ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

For THE TOWN OF GRAND LAKE

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Executive Director

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Northwest Colorado Council of Governments

INTRODUCTION

Town Manager Shane Hale requested that Northwest Colorado Council of Governments facilitate the annual retreat of the Town Council to be held in Grand Lake during the latter part of May, 2011. Shane's request was that the focus of the retreat for the first day concern Economic Development for the community. In the recent past, controlling growth had been such a concern that discussing an effort focused around economic development would have not been well received. Mr. Hale believed that there were things that could be done to improve the economic vitality of the community without permitting rampant out of control growth.

NWCCOG Executive Director Pam Caskie agreed to facilitate the program and met with Shane Hale and Abbi Whitman, Grand Lake's Town Planner to discuss the issues and direction that the retreat could take. It was recommended that members other than the Town Council should participate such as the Chamber Director and President. It was also discussed that the Grand Lake Lodge was the largest property owner in the community and it had just been purchased after having been closed for a period of time. There was discussion about inviting someone from the lodge property to participate.

The retreat was schedule for May 19th and 20th in the Town Hall Boardroom.

THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION

In attendance were

Judy Burke, Mayor
Benton Johnson, Trustee
Elmer Lanzi, Trustee
Kathy Lewis, Trustee
Jim Peterson, Trustee
Tom Ludwig, Trustee
Tom Weydert, Trustee
Shane Hale, Town Manager
Abbi Whitman, Town Planner
Steve Armstead, Chamber President
Lisa Jenkins, Chamber Director
Jeff Larson, Grand Lake Lodge General Manager
Greg Schjodt, CEO/President, Regency Hotel Management

After introductions by the group and a discussion of the format by Pam Caskie, Abbi Whitman discussed the Downtown Land Use Assessment (which is attached as Appendix A) that she completed for the area that was currently served by the Town's Boardwalk System. This report discussed the uses, ownerships, and vacancy information for the structures and businesses in

the downtown core area. The report set the stage for the discussion that followed regarding the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT Analysis) of the Economic viability of the community.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Breaking up into three groups, each group identified issues of Strengths in the community and issues of concern or weaknesses before coming back together and reporting out. The Strengths were varied but more clustered around some common ground than were weaknesses. Strengths are defined as those things that exist currently in the community that add to the value of the community. Weaknesses exist today and detract from the community. Most of the discussion about strengths centered about the natural environment of the area, location of the community at the lake, near the National Park, the proximity to Denver and the lifestyle that such location and beauty provides.

Natural Environment	10
Lifestyle	8
Location	7
Recreation	4
Tourism	4
Amenities	4
Walkability	3
Government	3
Character	3
Cost of Living	1
Population Diversity	1
Educational Environment	1

Figure 1; Generalized Strengths

Things within the community's control such as community amenities, the character of the downtown, the openness of the government, and created recreational opportunities also received numerous mentions. A complete listing of the strengths and how they were grouped for the above discussion can be found in Appendix B.

Short High Season	5
Infrastructure	3
Traffic Movement	3
Cost of Living	3
No Sense of Community	3
Dependent on others	3
Weather	3
Educational Opportunities	2
Difficult to get to	2
Lack of Economic Diversity	2
Lack of Organizational Support	2
Health Care Access	2
Dark Sky Concept	1
Diversity of Goals	1
Underutilization of Natural Resources	1
Forest Health	1
Tax Base	1
Loss of Population	1
Environmental Concerns	1
National Economy	1
Aging Community	1
Hospitality Staff Lacking	1

Figure 2; Generalized Weaknesses

The weaknesses were more varied and some were the counter benefit of an identified strength. Such as the town employs a dark sky concept to maintain its natural character and encourage nighttime sky watching. While perceived by most as a strength, it is also a weakness as it makes nighttime navigation difficult. A complete listing of the weaknesses are also found in Appendix B, along with the generalized category each was assigned.

Several of the weaknesses, just as the strengths, exist because of the location of the community. These factors may be able to be

mitigated but they cannot be resolved.

Following the discussion of existing strengths and weaknesses, the same groups again broke up to discuss Opportunities and Threats. Opportunities are operationally defined as positive events that if taken advantage of, will benefit the community. Threats are potentially negative occurrences that if actions are not taken to avoid may harm the community. Almost always a smaller set of identified items, the opportunities and threats ranged from some "very real possibilities" to a "one in a million chance of occurring."

Some of the concerns such as forest fire and rising fuel costs are well outside of the purview. While these could have a devastating impact on the community, once adequate precautions are taken, there is not much else the community can do to control its fate. It is far better to look at the lists and focus on those items that are within the control of the community. A full list of both the Opportunities and the Threats are listed in Appendix B of this report.

After a full discussion of the issues currently facing Grand Lake's economic environment and those that could possible impact for better or worse the community, the group agreed that an accurate picture of what is facing the community had been developed.

Opportunities

Enhance Tourism Offerings	6
Improve Transportation	3
Environmental Responses	3
Enhance Broadband	2
Create Brand Awareness	2
Expand High Season	2
Trail River Ranch	1
Population Shift	1
Educational Opportunities	1
Build Community Cooperation	1
Support Small Business Development	1
Create Partnerships	1
Better Marketing	1
Improve Hospitality Services	1

Threats

Natural Disaster	3
Aquatic Disaster	2
Employee Availability	2
Fuel Costs	2
Forest Funding	1
Development	1
Ski Industry Decline	1
I-70 Issues	1
National Economy	1

DETERMINING FOCUS AND DIRECTION

Once the SWOT Analysis was complete, the next step was to determine the direction and focus for the community to better improve its economic climate. The participants were broken up into different groups and asked to propose objectives or goals that they would like to accomplish which would be important to the community. After creating a list of 7 – 10 items, they were asked to prioritize these and their top 3 were put with the other groups' top three and then grouped. This process continued until all of the ideas were on the board and the ideas had been grouped into broad categories. The group then worked to name those categories.

A. Promote Grand Lake by Building Partnerships with Others
B. Employee hospitality Training
C. Increase Community Pride and Ownership
D. Brand & Market Grand Lake's Brand
E. Identify & Incentivize New and Existing Business Opportunities

Following the identification of the five broad goals, the groups were each given specific goals and asked to put an action plan together that would work to achieve the goal. They were also asked to assign a responsible party. Appendix C is a complete action plan that was developed from the process. This action plan has been provided electronically to the town so that it may be monitored, improved, and recorded.

THE TOWN'S CORE PRINICIPLES OF ECONOMIC FOCUS

The last step in the creation of an Economic Strategic Plan for the Town of Grand Lake was to identify the principles that should work when looking at potential economic activity. The identification of these principles is not to suggest that they are not currently in play, just that they should be considered when any economic project is discussed. It was believed by most of the participants that most of the identified principles were already being adhered to. Nonetheless it is important to get them on paper and identified so that there is public recognition of guiding principles of the community. With these identified the meeting for the day was adjourned.

Positive Attitude for Town Officials
Whatever it takes – without sacrificing the long term
Community Building
Be flexible
Treat Business equally
Partner, Partner, Partner
Be communicative
Consider Taking Risks
Look for unintended consequences
Transparency

CONCLUSION

The planning process undertaken by the Town of Grand Lake was an excellent opportunity for the community leaders to focus on the important tasks that could improve the economic climate of the Town. This process was about steering the boat instead of letting the winds of fate buffet them around the lake. So many times, when the winds blow, a community is left reacting and compensating as opposed to using the winds to get where they wanted to be in the first place. If the destination is determined, then the community is better capable of harnessing the winds to get there. Grand Lake is a charming, attractive community with a great deal of potential beyond its current capacity. This plan is an important step toward recognizing that potential for the benefit of the community, its residents, and its businesses.