

## Economic Development: Leading By Example La Junta //



### CHALLENGE STATEMENT //

Through the 2017 La Junta Comprehensive Plan, downtown revitalization has become a priority for city staff, with a focus in the rehabilitation of old buildings and second-story spaces. At present, there are several spaces downtown that are unoccupied or under-utilized. By improving those spaces, city staff believe they can increase the number of people who live downtown, which will incentivize businesses to start-up or expand their hours of operation.



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF STUDIO WORKSHOP //

From April 10<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup>, representatives from La Junta participated in Downtown Colorado Inc.'s *In the Game*. Working with other communities and consultants working in downtowns across the state, the team from La Junta brainstormed steps that could be taken to encourage local developers to rehabilitate their properties

downtown. This report provides an overview of La Junta's rehabilitation challenges, the team members involved in finding solutions, and potential resources and obstacles that could affect the project's outcomes. It concludes with a breakdown of four steps that should be taken to encourage downtown revitalization.

## TEAM MEMBERS //

### City of La Junta:

- Pam Denahy, *Director of Tourism*
- Bill Jackson, *Assistant City Manager*
- Rick Klein, *City Manager*
- Cynthia Nieb, *Economic Development and Urban Renewal Authority Director*
- Jeffri Pruyn, *Mayor*

### Community Partners:

- Elana Friedland, *University of Colorado, Boulder*
- Sarah Goldblatt, *Architect and Writer*
- Karen Harkin, *Colorado Housing and Finance Authority*
- Megan Kancilja, *Pueblo Urban Renewal Authority*
- Barbara Kloth, *Ayres Associates*
- Gayle Langley, *Department of Local Affairs*
- Betty Martinez, *Pueblo Urban Renewal Authority*
- Alece Montez, *Orton Family Foundation*
- Emily Moser, *Council of Development Finance Agencies*

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION //

The City of La Junta has a rich history in agriculture and trade, and while its economy is diverse, many within the community feel that business opportunities should be expanded, especially in downtown, where there are several vacancies. Downtown has a plethora of historical buildings, varying in character from classical to art deco. These spaces present great incubators for new businesses. But demand for new service downtown is low because not many residents see the area as a destination.

To attract new businesses and increase demand for new retail services, La Junta has an innovative idea. With the help of local and state grants, as well as public funds set aside for downtown economic development, city staff would like to purchase a two-story building downtown. They plan on renovating the second floor apartments to make them leasable, all while collecting rent from the currently operating businesses on the first floor. City staff hope that this project can act as a model for other buildings, and for business owners to renovate their second floor spaces and lease them.

**Population:** 7,000

### Assets:

- The Southwest Chief Rails is a busy Amtrak railroad line that stops in La Junta
- Local entrepreneurs have established start-up businesses downtown
- La Junta has good infrastructure, including sidewalks and roads
- Otero County has their main courthouse and county offices in downtown La Junta
- The city's industrial park has many high paying jobs

- Sports tourism is very popular in the region
- There are recreational amenities nearby, including a movie theatre and golf course
- Nearby tourist attractions include Bent's Fort, the Arkansas River, Early Settler's Days, and other historic sites
- There is a "hometown feel" in La Junta that is welcoming, and the residents reflect that feeling in their actions
- There are already some rehabilitation projects being developed by private developers
- The city is embracing multi-modal transportation with bike routes, trails, and bus service
- CDOT and the city are working towards building a new transit center near that will offer Bustang service
- The city has a local Chamber of Commerce that is active in the downtown revitalization process
- The city's Urban Renewal Authority is willing to dedicate funding for rehabilitation projects
- The local community college is about ten minutes away
- Downtown is built in a town square format that makes it easy to walk
- While La Junta's population is around 7,000 residents, their service area encompasses 12,000 residents

#### **Obstacles:**

- Currently, there is a lack of variety in businesses downtown
- Many shops and restaurants close in the early afternoon
- There is a lack of housing downtown
- Higher-paying jobs are difficult to come by
- There is a lack of diverse trades
- Young people are leaving the city for other opportunities
- The community college has services on campus, which keep students from coming downtown
- Housing in La Junta can be unaffordable for some residents
- Many second-story units are not ADA compliant, and thus have accessibility issues
- The city does not currently have a welcome center

#### **RESOURCES //**

- Urban Renewal Authority
- Opportunity Fund Zone
- Dana Crawford letter of support for project
- Certified Local Government designation
- Application for full-status as a Main Streets USA partner submitted
- Application for Blueprint 2.0 grant submitted
- Funding is already available for the purchase/rehabilitation of a downtown building
- There is a desire from community members for improved walkability/activity downtown
- Southeast Colorado Communications is installing broadband
- Governor Hickenlooper just signed a law funding broadband expansion in rural areas
- Downtown buildings have character, could be used to obtain historical designation
- National Historic Register nomination materials have been submitted
- Two buildings in downtown have already been purchased with the intent to rehab
- City has purchased a lot for a Livewell Park, to be designed with the high school, 4-H, and community partners

- Community Resource Center's Rural Philanthropy Days will be held in nearby Lamar, June 13-15, 2018
- The La Junta Democrat (newspaper) is very active in the city
- SBDC willing to contribute resource and training
- Chamber of Commerce has a new board that is considering hiring an employee to assist with rehab projects
- Visit La Junta and Canyons and Plains tourist organizations

## DESIRED OUTCOMES //

If successful, the City of La Junta's apartment rehab project would become a catalyst for future economic development. Business owners would renovate their unoccupied second-floor apartments, leasing them to community members who wish to live downtown. The increase in foot traffic downtown will push for greater demand for new retail and food services. The demand for services created by the new residents downtown will incentivize new businesses to start-up and current businesses to expand their hours of operation. As a result, residents of La Junta will have more housing, dining, and retail options.

## ACTION STEPS //

- 1. PURCHASE AND REHABILITATE A DOWNTOWN BUILDING:** To inspire business owners to rehabilitate their spaces, La Junta wants to "lead by example" by purchasing and rehabilitating a downtown building. The rehabbed building will be leased out to businesses on the first floor and residents on the second.
- 2. DEVELOP A CALL FOR ENTREPRENEURS:** To excite both current and prospective residents of starting businesses downtown, city staff will create a marketing campaign to share their vision for downtown to excite prospective business owners to open shop.
- 3. IMPLEMENT A REVOLVING LOAN FUND:** La Junta has secured funding for their own building rehab project, but to catalyze a downtown revitalization, they want to help new and current business owners invest in their spaces. To do this, city staff will seek out opportunities to provide funding for private projects, through low-interest loans.
- 4. CREATE A REHAB INFORMATION PACKET:** Downtown La Junta is comprised of many historical structures, which help shape the community's identity. Since this revitalization project might involve people who do not know much about historical preservation, La Junta will develop an information packet full of valuable resources to help developers understand the importance of historical preservation.
- 5. DEVELOP AND REFINE A PROMOTIONAL PACKET AND REFERENCE MATERIALS:** La Junta will curate information about city services and other funding opportunities that entrepreneurs can utilize to start their businesses.