

Community Revitalization Partnership

The Town of Lyons

July 28-29, 2008



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Table of Contents	<i>Page</i>
Executive Summary -----	3
Issue Overview and Historic Context -----	3
Partners and Resources -----	5
Observations -----	6
Issue Areas -----	7
Recommendations -----	8
Appendix -----	12
A. Action/Responsibility Matrix	
B. Resources	
C. Team Contact Information	
D. Participant List	



Executive Summary

The Town of Lyons requested a Community Revitalization Partnership (CRP) team visit from the Colorado Community Revitalization Association (CCRA). The purpose of the CRP visit was to bring a team of consultants specializing in downtown and community revitalization to provide tools, insights, and direction to help Lyons achieve its goals. In preparation for the visit, Lyons provided extensive background information about the history and status of the town's revitalization efforts and the issues facing the community.

On July 28th, the team met with local leaders, including the Mayor, the Town Administrator and members of the Board of Trustees for a general orientation about the opportunities and challenges facing the community. Following this briefing, the team conducted a series of focus groups with members from different Lyons organizations and citizen groups including the Downtown Improvement Plan Implementation Group (DIPICt), Lyons Economic Gardening Group (LEGG), Lyons Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Committee (EDC), and Planning and Community Development Commission (PCDC).

On July 29th, the team completed a walking tour of the downtown and of the completed High Street project. Following, the team was shown the map of the Lyons Planning Area (LPA) in order to understand the topographic and geographic boundaries of the town. The team spent the afternoon creating its recommendations and preparing the CRP report. The committee's findings were presented to the community at-large during an open town hall presentation.

Issue Overview and Historic Context

Lyons is a town of 1750 residents situated at the foothills at the confluence of the North and South St. Vrain rivers. It has more than 7500 acres of Boulder County Open Space adjoining the town limits and nearly 150 acres of prime parkland, much of it a native riparian environment. Increasingly, Lyons is a bedroom community to surrounding Boulder and Longmont. The town lacks retail and service businesses. Residents generally go to Boulder and Longmont to shop, thereby robbing the community of the revenues generated by basic spending. Lyon's Main Street

is US Highway 36, which pumps millions of cars a year through the town. However, few people stay and visit, and the strategy of “siphoning traffic” out of that stream, has not been a successful model. This has resulted in an underperforming commercial tax base, and an underdeveloped business area. According to DRGOG tracking data, Lyon’s sales tax base has been underperforming by almost 60% for nearly a decade.



There are several issues facing Lyons. First, for Lyons, “build-out” is a more significant factor than in most municipalities. Lyons is surrounded by open space and land subject to HR 35 rules, much of it in parcels which cannot be sub-divided. So by statutory or extra-governmental control, the surrounding density context is very unlikely to change. Therefore, there are limited opportunities for additional residential development. “Build-out” is an upper limit to development which is now on the near horizon.

For decades, Lyons has relied upon fee revenues from new construction as a principal revenue source in the General Fund. As Lyons approaches the completion of new residential construction in the next few years, this primary revenue source will decline and then disappear altogether. If a more balanced revenue structure is not put in place, the town will be left with the traditional choices: drastically cut services or raise taxes. An alternative solution is to promote an enhanced business environment which would generate increased sales tax revenue. Increased sales tax revenue could be created with a stable downtown filled with businesses that can

succeed. Lyons wants to ensure that they take the right steps to ensure the long-term viability of the town.

History of Issue

In 1998, the Town of Lyons adopted a Master Plan which has been consistently updated as land use matters changed, and as goals were accomplished. One of the sub-plans called for in that document, a Downtown Improvement Plan (DIP), was adopted in 2005 after an extensive 4 year public process that included workshops, Charettes, scientific surveys, and exhaustive committee review. Almost immediately, the plan was used in the acquisition of a TIP grant from DRCOG (TIP 2007 2030). The town was awarded \$300,000 to begin to implement components of the infrastructure plan of the DIP. The town has begun to implement other areas; the town completed substantial traffic calming, parking and pedestrian walkways, and street amenities on High Street, a commercial street one block north of Main Street. Geographically, this represents almost 20% of the DIP area. This was identified as a “low hanging fruit” that could be implemented at a very low cost, while achieving nearly all the design intent of the Downtown Improvement Plan.

Most of this implementation was accomplished by the newly formed Downtown Improvement Plan Implementation Committee (DICICt), formed in February of 2007. Since the town has TIP funds available to begin implementation of the DIP, this committee was enacted as a technical advisory committee to advise and oversee the project. DIPICt directs the actual expenditure of funds used in DIP implementation. The grant project has begun and is on track for implementation in early 2009. These funds will be spent on a portion of Main Street and represent a critical step because it will establish the “vocabulary” by which the rest of the implementation will be accomplished (design of the streetscape, monument and signage standards, paving patterns, street furniture, traffic signage). Over the past two years the town has expended more on planning than at any other time in the last decade. The town is working hard at advancing a grassroots plan.

Partners and Resources

Stakeholders involved in the CRP and visit included non-profit organizations, town government, elected officials, the Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Improvement Plan Implementation Committee (DIPICt), Lyons Planning Commission, Office of Economic Development (OED), Economic Development Committee (EDC), and the Lyons Economic Gardening Group (LEGG) and Lyons Planning and Community Development Commission (PCDC). Resources considered for use in implementing the recommendations of the report (see attachments for full details) include: The Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), Energy Impacts & Minerals Assistance Funds, University of Colorado at Denver – Political Science, private contractual services, Colorado Department of Transportation, Colorado Community Revitalization Association(CCRA), Colorado Municipal League, Colorado City/County Managers Association, Boulder County Consortium of Cities and other local governments and chambers.

With the CRP visit, and the extensive work currently underway, the community is setting the stage for an ongoing and strengthened relationship with the CCRA, DOLA, other local governmental agencies and the local business sector. During the two day visit, the community interactions with the CRP team members resulted in a strong, consensus building foundation. This foundation will be increasingly important for the many efforts that may result from the visit.

Observations

CRP team members found many positive attributes of the community that Lyons can build upon. These include, but are not limited to:

- A “Pro-Am” government (highly skilled volunteers supporting the town) – a significant donation of skills and resources by local businesses and residents
- A general feel that the Town is “on the cusp” of realizing positive change
- A hopeful outlook and a belief that residents of Lyons are lucky
- Lyons has many great assets:
 - Geographical position as a gateway
 - Live music
 - Historic Quarries – Sandstone

- Outdoor recreation opportunities
- An unspoiled, unique identity and distinctive businesses
- A complete water, sewer and utility infrastructure
- Lyons has been in the process of updating zoning code and other policies and procedures

Some other observations are:

- There are three separate target marketing groups:
 - Local
 - Day Trippers
 - Through Traffic

- Lyons is surrounded by Open Space Lands
- The cluttered appearance of the Town
- Parking challenges
- Numerous business vacancies and business sales
- A strong desire for sustainability within the community
- A reputation for not being business friendly

Issue Areas

A number of key areas of concern that constitute the primary cause of the challenge the community emerged from the group interviews. These issues include:

- A need to improve communications with businesses, residents, and other governmental entities. There is a need to communicate with stakeholders including businesses, developers, arts groups, and cultural groups. There has been conflict that was caused by a lack of a clear, transparent



communication process. Relationships with Boulder County, Longmont, and other governmental entities have been difficult to sustain.

- An insufficient capacity to implement plans that have been developed. There is very limited town staff and most of the work is performed by dedicated, highly skilled volunteers. Trustees are elected to two year terms with no overlapping terms. This makes it difficult for the Board to sustain long term efforts and impairs institutional memory. There are a number of active committees that rely on volunteers many of who serve on more than one committee. There is a concern about volunteer burn out and lack of follow-through on projects due to limited staff and volunteer time.
- The physical environment and aesthetic appeal of downtown is lacking. There are junk cars, uneven sidewalks, unclear parking, and inadequate signage.
- No consistent marketing approach for Lyons. There is a need to brand and promote Lyons. There is a great opportunity to promote Lyons, its businesses, festivals, and special events through a cohesive marketing approach.

Recommendations

Guiding Principles

The following recommendations were based on the needs of the town as outlined below.

Lyons residents want a town:

- Where citizens can live, work, play, and shop
- That is economically and environmentally sustainable
- With enough retail activity (sales tax) to fund town services

Capacity Building

1. Recommended Legislative Actions

Three recommended legislative actions are:

Short term

- Develop and adopt a code of ethics to increase trust, transparency and communication

Long term

- Change terms of office for Board of Trustees from two to four year terms which overlap that will provide continuity, sustain long-term efforts, and preserve institutional memory.
- Develop and adopt nuisance codes (trash, cars, and weeds) to improve the visual appearance of the town.

2. Increase Staffing

Increase staff capacity to ensure timely implementation of plans:

Short Term

- Contract for Public Information Officer or Communications Officer to develop consistent, pro-active communications plan
- Contract for code enforcement services to improve the appearance of town

Long term

- Utilize interns to extend town staff. Explore the Best and Brightest Program, a two year program provide by the University of Colorado-Denver, Masters in Political Science Program, as well as other internship programs.

3. Intergovernmental Relations

Establish strong relationships with other governmental entities including: Boulder County, Longmont, RTD, and St. Vrain School to enhance services.

- Understand and evaluate the current IGA with Boulder County to develop a set of goals and objectives for the negotiation of the new IGA that is to be completed by 2013.
- Review and identify issues relating to the IGA and water contract with Longmont
- Develop goals for expanded transit services from RTD
- Identify joint parks and recreation opportunities with St. Vrain School

4. Committee Structure and Priorities

Identify opportunities to consolidate, streamline and prioritize efforts to ensure the ability to implement plans given limited staff and volunteer time.

Economic Development

1. Physical Improvements

Enhance the aesthetic quality of Lyons

Short term

- Implement the planned physical improvements for the block on Main Street. Use the grant and budget town funds in 2009 to complete the project.

Long term

- Improve signage and town image through a way-finding program. Funding sources can come from businesses, Chamber of Commerce, and Town.
- Build on success of High Street project and build a longer term parking plan.

2. Evaluate Business Mix

Short term

- Complete a business inventory and sales tax leakage study to identify opportunities for improving the business mix. This will assist in private sector in determining potential investments in the Town of Lyons.



3. Leverage Existing Festivals and Events to Increase Retail Sales

Short term

- Consult with other communities with large events to identify strategies and opportunities for increasing revenue from events. Leverage existing events rather than increasing the number of events.

4. Infill and Redevelopment

The amount of land available for development within the town limits is limited. Infill and redevelopment are the highest priorities.

Long term

- Develop tools for property owners and business owners to develop and operate successful businesses. These tools could be developed utilizing the resources of Main Street, Colorado Community Revitalization Association, Office of Economic Development, Colorado State Historical Fund, local economic programs, CHAFA, and SBA and USDA Rural Development.
- Develop a marketing plan that includes branding, logo, and uniform and consistent look to all material. Use new look to create gateways at the entrances to town (bookends).
- Redevelop the Town Hall property to improve town facilities and increase retail revenue stream

Funding Mechanisms

There are numerous mechanisms that the Town of Lyons can utilize in order to increase revenue to fund the above recommendations. Included in Appendix B- Resources is a link to the funding mechanisms matrix from DOLA. In order to recommend the most appropriate funding mechanism, Lyons must determine the specific project for which funding is necessary. CCRA is committed to assembling a team of legal and financial experts led by Vicki Mattox to conduct a one day session on financing mechanisms as soon as the town is able to develop a prioritized list.

Appendix A

See separate attachment (Lyons Action-Responsibility Matrix)

Appendix B – Resources

Colorado Municipal League

The Colorado Municipal League (CML) disseminates a wide variety of publications that might be of interest to Lyons; of particular note is the book by William O. Lamm -

Financing Public Improvements –

A Guide to Borrowing Methods for Municipal Governments

In order to obtain this and other materials, visit the CML website at www.cml.org

or call (303) 831-6411

Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA)

The DOLA regional manager for the North/Central Region Counties (encompassing Lyons) is:

Don Sandoval

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Additionally, the contact at the DOLA Office of Smart Growth is:

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www.dola.colorado.gov/osg

A financing mechanism matrix can be found at

<http://dola.colorado.gov/dlg/resources/publications.html>. Scroll down to the Special Districts section and click on "Districts and Alternate Financing Mechanisms."

Appendix C – Team Contact Information

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Appendix D – Participant List

Tim Kyer – DIPICt

Howard Armstrong – Town Administrator,
EDC,

Tina Schooler- Town Trustee, DIPICt

Christine Ralston- DIPICt

Joseph Lekarczyk- Reporter for *Lyons
Recorder*

Julie Van Domelen- Planning Commission,
DIPICt

Laverne Johnson- DIPICt, EDC

Betsy Burton- DIPICt

Mike Whip- EDC

Kris Hicar- Mayor, DIPICt

John Burke – DIPICt , EDC,

John O’Brien – Planning Commission,
LEGG, Chamber of Commerce

Jerry Kuban – DIPICt, EDC,

Rick Whitcomb– LEGG

Chuck Keim – LEGG, EDC

Laurie Kennedy, Chamber of Commerce

Janice Gavin - Chamber of Commerce

Janie Brody – Chamber of Commerce

Bill Van Leeuwen- LEGG

Al Musser - EDC

Jill Musser -

Juli Waugh - Trustee

Susan McCann – Publisher, *Redstone
Review*

Jerry Skeels - PCDC

Read Spear - EDC

Brian Donnell - Town Trustee

Kirk Udovich – Town Trustee, Board
Liaison to PCDC