

The Wyoming Rural Development Council

The Wyoming Rural Development Council is a collaborative public/private partnership that brings together six partner groups: local/regional government, state government, federal government, tribal government, non-profit organizations, and private sector individuals and organizations.

WRDC is governed by a Steering Committee representing the six partner groups. The Steering Committee as well as the Council membership have established the following goals for the WRDC:

- ❑ Assist rural communities in visioning and strategic planning
- ❑ Serve as a resource for assisting communities in finding and obtaining grants for rural projects
- ❑ Serve and be recognized as a neutral forum for identification and resolution of multi-jurisdictional issues.
- ❑ Promote, through education, the understanding of the needs, values and contributions of rural communities.

The Council seeks to assist rural Wyoming communities with their needs and development efforts by matching the technical and financial resources of federal, state and local governments and the private sector with local development efforts.

If you would like more information about the Wyoming Rural Development Council and how you may benefit as a member, contact:

Mary Randolph, Executive Director
Wyoming Rural Development Council
2219 Carey Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-6430
307-777-6593 (fax)
mrand@state.wy.us
www.wyomingrural.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

RANCHESTER COMMUNITY RESOURCE TEAM REPORT

	PAGE
1. Process for the Development of the Team Study and Report	3
2. Executive Summary	4
3. Resource Team Members	5
4. Interview Agenda	6
5. What We Heard from What was Said	7
6. Recommendations Submitted by team members	10
7. What was Said in the Interviews	53

Process for the Development of this Report

The Wyoming Rural Development Council (WRDC) has provided a resource team to assist the town of Ranchester, Wyoming in evaluating the community's assets and liabilities and in developing suggestions for improving the environment, social and economic future of Ranchester.

The town of Ranchester requested a community assessment from the Wyoming Rural Development Council. Bill McIntyre served as the community contact and worked with the Ranchester planning group in agenda development, logistics, and publicity in town for the assessment. Resource team members were selected to visit; interview citizens, business and community leaders; and develop a plan of recommended actions for the town.

The Resource Team toured the town and interviewed residents over a two day period November 27th and 28th, 2001. There were several listening sessions established with the focus on community sectors. Those sectors included: students at Tongue River High School, education, business, city and county and agriculture. Two sessions were held as community session, which were open to any community resident wanting to attend. Participants were asked to respond to three questions designed to begin communication and discussion and to serve as a basis for developing the action plan. The three questions were:

- What do you think are the major problems and challenges in Ranchester?
- What do you think are the major strengths and assets in Ranchester?
- What projects would you like to see completed in two, five, ten, and twenty years in Ranchester?

Upon completion of the interviews, the team met to compare notes and share comments following the two days of study. The team made a preliminary determination of the major themes. The team then agreed that each team member would carefully analyze what was said, synthesize what they heard with their knowledge of programs and resources, prepare their notes and suggestions, and forward these items to be combined into WRDC's final report to Ranchester.

The oral report was presented to the people of Ranchester on November 28, 2001.

Following the oral report, this formal written report was prepared and presented to the town of Ranchester.

Executive Summary

The elements are all here for Ranchester to have a successful future. To become a growing, vibrant community takes only a few people willing to roll up their sleeves and go to work. Once this nucleus begins to exert effort, it will begin to show some successes. Then this nucleus needs to expand to include more and more of the community until the entire community is involved. But the work is not on big jobs; it is on small ones that can be achieved quickly. The big ones come later after Ranchester has seen the results of the smaller and sees that it can accomplish things.

There is a number of short-term, accomplishable recommendations that the review team has provided. The most important thing is to get the entire community involved in trying to find ways to accomplish its goals. A few celebrations at the successful conclusion of an activity, which involved a large number of citizens, will lead to a feeling of accomplishment that will carry over into other activities. Look through the short-term suggestions, pick out one that you know what you can do, and get started!

Each of you individually must decide what it is that you want to do, what kind of project you want to tackle. There are enough tasks for everyone. Each small step, every accomplishment, no matter how limited, is movement in the right direction toward achieving goals. It can be done! There is no problem facing Ranchester that cannot be solved by the people living in the community!

On behalf of the Resource Team Members, I want to thank the community and our sponsors, the Town of Ranchester, The Big Horn Country Mountain Coalition and the Wyoming Community Foundation for the warm hospitality shown to us during our stay. The meals and accommodations were outstanding.

We hope you will find great value in this report and remember, any team member is available for you to call to clarify information or provide more information and assistance.

The Wyoming Rural Development Council is willing to help you in any way that we can.

**Joe Coyne, Executive Director – CANDO and Team Leader
and
Mary E. Randolph, Executive Director, Wyoming Rural Development Council**

**RANCHESTER, WYOMING
RESOURCE TEAM ASSESSMENT
NOVEMBER 27, 28, 2001**

TEAM MEMBERS

Joe Coyne – Team Leader

CANDO
P.O. Box 593
Douglas, WY 82633
307-358-6520
CANDO@netcommander.com

Kim Porter

Wyoming Department of Agriculture
2219 Carey Ave.
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-6575
kporte@state.wy.us

Rich Douglass

Wyoming Department of Transportation
5300 Bishop Blvd.
Cheyenne, WY 82009
307-777-4384
rdougl@state.wy.us

Ben Avery

Wyoming Business Council
214 W. 15th St.
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-2863
bavery@state.wy.us

Joel Strong

Bighorn National Forest
2013 Eastside 2nd St.
Sheridan, WY 82801
307-674-2645
Fax: 307-674-2668
jbstrong@fs.fed.us

Shauna Gibbs

USDA Rural Development
208 Shiloh Road
Worland, WY 82401
307-347-2456
shaunagibbs@wy.usda.gov

Roger Reinke

USDA Rural Development
1949 Sugarland Dr., Suite 118
Sheridan, WY 82801
307-672-5820, ext. 4
roger.reinke@wy.usda.gov

RANCHESTER COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AGENDA

Tuesday, November 27th

- 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. Team arrives and checks in Old Stone House B&B
- 11:30 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch with advance planning team @ Cowboy State Bank
- 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. Community Tour
- 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. Listening Session 1 – Students at TRHS
- 4:30 – 5:30 p.m. Listening Session 2 – Education Focus at Town Hall
- 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. Dinner
- 6:45 – 8:15 p.m. Listening Session 3 – Community Focus at Town Hall

Wednesday, November 28th

- 7:00 – 8:15 a.m. Breakfast at Old Stone House B&B
- 8:30 – 9:25 a.m. Listening Session 4 – Business Focus at Town Hall
- 9:30 – 10:25 a.m. Listening Session 5 – Community Focus at Town Hall
- 10:30 – 11:25 a.m. Listening Session 6 – City, County Focus at Town Hall
- 11:30 – 1:00 p.m. Listening Session 7 – Agriculture Focus at Town Hall
- 1:00 - 5:30 p.m. Lunch and prepare for town meeting
- 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. Dinner
- 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. Town meeting at TRMS gym

Thursday, November 29th

Breakfast at Old Stone House B&B – team departs

What Was Heard From What Was Said

After listening to the citizens of Ranchester, the Resource Team reviewed what was said and condensed the comments down to a few key comments. At the Town Meeting, the key weaknesses, strengths and projects were presented. From this list, the Resource Team developed major themes which will be addressed in their final reports.

Summary from Town meeting (including Major Themes)

Key weaknesses

- apathy and complacency
- no restaurant
- affordable single family housing
- need new subdivision
- appearance and image of town (junk, vacancies, no trees)
- lack of businesses
- lack of support for businesses
- lack of youth activities
- need jobs with sustainable wages
- utilities – natural gas, telecommunications, water treatment
- law enforcement (too much? too little?)
- roadways (dirt, speeding, access for North side)
- lack of inter-community cooperation

Key strengths

- school system
- small town atmosphere – community celebration, know everybody, support each other
- physical location (mountains, highways, recreation, open space climate)
- core group of viable businesses/services
- room for growth
- new progressive administration
- law enforcement?
- cultural history
- tourism market potential

Key projects

- restaurant
- community/recreation center
- paving roads
- main street beautification
- general appearance and image improvement
- water quality improvement
- more youth activities
- use or lose vacant buildings
- housing/subdivisions
- utility improvements – water, natural gas, telecommunications
- more cooperation with other communities

Major Themes

- **Housing** – new subdivision – affordable single housing, middle income
- **Infrastructure/key services**
 - paving roads
 - natural gas
 - telecommunications
 - water/sewer
 - law enforcement
- **Youth**
 - include in government
 - activities
 - jobs
 - school strength
- **Community Image**
 - pride
 - small town atmosphere
 - volunteerism
 - cultural history
- **Community Aesthetics**
 - junk/cleanup
 - main street
 - trees
 - mountains/scenery
 - vacant buildings

- **Community enrichment**
 - restaurant – social gathering place
 - recreation
 - community/rec center
 - college classes
 - trail ways & pathways

- **Economy**
 - controlled growth
 - support local businesses
 - capture tourist market

- **Leadership**
 - communication
 - planning
 - town administration
 - “a few doing al the work”
 - need to include youth
 - cooperation with other communities

Ranchester Community Assessment

Team Recommendations

Ben Avery

Wyoming Business Council
214 West 15th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-2863
Fax 307-777-2838
bavery@state.wy.us

HOUSING

Challenge: The assessment team was told time and again about the need for affordable housing. The comments mostly desired single-family housing for moderate-income people rather than multifamily low-income housing.

Resource: Other communities have faced a similar situation and have used a variety of methods to solve the problem. The city of Powell prepared a housing demand study and used it to persuade homebuilders that there was a market for affordable housing. This resulted in new housing construction.

The Wyoming Community Development Authority (WCDA), which is the housing finance agency for the state, manages the HOME Investment Partnership Program, or HOME for short, which helps pay for development costs if the subsidy is passed on to the homebuyer.

Key Contact Information:

Dave Reetz, President
Powell Valley Economic Development Alliance
First National Bank and Trust
245 East 1st Street
Powell, WY 82435
307-754-2201

Cheryl Gillum
WCDA
155 North Beech
Casper, WY 82601
307-265-0603

Infrastructure/Key Services

Challenge: Many of the focus groups expressed concerns about the weakness in local telecommunications and the hindrance that places upon existing households, businesses and future economic development efforts.

Resource: The Wyoming Business Council has a Telecommunication division whose primary purpose is to coordinate and facilitate the development of Wyoming's telecommunications infrastructure to foster economic development. The goal is to achieve high-speed, broadband connectivity throughout the state. The Director of this Division is Michael Stull. He is available to consult with individual communities throughout the state on existing and improving the telecommunication infrastructure.

Key Contact Information:

Michael Stull
Director of Telecommunications
Wyoming Business Council
214 West 15th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-2847

Challenge: Numerous individuals in all of the focus groups expressed concern about the water quality (mostly during spring runoff).

Resource: Specific programs are available through the Investment Ready Communities Division of the Wyoming Business Council for public infrastructure projects. Funds for projects such as public water and sewer improvements are made available to communities through this Division from the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). The CDGB funds are a federally funded pass through program from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Key Contact Information:

Steve Achter
Director of Investment Ready Communities
Wyoming Business Council
214 West 15th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-2811

YOUTH

Challenge: Several of the focus groups commented on the need for activities and involvement of the youth in the community. The youth group greatly emphasized this as a challenge.

Resource: Numerous communities throughout the State have a Healthy Community/Healthy Youth program. The efforts of this program are to connect youth with other community activities and leadership.

Key Contact Information:

Sally Webster
Lander Valley High School
1005 West Main
Lander, WY 82520
307-332-3640 ex 406

Resource: The State of Wyoming has active Youth Council, which advises and makes recommendations regarding youth policy, high quality workforce development programs and the integrated delivery system for youth services. The State also has an active School-to-Careers initiative, which is designed to coordinate the efforts of local school districts, employers and youth allowing youth to experience various career opportunities of their choosing.

Key Contact Information:

Alfrieda Gonzales, Administrator
Office of Workforce Development
3120 Old Faithful Road, Suite 300
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-3465

Lori Morrow
Wyoming State School-to-Career Coordinator
3120 Old Faithful Road, Suite 300
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-7654

COMMUNITY AESTHETICS

Challenge: Each of the focus groups was very sensitive to the appearance of the community. This seemed to fall into three primary areas as follows: main street, vacant buildings and junk/cleanup. The community has begun enforcing a city ordinance on junk, plans to pave the south side of town and has plans for a main street improvement project within the next few years.

Resource: I would recommend that Ranchester apply for a planning grant through the Investment Ready Communities Division of the Wyoming Business Council. This CDGB grant could be used to contract with a consultant to identify a general community theme that you would like the business buildings, parks, sidewalks and overall community appearance to resemble.

Key Contact Information:

Steve Achter
Director of Investment Ready Communities
Wyoming Business Council
214 West 15th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-2811

Challenge: How does Ranchester encourage the business owners to complete a facelift of their business property to blend with an overall community theme? How does the community remove or cleanup vacant buildings on main street?

Resource: In 1996 Lander, Wyoming completed a downtown renovation project, which included new sidewalks, benches, landscaping and street. The local banks made available below market interest rate loans to business for the specific purpose of completing a facelift of their storefronts. The below market rates were made possible by a compensating balance agreement at 0% interest rate from a local economic development entity. The State of Wyoming Challenge Loan Program may also be available to assist this effort.

Key Contact Information:

Ben Avery
Portfolio/Loan Program Manager
Wyoming Business Council
214 West 15th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-2863

COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT

Challenge: The most repeated problem that the assessment team heard from all of the listening sessions was the need for a restaurant. This will be very difficult for the community to play much of a role in correcting, as the current closed facility is privately owned. However, when sold and/or reopened the community needs to support the business for positive cash flow. It was noted that the existing (closed) restaurant did not have a liquor license.

Resource: I would encourage the city, if possible, to make available a restaurant liquor license to the existing or new owner if applied for. Encourage some aesthetic enhancement to the facility such as decks or gazebo's that would be consistent with an overall community theme. Encourage another business to consider adding a restaurant with exciting aesthetic features to draw the public.

Key Contact Information:

Lynn Birleffi
Wyoming Lodging and Restaurant Association
211 West 19th Street, Suite 201
Cheyenne, WY 82001
307-634-8816 Ex.11

National Restaurant Association
1-800-424-5156

ECONOMY

Challenge: Support local businesses and capture tourist market.

Resource: Plan and utilize a customer service-training program, which are made available through the Travel and Tourism Division of the Wyoming Business Council.

Key Contact Information:

Laurie Green
Director of Travel and Tourism
Wyoming Business Council
214 West 15th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
307-777-2808

LEADERSHIP

Challenge: Ranchester has a good group of dedicated leaders who have made great strides in recent months. This is without question, however, the lack of youth involvement and a broader range of public involvement was heard during the listening sessions.

True sustainable development occurs when leaders from the town and county, the public and private sector as well as the young and old interact to lead from consensus.

Recommendation: Develop a Sheridan County (joint with other communities in the county) or a Ranchester/Dayton leadership program institute. The program would provide both resource and leadership training at a very minimal cost to current and future leaders in the town and local area. This leadership training is completed in groups of approximately a dozen. Over the course of a few years a large network of civic leaders are generated as alumni.

There are several local leadership programs already in existence in Wyoming. One of the very best exists in Park County and includes the communities of Powell, Cody and Meeteetse. Established in 1996, it already has over 60 alumni of the leadership training. Part of the reason that it is so successful is due the fact that no individual entity is responsible for its operation. Therefore, there is broad-based consensus for the program.

Key Contact Information:

Rhonda Shipp
UW Park County Extension Office
Courthouse, 1002 Sheridan Avenue
Box 3099
Cody, WY 82414
307-527-5905

Joe Coyne, Executive Director

Converse Area New Development Organization (CANDO)

121 Brownfield Road

P.O. Box 593

Douglas, WY 82633

(307) 358-6520

(307) 358-2972 (fax)

E-mail: CANDO@netcommander.com

Web: www.douglaswyoming.com

Introductory Comments:

I am grateful for the hospitality in Ranchester. Clearly, Ranchester is a great place to visit and, I think, would be a great community in which to live. Based on what I saw and heard, Ranchester has all the resources it needs to build on its strengths, resolve its challenges, and to accomplish its dreams. So, thank you for an opportunity to visit and share in Ranchester's future.

Please accept our team's recommendations with a grain of salt, and a good dose of optimism. Not all that we say will you find doable. But if we have even a few great suggestions, success will depend on your willingness and ability to follow through. So—good luck! Please call me if I can help you in any way.

Leadership & Planning:

Ranchester already has in place much of what it needs to thrive. But communication, leadership, partnership building, community marketing, entrepreneurship and grant writing are some of Ranchester's needs. Each of these areas are well served by several organizations who can readily facilitate or assist you:

Wyoming Rural Development Council (WRDC)

Mary Randolph, Executive Director

2219 Carey Avenue

Cheyenne, WY 82002

(307) 777-6430

(307) 777-6593 (fax)

E-mail: mrando@state.wy.us

Web: www.wyomingrural.org

Wyoming Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Judith Semple, Region 5 Director

222 South Gillette Avenue, Suite 402

Gillette, WY 82716

(307) 682-5232

Fax: (307) 686-5792

E-mail: sbdc@vcn.com

Web: <http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/SBDC/default.htm>

Wyoming Business Council (WBC)
Dave Spencer, North East Regional Director
222 S. Gillette, Suite 406
Gillette, WY 82717
(307) 685-0283
E-mail: dspencer@wysbc.com
Web: www.wyomingbusiness.org

Wyoming Community Network (WCN)
Jennifer Goodman, Executive Director
P.O. Box 3354
Laramie, WY 82071
(307) 766-2107
(307) 766-5544 (fax)
E-mail: jgoodman@uwyo.edu
Web: www.WyomingCommunityNetwork.org

Sheridan College
3059 Coffeen Avenue
P.O. Box 1500
Sheridan, WY 82801
(307) 674-6446
Web: <http://www.sc.whecn.edu/>

Wyoming Economic Development Association (WEDA)
Paula McCormick
5319 Hwy. 287
Lander, WY 82520
(307) 332-5546
E-mail: weda@rmisp.com
Web: <http://www.wyomingeda.org/>

Housing:

Clearly, there is an affordable housing shortage. But you need to know more about current demands re: rental vs. house, income brackets and trends, etc., so you need to have a housing assessment completed. Similarly, a retail leakage survey needs to be completed so that your retail merchants can develop an effective strategy for competing. Several other areas of study were suggested during listening sessions, including: county planning/zoning; downtown appearance or theme; and tourism marketing. The following agencies can help you with such studies:

Wyoming Community Development Authority (WCDA) [housing]
George Axlund
P.O. Box 634
Casper, WY 82602

(307) 265-0603
E-mail: axlund@wyoingcda.com
Web: www.wyoingcda.com/

University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW-CES) [economy]
Tex Taylor
P.O. Box 3354
Laramie, WY 82071
(307) 766-5682
(307) 766-5544
E-mail: ttaylor@uwyo.edu

Wyoming Business Council (WBC-Investment Ready Communities)
Steve Achter, Director
214 West 15th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-2811
(307) 777-2838 (fax)
E-mail: sachte@state.wy.us
Web: www.wyomingbusiness.org

Wyoming Business Council (Tourism Division)
Laurie Green, Director
214 West 15th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-2808
(307) 777-2838 (fax)
E-mail: lgreen@state.wy.us
Web: www.wyomingbusiness.org

Economic Development:

Ranchester can realistically grow and strengthen its economy, but it will take a champion and a concerted community effort to get the job done. As I see it, there are three logical steps to take.

First, promote or recruit a champion. There are a number of likely places to look for a champion: City Hall, County government, business or civic group leaders, etc. Surely there are several individuals who are well respected and capable of getting things done. If not, then perhaps Ranchester should consider recruiting an experienced economic developer. Or, better yet, select an inexperienced but capable young man or woman who has deep roots in the community, and cultivate that person as your champion.

Invest the resources necessary to get training for your champion. Send them to grant writing school and to NxLevel Entrepreneurship Training (see WRDC above). Send them to all the economic training courses you can afford (see WEDA or WBC above).

Send them to the Wyoming Leadership program (see WBA below). Encourage them to serve in city, county and other leadership positions. Be patient and supportive.

Wyoming Business Alliance (WBA) [Wyoming Leadership]
Bill Shilling
139 West 2nd Street, #3E
Casper, WY 82601
(307) 577-8000
(307) 577-8003 (fax)
E-mail: wba@trib.com

Second, identify and organize the individuals, businesses and organizations that will truly support economic development. Not all will, in spite of the obvious need, but that's okay. You already have a great start with the business merchants group, but I think you'll find significant support from individuals and families, too. Consider formally setting up a Ranchester Economic Development Council (REDC) as a Wyoming nonprofit corporation. Then, using a community visioning process, develop a reasonable strategic plan. I would suggest using the Resource Team's recommendations for this Assessment as the starting point for discussion, but be open to other suggestions. Identify a couple of "early win" projects. I would strongly suggest that those early wins include sending your champion to grant writing school, and then completing a few grant applications to various organizations. For specific grant opportunities, contact WCN (see above), or visit the State Library's page on Wyoming Grants (includes their Catalog of State Grants):

Wyoming State Library
Statewide Information Services
(307) 777-6333
Web: <http://cowgirl.state.wy.us/grantscat/>

Third, get something done and watch it grow. Celebrate any success, and use it as a stepping-stone to the next project. Use grant awards to add substance to GEDC. A couple of small grants could quickly lead to a paid position within GEDC. If your champion has other skills, GEDC could contract those skills out to other organizations (for example, doing contract research or acting as a regional office for a state organization). You will find it much easier to locally raise funds for GEDC if you have outside sources already contributing.

Fourth, make a family restaurant your top economic development target. Work closely with the Wyoming Business Council and the Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce to market the opportunity. Let the current owner know that you really need their help, and tell the owner just how important the restaurant is to the community. Consider forming an investment pool of local investors willing to be silent partners of a restaurant venture. You could even use the restaurant as a sort of community fund raising/service project, allowing youth, senior citizens and others to pool their resources to at least operate the facility on weekends and during the summer months.

Youth:

It is quite clear that the youth in the Ranchester area want to participate in their community. They have much to say, they expect adults (especially community leaders) to listen, and they want to be involved in getting things done. There are at least a few things Ranchester could do to accommodate youth.

First, youth need to be able to stay and prosper in the community. The youth in Ranchester seem to like living there, but mostly expect to flee as soon as they graduate – in order to find rewarding employment. It is critical that Ranchester immediately make a concerted effort to stem this flow, or at least to create a reason for youth to return after satisfying their wanderlust. I would suggest that the leaders of the school district, parents, youth, business and government leaders, and others get together to develop a more cohesive approach to preparing youth for the workplace. Most important, invite and encourage youth to take an leadership role in governing their community. For partnership building, you should talk with the State School to Careers office. For a better understanding of youth development initiatives, you should talk to some of the folks with the State Youth Collaborative.

Second, include youth in your governing process. Several Wyoming communities (apparently, including Dayton) have appointed youth to nonvoting positions on their city council. You could go further, and (using the advice of the youth professionals listed above) form a Ranchester Youth Council. Give them some financial support, provide mentors and adult support, and help them do what they want to do. You may be surprised to learn that some of the activities they want to engage in are actually healthy and productive! You will also be giving them an opportunity to share their dreams about the future of your community, including jobs, housing and quality of life.

Third, build on a key strength: The Dayton-Ranchester school system. While the adults in these two communities focus on key differences between themselves, the students in your school system have largely broken down the former barriers that were apparently held up only by misunderstandings, miscommunications and bias. I encourage you to find new ways to partner with Dayton, and there are many issues that seem ripe to do so: water supply & delivery, recreation, housing, economic development, etc. Such partnerships, particularly if they involve youth and the school district, are quite likely to succeed in spite of the history of these two towns.

Fourth, give youth a focal point for activities. There obviously has been a great deal of planning already underway for the community/events center. Why wait to raise all the necessary funds? You already have vacant buildings, and many of the activities you desire could take place in one of those buildings, right now. There's no reason to wait. Instead, if you worked with youth to get an activities center open now, you might actually enhance your ability to raise funds, since the community can see your progress and better understand where you are going.

School-to-Careers Office
Wyoming Dept. of Employment
Lori Morrow, Coordinator
3120 Old Faithful Road, Suite 300
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-7654
(307) 777-6966 (fax)
E-mail: lmorro@state.wy.us
Web: (currently under construction) www.wydoe.state.wy.us/does.asp?ID=192

State Youth Collaborative
Bill Barnes, Coordinator
(307) 777-7647
E-mail: wbarnes@state.wy.us

Community Image/Aesthetics:

God has blessed Ranchester with awesome outdoor beauty, recreational opportunities and activities. The community can take better advantage of this asset. Structure your business recruitment activities around outdoor recreation. That means finding companies that need the outdoors (rafting, fishing, etc.) or that are themselves oriented to the outdoors (such as manufacturers of camping equipment). It also means looking for businesses that are attracted to an outdoor quality of life (high tech/high stress companies) as opposed to a cosmopolitan quality of life (available in big cities).

You are already on the right track with cleaning up Ranchester. Celebrate that success! Maybe even give some awards to those who have cleaned up the worst looking areas (have an “ugly” competition and do some before/after picture promotions, etc.) That might also be a good source for identifying new volunteers that haven’t yet really made a commitment to the town.

Try to set up a Main Street program, which will improve the historic appearance of your downtown. Develop and promote your historic heritage, using some outside strategic planners if you have to.

Strategic Planners:

Randy Wagner	Gene Bryan
1007 Monroe Avenue	5733 Sycamore
Cheyenne, WY 82001	Cheyenne, WY 82009
(307) 634-4263	(307) 632-7933

National Main Street Center of the
National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 588-6219
Web: <http://www.mainst.org/>

Ranchester Community Assessment

Team Recommendations

Richard W. Douglass, Local Government Coordinator

Wyoming Dept. of Transportation
5300 Bishop Blvd., Cheyenne, WY 82009
Ph. 307-777-4384
rdougl@dot.state.wy.us

INFRASTRUCTURE/KEY SERVICES

- Paving Projects:

The Town's funding package for the South Side Paving Project for Special Improvement District No. 7 should be considered a model for other funding initiatives for community infrastructure projects. By approving a countywide Facility Tax and then a Special Improvement District (SID) at the August election, followed by a grant application to the State Loan & Investment Board's Mineral Royalty Grant Program, the Town has demonstrated local support, good planning and fund leveraging. WYDOT reviewed and recommended approval of this grant request for the initial step - engineering design. This engineering design grant is expected to be approved at the January 2002 meeting of the State Loan & Investment Board. However, assuming the engineering design stage is underway in the Spring months of 2002, it may be optimistic to expect adequate time for construction funding submittal and approval by the July 2002 meeting of that Board. Therefore, it may be more realistic to schedule a construction grant submittal to the Board for the January 2003 meeting with construction for Summer 2003 or 2004. Also, suggest using this funding strategy for future paving projects in the municipality. If not already in place, the Town should adopt subdivision ordinance, development standards and annexation rules requiring future additions to meet adopted street standards. The Wyoming Association of Municipalities (WAM) would be an excellent resource for model ordinances and other documents relating to growth management/control. When scheduling paving projects, Town should refer to WYDOT's State Improvement Program (STIP) to coordinate with state's construction/reconstruction projects to obtain favorable bid prices.

- Natural Gas & Telecommunications:

The Town could notify Wyoming Public Service Commission (PSC) of the Town's interest in acquiring natural gas supply. If a source could be identified, Town may want to consider a town-owned natural gas distribution system. Funding for such a venture could be financed through a variety of funding sources, including revenue bonding, and Mineral Royalty grants and loans.

The Town may also notify Wyoming Telecommunications Council of the Town's interest in upgrading its telecommunications system. This would make that State advisory council aware of the town's dissatisfaction with the current provider, and the commission may be willing to advocate in behalf of the Town. As with Natural Gas, the Town could elect to pursue a Town-owned, and contract with a phone company. Funding options could include those cited above, plus the Resource Development Council programs.

- Law Enforcement:

Enforcement of Town Ordinances is a town responsibility being addressed by the temporary Police Chief, this position is pending a permanent status upon completion of certain training requirements. Nonetheless, all Towns in the state need to have an effective relationship with the duly elected County Sheriff, responsible with State law violations and rural, unincorporated areas. Suggest, both Ranchester and Dayton open discussions for joint police activities, which could lead to improved, coordinated Sheriff Department cooperation. An example of such cooperation has existed for years in Kaycee in southern Johnson County where the Sheriff Kirkpatrick maintains a full-time deputy. Such an arrangement seems to work well in that rural area, and is well received by that community. In the event, the County Sheriff is uncooperative and unwilling to address Ranchester/Dayton law enforcement needs, the towns may choose to document concerns and shortcomings of the current system, and present their grievances to the County Commissioners when the Commissioners are preparing their annual budget reviews.

COMMUNITY AESTHETICS

- The old clichés “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” and “One man's junk is another man's treasure” seem to apply in dealing with community aesthetics. Ranchester, located in the scenic Tongue River, has a backdrop which would be envied by many Wyoming communities. But due to years of land use neglect, economics and personal perceptions there are some views that need improvement, especially on Historic US Hwy. 16 – Main Street. Specifically, the streetscape (windshield view of the main street) could be enhanced through planning and implementation of a plan. The following steps could lead to a new, improved look:

1. **Mayor appointed Downtown Beautification Committee**

A 5-member committee, appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by Town Council would validate the committee and require establish agreed upon actions, which may lead to:

2. Development of a Downtown Community Revitalization Plan

A revitalization plan would provide some creative conceptual ideas and artist renderings of what could be accomplished through a combination of streetscape features, including:

- Landscaping (trees, flowers, and shrubs)
- Signage
- Banners
- Benches & Kiosks
- Sculpture (an example might be the Bear already in place)
- Decorative Lighting
- Artistic murals on sides of vacant buildings and unattractive occupied buildings
- Decorative sidewalk and crosswalks

An excellent example of a Community Revitalization Plan is a May 2000 Town Dubois Community Revitalization Plan, prepared by Design Studio West, Inc. This plan contains: an Introduction, Inventory and Analysis, Goals & Objectives, Conceptual Design Alternatives, and Design & Construction Process. The Town of Dubois would probably be willing to share a copy of this plan with Ranchester, for reference.

A valuable contact might be the National Main Street Program, with a website at www.mainst.org.

3. Funding for a Community Revitalization Plan

- Transportation Enhancement Activities – Local
Administered by WYDOT's Office of Local Government
Coordination
A competitive application process wherein planning for transportation enhancement eligible activities, including scenic beautification planning. Funding is 80% federal and 20% local match.
- Community Development Block Grant (C.D.B.G.)
Administered by Wyoming Business Council, Division of Economic & Community Development

4. Funding Sources for Implementing the Plan

- Formation of a Downtown Improvement District (for Local Funding)
- Optional 1% Sales Tax devoted to Revitalization Plan Implementation
- Community Development Block Grant (C.D.B.G.)
- WYDOT's Transportation Enhancement Programs (State & T.E.A.L.)
- U.S. Dept. of Agriculture – Rural Resource Development Program

Contacts cited above:

Wyoming Association of Municipalities, P.O. Box 3110, Cheyenne, WY 82003-3110
website: *wyomuni.org*

Wyoming Dept. of Transportation, Programming Section of Planning, 5300 Bishop Blvd., Cheyenne, WY 82009

Wyoming Public Service Commission, Hansen Bldg., 2515 Warren Ave., Suite 300,
Cheyenne, WY 82002
website: *http://psc.state.wy.us*

Wyoming Telecommunications Council, A&I Information Technology Div., 2001 Capitol Ave., Room 237, Cheyenne, WY 82002-0060
email: dbliss@state.wy.us

Johnson County Sheriff, Sheriff Larry Kirkpatrick, 639 Fort St., Buffalo, WY 82834
Ph. 307-684-5581, Fax: 307-684-5585

Town of Dubois, Mayor Bob Baker, 712 Meckem St., P.O. Box 555, Dubois, WY 82513
Ph. 307-455-2345, Fax: 307-455-2567, email: dubois.wyoming.com

National Main Street Program, website: *www.mainst.org*

Ranchester Community Assessment

Team Recommendations

Shauna Gibbs, Rural Development Specialist

USDA/Rural Development
208 Shiloh Road, Worland, WY 82401
(307) 347-2456, Ext. 4
shauna.gibbs@wy.usda.gov
<http://www.ruvdev.usda.gov/wy/>

INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the Town of Ranchester and the surrounding area for the generous hospitality we received during our visit. In addition to the warm, friendly people who live there, Ranchester has an abundance of community assets including natural beauty, a small town atmosphere, outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities, a quality day care center, an excellent location for tourism, and a rich history. Ranchester has a solid base to build upon and a bright future!

Issue #1 Infrastructure/key services

Most of the Ranchester residents felt the town had plenty of water rights to handle current demand and future growth. During spring runoff, however, the residents said the water smelled bad and had a very high chlorine content. Ranchester does not have natural gas and many residents would like to explore the possibility of getting it into the community.

Consider immediate development of a community plan that outlines the total infrastructure need. For example, if you bring natural gas to Ranchester, tear up your streets one time and install the improved sewer, water and telecommunications infrastructure in conjunction with the natural gas project. If you want to grow or you are growing, it has to be backed by the infrastructure to support it.

Solution #1: Improve water quality.

USDA/Rural Development has loans and grants available for improvements to municipal water systems. Loan and grant funds may be used to construct, repair, improve, expand, or modify rural water supply and distribution facilities. The maximum term on all loans is 30 years and the interest rates are set quarterly. The current interest rates are between 4.5% and 5.25%. Eligibility for grant funds is based on the income of the Town in comparison to the State median household income. For further information contact:

Key Contact Information:

Lola Lucero, Rural Development Manager
USDA Rural Development - Northeast Area Office
1949 Sugarland Drive, Suite 118, Sheridan, WY 82801-5749
(307) 672-5820, Ext. 4
lola.lucero@wy.usda.gov
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wy/>

The web site listed above (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wy/>) carefully outlines the programs of USDA/Rural Development in Wyoming. Your knowledge of these programs and your ability to develop local and agency relationships will be significant in developing your business, your infrastructure and your housing objectives.

Another very useful tool is the Catalog of Wyoming State Grant Programs 2001. Wyoming is blessed with many financial resources. Local plans that solve local needs can sometimes be funded by our state. To obtain a copy of this resource write to the following address or access their web site.

Department of Administration of Information
State Library Division
Supreme Court & State Library Building
2301 Capitol Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
<http://www-wsl.state.wy.us/sis/grants/index.html>

Solution #2: Develop partnerships to improve water quality.

Consider a forming a Joint Powers Board with Dayton to provide good quality water for the area. This requires foresight and planning but could reap rich rewards for both communities. The Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) has grants available for Water supply projects, including project construction and rehabilitation. Typical grants range from 50 percent to 75 percent of project costs. For further information contact:

Key Contact Information:

Lawrence (Mike) Besson
Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC)
122 W. 25th Street, Herschler Building, 4th Floor West
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-7626
lbesson@state.wy.us

Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) is also involved with the Drinking Water State Revolving Funds program. Loans through this program may be made for up to 20 years at an interest rate determined by the State Loan and Investment Board, which is currently established at 4%. A loan origination fee of one-half of one percent (0.5%) of the loan amounts is collected. For further information contact:

Mike Hackett, WWDC
(307) 777-7626
mhackle@state.wy.us

or

Brian Mark, DEQ
(307) 777-6371
bmark@state.wy.us

The Office of State Lands and Investments also has loan/grant programs that can be used for Water System Repairs. The State Mineral Royalty Capital Construction Account (MRG) has matching grant funds that are available for public infrastructure and services. For further information contact:

Brad Miskimins (SP)
Office of State Lands and Investments
Herschler Building, #rd Floor West
122 West 25th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-7331

Solution #3: Provide natural gas to the community.

The desire to get natural gas can be investigated by calling the following person at Montana/Dakota Utilities (MDU). Your ability to establish need and help the company determine its profitability, will help make your natural gas project a reality. Developing coal bed methane resources in Sheridan County may also be an option. Be ready with a proactive plan presentation to the right people. Again, keep in mind that the best time to develop this portion of your infrastructure is when you are replacing sewer lines, putting in a new water system, repairing your streets, etc.

Key Contact Info:

Gerald "Poke" Buck, Marketing Manager
Montana Dakota Utilities
400 North 4th Street
Bismarck, ND 58501
(701) 222-7950

Theme or Issue #2 Economic Development

Controlled economic growth, fostering support for local businesses, and the need of a restaurant was something the team heard repeatedly. Again, please start building relationships with your local contacts!

Solution #1: Develop a plan for attracting the types of businesses you want in Ranchester.

Utilize free business assistance programs available through the Wyoming Business Council. The assistance includes business plan assistance, accounting, marketing, government procurement, and grant and loan application preparation.

Key Contact Info:

Dave Spencer, Director
Wyoming Business Council
222 South Gillette, Suite 406
Gillette, WY 82717
dspencer@wysbc.com
<http://www.wyomingbusiness.org/>

Solution #2: Refer Ranchester women entrepreneurs to the Wyoming Women's Business Center.

The Center offers business planning services and has a micro loan program (\$2,500 and less) available to small businesses at rates below prime and at favorable repayment terms. Check out the following web sites Organize and develop a public/private partnership to address the issue.

Discuss how similar public/private partnerships have been used before, and how it would work for Ranchester.

Key Contact Info:

Ilsa Lund, Lindy Murphy, or Zee Zee Moore
Wyoming Women's Business Center
P.O. Box 3661
Laramie, WY 82071
(888) 524-1947
ilund@uwyo.edu
<http://www.wyomingwomen.org/>

Solution #3: Develop public/private partnerships and information bases to address your overall rural development needs.

Key Contact Info:

Ted Buchanan, Project Coordinator
Northeast Wyoming RC & D Council
400 South Kendricks Avenue, Suite 104C
Gillette, WY 82717
(307) 682-8609
ted.buchanan@wy.usda.gov

The Rural Information Center provides information and referral services for rural communities, officials, organizations and citizens. This is an excellent web site for funding resources, grant writing resources, publications, and statistical information. It is sponsored in part by USDA.

Rural Information Center
10301 Baltimore Avenue, Room 304
Beltsville, MD 20705-2351
(800) 633-7701
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/>

Ranchester Community Assessment

Team Recommendations

Kim Porter, Administrative Services Manager

Wyoming Department of Agriculture

2219 Carey Avenue

Cheyenne, WY 82002

(307) 777-6575

kporte@state.wy.us

Planning

Develop a Strategic Plan for the Town of Ranchester

During the listening sessions, we heard the Town has many great ideas and projects already started. Now is the time to do Strategic Planning; get a plan. A plan will help you take into account all things needing to be considered, it will give you direction, it will help prevent urban sprawl, it will give you a picture of the future, and it will be a tool when getting assistance from other entities. Below are two resources who help towns develop plans:

Key Contact Info:

Mary Randolph
Executive Director
Wyoming Rural Development Council
2219 Carey Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-6430
mrand@state.wy.us

George Parks
Executive Director
Wyoming Association of Municipalities
PO Box 3110
Cheyenne, WY 82003
wam@wyomuni.org

Develop a Business Plan for the Community Center

If you haven't already, it would be a good idea to develop a business plan for the community/recreation center. A business plan will go through all aspects of the business and make sure you have thought out everything. It is surprising the little things a plan can point out. It will also give you an idea of income vs. expenses and will help you develop fees in order to make the center a success. Operations and maintenance cost and staffing costs will need to be offset by an income such as user fees.

I would like to note the Town could kill two birds with one stone by using the vacant building by Kelly' Kitchen. The building is large enough and one of the Town's vacant buildings would be put to use. Services could be brought in right away. This would be an immediate success, and the centered planned could still continue.

Key Contact Info:

Judith Semple
Wyoming Small Business Development Center, Region 5
222 S. Gillette Avenue, Ste 402
Gillette, WY 82716
(307) 682-5232
sbdc@vcn.com

Dave Spencer
NE Regional Director
Wyoming Business Council
222 S. Gillette Avenue, Ste 406
Gillette, WY 82717
(307) 685-0283
dspencer@wvsbc.com

Youth

Include the youth in City/County Government

The high school students have an interested in being able to have youth representatives in local government. This would be a great learning experience for them, teaching them how government runs, what the issues are, problem solving, and developing leadership and public speaking skills. This would also be an opportunity for the youth to provide their ideas and let the Town know what they want. They have a stake in what happens to the town, these kids are the Towns future.

Key Contact Info:

The Town of Dayton has a Junior Council, the Mayor of Dayton should be able to provide information.

The City of Douglas has started this program also:

Joe Coyne
CANDO
PO Box 593
Douglas, WY 82633
(307) 358-6520
CANDO@netcommander.com

Activities

The youth would like to have periodic dances and they indicated they would be willing to pay in order to have something to do. It would be fun to let the youth set up the dance – finding a place, making food and beverage arrangements, finding chaperones, and doing up an income/expense plan. The kids need the go ahead to do this and an adult who will help and be there for questions.

Get the youth involve on the committee for the Community/Recreation Center. Again this would be a learning experience for them and they will have some great ideas about what is needed and how to achieve some of the goals. It will also provide more manpower for the committee.

The Town of Pine Bluffs has a successful recreation program and they are similar in size (just over 1,000 people). The Town of Ranchester may want to check into a Recreation Director position, even if it is a part-time position.

There are opportunities for having fun, educational events such as different science, math, writing events, etc. These could be anywhere from a couple of hours to a weekend. I would suggest getting together with the schools to see if they are interested or have someone available to provide different classes. The Cheyenne City Parks & Recreation department currently offers some of these types of classes. Their website has information on their programs. Resource needs would not be high, and could be offset by a small fee. Flyers mailed to residents would be one way to get the word out. Once residents are aware of a program, they will start looking for this information, especially if these programs start at a certain time each year.

For school age children, there are many opportunities for clubs. Some examples would be 4-H, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, different clubs ranging from science to music to foreign language. Simply recruiting an interested adult to chair the club and provide guidance could set up many clubs.

Key Contact Info:

Sonja Carlson-Fornstrom, Director
Recreation, Pine Bluffs
217 W. 3rd
Pine Bluffs, WY 82082
(307) 245-3301

City of Cheyenne, Parks & Recreations
610 W. 7th
Cheyenne, WY 82007
(307) 637-6423
<http://www.cheyennecity.org>

Wyoming Association of Extension 4-H
Jill Kline
57 Antelope Gap Road
Wheatland, WY 82201-8959
(307) 322-3667

Boy Scouts of America
PO Box 394
Cheyenne, WY 82003
(307-632-5115)

Girl Scouts of Wyoming
Jan Woodhouse
1900 E 18th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82001
307) 632-1413

The above are just a few organizations that may be helpful.

Community Enrichment

The need for a restaurant

The Wyoming Economic Development Association exists to promote a diversified economy and coordinate the retention, expansion, creation and recruitment of business while improving Wyoming as a quality place to live. WEDA is a Strategic Alliance Partner with the Wyoming Business Council. WEDA is a partner of the Wyoming Growth Alliance, which promotes economic development efforts in the state. (*statement from their web page*).

Key Contact Info:

Paula McCormick
WEDA Coordinator
Wyoming Economic Development Association (WEDA)
5319 Hwy. 287
Lander, WY 82520
(307) 332-5546
weda@rmisp.com
Web page: www.WyomingEDA.org

College Classes

Partner with Sheridan College to bring classes into Ranchester. It would be a good idea to get a survey of the classes the Town is interested in having; the survey would also provide the college with numbers to justify having classes in Ranchester. Also partner with the Town of Dayton, to provide the same opportunity for their residents, as well as numbers for classes and possibly a class meeting space. A place to hold the class would be needed, again looking into empty buildings would be a way to fix two concerns.

Key Contact Info:

Mark Englert
Dean of Arts and Science
Sheridan College
3059 Coffeen Avenue
Sheridan, WY 82801
(307) 674-6446
Web page: www.sc.cc.wy.us

Conclusion

There was a lot of expertise on this team that will address other issues. I enjoyed my time in Ranchester . The Town has great ideas and enthusiasm, which will go far in the success of Ranchester.

Ranchester Community Assessment

Team Recommendations

Roger Reinke, Rural Development Specialist

Rural Development
1949 Sugarland Dr. Suite 118
Sheridan, WY 82801-5749
(307) 672-5820, ext. 4
roger.reinke@wy.usda.gov
www.rurdev.usda.gov/wy

Theme or Issue #1 HOUSING-new subdivision-affordable housing, middle income

Establish Curb Appeal within the town residential areas of Ranchester for development of affordable housing projects.

Solution #1 Roads, Streets, and Right-of-Way. Paved streets and roads with exits at both ends of similar width.

The town needs to begin the planning/feasibility phase for paved road, curb and gutter improvements. Street improvement should not be completed until utilities are up dated.

The FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY DATA AND STANDARD FLOOD HAZARD DETERMINATION NEEDS TO BE UPDATED. There are additional costs for flood insurance in flood zones and this would aid in affordable housing within the city and newly planned Subdivisions in the future.

The State of Wyoming has grant funds that can be used for planning, construction, acquisition, improvement of emergency repair of public facilities, including street and road projects. The board meets regularly on the third Thursday of each January and June to review grant applications. Matching funds may be required depending on the program used.

Key Contact Info:

BRAD MISKIMINS, Office of State Lands and Investments
Herschler Building, 3rd Floor West
122 West 25th Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-7331

USDA, Rural Development, Rural Housing Service (RHS) has loans and grants available for essential community facilities in rural areas. Funds may be used to construct, enlarge, or improve community facilities for health, public safety of public services-which include streets and roads. The maximum term on all loans is 30 years (due to statutory limitations) and the interest rates are set quarterly. The current interest rates are between 4.5% and 5.25%. Eligibility for grant funds is based on the income of the town in comparison to the States Median Household Income.

RHS Section 524 loan may be available through a applicant, that must be a private or public nonprofit organization (1)is owned and controlled by private persons,(2) is organized and operated for purposes other than making gains or profits for the corporation or members, and (3) is legally precluded from distributing to its members any gains or profits. OR, A” public nonprofit organization” is a nonprofit corporation other than a private non profit corporation, including a municipal corporation or other corporate agency of a state or local government. See FmHA Instruction 444.8 paragraph III and IV. Site development funding may be available under the RHS Section 524 Loan Program.

Key Contact Info:

LOLA J. LUCERO
Rural Development Manager
Rural Development
Northeast Area Office
1949 Sugarland Dr. Suite 118
Sheridan, WY 82801-5749
(307) 672-5820, ext. 4
lola.lucero@wy.usda.gov

JOHN JOHNSON
Rural Development Specialist
Rural Development
State Office
P. O. Box 820
Casper, WY 82602-0820
(307)261-6315
john.johnson@wy.usda.gov

Other possible contacts: The US Economic Development Administration (EDA) has grant funds available for infrastructure such as streets and roads. There does need to be some industrial development located in the area or proposed for the area when EDA funds are involved.

Key Contact Info:

JOHN ROGERS
EDA
P.O. Box 10075
Federal Building, Room 196
Helena, MT 59626
(406) 441-1175

UTILITIES AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS needs to be furnished to each Affordable Housing Lot in Ranchester.

Key Contact Info:

CLARENCE MOSHIER
Manager of Engineering
Powder River Energy Corporation
1095 E. Brundage Lane
Sheridan, WY 82801
(307) 674-6466, ext. 2500
Toll Free 1-800-442-3630
clarencem@precorp.org

CURT FLEMING
General Manager
Range Telephone Corp.
P.O. Box 127
Forsyth, MT 59327
curt@rangeact.com

Solution #2; Develop a public/private partnership to address the issue.

Town of Ranchester should develop a comprehensive plan to address the above issues. This plan would help in submitting General Information regarding a public/private partnership to address the Ranchester site and affordable housing issues. Similar public/private partnerships have been used before in small rural communities and have used a variety of methods to solve their problems.

The Wyoming Community Development Authority (WCDA), which is the housing finance agency for the states, manages the HOME Investment Partnership Program, or Home for short, which helps pay for development costs if the subsidy is posted on the homeowner. In the past rural communities have prepared a housing demand study and in turn used it to persuade homebuilder there is a market for affordable housing. This may result in new housing construction using local material and employees.

Key Contact Info:

CHERYL GILLUM, Housing Program Director, WCDA
155 North Beech Street
Casper, WY 82602
(307) 265-0603
gillum@wyomingcda.com
www.wyomingcda.com

There is direct, leveraged, and guarantee funding available through USDA, Rural Development, as well as a program called “Self Help Housing.” This program allows homeowners to provide sweat equity for construction of homes under supervision by construction supervisor sponsored by a housing authority or other non-profit organization.

Recently, Housing Partners in Riverton applied for a Self Help Grant for technical assistance in the development of a Self Help Project. Four homes are now occupied and financed by Rural Development. For more information, contact the following:

Key Contact Info:

LOLA J. LUCERO,
Rural Development Manager
Northeast Area Office
1949 Sugarland Drive, Suite #118
Sheridan, WY 82801-5749
(307) 672-5820
Email: lola.lucero@wy.usda.gov

Theme or Issue #2 New Non-Profit Subdivision if areas are available without causing urban sprawl.

Unable to obtain affordable housing without reasonable lot purchase prices, and need for improved lots with paved streets, curbs, and gutter and city utilities.

Solution #1: The possibility of the Town of Ranchester, a local rural utility cooperatives or a community action agency, purchasing property and obtaining a loan and or grant developing the subdivision and selling lots on a non-profit basis to promote the use of local buildings, supplies, and labor.

An old example is Texas Trails Subdivision of which the Town of Moorcroft was the developer and supervised the sale of these improved lots to private buyers. These lots didn't sell right away, however, as recent industries came into the area they have been sold for affordable housing.

Key Contact Info:

LOLA J.LUCERO
Rural Development Manager
Northeast Area Office
1949 Sugarland Dr. Suite 118
Sheridan, WY 82801-5749
(307) 672-5820, ext. 4
lola.lucero@wy.usda.gov

Solution #2: The possibility of a Mutual Self Help Site Development and Construction Project. (Found in FmHA Instruction 1944-I, paragraph 1944.403)

The construction method by which participating families organized in groups generally of 4 to 10 families utilize their own labor to reduce the total construction cost of their homes. Participating families complete construction work on their own homes by an exchange of labor with one another. The mutual self help method must be used for new construction.

Organizations may be State, political subdivision, or public non-profit corporations. Sponsors may be an existing entity that is willing and able to assist an applicant, with or without charge, in applying for a grant and in carrying out responsibilities under the agreement.

Key Contact Info:

JOHN JOHNSON
Rural Development Specialist
Rural Development
P.O. Box 820
Casper, WY 82501
(307) 261-6315
john.johson@wy.usda.gov

BARNEY HARLESS, Coordinator
Housing Assistance Council
Little Dixie
502 West Duke
Hugo, OK 74743
(580) 326-5165

Ranchester Community Assessment

Team Recommendations

Joel Strong, Planning Staff Officer

UDSA, Forest Service
Bighorn National Forest
2013 Eastside, 2nd Street
Sheridan, WY 82801
(307) 674-2645
FAX: (307) 674-2668
Email: jstrong@fs.fed.us

Introductory Comments:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the community of Ranchester and our sponsors, especially those that contributed time, lodging and meals (Old Stone House B&B and Branding Iron Restaurant, community leaders). Unfortunately, I was caught in a snowstorm in the middle of South Dakota on Tuesday, November 27th and not able to make the first day of listening sessions. But, I was briefed by the rest of the team and did participate in activities on Wednesday. I'm also a resident of Sheridan County for over 14 years, so I have claims to being a "close community" inhabitant. My comments may be brief, but hopefully helpful.

My expertise is primarily in recreation and tourism, although I do have formal training in sociology and psychology. Most of my detailed comments address **tourism** issues. Some of the suggestions offered in my report came directly from participants at the listening sessions. I also had the opportunity to visit Ranchester the following week and note a few additional ideas. My comments are not meant to be critical, but rather offer some observations with suggestions that help make Ranchester an even better community. I was very impressed with the sincere interest of the residents and their willingness to move forward to the future.

I will be happy to address any of these issues in more detail or provide additional clarification.

RECREATION AND TOURISM

CHALLENGE: Tourism/Community Involvement – Tourism can definitely be an engine of growth, capable of rejuvenating other sectors of the economy. Tourism has the potential to:

- Provide employment for a multitude of skills
- Provide for entrepreneurial opportunities
- Bring development to our rural areas, and
- If responsibly practiced, be kind to the environment

But, don't expect miracles. Tourism does not just happen. It must be planned. It will not solve all problems -- it may even introduce new concerns. I feel the town of Ranchester is in an excellent position to capture visitors on the way to Yellowstone National Park or the Black Hills of South Dakota. Your location adjacent to Interstate 90 and your Main Street being US Highway 14, a major corridor over the Big Horn Mountains, are important assets.

Another important aspect of the tourism market is working together to ensure quality customer service. All services need to promote the concept. All too often segments of the tourism industry think in a short sighted myopic way – they tend to have a rather limited view of the product they offer – only the goods and services within their own four walls. The experience a visitor has at the local gas station directly affects his view of the community no matter if his/her lodging were excellent. **ATTITUDE is the number-one factor for insuring success in the tourism business.**

SOLUTION: To get started, the **communities** must be willing to work together to make tourism a success. If you noticed, I said “communities”. I feel that the towns of Ranchester and Dayton should be working more closely in trying to meet the needs of the visiting public. Each area has opportunities that are unique and different. The school system is shared – Can-not businesses try to promote each other? The Assessment team agrees that it's critical to have a restaurant in the town, not just for a place to eat, but also as a local “watering hole” for all residents to socialize. Until the Ranch House is reopened, it may be appropriate to make arrangements for free bus service to the “Branding Iron” in Dayton if lodging is secured in the town of Ranchester. These may be “far out” ideas, but working together may generate income possibilities for both towns.

Tourism starts with planning and marketing. I will discuss this later in this report. I would recommend the community, through its business establishments, look at ways to integrate tourism into an economic development agenda for both Ranchester and Dayton.

Last but not least, no matter what direction you decide to proceed, I would encourage you to do it with **full community support**. Apathy is a comment we hear often from smaller towns across the State of Wyoming. Yours is no exception. The key is not allowing that to get you down – move forward. Take a poll in your town or conduct meetings to see how people feel about elevating tourism and how it could be made to work better. This involvement should be part of a public policy process that brings everyone into the discussions.

Of course, how do we fund all this? One option would be the Rural Community Assistance Grant program (RCA Grants) under the Economic Action Program (Authority - 1990 Farm Bill). The overall goal of this program is to facilitate sustainable community development in rural areas and to foster a link between communities and forest resource management. More specifically, direction provides for:

- Building relationships between communities, agencies and businesses to collaboratively solve problems, and implement projects.

- Providing assistance in community leadership.
- Providing assistance to develop and implement Community Action Plans.
- Provide assistance to business retention and expansion projects and feasibility studies.
- Providing assistance for infrastructure development, improvement or other sustainable rural development projects.

Projects tied to a Community Action Plan receive primary consideration. This assessment should help the town develop such an action plan. Requests for grant dollars to develop or update strategic plans are also an appropriate use of the funds. The grant proposal deadline is usually June 1 of each year. Match requirements of at least 20 percent are required. Your local contact is Margi Brayton at (307) 674-2675 (USDA Forest Service, Bighorn National Forest, 2013 Eastside 2nd Street, Sheridan, WY 82801.

CHALLENGE: Planning - Ranchester is located at the junction of two major highways, is near the scenic Big Horn Mountains, and has historic significance that puts it in the position to capture a segment of the tourism market. Most of the residents are already aware of these attributes, but I'm sure the casual visitor does not tune into this information. Likewise, it's unclear to me if the town has capitalized on its resources in a structured format that allows for planned growth. Marketing should be done to promote what you want promoted. However, you do not want to significantly change the character of the town or its' surroundings without a **"Plan"**.

This issue is even larger in scope than just tourism, we must consider all aspects of community growth, including new industry opportunities, housing, public infrastructure and services. I would encourage you, at a minimum, to do the following:

- Integrate tourism efforts into a comprehensive economic development plan.
- Cooperate and insist on help from State and Federal governments
- Encourage cooperation among neighboring communities and/or counties
- Encourage cooperation among private, public and nonprofit sectors.

SOLUTION: How do you get started? I would suggest you consider a consultant to provide these services and complete a **"Community Development Plan"** – your recreation/tourism resources would be one critical element of this planning process. You may want to contact some local firms to get an idea on the complexity of the job and the dollars necessary to complete the work. It may be possible to establish the Plan in phases to make it more economical and efficient. I might suggest that you look outside your own community for the initial phases of this work. Bringing in new ideas and an independent view of the issues is critical for mapping out the future. This work should be followed up by or integrated with an "Economic Development Team". **It's an excellent time to begin the process before you finalize plans with WDOT for reconstruction work on Main Street – You need an integrated program.**

Our Forest (Bighorn) has had some excellent success in working with EDAW with offices in Fort Collins, CO. (Address: EDAW, Inc., 240 East Mountain Avenue, Fort Collins, CO. 80524 – Phone: (970) 484-8518). They have a web site that provides additional information (<http://www.edaw.com/>). Your main contact person would be Jana McKenzie. Their offices do extensive work including economic development, land use planning, streetscape design, environmental planning, development of design guidelines and zoning. These consultants should be able to look at a program that looks at all phases of planning. It is extremely important that you **plan for the future today, while you still have options.**

CHALLENGE: Marketing Opportunities – It appears the community of Ranchester has some recreational opportunities that are not easily identified or promoted in such a way that would provide optimum benefits. All too often we assume, as residents, that recreation sites are easy to find – We know where they are. All too often we assume that the services provided are adequate and fulfill our customers desires. Promoting what the town has to offer is critical to ensuring that tourism remains an important part of economic development. Marketing is not just promotions, but matching visitors and their expectations to the services of the community. It includes steps necessary to fulfill customer needs and ways to monitor success. It's more than creating a brochure.

Here are a few suggestions that may lay the foundations for a more effective marketing program.

SOLUTIONS:

- 1) Constituent Surveys – Visitor/User surveys are the building blocks of future recreation plans and developments. It's important to determine if the public is satisfied with the facilities and services offered in your community. What would they like to see changed or added? Surveys may include such information as demographic characteristics, perceptions regarding the adequacy of facilities and services, and scales of development. Survey participants should include visitors to Ranchester (and Dayton) and the resident users. Varied tools can be used to collect this data. If the community does not already have this information, I would suggest that a survey be conducted. It may be as simple as asking the local business to gather data from clients. Another choice is to use an established institution such as the University of Wyoming through its extension service. The Bighorn National Forest conducted such a study through use of a graduate student project in the early 90's. Tex Taylor, UW Cooperative Extension (Phone – (307) 766-5682), can provide some background information. The consultant listed above (EDAW) may also provide more details.
- 2) Signing – I'm impressed with the Connor Battlefield, its facilities and history. The community may have an excellent guide to the area, but you have to obtain a copy before its usable. I would recommend the town work with the State Highway Department to improve signing for the Connor Battlefield. When I first arrived in Sheridan County I was rather surprised to find the historic site had camping, fishing

access and picnicking. I venture to guess that most travelers feel the Battlefield has historic significance, but not recreational facilities. These facilities are an important selling point that is being missed.

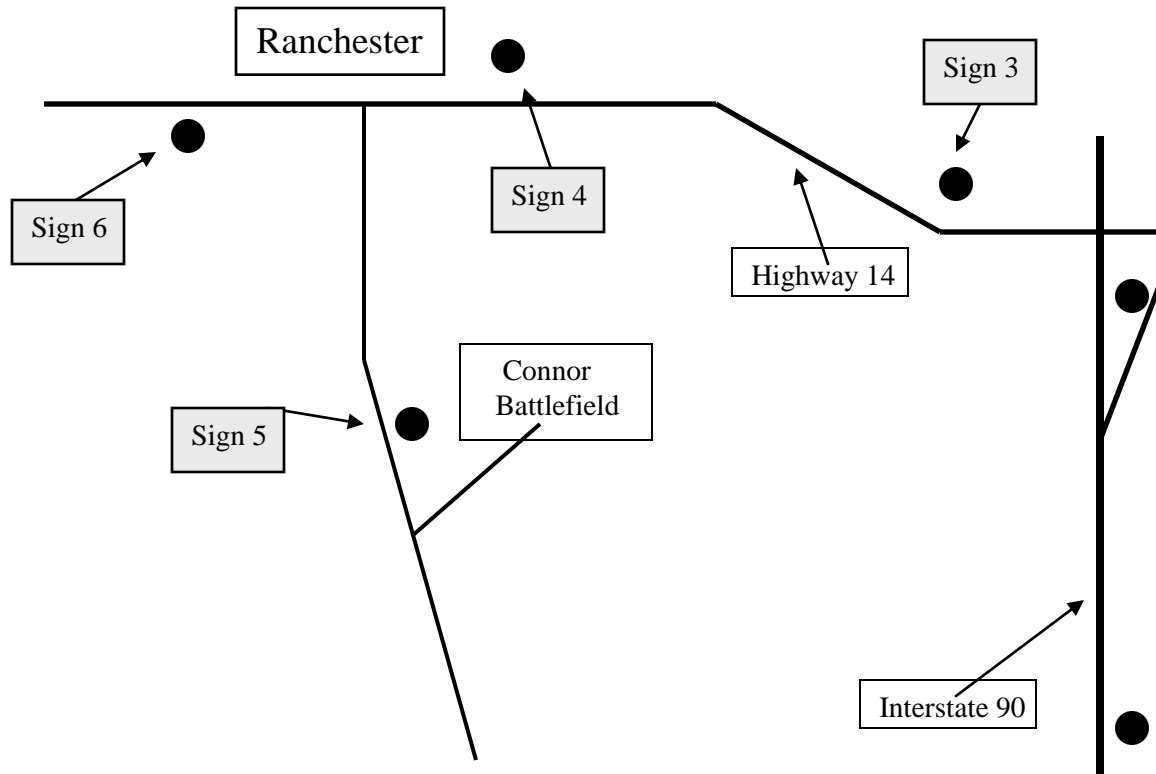
At the end of this report I included an example of signing that may help to better promote the Battlefield. Although numerous signs announce this site, I would replace most of them with ones containing more detailed information on recreation opportunities. I would place heavy emphasis on the use of international symbols. These signs (following this report) are only an example -- exact wording would require more design time. All signs should meet MUTCD (Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices) standards (e.g., size, color).

- 3) Themes/Interpretation – One of the best ways to promote the community is through the use of themes. Themes are statements that collectively assemble subject matter in a manner that is easier to understand and communicate. A theme is the central or key idea to any presentation whether it's oral or written. Themes should be stated as short, simple complete sentences, contain only one idea, reveal the overall purpose of the presentation (e.g., marking the area) be specific, and interestingly worded (if possible using active words). Themes can be used to help design new structures, provide a pleasing streetscape and ultimately promote a unified concept of what the community is all about. Perhaps the town already has a theme for marketing. If so verify it or develop/refine another one (again, consider work with Dayton) and aggressively market it through tourism outlets. Be careful of mixing too many ideas together.
- 4) Infrastructure - Maintaining infrastructure is critical to making a favorable impression on the visitor. Simple things can make all the difference. Keeping facilities clean is extremely important. Keeping storefronts an attraction not an eyesore is important. I understand the town is working with the Wyoming Department of Highways to redesign Main Street. I commend this approach. First impressions are important!
- 5) Intergovernmental Cooperation – I would recommend that the town, businesses and the county continue to work closely with the Forest Service in promoting the area. Information should be readily available about Ranchester and its attractions at public facilities. Correspondingly, the town should have information about the National Forest. The town should work closely with the State Division of Tourism and ensure that all attractions are given adequate coverage. It was also apparent that the town does not have a lodging tax structure making it difficult to work closely with the Sheridan Chamber of Commerce. You may wish to reconsider this idea. I believe it's important that Ranchester and its businesses be promoted as part of the Sheridan Country area. Again, don't forget about working with your neighbor – Dayton, Wyoming and the Bighorn Mountain Country Coalition.

As a sidelight, I would encourage you to work closely with the Bighorn National Forest and their local office, especially as they continue the Forest Plan Revision. It's critical that the town gets input into this process.

CHALLENGE: Community Center/Youth - It was obvious that leaders of the community, the youth, and many of the residents want some type of community center. The Team felt it might be more appropriate to use one of the vacant buildings and begin the process slowly. It could be a multi-purpose building to better meet all needs. But, take it in small steps rather than commit all the town's energy to a structure that will be costly to maintain and may or may not be supported by its users. Try the concept out first. I would encourage you to form a team to address these issues composed of representatives of different user groups. Please don't forget to include the youth – they are the future.

Likewise, I clearly heard a suggestion to strengthen ties with the youth – development of a Teen Council representation is a good idea. This individual(s) could participate with the city government not only offering suggestions, but also developing a level of trust and support.



Sign Location Placement Map

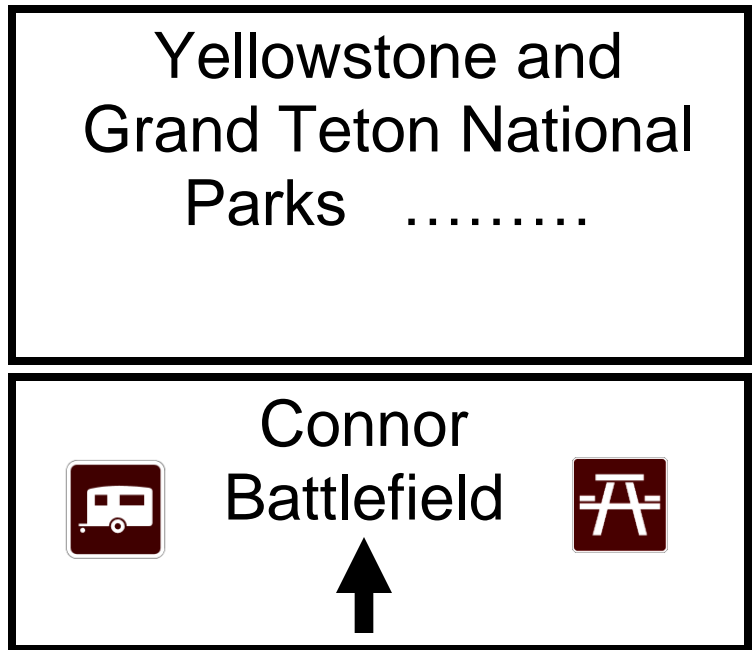
Connor Battlefield
Ranchester Community Assessment
No Scale



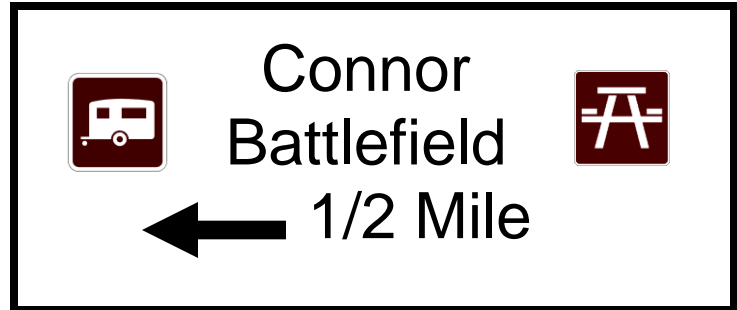
SIGN 1 -- Interstate 90 Exit Sign: Suggest this sign be redesigned with the use of international symbols to let the public know of available opportunities (camping, picnic use). It may be possible to insert the symbols on the existing sign.



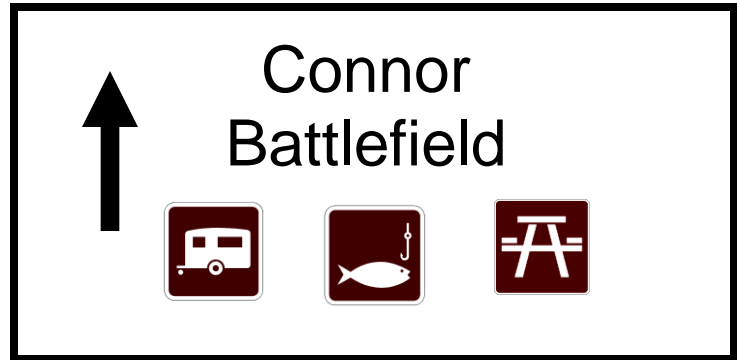
SIGN 2 -- Interstate 90 Exit Ramp Sign: Suggest this sign be redesigned with use of international symbols. It should follow the same format and colors as the existing Interstate sign.



SIGN 3 -- Remember Sign (Top of Hill): This sign would look better matched (length) with the existing Yellowstone National Park Sign. It now appears as an “thought”. I realize this was the most convenient way of mounting the present sign but improvements would give a better image to the arriving public. Again the use of international symbols would help “advertise” the sites opportunities.



SIGN 4 AND 6 -- Directional In-Town Signs: Both these signs, especially for westbound traffic, appear too small. They get lost with the other buildings and infrastructure. Use international symbols – maintain the brown recreational sign color – consider a larger sign or better placement.



SIGN 5 -- Reminder Sign on Gillette Street: This is the only time that recreation opportunities at Connor Battlefield are mentioned in the design of signs. Unfortunately, most vehicles pass the site on US Highway 14 without knowing that camping, fishing, and picnicking exist. I would again use international symbols – making all signs consistent.

WHAT WAS SAID AT THE INTERVIEWS

The Resource Team spent two days interviewing the local residents to hear what they had to say. Those being interviewed were directed to answer three questions:

- What are the major problems/challenges in your community?
- What are the major strengths/assets of your community?
- What projects would you like to see implemented in your community in the next two, five, ten or twenty years?

We have listed below, without comment, what we heard from those who volunteered to be interviewed.

What are the major problems and challenges in your community?

- community apathy and complacency (ditto 7 times)
- some people in community not wanting things to change
- infrastructure problems i.e. natural gas, phone
- lack of activity with in the community - most of activities are based in Sheridan
- No restaurant
- more businesses
- lack of respect of others
- people don't stay out of others business
- low economy in Ranchester
- no restaurant
- no rec center
- no jobs for younger people
- nothing to attract people
- boring
- offers nothing to youth which causes a division between youth and older folks
- lack of support of educators by community
- very easy to get in trouble
- two faced people
- town leadership
- go to Sheridan for stuff to do
- to much change recently
- junky stuff in peoples property
- certain people seem to run everything
- lighting in parks
- no housing available for buy or renting
- minor drug problem
- communication to people from leaders
- teenagers not taken seriously
- lack of restaurant

- lack of support for local business (ditto 2 times)
- living in the shadow of a larger town (ditto 2 times)
- need beautification, welcoming climate when you enter town, run down buildings
- no recycle program
- water facility bad taste of chemicals
- lack of kids activities other than sports
- need to stop tourist traffic more
- maintaining of infrastructure, land value assessment
- financing of infrastructure
- beautification needed
- lack of a restaurant, needs to be focused for local people
- community center for everyone
- no restaurant, not drawing people
- lack of light industry
- lack of affordable housing for rent and buy
- lack of finances to develop land into residence
- definite need for mid level income housing in whole county
- lack of cooperation in new business development
- lack of infrastructure to handle expanded tourism
- not tapping into area as destination
- jobs for young people
- lack of things for tourist to do, not developed
- empty commercial properties
- projecting a dying image
- not soliciting input from ag community
- not looking at ag related businesses
- apathy (ditto 3 times)
- something for youth to do
- lack of community participation
- loss of restaurant
- complacency
- lack of community pride
- need to replace a basic level of business services
- bad water quality
- lack of affordable housing
- need to keep families here
- lack of local support for local businesses
- marketing the town to tourist
- physical appearance
- 4 lane highway becomes a speed way
- too many businesses for sale
- lack of support from Chamber of commerce (ditto twice)
- lack of desire on residents part to change
- sewer infrastructure
- prisoner of Qwest

- no local jobs
- drugs
- lack of natural gas
- businesses not mutually referring people to other businesses
- lack of adequate
- barbed wire for telephone lines
- expensive phone services
- no sign promotions for Hwy 14 as route to Yellowstone
- no semi parking (ditto 2 times)
- too many vacant buildings
- kids being rowdy at night
- need more for youth to do
- may not know our purpose (are we a bedroom community, etc)
- lack of restaurant
- lack of affordable housing
- lack of law enforcement/resistance of county and community (minimum but vocal)
- lack of assistance/response time from Sheriff's Dept.
- lack of community pride/attitudes towards progression
- lack of community involvement (actively)
- lack of acceptance of change, townspeople are dragging their feet
- junk/old cars
- lack of shopping, restaurant,
- small businesses being able to make it – help keep businesses
- lack of support for businesses
- lack of minor stockyard close to town
- how to get people to stop here
- lack of restaurant
- lack of restaurant
- drug problem in school – not aggressively working on this
-

What are the major strengths and assets of your community?

- new administration
- location, view
- school system is fantastic
- strong water infrastructure
- not land locked by large land owners
- great living in small town
- great outdoor opportunities
- recreation opportunities
- small school system
- a lot of nice people
- best school in district
- semi quiet town

- mountains, very pretty
- not over populated
- more to offer than Dayton
- small school
- low crime
- accepting
- helps each other out
- no gun problem
- people care what youth thinks
- good water supply
- state park in an asset
- good parks for kids
- good property available to be developed
- great core of people who want town to move forward
- school system is great
- good core of good people who get burned out doing everything
- history is deep and location is good
- great small town atmosphere
- great proximity to mountain and forest
- great schools
- good churches
- reasonably safe place to live and raise children
- place where kids can make own choices
- main access route to Yellowstone
- people in the community are supportive even if they are not vocal
- schools are good
- location is good
- a lot to see
- lack of sprawl
- schools
- very favorable climate
- reasonable water sewer, public facilities
- local full service bank run locally
- good access to interstate and recreation areas
- small schools are great
- schools
- area to grow
- independent cable TV
- 25 active businesses in Ranchester
- good diversified business base
- rotary pond
- library is a great facility
- community events are getting really good
- great fire protection
- full service bank
- dentist

- full service insurance
- beautiful place
- small town living
- good school district
- location mtns, other towns
- major artery to Yellowstone and location to I90 (iii)
- good location for small business relocation if problems are corrected
- room for growth
- water infrastructure
- hwy 14
- people want to live here
- people want to retire here
- school system is good
- cleaning up town (iii)
- physical location
- city admin has gotten more progressive
- getting funds for paving streets (iii)
- new ordinances/law enforcement
- no deficit budgets
- a good location for snowmachine business
- small community, slow controlled growth
- prime area – for tourism, bringing people in
- good proactive administration
- financial viability of community
- good relations with State
- great engineering firm
- county support of capitol facility tax
- has all elements for a town to survive
- close to main highway I-90, Highway 14 runs through town
- infrastructure
- local bank
- two active bars
- lumber yard
- school system
- day care
- city employees
- senior services out of Sheridan
- high school works with Sheridan College for college credits for students (dual enrollment)
- wonderful place to raise kids, safe
- people watch out for everybody
- community pride is growing
- support of the people
- pleasant nice place to live
- small community
- better location for highway weigh station

**What projects would you like to see completed in your
Community in the next 2, 5, 10 or 20 years?**

- community center
 - large multipurpose gym
 - kitchen
 - game room
 - swimming pool in future
 - dance club
 - work out area
 - after school facilities
 - computer room
- one town focus on elderly other town focus on youth and family
- paving (ditto 2 times)
- more trees
- youth activity program (ditto 7 times)
- more reasonable housing development
- industry/business boost
- improve appearance of town
- more jobs for youth
- bowling alley, pool hall, etc
- use empty building for businesses
- transportation between Ranchester and Dayton
- a larger business (a larger retail type business unique to the county)
- larger library
- student representative to the council
- improve image of town
- conservative expansion
- paving of total town
- restaurant
- joint water treatment plant with Dayton with water line to Ranchester
- trail system on top of the water line for biking and hiking
- city beautification
- open up intersection to alleviate traffic outlet for north side of town as well as help with an already plotted development
- credit and non credit extension courses using existing facilities
- better use of school board founded activity board
- community center
- recycling facility
- establish a cemetery
- community center
- economic enhancement through community center
- better water treatment

- sidewalks
- interactive trail system through community
- museum
- auditorium for community use (long term)
- regional water system
- broadband electronic capabilities
- conservative housing growth
- 1,000 target of population to stabilize economy
- settling system for water prior to treatment
- more cooperation between Dayton, Ranchester, Parkman
- use of rail siding
- new subdivision
- restaurant
- community center
- bigger police department
- better telecommunications services
- paving
- city beautification
- main street beautification
- move power poles
- reason to slow down and stop on Main Street
- unify Dayton and Ranchester
- get atmosphere like Dayton Main Street
- more trees
- light industry businesses
- rec center/youth program
- subdivision geared to single family residences in an affordable range, moderate income
- beautification
- redesign main street to be less of a straight shot
- whole community center, not just for youth
- more housing opportunities
- a little larger size, adding a little population and business (adding critical mass)
- larger variety of services
- natural gas
- fiber optics
- better reputation, overcome the dumpy town image
- reduction of for sale signs in business property
- grow to be twice size it is now
- reasonable growth
- quality environment
- beautification of Hwy 14
- community center
- tie-flume museum
- small, functional police department

- water treatment – bio filter upgrade to a more economic well run system
- drug problem, vandalism – keep this low – stay on top of
- community center
- senior center
- continued efforts to make it a pleasant looking community – clean up efforts continued
- few more local business – self supporting to stay in business
- rural area around Ranchester stay rural
- small growth
- more economically strong – business
- more self supporting of business
- paving – community involvement in city beautification
- understanding of long term benefits of city beautification