

About the City
by
Councilman Kingery

My summer is going way too fast! How about yours? My summer employment with the U.S. Forest Service started on May 16th and three days later I left for Iowa. Seems only yesterday that I was in Iowa for the Main Street Wyoming tour, when in reality it has been over a month. It must be my age catching up with me!

The Iowa tour was informative and I came back with some ideas that I believe would work in Douglas. Iowa went through an economic downturn in the 80s and some of the towns lost a lot of businesses and the downtown areas suffered seriously. The result was a lot of empty buildings that then deteriorated over the years. (Sound familiar?)

One of my favorite towns was the town of Jewel which is located north of Ames, and is a town of about 1100 population. (Smaller than Douglas!) At one time they had 13 buildings empty in the business area and all were in pretty bad shape. Some were deeded to the city and were scheduled for demolition, because the owners could not afford to do anything with them. A local pharmacist and his wife spearheaded a drive to try to save, and put back to use, some of the buildings. The first building scheduled for demolition was going to cost the city of Jewel \$24,000 to demolish and haul to the landfill. The pharmacist, his wife and a small group of local citizens asked the city to deed the building to them and give them the \$24,000 that was going to be spent for demolition. The city agreed, and that seed money along with some grant money from the National Main Street organization, and money added by the pharmacist and the group, was used to refurbish the building. Before the project was finished there were businesses that contacted the group with interest in the building. Several years later and “one building at a time” the group has completed ten of the thirteen buildings and all are occupied! Some buildings were sold and some are being rented.

Jewel has become a real “jewel” of a community as a “bedroom” community for Ames. The upper floors of the buildings were made into nice apartments and young people that work in Ames, or relocated their business to Jewel because of better rental prices, occupy most of the down town apartments and several of the businesses.

With the increase of the younger population there has been a need for more entertainment businesses, like coffee shops, bowling alley, movie theater etc. A photographer moved from Ames to Jewel to save on rent, a cabinet shop does business all over the nation from their office in Jewel. Insurance offices

re-opened in Jewel and the pharmacy business is healthy and busy with the increase in population. The local school district has a down town office. When I walked into the school office a young lady came up and asked me if I had lived in Basin, Wyoming at one time. I had known her father and mother many years ago in Basin and was a business partner in construction with her uncle! A small world we live in! Wyoming exports young people!

The other towns we visited have similar stories of re-doing the down town areas instead of just letting the downtown continue to die. Sometimes the impetus for the projects was people returning to their "home town" after being gone for many years. Some had been successful and wanted to return something back to the community they had grown up in. Some were funded by wealthy people within the community. At times it was someone that had ideas and energy and they became the organizers that made things happen.

Our down town area has several buildings with upstairs rooms that could be made into nice apartments. We need rentals. Young people like to be down town in an apartment where there are other young people. We already have the theater remodeled. We have a coffee shop/book store close to down town. We have a bowling alley and bars down town. We have restaurants and cafes down town. We have Jackalope square for pleasant outdoor visits. We need someone to start remodeling our down town buildings and make a pleasant place for young people to live and work.

The National Main Street organization has architects and engineers available for evaluation and design work. They have grants available to help fund projects. Sherri Mullinnix is the Wyoming chairperson for Wyoming Main Street. She can help you get information you need to get started.

We could have local architects in offices downtown, insurance companies could be down town. How about a nice lounge area for college age people to meet, use the internet, do a little wine tasting and have some snacks. How about coffee specialty shops with fresh baked items and a place to sit and visit instead of drive up and drive away. If we can provide a place for young people to live down town we can have evening businesses staying open later. It is a "win-win" situation just waiting to happen.

Building contractors and investors, here is an opportunity that needs you!