TOWN OF COWLEY, WYOMING
MASTER PLAN

AUGUST 2007
A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE TOWN OF COWLEY MASTER PLAN AND CERTIFYING SAID PLAN TO THE COWLEY TOWN COUNCIL

WHEREAS, the Cowley Planning Commission was appointed in 2007 for the purposes of preparing a new master plan for the Town of Cowley; and

WHEREAS, in July 2007, the Commission prepared a draft master plan, entitled the Town of Cowley Master Plan consisting of 62 pages of text and maps and including a future Growth Areas Map; and

WHEREAS, in preparing the master plan, the Commission made careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and probable future growth of the town and its environs; and

WHEREAS, the plan was made for the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the town which will best promote the general welfare as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development; and

WHEREAS, the Commission held a public hearing on August 23, 2007 for the purpose of taking public comments on the master plan; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has considered the public hearing testimony.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Cowley Planning Commission does hereby adopt the Town of Cowley Master Plan and certifies it to the Cowley Town Council.

DATED August 23, 2007

Martha Durand

Dexter Woodis, Jr.

June Minchow

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Todd Simmons
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CHAPTER 1 -- PLAN BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 2 -- PLANNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

The Cowley Master Plan is a long-range plan intended to guide the growth and development of the community. The master plan includes background studies and analyses that lead to recommendations for the community’s future in terms of environment, housing, economic development, public services, infrastructure, parks, transportation, and land use. The recommendations are intended to help Cowley achieve its goals for the future of the town.

The master plan process was initiated in 2006 when the Cowley Town Council applied for and was awarded a Wyoming Business Council planning grant. Later in 2006, the Council hired Ken Markert AICP, a professional city planning consultant from Cody, Wyoming to prepare the plan. In early 2007, the Council appointed a planning committee of 18 Cowley area citizens to work with the consultant in producing the plan. The committee and consultant began work in February and produced a draft of the plan in July, 2007.

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

The Town of Cowley encompasses 511 acres at an elevation of about 4,000 feet. Cowley is in Big Horn County, Wyoming. U.S. Highway 310 is Cowley’s Main Street and connects the town to Lovell to the east and to locations in Montana to the north. (See Table 1.)

SETTLEMENT HISTORY

Cowley was established in 1900 as a colonization project undertaken by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The town was incorporated seven years later. Development of the town initially reflected the Mormon ideals of rural life with farmers living in town on large lots and commuting to their fields each day. Lots in the original town plat are 1.23 acres with four to a block. However, by the 1920’s farm tenancy requirements of Federal irrigation laws dispersed farmers from town and the town population declined, reflecting the breakdown of the original settlement pattern. The 1977 Cowley Plan observed that the large lots have given the town a feeling of spaciousness.

The original town plat included additional features that continue to shape the form and function of the town. Most street rights-of-way in Cowley are 99 feet wide (purportedly to accommodate the turning...
radius of a four-horse team and wagon). One town block was set aside for schools and is the present site of Rocky Mountain Elementary School. The next block to the north was set aside for the use of LDS Church. The next block north across Main Street was split with the south half being the town's commercial district and the north half reserved for the town park.

With the influx of the original pioneer settlers of the town, Cowley's population hit its all-time high of about 800 people in the 1910s. Population declined from then until the 1970s when the town's population started rebounding as Cowley began serving as a bedroom community for people working in Lovell and Powell. Since 1970, Cowley's population has increased at a slow but steady rate, reaching the present (2005) population of 582 residents. Cowley has had significant numbers of new homes constructed since 2000. With the imminent construction of the new Rocky Mountain High and Middle School in Cowley, the town is expecting continued growth and development.

1977 COWLEY PLAN

In 1975, the Wyoming Legislature required all communities to develop master plans. A Cowley Planning Committee was established and plan was produced in 1977 as part of the Big Horn County Comprehensive Plan. At 12 pages in length, the plan provides basic information about the town, discusses future community development needs, and recommends policies for guiding future growth and development. At the time the plan was prepared, most Cowley streets were gravel, irrigation water was delivered by open ditches, individual septic systems were the means of wastewater disposal and the town's drinking water came from the Deaver Reservoir. The plan noted that installation of a central sewer system was underway and that the town had decided to enclose open ditches in pipe. The plan recommended hard surfacing the town streets and investigating additional drinking water sources for the town. In terms of land use policies, the plan suggested Cowley appoint a permanent planning commission and adopt a development code and building code. The plan appears to have set a good course for Cowley in the 1970s. However, it is now clearly out-of-date and no longer serves its stated purpose of guiding future development.
PLANNING CONCEPTS FOR SMALL TOWNS

Although Cowley has shown an ability to organize itself for improvement and progress, the town also has challenges common to many small towns. Other small communities have survived and thrived and Cowley can benefit from their experience. The Heartland Institute for Community Development, which has specialized in supporting small towns in the Midwest, publishes keys to small community survival and growth. These are worth summarizing as they are applicable to Cowley.

From the Heartland’s “Seven Secrets to Coping with Change in Small Towns:"

Secret 1 – Positive attitude
A positive attitude is probably the most important quality small town people can have to deal with the changes and be innovative and survive.

Secret 2 – Entrepreneurial spirit
Public and private sectors that work together and take risks can make the difference in the life of a small town.

Secret 3 – Bias for action
In viable communities people are not waiting for someone else to tell them what to do.

Secret 4 – Focus on what is controllable
Communities must focus on what they can control, not on factors outside their control, such as location.

Secret 5 – Plan for development
By working together to write down a plan for development, communities can take hold of their own futures and then carry out their plans with specific blueprints for towns, schools, and business.

Secret 6 – Strategic outlook
A community needs to become aware of its own competitive situation, and it needs to learn to take steps that put its competitive advantages forward.

Secret 7 – Vision for the future
A community needs to have a vision for the future, with community leaders and residents agreeing on what the community should be like in five, ten or even twenty-five years.

The Heartland Center publication, “Six Myths About the Future of Small Towns” provides a focus for the basic functioning of the community:

Myth 1 - Towns that are “too small” have no future.
Heartland says that towns of 100 person have survived through thoughtful planning, entrepreneurial
genius and hard work. Small towns can use their smallness and flexibility to their advantage.

Myth 2 - A community's location is the key to its survival.
In today’s Information Age, it is leadership, not location, which is the most important factor.

Myth 3 - Industrial recruitment is the best strategy for economic development.
Small towns are better off investing time and money in retaining and expanding existing businesses.

Myth 4 – Small towns can’t compete in the global economy.
With telecommunications advances and the ability for a town to find its own niche, small towns can often do well economically.

Myth 5 – The best people leave small towns as soon as they can.
Small towns survive because plenty of talented people make the decision to stay and work to make the town a good place to live and work.

Myth 6 – The rural and urban economies are not interdependent.
The urban economies depend on goods and services from the rural areas.

Cowley's welcome sign reflects the town’s pioneer heritage

WYOMING TOWN PLANNING STATUTES

The state laws of Wyoming specify how a town prepares the plan, what the plan should contain, how the town adopts its plan, and the effect of the plan once it is adopted. These laws are found in Title 15, Chapter 1, Article 5 of the Wyoming Statutes.

This plan for the Town of Cowley conforms with those laws and is intended as a policy statement and roadmap for the future development of the town. This plan is not regulatory and does not have the force and effect of law. However, the plan is a prerequisite for the adoption of a zoning ordinance and the Town’s land use and development ordinances including zoning must be consistent with the plan.
CHAPTER 2 — PLANNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of the plan are what the plan intends to achieve. Without such statements of purpose, it is difficult to prepare a plan that meets the particular needs of the community. The goals and objectives of the plan provide citizens with a basis for understanding the plan. If citizens find the goals and objectives agreeable, then they may review the remainder of the plan to see if the plan actually helps accomplish the goals and objectives. On the other hand, if the goals and objectives are not correct they can be revised, possibly triggering further changes to subsequent parts of the plan. The best community plans are those that make their goals and objectives explicit and finalize them after thorough public review and discussion.

In Cowley, the planning goals and objectives were prepared following two steps that were undertaken to understand and summarize the values, needs, priorities of Cowley and its citizens. The first step was to ask each of the 18 planning committee members to complete a questionnaire concerning assets, needs, issues and priorities in Cowley. The results helped educate the planning consultant on the committee’s goals and objectives for planning Cowley’s future. The second step was to conduct the Cowley planning survey, which is described in the next section. These two steps have yielded important information about what Cowley desires for its future. This chapter culminates by presenting Cowley’s community planning goals and objectives.

COWLEY PLANNING SURVEY

The Cowley planning survey was developed by the planning consultant with extensive input from the planning committee. The survey was sent to all town utility customers and registered voters. By mid-April 2007, 153 surveys were completed and returned out of 404 surveys sent out, giving a response rate of 38 percent. When response rates are over 50-60 percent, the results can be said to be representative of the entire population. Cowley’s survey cannot make that claim. However, 153 people were able to contribute their thoughts to the process and everyone else had the opportunity to do the same.

Among the major findings of the survey were:

- Most survey respondents felt that a number of town-managed facilities were in good condition. These included sidewalks, the irrigation system, the drinking water system, and town parks.
- Most respondents rated the community “poor” with respect to the availability of affordable housing.
- Over two-thirds of respondents believed Cowley should encourage growth and that new subdivision developments have been beneficial.
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents supported growth and use of the local airport.
- Three-quarters of respondents indicated that Cowley needs more rental housing and a town-wide
clean-up of empty lots.

- Over three-quarters of respondents felt Cowley needs a master plan for future growth and development.

Detailed results for these and other questions are presented in the plan Appendix. The original questionnaire is also included to show exactly how the questions were worded. 65 respondents provided written comments including some that were very insightful and informative. The written comments are not summarized here but are available in a report on file at the Town Office.

COWLEY’S TOWN PLANNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Cowley, a town with a rich pioneer heritage, has maintained a safe, friendly, small-town atmosphere. Cowley is recognized as one of the nicer towns in Big Horn County and one that energetically continues to improve itself. Decades of steady growth attest to the fact Cowley is a great place to live and raise a family.

Cowley’s citizens appreciate the need for a long-range plan to guide the growth and development of the town. In planning for the future, Cowley will strive to retain and enhance all that is best about small-town living. Cowley’s future is to be a beautiful, growing community with a family-oriented, friendly ambiance; with well-managed town services and infrastructure; and with a high quality of life for all residents. This master plan for the Town of Cowley seeks to organize community development activities to advance this vision of the town’s future.

To further describe the intentions and purposes of this plan, the following town planning goals are established for each of the major topical areas of the plan. Each goal is further defined by policy objectives that follow immediately after each stated goal.

Citizen Participation Goal: To involve the town’s citizens in community planning and development decision making.

Policy Objectives:
- Keep citizens informed about planning and development activities in town.
- Ensure that citizens have opportunities to comment on proposed developments and plans.
- Establish a town planning commission as a way of involving more citizens in the planning and development of the town.

Environment Goal: To sustain and enhance important features of the natural environment in and around Cowley.

Policy Objectives:
- Minimize development activity within flood prone and steep slope areas (mainly the Wash on
the western end of town).

- Encourage the planting of additional trees as part of any development projects.
- Encourage energy efficient site planning, landscaping and building designs.
- Support the establishment of a solid waste recycling program in Cowley.

Population Goal: To continue moderate population growth.

Policy Objectives:

- Plan ahead to ensure that adequate provisions are made to accommodate probable population growth.

Housing Goal: To have a sufficient supply of wholesome housing to meet the needs of all ages and income levels.

Policy Objectives:

- Promote the rehabilitation or replacement of substandard housing units.
- Encourage the development of a variety of housing types, sizes and costs. (single-family, multi-family, senior housing, etc.)
- Support efforts aimed at increasing the availability of affordable housing.

Economy Goal: To maintain and expand the businesses and institutions that provide goods, services and employment for area residents as well as contribute to a balanced tax base.

Policy Objectives:

- Work with existing businesses to help them remain in Cowley.
- Encourage additional retail and service businesses, especially those that provide for the needs of town residents.
- Support the recruitment of new businesses that are compatible with the town’s size and rural character.
- Ensure that new commercial and industrial developments have well-designed architectural and site layout plans.
- Support tourism and tourism-related businesses in northern Big Horn County.
- Encourage and promote compatible businesses at and near the airport.
- Support regional economic development efforts for the northern Big Horn Basin.

Public Services and Facilities Goal: To continue the economical delivery of necessary town services and facilities to existing residents and businesses while wisely planning ahead for improvements and efficient expansions of these services in anticipation of future needs.

Policy Objectives:

- Continue providing safe, adequate, and cost-effective water supply, sewage treatment and irrigation water services to all town residents.
Continue planning ahead for needed improvements to town utilities.
Continue vigorously pursuing grant opportunities to assist with funding improvements to public facilities.
Continue providing town services, such as police and fire protection, and annually review the need to add new services or increase existing services.
Require new developments to provide necessary public utilities, streets and sidewalks similar or better than the existing facilities in town.
Carefully scrutinize the extension of town services and facilities outside the town limits.

Parks and Recreation Goal: To have abundant recreational opportunities for town residents provided at reasonable cost and in a manner that adds to Cowley’s sense of community.

Policy Objectives:
- Continue providing a variety of parks and recreational facilities that serve a wide range of ages and interests.
- Encourage cooperative partnerships with the school district, non-profit organizations, and others to provide new recreational opportunities.
- Ensure that all residential areas have adequate proximity to parks or other recreational open space.

Transportation Goal: To have a transportation system that provides safe and efficient movement of people and goods while stressing a balance between vehicular and pedestrian modes of travel.

Policy Objectives:
- Continue the long-term process of upgrading town streets, sidewalks and walkways.
- Support making U.S. Highway 310 more visually attractive and pedestrian friendly and safer for vehicular traffic.
- Provide pedestrian access throughout town, especially to connect residential neighborhoods and areas with high pedestrian traffic such as schools and parks.
- Provide a pedestrian network of sidewalks, walkways and trails that is as complete and well maintained as the street network.
- Ensure that new developments provide streets and sidewalks that meet the town’s standards.
- Support the use and development of the North Big Horn County Airport.

Land Use Goal: To have an efficient land use pattern that reflects Cowley’s existing character, conserves property values, and facilitates orderly development.

Policy Objectives:
- Encourage infill development in vacant areas in town where town services, utilities, and streets are already available or easily provided.
Promote compact growth and extension of the town as opposed to low-density developments in Cowley’s future growth areas.

Promote the physical improvement of Cowley’s Main Street business district through landscaping, sign control, facade renovation, and other public and private improvements.

Promote the preservation of important historical buildings and sites including the Big Horn Academy Historic District.

Concentrate the location of future commercial development to avoid strip development along U.S. Highway 310.

Ensure that the town’s development ordinances are up-to-date and supportive of the new master plan.

**Neighborhoods Goal:** To protect and maintain the best features of Cowley’s peaceful and attractive residential neighborhoods.

*Policy Objectives:*

- Protect residential areas from encroachment by intensive commercial activities or other incompatible land uses.
- Ensure that infill residential development is compatible with the character, scale and design of surrounding land uses.
- Support and expand on-going efforts to improve the appearance of Cowley’s residential neighborhoods.
CHAPTER 3 — ENVIRONMENT

This chapter presents background information and recommendations concerning environmental features in and around Cowley. The topics covered here include the natural environment, historical resources and town parks and recreation.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The natural environment presents certain physical constraints on future development in Cowley. These physical constraints include floodplains, steep slopes and problem soils.

Flood Plains

Cowley’s floodplains have been mapped in the city as part of the National Flood Insurance Program. (See Map 1.) In town, the flood prone areas are primarily the Wash on the western edge of town. Out of town, flood prone areas include further reaches of the Wash, Sage Creek, and other smaller water courses. Development in these areas should be avoided or carefully controlled.

The Town of Cowley does not participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The program makes reduced-cost flood insurance available for properties in participating communities provided the community adopts and enforces a local floodplain management program that meets federal guidelines. Typically, the program applies to new buildings or substantial modifications of existing buildings located within the mapped floodplain. Any such construction project must be “flood proofed” using specific construction techniques or be elevated to minimize the potential for flood damage. While it is not necessary for Cowley to participate in the NFIP, it is advised that the town development ordinance contain basic flood plain development standards.

Steep Slopes

There are small areas of steep slopes in and around Cowley. (See Map 1.) These areas are primarily associated with the Wash. Slopes are characterized as low or steep based on percent of slope. Low slope is 20 percent or less and steep slope is over 20 percent. Steep slopes can present significant problems for construction of roads and larger building foundations. Many communities restrict development on these slopes or require special mitigation measures.

Problem Soils

Soil maps and soil data for Big Horn County provide important information concerning soil suitability for a variety of land development activities, such as constructing local streets and building homes with...
and without foundations. Map 2 shows soil suitability ratings for building homes with foundations. The map illustrates that there are a number of problem soil conditions in the Cowley area, including high water tables and high shrink-swell soils. These problems are not severe enough to preclude development. However, problems soils should be identified and accounted for in the development process, possibly necessitating different construction techniques or other soil mitigation measures.

Because of the existence of problem soils, soil evaluations should be part of the development review process. Presently, Big Horn County refers all subdivision applications to local conservation districts for non-binding recommendations concerning soil issues. It would be advisable for the Town of Cowley to adopt a similar policy and refer all subdivision applications to the Shoshone Conservation District for advice on soil issues.

HISTORICAL RESOURCES

The most prominent of Cowley's historical resources is the Big Horn Academy Historic District. The District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, includes the Big Horn Academy building constructed of rusticated sandstone and the Log Gym built of lodgepole pine logs. The Historic District is significant for its primary role in the development of education in Cowley and the Big Horn Basin. The Big Horn Academy was the first high school in the Big Horn Basin and in Cowley; the Gym was the first gymnasium constructed in Cowley.

The Mormon people came to the Big Horn Basin in 1900 in response to a call from their church president to colonize the West. An added incentive came from William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) who had acquired state permits to appropriate water along the Shoshone River. In 1909 the Mormons started construction in Cowley of a public school house, a stone building that was eventually torn down in the 1950s. A part of the public school house was allocated to the use of a more advanced, church-run academic enterprise which they would call the Big Horn Academy. Its program was essentially that of a high school, although in the context of that time it was thought of almost as a college. The Mormon church planned to rotate the Big Horn Academy every few years between the towns of Lovell, Byron, and Cowley where the program would be housed in available facilities. However, the school never made it to Byron and in 1913 the LDS authorities started planning the construction of a permanent building to house the Academy. The new school building was completed in 1919 at a cost of $40,000. The Academy was operated as a church school until 1924 when its physical facilities and responsibilities were transferred to School District No. 28 and the entity thereafter came to be known as the Cowley High School. In 1936 the Gymnasium and Community Hall was constructed adjacent to the Cowley High School as part of a Works Progress Administration project.

The Academy building and Log Gym are presently owned by the Town of Cowley. The Log Gym continues to provide a venue for indoor recreation in Cowley. Part of the Academy building houses a local business but the building is in need of restoration.
The Cowley Town Office adjoins the Historic District and is worthy of inclusion in the District. The native sandstone building was constructed by the LDS Church in 1909. The building originally served as an administration building for the church and afterwards was used for various purposes. In 1997, the building was remodeled to serve as the Town Office and Pioneer History Museum.
CHAPTER 4 — POPULATION

This chapter examines dynamic features of Cowley’s resident population. The chapter also recommends a population projection or prediction of future population growth for Cowley.

HISTORIC AND REGIONAL TRENDS

Cowley was incorporated in 1907. In the next decade, the town population reached its peak at around 800 and then steadily declined. The town’s lowest population level was 366 in 1970. Cowley’s population has been growing steadily ever since but has still not yet reached its previous high.

From 2000 to 2005, Cowley was the fastest growing community in Big Horn County on a percentage basis. (See Table 2.) Cowley is growing more consistently than any of the other communities—many of the communities that added residents in the 1990s lost population since 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2, RECENT POPULATION CHANGE IN BIG HORN COUNTY AND ITS TOWNS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big Horn County</strong>*</td>
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<td>Big Horn County*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basin</td>
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<td>Burlington</td>
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<td>Byron</td>
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<td>Cowley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frannie (part)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greybull</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lovell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manderson</td>
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</table>

(*Big Horn County figures include all towns and the unincorporated area of the county)

AGE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION

The median age of Cowley residents was 33.8 years in the 2000 Census. This is somewhat younger than the medians for Big Horn County (38.7), for Wyoming (36.2) and for the nation (35.3). To better understand the dynamics of Cowley’s population, it is necessary to examine the age-related structure of the population.
Age distribution is a representation of the proportions of the town’s population that belong to different age groups. Comparing Cowley's age distribution in 1990 and 2000 gives a sense of how the town's age distribution is changing. (See Chart 1.) The following age groups decreased in relative size from 1990 to 2000: Under 10 years old, 20 to 19 years old, 30 to 39 years old, and 80 years old and older. Other age groups increased in relative size, especially the 40 to 49 year olds.

The decrease in many of the younger age groups tends to indicate that Cowley's population is getting older on average. Indeed, the 1990 median age of the town was about 29 years and that had risen to 33.8 in 2000.

The State of Wyoming publishes predictions on the future age characteristics for counties. The county level is the smallest unit of analysis for available projections of future age distributions. The trend predictions for Big Horn County may be relevant to Cowley and include the following features:

- Future changes to the population show the ripple effect of the aging of the baby boom generation; and
- In general, the population will tend to be older overall than it is now.

The state estimates that Big Horn County, including Cowley, will see the 60 and over age groups increase the most by the year 2020. Among younger age groups, most will decrease in numbers. However, the 30 to 39 age group will increase slightly, according to the state's analysis.

Cowley may not be typical of Big Horn County, especially when one considers that the town's growth rate exceeds that of the county and the median age is lower in Cowley than in the county. Cowley will probably not adhere to the age distribution predictions for the county. However, Cowley will likely see growth in the older groups and decreases or small increases in younger age groups.
HOUSEHOLDS

A household is defined as the people living in a single housing unit and does not include people in group housing, such as retirement homes and college dormitories. Changes in household characteristics will tend to drive changes in housing needs. For that reason, household characteristics are important to land use planning.

Most communities throughout Wyoming and adjoining states are experiencing major changes in household demographics which coincide to change the nature of their future populations. These trends include fewer households with children, smaller household sizes (fewer people living in each housing unit), and more single-person households (one person living alone).

Most but not all these trends are evident in Cowley. During the 1990’s Cowley’s average household size decreased from 3.1 persons per household to 2.8. Meanwhile, the state average household size decreased from 2.69 to 2.55. While Cowley’s average household size is larger than the state’s, Cowley’s dropped by a greater amount in the 1990s. In Cowley, the percentage of households with children dropped by less than three percent while statewide the decrease was seven percent. In Cowley, single-person households held steady at 19 percent of all households in 1990 and in 2000. Statewide, the figure is increasing and stood at about 26 percent in 2000.

It may be that Cowley did not more closely follow the statewide trends because virtually all the town’s housing is single-family housing. The town’s housing units are conducive to families and may attract them. The absence of apartments, townhouses, and senior housing complexes may make it harder for smaller-sized households to move to or stay in town.

The changing nature of Cowley’s population should be a consideration in planning for public services and housing. Public services may need to be adapted to an increasing older population. Housing opportunities will need to cater increasingly to the needs and preferences of an older population with relatively fewer children.

FUTURE POPULATION PROJECTIONS

It is important in town planning to understand whether the population will increase or decrease in the future and by how much. Several different methods are available for predicting future population growth. These predictions, called population projections, will differ in the amount of growth they predict for Cowley. In deciding which projection to use for this plan, the following considerations are noted:

- The town will continue growing—it has for the past 35 years and especially lately as the town continues to grow while all other Big Horn County communities are static or losing population.
Population growth will be similar to past growth since the basic dynamics of employment, housing demand, and the town's ability to support growth have not changed radically in recent years.

The relocation of Rocky Mountain High School and Middle School to Cowley will bring many new jobs to town which will lead to population growth.

Retirees, particularly those with family ties in Cowley, will choose to settle in town in greater numbers than in the past.

Finally, the risks or problems associated with under- or over-estimating the growth rate should be considered. In terms of land use planning, underestimating the growth rate can lead to the plan quickly becoming obsolete because the plan failed to identify enough land for expansion. This can lead to a restricted land market and pressure to deviate from the plan. Over-estimating growth can be dangerous when financial plans for infrastructure expansions are based on revenues from new development that does not materialize. In all cases, the town should monitor growth rates in the future and make adjustments to plans if growth occurs at much different rates than anticipated.

After considering these factors, the most realistic population projection for Cowley was selected. It is depicted graphically in Chart 2 and numerically in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>861</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Housing is one of the most important elements in our lives and our communities. The quality of housing has a large impact on the health, safety, and quality of life of citizens. In Cowley, housing is the predominant land use and a major part of what makes the community attractive. In planning for the future, it is important to understand the present housing situation and the emerging trends. This chapter reviews the housing situation in Cowley and provides a number of recommendations concerning present and future housing.

**HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS**

Every ten years, the Census Bureau estimates the number of housing units in Cowley and collects a variety of information on housing characteristics. According to Census reports, in the year 2000 Cowley had 223 housing units, 200 of which were occupied and 23 vacant.

In Cowley, 161 of the 200 occupied housing units were owner-occupied and 39 were renter-occupied. This yields a home-ownership rate of almost 81%, which is considerably higher than the county, state and national rates. (See Table 4.)

Cowley’s housing units consisted of 159 single-unit homes and 67 mobile homes. In 2000, there were no multifamily housing, apartment buildings, or institutional housing (dormitories, nursing homes, etc.) in the town.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Cowley’s housing (including mobile homes) is slightly older on average compared to both the state of Wyoming and the nation. (See Table 5.) This may be noteworthy because older housing is more likely to require rehabilitation.

In terms of total housing units, 43 housing units were added to the housing stock between 1990 and 2000, a 24% increase. Fewer homes were vacant in 2000 than were in 1990. It is estimated that about 40 new housing units have been built in Cowley since 2000 and through 2006.

**TABLE 4. HOMEOWNERSHIP RATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Homeownership Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNITED STATES</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WYOMING</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIG HORN COUNTY</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COWLEY</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 5. MEDIAN YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Year Built</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNITED STATES</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WYOMING</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIG HORN COUNTY</td>
<td>1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COWLEY</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of mobile homes in town increased from 32 to 67 in the 1990s. (See Chart 3.) During the 1990s, most of the added housing units in Cowley were mobile homes. Mobile homes constituted 18% of the housing stock in 1990 and increased to become 30% of the housing stock in 2000. In early 2004, the Town Council adopted Ordinance #262 which bans additional mobile homes and requires any replacement mobile home installed be no more than five years old. The ordinance is likely to slow the growth of mobile homes in town.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Until recently, housing prices in Cowley have been relatively low. The Census Bureau reported the median value of owner-occupied homes was $72,700 in 2000, while the figures were $71,800 for Big Horn County and $96,600 for Wyoming. Rents in Cowley in 2000 were relatively higher, at $415 compared to $277 for the county. However, the state median rent was higher at $437 per month in 2000.

In terms of recent price increases, the Big Horn County Assessor has reported a 17 percent increase in housing values county-wide over the five years, 2000-2005. Statewide, the increase was 44 percent during the same time. Unpublished data from the Board of Realtors indicates that in northern Big Horn County the 2006 median sales price was 50 percent higher for homes and 46 percent higher for lots compared to the previous year.

Using sample data, the Census estimated the number of households in Cowley experiencing a “cost burden” or “severe cost burden” with respect to housing costs. A cost burden is when a household spends more than 30% of household income on housing and a severe cost burden is when 50% is spent on housing. It is generally considered as financially stressful for a household to pay more than 30% of its income on housing.

In Cowley in 2000, no renters had a cost burden and only ten percent had a severe cost burden. For
households that own their homes and pay a mortgage, 14 percent had a cost burden and another 6 percent had a severe cost burden. This means that ten percent of all renters and 20 percent of homeowners with mortgages had a cost burden or severe cost burden. (See Table 6.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Spent on Housing</th>
<th>Renter-Occupied Units</th>
<th>Owner-Occupied Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Less than 30%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ 30 to 49.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ 50% or more</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Not computed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cowley's housing affordability situation was a little better than that of nearby communities in 2000. In Powell, for example, about half of all renters and about one-third of home owners with mortgages had a cost burden or severe cost burden. In Lovell and Cody, about one-third of renters and one-fifth of homeowners (with a mortgage) had a cost burden or severe cost burden. (All these figures are based on 2000 Census data.)

For all of these communities, including Cowley, the proportions of households with cost burdens has probably significantly increased since 2000 as the housing market has tightened up in the past few years while income growth has not kept pace with higher home prices.

FUTURE HOUSING NEEDS

As a growing community, Cowley should anticipate the need for additional housing in town. Having an accurate estimate of the town's needs for new housing is important in planning for the orderly and efficient expansion of residential areas.

The amount of new housing needed is related to population growth and average household size. These two factors together determine how many households Cowley will have. In turn, the number of households will drive how many housing units will be needed—each new household will require one housing unit. The number of new housing units that will be needed in Cowley can be estimated using the population projection presented in the previous chapter.

The projection of future housing needs assumes housing vacancy rates are similar to what they are now and household size will continue to decline as it has in the past. (See Table 7.)
Beyond the amount of housing, consideration should be given to the types of housing units that will be needed in the future. As noted previously, Cowley's future population will be on average older than it is now. Furthermore, the average number of people living in each housing unit will be less and proportionately fewer homes will have children living at home. These population changes will tend to influence the demand for more variety in housing types, with less emphasis on single unit homes such as traditional site built homes. There will be a greater future need for homes with single level floor plans, fewer bedrooms and low maintenance features. Future housing may need to include more apartments, condominiums, duplexes, and retirement housing. Cowley's planning and zoning requirements should facilitate a wide variety of housing types.

### MOBILE HOMES

Until the passage of the 2004 Cowley ordinance tightening requirements on mobile homes installations, mobile homes numbers had been increasing in town. The poor condition of some mobile homes, particularly rental units, inspired the town to ban additional mobile home installations and to require replacement installations to be no older than five years old (except in mobile home courts). This succeeded as a stop-gap measure to prevent the establishment of new sites for mobile homes. However the ordinance has no effect on improving the condition of existing unsightly and poorly maintained mobile homes. Over the long term, the ordinance may inhibit the replacement of older mobile homes, perpetuating the existence of substandard units.

The National Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Act of 1976 required significant improvement in the safety and quality of mobile homes. Homes that comply with the act are said to meet the “HUD code”. The HUD Code is a uniform construction code that ensures that a manufactured home, regardless of where it is built in the U.S., will meet certain publicly adopted standards related to health, safety, and welfare.

According to the County Assessor, of the 57 mobile homes in town, 25 units (44 percent) are pre-1976 vintage. These older units are referred to as “mobile homes” while the newer units should be called “manufactured housing”. (Note there is yet another category, “modular homes” which are built off-site to the same code as site-built homes and are placed on a permanent foundation.) These older mobile homes do not meet health and safety standards. There is a legitimate public interest in facilitating the removal of these older mobile home or their replacement with manufactured housing that meets the HUD code.

Manufactured homes, on the other hand, should be allowed in residential areas. They can provide an
important affordable housing option, do not have the safety issues associated with mobile homes, and can be compatible in established residential areas. Compatibility can be assured by requiring good siting and design without prohibiting manufactured housing. Siting and design standards should be applied equally to all housing forms, including traditional site-built housing. Other communities have addressed this by adopting standards requiring permanent foundations, pitched roofs, and minimum unit dimensions. Standards can also include specifications for wind load, snow load, ventilation, siding, skirting, and additions.

HOUSING REHABILITATION

Cowley should consider taking steps to improve the condition of substandard housing in town. There are several regulatory tools other communities have used to compel improvements to or removal of substandard housing; these include a housing code, a property maintenance code and the Uniform Code for the Abatement of Dangerous Buildings. Non-regulatory measures, including offering incentives or assistance to homeowners, should also be considered. A combination of regulatory and non-regulatory measures may be the most effective approach.
CHAPTER 6 — ECONOMY

This chapter presents a basic overview of the local economy and provides recommendations regarding economic development.

WORK FORCE CHARACTERISTICS

The 2000 U.S. Census reported that Cowley had a work force of 280 people with a low unemployment rate of 3.8 percent. Most of the work force commuted to work with an average commute time of 16 minutes. There are relatively few jobs in Cowley and most employed residents work outside of town. Of the type of jobs held by Cowley residents:

- 38 (14% of the work force) were service jobs
- 72 (27%) were management and professional jobs
- 60 (23%) were sales and office jobs
- 47 (18%) were production and transportation jobs
- 40 (15%) were construction, extraction and maintenance jobs
- 40 (15%) were construction, extraction and maintenance jobs
- (3%) were farming jobs

Most employed Cowley residents (165 or 62%) hold private wage and salary positions while 73 (28%) are government workers and 27 (10%) are self-employed.

SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT

Cowley residents work in a number of settings both in and outside of town. According to the 2000 Census, employed Cowley residents worked in various economic sectors as follows:

- 41 (16% of the work force) in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining
- 29 (11%) in construction
- 20 (20) in manufacturing
- 31 (12%) in retail trade
- 13 (5%) in transportation and warehousing, and utilities
- 0 (0%) in information services
- 5 (2%) in finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing
- 12 (5%) in professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services
- 83 (32%) in educational, health and social services
- 9 (3%) in arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services
The largest sector for employment of Cowley residents was the education, health and social services sector. No employees in the information services area seems unlikely now (seven years later) and probably is no longer true.

Major employers within a short commute from Cowley include several in Lovell: Western Sugar, Georgia Pacific, Halliburton and WyoBen (bentonite plants), North Big Horn Hospital and the Lovell school district. Also within easy commuting range are the major employers in Powell including Northwest College, the Powell school system and the Powell Valley Hospital.

INCOME STATISTICS

Income and poverty level statistics indicate that Cowley fares well economically compared to the remainder of Big Horn County. Cowley’s poverty levels for both families and individuals are much lower than for the county. Indeed, Cowley’s poverty statistics are much lower than those of the state and nation. (See Table 8.)

Baseline poverty levels are based on the number of people in a household. For a typical three person household the poverty level was $13,290. For one person living alone, the poverty level was $8,501. For a family of four (two adults and two children) the poverty level was $16,895.

Compared to the county, income levels in Cowley are higher for households and families, but lower on a per-capita basis. Compared to the state, Cowley’s median household income is higher than the state median while family and per-capita income are lower. Cowley’s income levels are lower in all respects compared to those of the nation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 8: 2000 CENSUS INCOME AND POVERTY LEVEL STATISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median family income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families in poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals in poverty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN COWLEY

The most recent (2004) County Business Patterns report provides basic statistics on business and industrial activity. The information is collected based on the zip code of the business. The information excludes data on self-employed individuals, employees of private households, railroad employees, agricultural production employees, and most government employees. The Business Patterns report indicates the types of businesses in the Cowley zip code area and how many employees they have. (See Table 9.)

### TABLE 9: EMPLOYMENT AT PRIVATE BUSINESSES IN COWLEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Type</th>
<th>Total Businesses</th>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail trade</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, scientific &amp; technical services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation &amp; food services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services (except public administration)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cowley's largest public sector employer is Big Horn County School District #1 with 43 employees based in Cowley. The Town of Cowley employs two full-time and two part-time personnel as well as seasonal recreation and maintenance staff. Other public sector employers in Cowley include the Big Horn County Road and Bridge Department and Sidon Irrigation District.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2005, The Wyoming Business Council commissioned a study that examined economic development constraints and opportunities for Park County and western Big Horn County, including Cowley (Wadley-Donovan Group and Taimerica Management Company, "Target Industry Assessment"). The study identified key assets and key challenges for economic development for the area that includes Cowley. (See Table 10.)

The report recommended that communities in the area, including Cowley, would be most suited to new businesses known as "mobile entrepreneurs" and "lone eagles" particularly in the areas of "knowledge-based operations" and creative arts, western arts and home furnishings. Outdoor recreational products businesses were also identified as a good prospect for the area.

Mobile entrepreneurs are individuals who are willing and able to relocate to communities of their choice in order to start and develop their own business. Lone eagles are individuals who look to operate as self-employed individuals or in free-lance capacities using advanced telecommunications technology and a
### TABLE 10: NORTHERN BIG HORN ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Assets</th>
<th>Key Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growing population and labor force</td>
<td>Higher wage levels compared to Wyoming and the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A growing base of retirees willing to work</td>
<td>Higher median age (39.6 years) compared to Wyoming and the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce has good basic skills</td>
<td>Low unemployment rate - employers report a lack of qualified applicants for available jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college presence – Northwest College</td>
<td>Productivity, computer skills and work ethic rated as unsatisfactory by employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well rated K-12 public education</td>
<td>Limited housing availability in Big Horn County, and lack of affordable rental housing overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among the lowest, if not the lowest, electric power costs in the nation</td>
<td>Lack of vacant industrial and business sites, and lack of vacant industrial buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A very good quality of life as measured on a broad set of indices</td>
<td>Inadequate and expensive truck service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commercial airport to remain linked with the outside world. Examples include writers, consultants, software programmers, investors, financial analysts, traders, brokers, and manufacturing representatives. Knowledge-based operations include software development, advertising, management consulting, writing and journalism, and public relations.

Cowley is primarily a “bedroom community” with most employed residents working outside the community. Economic development in Cowley should be compatible with the community’s primary role as a bedroom community. This means keeping the scale of economic development small enough that it does not overwhelm the town. At the same time, additional businesses in Cowley would help provide a larger and more diverse tax base, could provide needed services for town residents, and could offer employment for those who would rather not commute. In order to achieve this, the Town should pursue several different tasks:

- There is insufficient commercial land in Cowley for any new, substantial business. The Town
COWLEY MASTER PLAN

should facilitate the creation of designated areas for commercial development. This would involve zoning undeveloped areas for commercial use, establishing commercial development standards in the development ordinance, and arranging for needed utilities to the locations.

- Cowley has great potential for home-based businesses, in line with the recommendations of the Target Industry Assessment report mentioned above. The Town’s development code is about 25 years old and should be updated to reflect modern trends in home-based businesses.

- Cowley has traditionally had small-scale commercial activity in residential buildings located on U.S. Highway 310 in town. This type of business activity should be encouraged. Cowley’s development code should be modified to designate these areas for commercial uses. The code should specify that businesses should be highly compatible with the adjoining residential areas.

- Cowley’s original business district could become a greater focus of business activity. The district is already at the heart of town. The district could stand to be improved from the appearance standpoint, with a focus on storefronts, sidewalks, street lighting and similar elements of the streetscape. In addition, non-business uses, including the Town’s equipment yard, a parking lot, and the irrigation district building are not ideal for the district. The Town should look for opportunities to eventually relocate these uses and allow commercial buildings in their place.

- The North Big Horn Airport could support economic development for aviation-related businesses. The nearby proximity of town water could be a plus for certain businesses. To make the most of this opportunity, the Town should work with the Big Horn County Airport Board to develop a plan for business development at or near the airport.
CHAPTER 8 — PARKS AND RECREATION

This chapter is an overview of present and future parks and recreation in Cowley and includes possible concepts for a walking and biking path.

COWLEY’S PARKS

The Cowley Town Park, a 3.4-acre park immediately north of the downtown commercial district, is Cowley’s main park. The park includes an outdoor swimming pool, outdoor ice rink, a baseball field, horseshoe pits, volleyball courts, a basketball/tennis court, a playground, and a picnic shelter. The Town is currently building a new baseball field on 5 acres of town-owned land south of 4th Street South near the future location of the new Rocky Mountain High School. The Town also owns the Log Gym, the historic structure that is used for indoor recreation. The Cowley Planning Survey (see Chapter 2) found that most Cowley citizens felt that the town parks are in good condition and no additional parks are needed.

FUTURE PARKS

While Cowley has plenty of good park space now, additional park land should be considered in the future as the town grows. It would preferable if there was a playground within a quarter mile of any residential area in town. Most residences in town are now within a quarter-mile of the town park and the elementary school playground. However, if the town were for instance, to have a new residential development west of the Draw a small park would be needed there. The Town should remain mindful of the need to have neighborhood parks if the town expands outward.

Many communities in the region require subdivision developers to allocate a portion of the land in the development as park land. For instance, Powell requires six percent of the subdivision land or a cash equivalent to be used for future parks. Cowley should consider such a requirement for subdivisions beyond the present town limits. This would ensure that new additions to town have the playgrounds and
small parks that make for pleasant, family-friendly communities.

WALKING AND BIKING PATHS

A majority of respondents to the Cowley Planning Survey felt that the town needs walking and biking paths. The town presently has extensive platted street rights-of-way with no actual street. The Town also owns some vacant lots in the northwest corner of town. These holdings could form the basis for a trail location particularly if supplemented by easements over private land. The town could have a nice nature trail by including areas along the Wash.
This chapter describes Cowley’s transportation resources—the town’s street system, sidewalks and walkways, Cowley’s Main Street (U.S. Highway 310), and the local airport. Each of these is important in terms of the future growth and development of Cowley.

TOWN STREET SYSTEM

The street system in Cowley presently consists of a grid of town-maintained streets and the state-maintained U.S. Highway 310. (See Map 5.) About 1.4 miles of U.S. 310 are within the town limits. The highway is two lanes where it runs north-south, entering town at the southeast corner of town. Where the highway turns west, it becomes Cowley’s Main Street and it widens out to four lanes with a small, raised, central median.

The town-maintained streets are located within the 99-foot wide street rights-of-way as laid out on the original 1900 Cowley town site plat. There are about 7.7 miles of constructed streets in Cowley. Most are paved, generally with 28 feet of paved surface. There is about one-half mile of gravel streets in various locations in Cowley. Because of the width of the typical town street right-of-way is 99 feet and the typical street surface is 28 feet, there are extensive street margin areas.

Cowley’s street system is one area where major improvements are anticipated in the future. Most existing, town-maintained streets are in need of crack sealing and new chip seal surfacing. The Town is also committed to building the streets in the new Steven’s Memorial Estates subdivision on 4th Street South, first as gravel streets and then paved as funds are available.

Cowley’s 2007 Street Improvement Master Plan is an eleven-year schedule of street projects including road surface maintenance work, installation of drainage features, and paving of gravel streets. The first year involves patching, crack sealing, chip sealing all streets and some drainage work. In the subsequent seven years, the plan will focus on installing drainage improvements. The last three years of the plan
COWLEY MASTER PLAN

will see paving of unpaved streets including the Steven’s subdivision streets and putting a two-inch pavement overlay on all town streets. The total project cost is estimated at $5,680,000.

The Town is exploring an additional street project—the installation of curb and gutter on town streets. The present lack of curbs and gutters allows vehicles to breakdown the edges of street pavement. Adding curb and gutter would reduce street repair costs and would help control surface drainage. Related to this is the question of what to do with the wide street margin areas between the edge of the street and the walkways. The Town does not need such wide rights-of-way and the maintenance of the margins is an added expense. The Town should ask the Planning Commission to study these issues and provide recommendations to the Town Council.

In discussion about this issue, the planning committee concluded that new sidewalks that are going to be installed in the next year should be placed within the street rights-of-way as if the rights-of-way were 60 feet wide (outer edges of a new sidewalk would be about 60 feet from the new sidewalk on the opposite side of the street). By doing this, the town would standardize sidewalk locations and would set the stage dealing more completely with the town’s wide street margins.

Concerning the street margins situation, the committee agreed that the Town does not need to have street rights-of-way as wide as they presently are (99 feet). Furthermore, the committee felt it is important to establish identifiable borders between private land and the town street right-of-ways and that doing so would enhance private maintenance of the private land adjoining the streets. Curbing and/or sidewalks could be used to delineate the border. In any plan to reduce street rights-of-way widths, the Town will need to ensure that it has adequate rights-of-way for streets, sidewalks, walkways, drainage structures, and utilities.

U.S. HIGHWAY 310

WYDOT (the Wyoming Department of Transportation) is planning a major reconstruction project for U.S. Highway 310 through Cowley. The WYDOT project will change Main Street from its present four-lanes and median to three lanes with no median. Furthermore, the project will create wider sidewalks in the boulevard style, with landscaped space between the street and the walkway (except in the downtown business block where sidewalks will extend from buildings to street). The project will include extensive landscaping. The overall effect of the project will be to make Cowley’s Main Street more attractive, inviting and pedestrian friendly while adequately accommodating all vehicular traffic.

SIDEWALKS AND WALKWAYS

One area where Cowley has made great strides in creating family-friendly residential neighborhoods is with its sidewalks and walkways. Many blocks in town have sidewalks or walkways because Cowley has energetically sought grant funding for them. (See Map 6.) These sidewalks and walkways provide
MAP 6 -- SIDEWALKS AND WALKWAYS

- Walks complete on side of block
- Existing streets & roads
- Town Limits
- Property Lines

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safer routes for children walking to school. Other pedestrians appreciate the sidewalks and walkways as well—more than two-thirds of townspeople responding to the Planning Survey felt sidewalks should be installed around every block in town.

The Town has recently received a grant from the Wyoming Highway Commission to install approximately one additional mile of walkways. The Town is working with school officials to identify walkway segments to be added.

RAILROAD

The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company’s Casper line runs from Laurel, Montana through Lovell to Casper, Wyoming with a spur between Frannie and Cody. The rail line runs about one mile south of Cowley and includes a siding near the crossing of State Highway 35. The Casper line is a low-density rail line that carries limited rail traffic.

NORTH BIG HORN COUNTY AIRPORT

The North Big Horn County Airport, also known as the Lovell-Cowley-Byron Airport, is a general aviation airport located about three miles north of town. The airport provides another transportation option that can be a positive consideration for prospective businesses. In addition, aviation-related businesses can potentially be located at the airport. Federal airport rules limit or may prohibit non-aviation commercial development on airport grounds. The town water line, which runs near the airport, could be used to provide water service to businesses at or near the airport. The Town should work with the airport board to investigate these issues and opportunities.

As a consequence of accepting federal grant funds, the airport is obliged to try to reduce land use conflicts near the airport. The airport has a 2002 land use plan that delimits several different types of airport zones each with different land use restrictions. The Town should review any proposed development located between town and the airport to see if it is in one of the airport zones. If so, the development should be referred to the airport board for their comments on how to preclude land use conflicts.
CHAPTER 10 — LAND USE

This chapter reviews Cowley's present land use and provides future land use recommendations. As noted in previous chapters, Cowley is expected to continue growing. The amount of growth Cowley is expected to have can conceivably be accommodated within the present town limits. Growth within the existing town limits is generally more economical and should be encouraged. However, for a variety of reasons, it is likely that Cowley will need to annex land and expand the town to accommodate future growth. This chapter defines the extent, location and types of future growth that should occur in and around Cowley by the year 2030.

PRESENT LAND USE

Residential land use is the predominant use of land in Cowley. There are about 263 housing units on 209 lots taking up a total of 187 acres. (See Table 12.) This means the average residential lot area is about 0.7 acres or 31,000 square feet. This equates to a residential density of 1.4 housing units per acre. By typical city standards, these are large lots and a low residential density.

The next largest land use category, vacant lots, comprises 102 acres or about one-fifth of the town. An additional 57 acres (over one-tenth of the town) are vacant street rights-of-way where a town street is laid out on paper but has not been constructed. Existing streets and highways and their rights-of-way take up 94 acres or nearly one-fifth of the town's land area. It should be noted that 26 acres in the northwest quarter of town is listed as vacant but actually is Cowley Riding Club's rodeo grounds.

The town and county governments together own 16 lots consisting of 58 acres—some of these lots are occupied with facilities such as the town park and town office while others including several lots in the northwest corner of town are vacant. The town also owns the future site of the new Rocky Mountain High School.

Public and quasi-public properties including the LDS church, the Sidon Irrigation District shop and...
properties of Big Horn County School District #1 occupy 11 acres.

Little land is used for commercial purposes—10 lots comprising only three acres are predominantly commercial in usage. These lots include the Main Street business district as well as a few isolated commercial properties elsewhere in town.

RESIDENTIAL LAND SUPPLY AND DEMAND

In the housing chapter of this plan (Chapter 5), it was estimated that Cowley will add approximately 160 additional housing units by year 2030. Will the Town need to expand its borders to accommodate this growth? How much land will these additional housing units require? The answers depend on the characteristics of future residential development in Cowley.

Presently, there is potentially enough vacant land in town to accommodate all future growth. The Town development code sets the minimum lot size at 7,000 square feet for residential lots. If all the vacant land in town were subdivided to the fullest extent allowed, about 600 lots would be available. In addition, many lots with existing residences on them are large enough that they also could be subdivided (these are called semi-vacant lots). If all were divided, an additional 800 lots could be produced. The combined total of over 1,400 lots is almost ten times the projected demand.

In reality, far fewer lots will become available. First of all, many subdividers may choose to create lots that are larger than the 7,000 square-foot minimum size. Secondly, much of the land supply may be unavailable for development due to preferences of the landowners. A substantial number of landowners will for various reasons be unwilling to have their land developed.

The size of new lots is an important factor. Lot size affects the cost-efficiency of utility service—it is more cost-efficient to provide infrastructure to denser developments with smaller lots. Infrastructure installation costs influence the affordability of housing, with large lots typically having higher costs for new streets, utility extensions and other improvements.

The town should seek to have the lot size of future residential developments average closer to 12,500 square feet. This is a common “town density” that is a good compromise between the costly, sprawling development of very large lots (such as 30,000 square feet) and urban lot sizes that may be out of character for Cowley (7,000 square feet). It should be noted that the 12,500 square foot lot size is recommended as an average lot size. Not all lots should be this size—a variety of lot sizes, some larger and some smaller, is preferable.

The town should also encourage infill development instead of expanding the town by annexation of large areas. Infill development—the development of housing on vacant lots already within the town limits—has advantages. Typically, infill development is the most economical way to develop. No major streets will need to be built; water, sewer and other utilities are already in place, and other town ser-
vice, like police protection, are already provided. Map 7 shows the locations of the larger vacant and semi-vacant lots relative to existing town streets.

Cowley can grow compactly and efficiently and minimize the need for annexation and expansion of the town and its facilities and services. To do this, the town must avoid new large lot developments and keep residential densities at "town density". In addition, the town needs to encourage and promote infill development as the preferred way of accommodating future residential growth.

Measures that should be used to promote infill development include the following:

- Provide tap fee discounts for infill development.
- Have streamlined subdivision procedures for lot splits (division of an existing lot into two).
- Assist in the marketing of available in-town development sites.

Measures that should be used to discourage overly large lots include the following:

- Set lot size maximums for subdivisions—for example, lots can be no larger than one-half acre.
- Avoid annexing or extending town services to large lot developments.
- Require large lot subdivisions be designed for future resubdivision—the large lots would actually be several smaller lots with reservations made for future streets and utility connections.
- Require county subdivisions within one-half mile of town to have lot sizes of at least 10 acres so that these lots can be later subdivided into denser developments.
- Require county subdivisions to waive their right to oppose future annexation.

FUTURE GROWTH AREAS

The Future Growth Areas Map (Map 8) is a graphical depiction of the land use and development policies recommended for Cowley. The map represents how Cowley should develop to 2030 by showing the locations of major growth areas.

It should be noted that the map is intended to be fairly general. The boundaries between different areas are not distinct. The development criteria for each area is general as well. The future growth areas map will provide guidance for zoning decisions but it is not as precise as a zoning ordinance or zoning map. Many details about which land uses should be allowed in each type of area and the exact boundaries of areas will be worked out in the zoning ordinance.

Core Developed Area

The Core Developed Area is the area of town that has the smallest lots and greatest concentration of de-
Lots with Infill Potential
(Privately owned residential lots at least 28,000 s.f. in size)
- Improved lot
- Vacant lot

Streets and Highways
Property Lines
Town Limits

MAP 8 -- INFILL POTENTIAL

June 2007
Cowley Master Plan

veloped land. In terms of growth potential, this area is expected to absorb the least amount of future development because it has the least vacant land.

- Residential Uses: This area should have a variety of residential types—primarily single-family dwellings, but also duplexes, townhouses, and small apartment buildings. Residential housing density should be approximately 3.5 units per acre with lot sizes averaging about 12,500 square feet per unit.

- Business Uses: This area should have three types of business areas: downtown business district use in the present business district; residential scale businesses in developed areas on U.S. Highway 310; and home-based businesses in areas that are primarily residential (and not fronting on U.S. 310).

- Community Uses: This area will have schools, church, governmental offices and facilities, and public parks.

- Infrastructure: Mostly all infrastructure is in place except for isolated sections of sidewalk or walkways.

Infill Area

The Infill Area is the area of town inside the present town limits and dominated by large, vacant or semi-vacant parcels. Streets and utility services are in-place or are easily extended making this area highly conducive for infill development.

- Residential Uses: This area should have a variety of residential types—primarily single-family dwellings, but also duplexes, townhouses, and small apartment buildings. Residential housing density should be approximately 3.5 units per acre with lot sizes averaging about 12,500 square feet per unit.

- Business Uses: This area should have residential scale businesses in developed areas on U.S. Highway 310 and home-based businesses in areas that are primarily residential (and not fronting on U.S. 310).

- Community Uses: This area will have schools, churches, governmental offices and facilities, and public parks. The new Rocky Mountain High and Middle School and related facilities will be constructed in this area.

- Infrastructure: Most infrastructure is in-place in most areas; some additional sidewalk or walkways section and streetlights are needed. Other areas lack most infrastructure; streets, sidewalks, streetlights, potable water, irrigation water, sewer and other utilities will need to be extended.

Primary Expansion Area

The Primary Expansion Area is the area mostly outside the present town limits that is most conducive to extension of town streets and utilities. This is the area that is the most prime for annexation and future
MAP 9 -- GROWTH AREAS

GROWTH AREA TYPES
- Core (145 acres)
- Infill (290 acres)
- Primary Expansion (400 acres)
- Secondary Expansion (800 acres)

Highways
Property Lines
Town Limits

June 2007
extension of the town to the year 2030. Growth in this area will be necessary to the extent that development does not occur in the Infill area.

- **Residential Uses:** This area should have a variety of residential types—primarily single-family dwellings, but also duplexes, town houses, and small apartment buildings. Residential housing density should be approximately 3.5 units per acre with lot sizes averaging about 12,500 square feet per unit.

- **Business Uses:** This area should have three types of business areas: Commercial parks on undeveloped sites along U.S. Highway 310; residential-scale businesses in developed areas on U.S. Highway 310; and home-based businesses in areas that are primarily residential (and not fronting on U.S. 310).

- **Community Uses:** This area should have schools, churches, governmental offices and facilities, and public parks.

- **Infrastructure:** Most infrastructure is lacking—streets, sidewalks, streetlights, potable water, irrigation water, sewer and other utilities will need to be extended.

**Secondary Expansion Areas**

The Secondary Expansion Areas are areas outside the present town limits that are less conducive for expansion of town streets and utilities but could potentially be annexed and developed by the year 2030. Such development would be advisable only if land is not available within the other growth areas and the proposed developments are contiguous to built up areas.

- **Residential Uses:** This area should have a variety of residential types—primarily single-family dwellings, but also duplexes, town houses, and small apartment buildings. Residential housing density should be approximately 3.5 units per acre with lot sizes averaging about 12,500 square feet per unit.

- **Business Uses:** This area should have three types of business areas: Commercial parks on undeveloped sites along U.S. Highway 310; residential-scale businesses in developed areas on U.S. Highway 310; and home-based businesses in areas that are primarily residential (and not fronting on U.S. 310).

- **Community Uses:** This area should have schools, churches, governmental offices and facilities, and public parks.

- **Infrastructure:** Most infrastructure is lacking—streets, sidewalks, streetlights, potable water, irrigation water, sewer and other utilities will need to be extended.

**Rural Area**

The Rural Area is the area outside the growth areas and extending out one mile from town. Future uses
will include agriculture, rural residential uses, and other land uses ordinarily allowed in rural areas by Big Horn County. Typical subdivisions should generally not be developed in this area and instead should be located in town or annexed to town and serviced by the Town’s water and sewer systems. Any subdivisions that are developed in this area should conform to the recommendations on Page 46.
CHAPTER 11 — PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Plan implementation means putting the master plan into action. There are several ways this should be done, as described in the following sections:

MASTER PLAN

To implement the master plan, the plan must be used as an aid to decision making regarding development and infrastructure projects. Whenever the Town needs to make a decision about development or infrastructure, the master plan should be reviewed for guidance. The plan contains goals and policy objectives as well as specific recommendations regarding the plan’s functional areas (housing, economy, etc.). Each development or infrastructure proposal should be evaluated using these goals, policy objectives and recommendations. The master plan also contains specific land use recommendations for the several “future growth areas” as detailed in the land use chapter. Development proposals should also be evaluated in light of the land use recommendations.

DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

The Town’s development ordinance is a crucial mechanism for implementing the master plan. The development ordinance governs land usage, land development and land subdivision in Cowley. In order to implement the master plan, the development ordinance should be consistent with the master plan’s goals, policy objectives and recommendations. This will require reviewing and updating the development ordinance on the following eleven points:

- Provide for Town Planning Commission review of development applications.
- Create separate zoning categories for major land uses (residential, commercial, public, etc.) and a corresponding zoning map.
- Provide for simplified review of minor subdivisions (four or fewer lots).
- Update standards for multiple-family dwellings.
- Include flood plain development...
COWLEY MASTER PLAN

requirements.

- Specify the infrastructure improvements and facilities that will be required for subdivisions.
- Adopt state statute variance procedures.
- Provide specific enforcement procedures.
- Improve public notice requirements.
- Establish standards for non-conforming uses.
- Update numerous references to out-of-date standards.

PROJECTS PRIORITY LIST

There are several major projects planned for Cowley. Many of these are strictly town projects that are planned and carried out by the Town government. Others are projects by other entities in which the Town government is a key partner. This project list should be reviewed each year and revised as projects are completed and/or as priorities change. Projects that should be added to the list include ones that involve major capital investment by the Town within the next five years. In updating the list each year, it would be best to publicize a draft list and invite public comment on it before finalizing it. This could be done as part of the annual town budget process.

Project Priority List as of July, 2007

1. Rocky Mountain Middle-High School
2. U.S. Highway 310 Reconstruction
3. Ten-Year Street Master Plan
4. Completion of Sidewalks/Walkways
5. Main Street Facade Project
6. Master Plan/Revision of Development Ordinance

PLANNING ACTION PROGRAM

The Planning Action Program (see following pages) is a set of tasks that are designed to accomplish a number of goals, policy objectives, and recommendations discussed throughout the master plan. These tasks include such items as appointing a permanent town planning commission, participating in housing rehabilitation programs and achieving a joint development policy with the county. The Planning Action
Program provides the general timeframe for completing the tasks and identifies the lead agencies responsible for the work. The individual items in the program are assigned a priority rating, based on input from the Planning Committee—the 32 items are rated “1” through “32” with “1” being the highest priority. This program should be reviewed from time to time to ensure that the recommended actions are progressing and to see if the program needs to be revised.
## COWLEY MASTER PLAN

### PLANNING ACTION PROGRAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION ITEM</th>
<th>TIME LINE</th>
<th>LEAD AGENCY</th>
<th>PRIORITY RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citizen Participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Establish Town of Cowley Website.</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Revise development ordinance to increase public notice and comment opportunities.</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Have town ordinances codified and posted on the Town Website.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Develop a standard format and process for handling public complaints concerning town code violations and follow the process to respond to every complaint.</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Enact flood plain development regulations.</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Restore the Big Horn Academy Building.</td>
<td>Two to five years</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Monitor development activity and population growth.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Consider participation in state housing rehabilitation program (this may be more feasible if done cooperatively with other area towns and/or Big Horn County).</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Review development ordinance to ensure that it allows a variety of types, sizes and costs of housing units.</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Work with private developers to promote the construction of a greater variety of housing types.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ Revise development regulations to provide for commercial zoning.</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## COWLEY MASTER PLAN

### PLANNING ACTION PROGRAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION ITEM</th>
<th>TIME LINE</th>
<th>LEAD AGENCY</th>
<th>PRIORITY RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy (continued)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Work with the Big Horn County Airport Board and local economic developers to produce a plan for business development at the airport.</td>
<td>Two to five years</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Services and Utilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Establish a five-year Priority Projects List and update it each year.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Study the west end water system and recommend solutions.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Improve the appearance of town and county facilities (storage yard and road maintenance shops).</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Create a development specifications manual including infrastructure construction standards pertaining to new developments.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Town Engineer</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Require developers to provide at their expense all utilities in all new subdivisions.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Evaluate feasibility of establishing a fire department branch station in Cowley.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transportation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Continue installation of sidewalks and walkways for all developed blocks in town.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Develop written street construction standards to include in development specifications manual.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Town Engineer</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Require developers to construct at their expense paved streets and sidewalks in all new subdivisions.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Develop a plan for maintaining town street margin areas.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Adopt new street names to replace the existing street names.</td>
<td>Two to five years</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## COWLEY MASTER PLAN

### Planning Action Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Time Line</th>
<th>Lead Agency</th>
<th>Priority Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transportation (continued)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Prepare a feasibility study for installing streetlights in Cowley and requiring them in new developments.</td>
<td>Two to five years</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parks and Recreation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Investigate establishing walking and biking trails around the outskirts of town.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land Use</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Appoint a permanent Town Planning Commission</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Seek County Planning Commission approval of Cowley Master Plan.</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Develop joint Town-County agreement regarding review of developments in the county near Cowley.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Revise town development ordinance to bring it into conformance with the Master Plan.</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Review all proposals for land development, annexation, and town utility extension in light of the recommendations of the Master Plan and approve only those that comply with the plan.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Town Council and Planning Commission</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighborhoods</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Conduct annual town-wide clean up of vacant lots.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Review the need for new ordinances concerning weeds, abandoned vehicles and other problem conditions.</td>
<td>One to two years</td>
<td>Town Council</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>