Street through-traffic.

Encouraging the police to spend more time issuing speeding tickets along 3rd Street is a third option, but this requires numerous hours of staff time and will not be a long-term solution.

Even if these ideas could work, the existing and future traffic volumes and the unsafe intersection geometry would still need to be addressed. This alternative does not resolve key issues and was dropped from further consideration.

Reduced Lane Alternative

Another alternative is to reduce the number of lanes on 3rd Street, from the existing four lanes to a three-lane facility where one through-lane would be provided in each direction along with a dedicated center left turn lane, as shown in the next figure. This alternative improves parking along 3rd by widening parking and travel lanes, and benefits pedestrians by reducing the overall time and distance necessary to cross 3rd Street. However, existing and future traffic volumes would result in unacceptable levels of service. In addition, with only one lane of travel, through-traffic would be slowed by vehicles entering and exiting parking spaces along 3rd Street.

Because of this conflict, the Reduced Lane Alternative was dropped from further consideration.

Modified 3rd Street Alternative

The Wyoming Department of Transportation’s analysis of the 3rd and Grand intersection considered an alternative that added a left turn lane for north- and southbound vehicles on 3rd Street at Grand Avenue, and a right turn lane for westbound vehicles on Grand at 3rd. Because of the limited curb-to-curb width, parking would be removed along 3rd Street.

LSA’s evaluation determined that current traffic flows and turning movements along 3rd warrant a separate left turn lane for north/south traffic only at the intersection with Grand, and that on-street parking spaces would need to be removed between Ivinson and Garfield, after which the lanes could transition back
to the current four-lane cross-section. In order to mitigate this loss of parking, replacement parking would need to be provided in close proximity to this two-block area. Two potential locations for a new 25-space surface parking lot are at the southeast corner of 3rd and Ivinson (the former Exxon station presently occupied by Hugh Lockhart Service), and at the former bank building at the southeast corner of 3rd and Garfield. Additional parking spaces could be created along the side streets of Ivinson and Garfield by converting parallel parking to diagonal parking. This alternative is illustrated below.

NVO potential locations for a new 25-space surface parking lot are at the southeast corner of 3rd and Ivinson (the former Exxon station presently occupied by Hugh Lockhart Service), and at the former bank building at the southeast corner of 3rd and Garfield. Additional parking spaces could be created along the side streets of Ivinson and Garfield by converting parallel parking to diagonal parking. This alternative is illustrated below.

The fourth alternative consists of a pair of one-way streets (or "couplet") along 3rd and 4th, as proposed in the City's current Major Streets and Highway Plan, and shown in the next figure. A couplet of 3rd/4th from Custer on the south through Lewis on the north would allow significant capacity and safety improvements in the corridor, improve traffic operations at 3rd and Grand and 3rd and Clark, maintain consistency with the City's adopted Transportation Plan, and be consistent with the Wyoming Department of Transportation objective of efficient traffic movement. LSA also evaluated a 2nd/3rd couplet, but eliminated this variation because it did not improve traffic operations at 3rd and Clark.

In this alternative, northbound traffic on 3rd Street would be diverted at Custer, which would be prominently signed as a gateway. Vehicles could turn left to enter the historic Downtown, or right (to continue north.). Northbound through-traffic would then turn left on 4th Street, continuing to Lewis where they would turn left to reconnect with 3rd as illustrated on page 19. Southbound traffic on 3rd Street would continue to operate as it does today.

With the couplet, both 3rd and 4th would carry three lanes of traffic with parallel parking on both sides. By reducing one travel lane in each direction, the narrow travel and parking lanes could be widened and a buffer could be created between the travel and parking lanes.

For the Downtown Revitalization Plan, the couplet limits were defined as Custer and Lewis because they define entryways into Downtown and they address the congestion problems at 3rd and Clark by eliminating the east-to-north turn movement of traffic coming over the viaduct.
Circulation Alternatives Evaluation

Modified 3rd Street Alternative

Economic Development. Maintaining 3rd Street as a two-way street keeps vital retail traffic closer to the urban core, and affords businesses on 3rd Street more visibility to drive-by traffic. This alternative removes on-street parking for two blocks along 3rd Street, however, which is particularly detrimental to business dependent on impulse purchases, such as fast food stores, or drop-in customers, such as florists.

Streetscapes. From an urban design perspective, the Modified 3rd Street Alternative has both positive and negative aspects. A positive attribute is that it keeps traffic closer to Downtown and maintains an easily legible circulation pattern. With traffic

Benefits of Bulbouts

The Modified 3rd Street and 3rd/4th Couplet both include curb extensions or "bulbouts" at major intersections in Downtown. Bulbou benefits include:

- Providing a gateway into a special district.
- Changing the character of intersections from automobile-dominant to pedestrian-friendly.
- Enhancing the visibility of pedestrians.
- Reducing the time it takes a pedestrian to cross from curb to curb.
- Changing the turning radius at an intersection, reducing turning speed and vehicle and pedestrian conflicts.
- Constricting traffic flow through reduced lateral clearance.
- Providing visual and aesthetic enhancements with pedestrian lighting, planters, and benches.
moving in its traditional pattern, businesses along 3rd will not be adversely impacted with the exception of the area surrounding the improvements at 3rd and Grand where parking is removed, though mitigation is provided with through the inclusion of a new surface parking lot to offset the loss of on-street parking.

**Pedestrians.** Parking east of 3rd Street could be less satisfactory for pedestrians destined for Downtown destinations. The proposed lane improvements will exacerbate the existing conditions by replacing the current buffer of parked cars with a travel lane, increasing the time it takes pedestrians to cross the street. Under the Modified 3rd Street Alternative, the addition of one travel lane increases the exposure of pedestrians from about 14 seconds to 17 seconds to cross all five travel lanes.

One potential solution would be to add a median as a pedestrian refuge; however, a median would require more space and would subsequently reduce the amount of sidewalk adjacent to storefronts, which already is minimal. Another potential solution would be to lengthen the walk time with a crosswalk or to create a four-way walk signal. There are tradeoffs to traffic flow for either of these options, but both would make the intersection more safe for pedestrians.

**Traffic.** Existing and future traffic volumes in Downtown could be accommodated with the Modified 3rd Street Alternative. Constructing a left turn lane on 3rd at Grand and left/right lanes on Grand would correct most operational problems at the intersection, and allow acceptable level of service in the future. The modified 3rd Street Alternative does not improve the intersection of 3rd and Clark, however. Although this intersection is not in Downtown proper, it affects traffic movement into and out of the Downtown.

**Parking.** The most detrimental aspect of the Modified 3rd Street Alternative is the loss of on-street parking along 3rd Street. Construction of a new surface lot would mitigate the quantity of spaces lost, but may not be widely used by visitors Downtown. The proposed new parking lot likely would be on the upper end of the 300-400 feet most pedestrians would accept walking in a smaller downtown like Laramie, and would require users to walk across the street (Ivinson/Garfield or 3rd) to get to one of three corners.

**Phasing.** The Modified 3rd Street Alternative could be constructed in phases to lower the initial cost and to modify the "highway" atmosphere of the corridor near Downtown. Phase I would include installation of a new traffic signal at 3rd and Grand with left turn phases, and streetscaping at 3rd Street intersections from University to Garfield, as shown in the "Cost Comparison" figure. Phase I would cost approximately $1.1 to $1.4 million, given the assumptions described in the figure.

Building out this alternative according to the Streetscape Master Plan would include constructing installing six more new signals, and streetscaping the other 24 intersections identified in the 1992 Plan. The Build Out plan as shown in the "Cost Comparison" figure would cost approximately $6.7 to $8.4 million, given the assumptions described in the figure.

### 3rd/4th Couplet Alternative

**Economic Development.** The couplet offers positive and negative aspects for economic development Downtown. This design allows expansion of downtown and encourages growth in the core. The couplet begins this process by directing more traffic to 4th Street. The property values over time will rise and the subsequent drive-by traffic will make this corridor more attractive for infill development. If appropriately designed and zoned, this can add to the Downtown and hopefully expand the business base.

This alternative effectively brings Downtown one block closer to the University campus, if appropriate development can be encouraged along 4th Street. The perceptual distance between Downtown and the campus may be lessened which, when combined with active programming and other measures, gives Downtown a greater chance to strengthen its ties with the University.

However, the couplet halves the traffic and moves cars away from existing storefronts, an undesirable condition for businesses trying to attract shoppers. Businesses that and rely on drive-by traffic could suffer from this loss of exposure. For Laramie, the couplet also moves traffic farther from the historic Downtown.

**Streetscapes.** One objective of urban design is to get people out of their cars and into stores. The couplet tends to accomplish the opposite of the desired goal by shuttling people through the retail district without attracting their attention or getting them to stop.
## Cost Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I: Modified 3rd</th>
<th>Phase I: 3rd/4th Couple</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modified 3rd Street Alternative</strong></td>
<td><strong>3rd and 4th Couple</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Landscaped Intersections = $800,000</td>
<td>5 Landscaped Intersections = $1,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 New Signal = $175,000</td>
<td>13 New Signals = $1,300,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surface Parking Lot = $220,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Cost = $1,145,000 to $1,431,000</td>
<td>Total Cost = $2,300,000 to $2,875,000</td>
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<th>Build Out: Modified 3rd</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modified 3rd Street Alternative</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Landscaped Intersections = $5,600,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 New Signals = $875,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surface Parking Lot = $220,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cost = $6,695,000 to $8,369,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Assumptions
- **Phase I** improvements are the minimum needed to implement the circulation plan. **Build Out** includes full streetscape treatments of all intersections identified in the 1992 Streetscape Master Plan plus the circulation plan described in this report.
- Landscaped intersections cost $200,000 average and include demolition of curbs and gutters; concrete walks, asphalt pavement; pavement sawcut; concrete curbs and gutter; ornamental trees and plantings.
- Traffic signals: Four-way cost $125,000 per intersection; Three-way cost $100,000 per intersection.
- Surface parking lot costs include buying an 8,800-sq.ft. lot at $18/sq.ft. plus construction cost of $2,500/space for 25 spaces at 350 sq.ft./space. This does not include demolition or environmental remediation.
- Total cost range upper bounds include 25 percent contingency.
The couplet creates an opportunity create a gateway into historic Downtown at Custer Street. A sign identifying the National Historic District directing vehicles towards 2nd Street could begin to define the Historic District and attract visitors to the core area. If developed as part of an overall sign system that begins at the I-80 exit, an easy wayfinding sign system could be put into place to heighten visibility of the District to visitors. This addresses one of the main concerns identified in this study—finding your way into the heart of Downtown.

The key urban design consideration for the couplet is to understand that it is not simply a circulation plan. The impacts of moving traffic onto 4th Street will have long-range effects that need to be anticipated and proactively addressed. To ensure that development is orderly, City planners must consider the types and desired outcomes of proposed new land uses, and establish land use standards and design guidelines for the types of uses and the desired design qualities. If the couplet is implemented the City should prepare a sub-area plan for the properties located between Clark and Custer and between 3rd and 4th. The plan would establish building setback criteria, streetscape and walk standards, permitted land uses, building height restrictions and other appropriate measures to make the area a vital and consistent part of Downtown.

**Pedestrians.** The 3rd/4th Couplet Alternative best addresses pedestrian mobility. With the reduction in travel lanes from four to three on both streets, and constriction of curb extensions, or "bulbouts," the pedestrian would require approximately 10 seconds to cross 3rd Street, a reduction of about 4 seconds from the current design. The 3rd/4th couplet bulbouts could be extended further into the street than the other two alternatives, which provides for more opportunity for inclusions of pedestrian amenities and a place of pedestrian focus.

**Traffic.** Couples tend to convey traffic more efficiently. While this may seem positive when considering traffic flows, the solution tends to change streets from destination roadways to conveyance roadways, meaning that people are shuttled through Downtown more quickly and are less inclined to stop and shop. In general, however, the 3rd/4th Couplet provides for the best level of service for Downtown. Traffic could be better progressed with a one-way couplet than with two-way operations. This will allow both less vehicles delay at intersections and better progression of traffic at a lower speed, improving pedestrian mobility.

**Parking.** Parking quantity would not be affected by adopting the couplet, but the quality of on-street spaces along 3rd Street could be improved significantly by being widened.

**Phasing.** The 3rd/4th Couplet Alternative could be constructed in phases to lower the initial cost and to modify the "highway" atmosphere of the corridor near Downtown. Phase I would include installation of 13 new traffic signals and streetscaping at five intersections along 3rd and 4th, as shown in the "Cost Comparison" figure. These improvements would create a functional couplet from Custer to Lewis, and create Downtown gateways at Custer and at 3rd/4th/Vinson/Grand. Phase I would cost approximately $2.3 to $2.9 million, given the assumptions described in the figure.

Building out this alternative according to the Streetscape Master Plan would include streetscaping 23 more intersections identified in the 1992 Plan. The Build Out plan as shown in the "Cost Comparison" figure would cost approximately $6.9 to $8.6 million, given the assumptions described in the figure.

**Circulation Alternatives Evaluation Summary**

The two circulation alternatives available to Laramie represent considerably different future conditions for Downtown, truly a proverbial "fork in the road."

The Modified 3rd Street Alternative:
- improves vehicular traffic operations at 3rd and Grand,
- removes approximately 35 on-street parking spaces on 3rd between Garfield and Ivinson,
- may increase pedestrian crossing time of 3rd between Garfield and Ivinson by expanding the facility to five travel lanes,
- keeps all traffic on 3rd Street closer to Downtown, and
- costs approximately $1.1 to $1.4 million implement initially.

The 3rd/4th Couplet:
- improves vehicular traffic operations at 3rd Street intersections with Grand and Clark,
- does not reduce on-street parking on 3rd,
- may improve the pedestrian friendliness of 3rd Street by re-
Reducing crossing time by contracting 3rd Street to three travel lanes,

- moves northbound traffic on 3rd Street farther from Downtown,
- may perceptually move Downtown closer to campus, and
- costs approximately $2.3 to $2.9 million to implement initially.

Public Preference

The project steering committee unanimously recommended the 3rd/4th Couplet in its final meeting. Committee members preferred the couplet for the benefits cited above, because it allows for future expansion of Downtown into the block between 3rd and 4th, and because they perceive it as a better long-term solution of the issues facing Downtown.

Participants at the Open House who voiced a preference slightly favored the one-way couplet, though with significant reservations. The reservations focused on perceptions of (1) lost business along 3rd Street because of the reduction in drive-by traffic, and (2) compromising pedestrian friendliness of 3rd and 4th by facilitating faster traffic movement by converting 3rd and 4th into "corridors" for faster moving vehicles. The second concern was particularly strong since one of the objectives of the DDA was to increase the pedestrian-friendliness of Downtown.

Consultant Recommendation

The LSA team recommends the 3rd/4th Couplet be implemented, and that prominent gateway signage be placed at Custer where traffic is diverted from 3rd Street east to the Couplet. The street on which traffic is diverted is a key element of LSA's recommendation for the DDA. Diverting couplet traffic farther south on 3rd Street would eliminate the opportunity for a prominent Downtown gateway at the beginning of the couplet.

Implementing the 3rd/4th Couplet provides benefits identified above, and it:

- allows standard widths for travel lanes and a buffer between the travel lanes and parking lanes on 3rd and 4th, (this buffer could be designated for a bike lane on 3rd and 4th), and
- provides for a prominent southern gateway into Downtown.
Funding Sources

Revitalizing Downtown Laramie will require funding, and will be most successful if undertaken with a combination of local, state, and federal programs. The dozen programs listed below are potential sources for monies for streetscapes, building redevelopment or improvements, and highway and street construction.

Grants and Sponsorships

Many downtown programs are candidates for grants or sponsorships from philanthropic organizations or local business. Businesses—beer distributors, for example—may sponsor events in exchange for "pouring rights" and advertising displays. Utilities, telephone companies, soft drink companies, banks, law firms, bars, restaurants, and radio stations are all potential sponsors for support that is promoted as marketing, not philanthropic giving. In Old Town Fort Collins, for example, a local bank donated a street clock in exchange for having its name displayed on the clock casing.

Urban Systems Funds

The Wyoming Department of Transportation makes available "urban systems funds" for transportation projects in smaller communities. Laramie presently accumulates around $4 million every six years for transportation-related improvements.

Community Development Block Grant Funds

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) focus on financial assistance for affordable housing, but a portion of grants can be applied to economic development programs. Wyoming’s program includes specific categories for downtown development, including assistance for public facilities, rehabilitation of commercial buildings, historic preservation, land acquisition, and site clearance. In Laramie, CDBG assistance is available through the University and the Wyoming Small Business Development Council. Website: www.uwadminweb.uwyo.edu.

Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program

The Section 108 program allows local governments to leverage CDBG funds into larger federal loan guarantees by guaranteeing borrowed funds through a pledge of current and future CDBG allocations. Borrowed amounts cannot exceed five times the most recent CDBG allocation. Because Laramie is a non-entitlement city, the pledge of CDBG revenues must come from the State (this may be beneficial to Laramie since the State’s allocation is substantially larger than that of any single community and therefore a larger pledge may be available). Some restrictions apply. Contact: Mr. Paul Webster, 451 7th Street, SW, Room 7180, Washington, DC 20410; (202) 708-3226. Website: www.hud.gov/progdesc/cdbg-108.cfm.

National Community Development Initiative (NCDI)

NCDI is a private partnership that provides support to nonprofit community development corporations working to improve physically and economically distressed inner city neighborhoods. NCDI harnesses the resources of major national corporations and foundations, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and scores of local public and private organizations. Contact: The National Community Development Initiative, 330 West 108th Street, Suite 1, New York, NY 10025; phone 212-662-6630. E-mail ncdi@ncdi.org.

Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI)

BEDI makes grants for the remediation, redevelopment, and economic development of qualified brownfield (contaminated) projects that are leveraged with private sector funds. Funds may be used for property acquisition, installation of infrastructure, demolition, construction, job training, providing business loans, and developing public facilities and attracting businesses. Restrictions apply, including benefit to low- and moderate-income groups. Contact: Stan Gimont, Office of Community and Economic Development Finance, 451 7th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20410; (202) 708-7817. Website: www.hud.gov/progdesc/brownf.cfm.

Historic Preservation

The Federal government provides a 20 percent income tax credit to individual property owners and (sometimes) the lessees of buildings for the cost of rehabilitating qualifying income-producing properties. To receive historic tax credits, qualified reha-
bilitation expenses must exceed $5,000, or the adjusted basis for the property. The property must be a certified historic structure that is subject to depreciation, and the rehabilitation work must be approved in advance by the National Park Service. Additional information and applications can be obtained from the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office in Cheyenne.

**Industrial Development Projects (Wyoming Statute 15-1-700)**

This Wyoming law vests counties and municipalities with the power to pursue economic growth and to promote employment opportunities by creating or encouraging the attraction and expansion of all kinds of business that contribute to payrolls and tax base. Projects financed under this law must make payments in lieu of taxes, which fully compensate all the overlapping taxing jurisdictions. Municipal realty transactions are financed through bonds secured by specific forms of security. Projects using this funding source must:

- create new or additional employment opportunities,
- expand the tax base and increase sales, property, or other tax revenues,
- maintain and promote a stable, balanced and diversified economy, and
- promote or develop the use of agricultural, manufactured, commercial, or natural resource products.

**Urban Renewal Authority (URA) (Wyoming Statute 15-9-100)**

Wyoming allows formation of municipal URAs to rehabilitate, conserve, and redevelop properties in the interest of public health, safety, morals or welfare of its residents. In theory, the URA can issue revenue bonds, appropriate funds, make expenditures and levy taxes and assessments to implement a project plan. URAs can use property tax increment financing for payment on bonds, and can issue general obligation debt with voter approval.

**Downtown Development Authority (DDA) (Wyoming Statute 15-9-200)**

Laramie's DDA is ceasing its day-to-day operations on February 28, 2002. Its purposes are similar to urban renewal authorities though DDA projects can be initiated to prevent the spread of blight rather than removing it. DDAs have access to both property and sales tax increment financing, which can be collected for a period of 25 years, and in Wyoming can levy up to 30 mills on non-residential properties in its district. Revenues can be used for administrative expenses and projects including:

- planning or management of development or improvement activities,
- landscaping and maintenance of public areas,
- promotion of public events,
- activities in support of business recruitment and development, and
- any economic improvement activity for which an assessment may be made on properties that benefit from the activity.

**Affordable Housing**

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is a federal program to fund construction of new rental housing and the acquisition and rehabilitation of existing rental housing for low-income households. Both nonprofit agencies and for-profit developers may use the tax credits to develop low-income housing. Projects developed with LIHTC-backed dollars must reserve a minimum percentage of units at restricted rents for low-income families over a period of no less than 30 years. To qualify for tax credits, developers are required to rent at least 40 percent of their units to tenants with incomes equal to or less than 60 percent of the area median income, or 20 percent of units to residents earning 50 percent or less of the area median income. Contact: Wyoming Community Development Authority, 155 North Beech, Casper, WY 82602; 307-265-0603. Website: www.research.aarp.org/consume/fs74-credits.

**National Development Council (NDC)**

The NDC is another source and potential development partner in tax credit projects and was a principal in the redevelopment of the Northern Hotel in Fort Collins, into affordable housing for seniors. The Northern Hotel project involved several funding sources—affordable housing tax credits, historic preservation tax credits, historic preservation grant funds, DDA tax increment funds, City affordable housing funds, General Improvement District funds, and a CDBG grant. Website: www.ndc-online.org.
Getting it Done

Revitalizing Downtown will be accomplished through the efforts of individual business and property owners, by informal associations or affiliations of the business and property owners, and through a legal downtown entity such as a DDA or Urban Renewal Authority. Each of these entities can cooperate effectively at some tasks with local, state, and federal agencies, though some have different standing in obtaining funding.

Dam Good Ideas

Individual business and property owners can take simple and inexpensive steps that will begin the revitalization of Downtown Laramie.

Gateways

- Follow through with the Wyoming Department of Transportation to ensure they install signs on the interstate identifying Downtown as a National Historic District. The sign for eastbound traffic has fallen down, but will be replaced, according to Wyoming Department of Transportation's state traffic engineer. These signs may do more to encourage visitor traffic than any other single action.

Merchandising and Marketing

- Storefronts should be simple and clean but tasteful and lively. Key components to a successful storefront include bulkhead, transom, shop front, clear windows, and entertaining signs.

- Display merchandise effectively in storefronts. Keep glass storefront windows clear—eliminate reflective coatings on storefronts, especially along 3rd street. Keep window displays simple and understandable for passing motorists, who have about one second to view windows.

- Merchandise for the University—this is the primary market. Downtown should target Engage University faculty and students in market assessment and merchandising to help determine what inventory to carry in Downtown stores.

- Market to the University—every day—by radio, in the local and campus newspapers; try TV and the internet. Market jointly with several businesses to share costs. Make student I.D. cards into credit cards that work Downtown.

- Promote Downtown to the University. Link special dining offers to events on campus—“get 25 percent off dinner if you hold two tickets to the symphony Friday night;” “celebrate the Cowboys’ victory over CSU with two-for-ones.”

- Establish close and permanent links to the University through membership on boards, commissions, and service and social clubs. This is a good way to communicate what Downtown has to offer and learn what the University faculty and students are looking for.

- Everything mentioned above regarding the University should be repeated targeting Wyotech. While its educational focus is different from the University, the school employs hundreds and brings hundreds of visitors to the community every year.

Signs, Awnings, Storefronts

- Create attractive projecting signs at pedestrian height.

- Use attractive sidewalk signs, and historic-style fabric awnings (not internally illuminated fiberglass sign systems or metal cabinet signs), and offer outdoor dining. Use externally illuminated signs to reduce glare and maintain historic character. Preserve historic signs such as those on the Fox Theatre and the Fireside Lounge.

- Identify national brands in store signs to compete more effectively with suburban merchants.
- Remove corrugated metal in all forms, including awnings and storefronts. Remove facades that have been placed over original brick buildings.

Events and Programs
- Sponsor events and programming Downtown that appeals to University faculty and students, such as weekly concerts.
- Work with the University to have some classroom activities Downtown. These programs may be more oriented to continuing education, adult classes, outreach programs, or extension service activities.

Other Ideas
- Continue to promote second-story housing Downtown. This will reduce vandalism and crime, and Downtown residents tend to support their neighborhood retail stores.
- Maintain clean sidewalks to convey safety; request the City to steam clean sidewalks annually to keep them looking good.

Working Together
Some action items may be more effectively implemented by an affiliation of Downtown interests, often working in conjunction with the City or other local or state agencies. These may take more investment in time and effort than the previous actions, but also will be beneficial. The first task of this group should be to persistently pursue funding opportunities with the City and State agencies.

Gateways
- Prioritize the I-80/U.S. 287 interchange as a gateway by developing a landscape plan and gateway sign system.

- Develop gateway signs in Downtown identifying the National Historic District.

Appearance
- Request that the City maintain adequate nighttime illumination standards of at least 1 foot-candle, and possibly up to 3 foot-candles.
- Request that the City paint street stripes yearly to maintain a clean, well-maintained look.

Land Use
- In retail areas prevent long stretches of street front without a retail storefront. Large breaks in the retail walk reduce effectiveness.
- Establish “anchors” to draw shoppers through downtown. Capitalize on the Union Pacific rail yard and views west to the mountains to draw visitors to the west end of Ivinson and Grand. Build a viewing platform for the rail yard; install an interpretive sign system. Restore the operations of the Fox Theatre on 2nd Street to be an anchor. Redevelop The Cowboy Bar on 2nd Street by the Fox Theatre to open for lunch and have outdoor dining.

- Encourage storefronts and discourage parking lots abutting streets. Place overflow parking lots behind buildings, and sign them appropriately for access. When parking lots must front the streets, require landscape buffers.

Develop and Cultivate an Image
- Build an image around the historic qualities of Downtown. This may be art and sculpture, wall murals, streetscape, building design, sign design and other elements. Preserve and capitalize on historic features like...
the Union Pacific chimney by the rail yards. Encourage use of the pedestrian bridge over the rail yard.

- Create an interpretive sign system and walking tour geared toward visitors interested in the National Historic District. Develop the Depot into a museum or use it and the adjacent park as a venue to inform visitors about the history of Laramie; entice visitors to walk and shop in Downtown.

- Cooperate with the Territorial Prison to jointly market Laramie as a historic old west town.

**Other Actions**

- To be most effective, the Downtown Laramie Business Association must include members from the top ranks of Laramie’s leaders. Key leaders are usually effective at rallying broad support for projects and programs, and can be good lobbyists. Representation from this group on the governing board of a Downtown organization clearly and simply informs the whole community of the importance of the central business district.

- If the University’s deal to build a hotel/convention center falters, Downtown should work to get the project transferred to the central business district. Downtown is usually the preferred location with convention hotel patrons because of the proximity to local restaurants and entertainment. The current proposed site, which is across the street from a large car dealership and near Wal-Mart, probably does not provide the same atmosphere as a historic Downtown location.

- Downtown should apply the National Main Street four-step approach to its revitalization. The program is concise and sequential. It emphasizes marketing, promotions, and capital investment, and provides technical assistance for a negotiated fee.

- Retain diagonal parking, which provides easy-access parking and allows more cars per block.

- Establish a direct shuttle service between Downtown and the University, using a rubber-wheeled trolleys or some other “fun” conveyance.

- Request the City extend on-street bike lanes continuously from Downtown to campus.

- Continue to seek funding for the rest of Streetscape Master Plan after the Phase 1 improvements are completed.

- Promote the Wyoming Small Business Development Center to Downtown property and business owners. Set up short seminars to bring SBDC and Downtown property/business owners together. SBDC contact: Diane Wolverton, State Director, P.O. Box 3922, Laramie, WY 82071-3922; 307-766-3406. E-mail: ddw@uwyo.edu.

**A Formal Organization**

Business leaders have recently organized the Downtown Laramie Business Association to complement the DDA. The DLBA is a volunteer organization with a unique “open” board—anyone who is a member and shows up at scheduled meetings is eligible to participate and vote on decisions. Regardless of whether Downtown Laramie restores funding to its DDA in the future, some kind of formal organization eventually should be established to represent the interests of the central business district.

Several of the funding sources previously discussed require a formal organization—a downtown development authority or an urban renewal authority, for example—to obtain funding for staff and projects, and advocate for Downtown. The action items listed below might be more effectively carried out through a formal organization.

- Hire professional, full-time staff. DDA board could approach the Chamber of Commerce for staffing assistance in the short-term, or ask the City for the temporary loan of an executive. Full-time staff will be needed to pursue funding options, write grant proposals, administer contracts and grants, and conduct advocacy.

- Create a quasi-public agency that reviews architectural
• Seek tax increment financing. Though this requires voter approval it would provide a permanent source of revenue for a downtown organization.
• Revise the state of Wyoming Downtown development authority and urban renewal authority statutes with regard to their ability to use tax increment financing. The Appendix includes a review of how the current program works. This project would be an excellent undertaking for the University!

renovations and signs in Downtown to ensure they are appropriate for its historic character. This same committee also should review any proposed building demolition.

• Create a sub-area plan for the block between 3rd and 4th Streets. This area is inconsistent in its zoning standards and setbacks. A sub-area plan can establish consistent standards to ensure a uniform image and appeal as well as to create consistency in land uses.

• Form public/private partnerships to promote funding of improvements that may otherwise be difficult to finance privately.

Diagonal parking has been provided in Downtown for nearly a century (photo: 1920)
Source: www.wyomingtalesandtrails.com
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