



La Junta Community Assessment Report

February 23 & 24, 2015

Introduction

Welcome to the community assessment for the Colorado City of La Junta. Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) is proud to offer affordable, quality assessments for all Colorado member communities to build and maintain vibrant commercial districts, town centers, and downtowns in our state. Qualifying communities in Colorado have the opportunity to apply for assistance through DCI and receive a reduced rate thanks to the in-kind contribution of consultants from DCI's professional membership base.

The DCI community assessment gathers community leaders and stakeholders to develop a structure and process for the community to support local businesses and a vibrant commercial district. The process results in a road map to guide community leaders in providing services and training to help local businesses thrive.

To ensure quality and affordable services, DCI assembles a team of professional consultants experienced in their discipline, including designers and architects, marketing and branding specialists, land use and urban planners, redevelopment and real estate specialists, economic developers, and finance experts, to work in communities over the course of two days to contribute to this final report. The assessment team members value the invitation to learn about and assist your community, and worked diligently to provide relevant and realistic input toward the betterment of your community.

Executive Summary

In the fall of 2014, the City of La Junta requested a community assessment from Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI). The assessment visit was held on February 23 and 24, 2015 with the purpose of identifying community issues and opportunities, as well as to provide tools, insights and direction to help La Junta achieve its community revitalization goals.

Prior to this visit, the City of La Junta planned the agenda, identified key stakeholders for focus groups, and provided extensive background information about the history and status of La Junta's downtown revitalization efforts and any issues facing the community.

DCI organized an assessment team with combined experience in organizational management, marketing and promotions, historic preservation, economic development, land-use planning, transportation planning, urban design, resource development, and financing mechanisms. Upon arrival in the community, team members were given a presentation on the community history and current issues, and a tour of the town. Throughout the day, the team conducted focus groups with elected officials, town staff, service providers, business owners, and interested residents. The focus groups allowed the team to meet directly with stakeholders and hear multiple perspectives about the issues facing the downtown and the community as a whole. It also provided a chance for team members to ask the community about the perceptions, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities related to La Junta.

On the second day of the assessment, DCI's team members gathered to discuss their observations and formulate recommendations. That evening, team members presented their findings in the form of a PowerPoint presentation

followed by a question-and-answer session open to the community-at-large. The following report provides a brief history of the community, a list of observations gathered from the community, and provides action recommendations for short and long-term implementation in six areas: Management and Organization , Marketing and Promotions, Economic Development and Restructuring, Cultural Heritage, Physical Improvements and Design, and Creative Placemaking and Creative Economy. The report appendices contains an action plan and toolkit to assist the community in implementing the provided recommendations.

Background Information and Historical Context¹

La Junta, “The Junction”, is a regional hub for Southeast Colorado, and has been since before its incorporation. Just eight miles northeast of the downtown, La Junta got its start from Bent’s Fort, the first major white American settlement along the Santa Fe Trail. The Fort was a popular trading post and drew hunters, trappers, and travelers from far and wide. After the Fort’s destruction in 1849, La Junta began to form as a junction for agricultural and ranching ventures and incorporated as a city in 1881. La Junta still draws many farmers and ranchers in today who come to purchase their agricultural products on the edge of town.

When the train came West, La Junta entered its next phase of development and became a bustling railroad town. For some time, the city was a center of commerce and a popular stopover for railroad workers. Theodore Roosevelt even stopped in La Junta to give one of his campaign speeches. Although it does not generate as much activity within town today, the railroad industry still contributes significantly to the local economy, filling up the local hotels on week nights with engineers between shifts.

La Junta today finds its economy quite diverse. Besides agriculture and the railroad, it has the Otero Junior College, with about 1,500 students, a medical campus, and an industrial park. Demographic information provided by the Colorado State Demography Office, within the Department of Local Affairs, show that government, health care and social assistance, and retail trade provide the most jobs in the city. Other notable demographic information provided shows that La Junta’s population is aging and has a negative annual growth rate.

Besides its diverse economic base, La Junta also has several physical assets. The local skate park, outdoor public pool, museums, and Fox Theater are popular among locals and within the region. City Park located south of downtown serves as host to community events and activities throughout the year. Several historic buildings still stand and their stories are still told by the locals whose families have lived in La Junta for generations. Additionally, the largest set of dinosaur tracks in North America and Bent’s Old Fort National Historic Site are other popular draws for visitors from around the nation.

The City of La Junta has a lot going for it, including the community members themselves, who have been working hard over the past several years to revitalize the downtown. Several events are organized annually including Early Settler Days and a 5k run. La Junta also recently began participating in the Pedal the Plains bicycle race. The city has an Urban Renewal Authority that: purchased the historic Plaza Building, incentivized a hotel and communications company to locate in town, and offers façade improvement grants to local businesses. The local arts community is strong. An artists’ collective called the 1st Street Emporium was able to open shop after successful rent negotiations with a building owner. Their sister group, the Southeast Colorado Creative Partnership (SECCP), is working on a bench art project, a mural program, and an artistic Christmas tree display off the highway, just to name a few of their initiatives. The city is also striving to lead efforts in the community’s development. In 2014 they completed a reimagine La Junta visioning exercise and named Economic Development, Parks and Trails, Neighborhood Improvements, Downtown Development, and Creative Arts as top priorities. With strong roots, supportive leadership, and a passionate community, La Junta has immense potential to make positive and lasting change towards a vibrant economy and community.

¹ Sourced from La Junta City Staff, VisitLaJunta.org, and community focus groups held Feb 23-24, 2015

Focus Group Observations

The following observations were made during the four focus groups held on the first day of the community assessment.

- La Junta has many community champions with enthusiasm and creative ideas for positive change.
- La Junta has a rich heritage and a story to tell.
- There are several groups actively working on initiatives that could benefit from collaboration.
- La Junta has a strong focus on tourism and drawing visitors to the area.
- Many locals are not aware of the amenities and activities available in the community.
- Community meetings draw a crowd, but those present do not represent the diversity of La Junta's population.
- La Junta has a diversity of economic and physical assets; however, many are not well connected to each other or to the downtown.
- Many historical treasures are located in the city, but there has not been a precedent for preservation thus far.
- There is a strong arts community that has already taken the lead on using creativity to beautify and strengthen the city.

Assessment Team Recommendations

This assessment focuses on activating stakeholders and resources in a comprehensive approach to capture and direct existing activities into the following topic areas that are vital to revitalizing downtowns:

- **Management and organization:** Primarily focuses on resource management including human resources, partnerships, and finances.
- **Marketing and promotions:** Primarily focuses on branding and messaging, communication, and events.
- **Economic development and restructuring:** Primarily looks at opportunities to collect data, enhance services for business, and identify and catalyze underutilized assets.
- **Physical improvements and design:** Primarily looks at beautification, infrastructure, parking, and connectivity.
- **Cultural heritage:** Primarily focuses on leveraging historical assets and communicating the history and culture of a place.
- **Creative placemaking and creative economy:** Primarily looks at creative approaches to revitalization initiatives and harnessing local arts and creative assets to benefit projects.

The observations gathered from the community have been categorized into these topic areas. Recommendations specific to the City of La Junta follow each observation.

Management and Organization

The first section of this report focuses on management and organization, which includes collaboration efforts, volunteer recruitment and management, fundraising, development of operational strategies and communications between stakeholder groups. Management involves getting everyone working toward the same goal, and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a downtown revitalization program. The three principal components of management are:

1. Community and media relations
2. Volunteer development
3. Fundraising

A governing board and standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of a volunteer-driven program. Volunteers are best coordinated and supported by a paid, full-time or part-time program director. This structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders. While a paid downtown coordinator may not currently be feasible, it is something to strive for in the future.

In addition to a volunteer-driven program, numerous successful management structures exist throughout the country and are driven largely by local circumstances. In some towns, for example, the chamber of commerce is strong enough to add an organizational component designated to focus on the downtown. Other towns develop some form of a special district to dedicate resources and focus to downtown.

Regardless of the organizational structure chosen, one overriding factor is demonstrated time and again: the most successful communities accomplish their desired outcomes by developing a solid management component early in the process to oversee their downtown revitalization efforts. If the community does not develop a solid management component to oversee and manage the process early, the program will most likely not accomplish the desired outcomes.

Given these realities, we cannot overemphasize the importance of placing organizational development amongst the highest priorities of early revitalization activities. Most, if not all, of the recommendations in this report are made within the framework of this understanding and the assumption that this is the foundation of all community revitalization efforts.

Observation: La Junta has many partners and resources working to make the community stronger. There is an impressive array of people and projects working in this community. La Junta partners are innovative and energetic champions.

Recommendations: La Junta is a small city, making it unnecessary to house information in multiple venues. You can share information more successfully with less work through increased collaboration.

- Simple is better. There were several comments about the process of gleaning information from “4 websites” and social media. Simplify the process for finding information about La Junta by consolidating resources and information.
 - Create one La Junta website that is a virtual one-stop shop for tourists, businesses, residents, and volunteers. By housing city, tourism, economic development, chamber, and events on one site you can facilitate greater awareness for those visiting the site and reduce the time and costs of maintenance.
 - Social media is a must for connecting with tourists as well as young adults and teens. Consider linking and “liking” all of the La Junta social media venues so that your online community shows the tight knit connections that make La Junta so special.
 - Consider establishing a visitors’ center that uses existing resources to create a seven-day a week option. The 1st Street Emporium is a venue on Highway 50 that is open every day. Using some space in this venue to house the visitors’ center would bring additional foot traffic into the store. Tourism dollars could be used to pay the rent on the building, and the Emporium artists could provide information to visitors and customers.
- Use the coming Comprehensive Plan update to engage and interlace partners and ideas. The process to update the plan will require a lot of meetings. Use these meetings to gather input on multiple areas so that you can use the process to achieve multiple goals and avoid engagement burn-out. Be creative in your engagement techniques to be sure you engage the entire community

- DOLA offers funding to assist with comprehensive planning projects. Work with your Regional Manager to learn about funding opportunities. Consider updating your land use code in coordination with your comprehensive plan update.
- Declare the downtown as a priority and be sure there is a downtown-specific section to the comprehensive plan. The downtown section should include goals and policies that are specific to downtown.
- Declare historic preservation a priority moving forward. These buildings create unique character and provide viable housing and retail space. Be sure to include historic preservation as a key component of the comprehensive plan.
- Engage all demographics in planning and activities. The planning process will give a great opportunity to engage with all of the groups in La Junta. Be sure to a dialogue is facilitated about continued engagement and preferences for events with demographics that may not usually be involved or come to meetings.
- Existing successful partnerships are strong and innovative. Consider how the partnerships can be strengthened to add even more value to the community.
 - Otero Junior College is currently a great asset for facilities. The facilities would be even more appreciated if the community could use them broadly without being a student. Consider how to negotiate a deal for locals to use the facilities as a part of the community and college partnership.
 - The college, school system, SBDC, and Workforce are great partners for training opportunities. Create a running list of training that the businesses, residents, students, employees, and employers would like to have available. Then talk to all partners to determine how to hold desired trainings.
 - The college is also a great place to gain access to young adults for interns, researchers, employees, and even social media mentors. Work with the college to identify the contact for internships and if there is a way to hold a La Junta Opportunity Fair.
 - Tourism, Chamber, SBDC, Workforce, and Economic Development should create a combined strategic communications plan. La Junta is small enough that each of these groups can take on a role in communications, development, and outreach with a specific focus. Considering the best use of time and money is important. Clearly identify your target groups and look for proven advertising methods to reach them.
 - Consider an inclusive chamber model with investor benefits. The entire downtown benefits when more businesses and restaurants are listed in collateral material and on the website. Review the options for tiered benefit levels in the Chamber Investor Model guide in the appendices.

Observation: Deteriorating properties are not exclusively a private problem. Individual property owners ideally would be responsible and would benefit from improvements. The fact is that La Junta is suffering because of lack of upkeep. La Junta has volunteers and resources to assist with property improvements. Improved housing quality and building upkeep are priorities that go beyond the private owners.

Recommendations: Develop a program to improve housing options in downtown La Junta that engages people who care about the community, fills an immediate need, and facilitates a stronger relationship with absentee and other property owners.

- Develop a partnership with realtors to identify downtown housing that could be improved. Realtors are usually aware of the strengths and weaknesses of a community and have a lot of opportunities to share information. Identify realtors who are familiar with La Junta and enlist them to help create an inventory of housing in the downtown that is (1) Good; (2) In need of a little love; or (3) In need of heavy work. The realtors would be able to get a commission if they rent the properties so it should be in their interest to help.
- Use the list of housing as rated by the realtors (categories 2 or 3), to target property owners who own downtown housing options. Create a message to property owners that includes background on La Junta's economic situation and the impact of deteriorating properties; the financial and volunteer programs to help property owners, and the potential for revenue for upgraded housing. Offer the property owners an agreement: the City will work with volunteers to make improvements to the housing; if the housing is rented, the property owner donates the first two months' rent to the City or to the group providing volunteers.
- Engage volunteers to donate time and resources for building improvement projects. Work with the Church of the Nazarene and other groups who have shown willingness to paint, clean, and do minor improvements to buildings. Develop a plan to work in category 2 housing where property owners have signed the agreement.
- Work with the local hardware store and/or Walmart for donations of paint and building supplies for volunteer improvement projects.
- To address housing in category 3, begin discussions with the Goal Academy to consider a program for intensive renovations so that building trade students can learn through practice as they improve existing properties in La Junta.
- Consider a training looking at different innovative partnerships for rehabilitating properties and downtown housing. Work with DCI and other partners to identify training opportunities to further this discussion and facilitate ideas with La Junta partners.

Marketing and Promotions

Marketing and promotions assist in building a vital downtown by creating and delivering a positive image of the commercial district. A clearly identified image encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play, and invest in the commercial district. By marketing a district's unique characteristics to residents, investors, business owners, and visitors, an effective promotional strategy creates a positive image. This image can then be reinforced through advertising, retail promotional activity, special events, and marketing campaigns carried out by local volunteers. These activities improve consumer and investor confidence in the district and encourage commercial activity and investment in the area.

Observation: Businesses are the first line of marketing and promotions. Most times people, whether new residents or tourists, will stop into stores to ask a question to find out what is going on locally. If the employees don't share information, or even worse, share negative feedback, they may not stick around.

Recommendations: Make sure your businesses, virtually and physically, are linked in to what is happening in town. Use every opportunity to provide information to employees and shape their image of the community with positive information.

- Engage businesses with each event to include a component that draws people to stores and services. Use the strategic events matrix in the report appendices to list the community's objectives for events in La Junta. Then list each event and evaluate how many of the objectives it is meeting. Consider how to add event components that engage locals by identifying partner groups to host activities with a focus on young adults, young families,

different ethnicities, fundraising, celebrating history, etc. For example, a historical celebration could be added to an event by inviting the SECCP to host an interactive project in which people create art representing La Junta's history. The cultural diversity of La Junta could be celebrated by providing different types of ethnic food, music, and dance during an event.

- Create a contest for artists, students, etc. to decorate windows in vacant properties or non-retail businesses. Start by asking students/volunteers to inventory places around town such as vacant stores or dark windows that could be more active and beautiful with displays. Develop a series of four seasonal themes, including at least one theme from La Junta's history. Create a list of materials that should be included, like lights, for each theme. Then send a letter and meet or call each property or business owner to see if they will participate. If property owners are concerned with liability during the set up or removal of the display, consider how to treat this as a city event despite taking place on private property.
- Build awareness among employees and realtors about what is available in La Junta through regular local night familiarity tours. Familiarity tours are often held in resort communities so that the various seasonal employees are familiar with what businesses, services, and products are available. Use this as a way to invite locals to spend time together as they progress from one business to another.
- Develop options to "package" La Junta through cooperative advertising of multiple businesses. Many downtown organizations or chambers negotiate discounts or identify ways to list multiple businesses from the downtown in one place. This might be on a website or on an unsold ad page in the newspaper.
- Engage college interns to support the chamber in getting all businesses online and on social media.

Observation: The Wake-Up Breakfast shows are the best advertising. When visitors get to see La Junta come together, it attracts not only new businesses, but new residents who care about the community.

Recommendations: Focus on locals.

- Consider that tourists will come where people are, and focus on getting locals to gather where tourists and maybe new residents or neighboring towns can see and join the fun. The Plaza Park is a great gateway to the city and downtown. Look at the park as your town square. Plan a big event made up of small activities and bright colors that lead people through and around the park and up the alley into downtown.
- Consider holding another event planned by student leaders at the college and the SECCP to include many simple activities in currently inactive spaces around town. Activate the spaces with chalk art competitions and games like corn hole or horse shoes. Hold a Zumba class in the street. Place historical images and stories in window displays.
- Promote the branding of La Junta and the branding of Highway 50 as a fun and interactive activity. For example, you could have people submit slogans in a competition. Consider working with a branding professional to develop a look and feel that captures the identity and vision of the community.

Economic Development & Restructuring

The focus of economic development and restructuring is to assist in efforts to recruit, retain and expand opportunities for investment in downtown. This is accomplished by ensuring that investors and businesses are aware of all of the resources available for assistance as well as the benefits of choosing to locate their business in downtown. This includes the opportunities that may exist to capitalize on promotional activities. It also works to build strong relationships between downtown businesses, residents, and users.

Observation: There is a limited selection of products downtown, with many locals purchasing items at big-box stores on the edge of town. There is a desire for the ability to shop and eat at additional downtown businesses, especially restaurants and retail.

Recommendations:

- Provide opportunities for people to test their new business ideas. This could include creating a partnership with vacant building owners to allow pop-up shops during special events or seasons. This allows new businesses to test out the viability of their business model before signing a lease.
- Additional opportunities could be provided for start-up businesses by allowing vendor trucks at events, during particular days in the summer, or at other designated times and areas. The cost of starting a new business is very prohibitive. If people can test out their ideas first, they will be more confident and secure when opening.
- Provide rental assistance for new businesses to offset start-up costs. The La Junta Economic Development group could pay a portion of the rent with urban renewal funds. The city can contact the City of Parker to learn more about their program, a three year phased approach to rental assistance. Even paying a business' first months' rent can help make starting a business more feasible and less volatile.
- Utilize Thyme Square as an incubator for new restaurants. This commercial kitchen and restaurant site could be used by people interested in starting up a restaurant. It could be rented for certain days of the week or for a month at a time. The incubator concept could go a step further and provide business, marketing, administrative support and educational tools to prospective restaurateurs.
- Complete a simple market study to determine market strategies for attracting investment, identify business opportunities, and identify opportunity sites. Consultants can complete this type of a project in about four to six months. The completed study should help the community attract and recruit business that the community wants and can support. This type of study will give people confidence to make the investment of opening a business in La Junta.
- The best business attraction plan is a strong retention program. Nearly 80% of all new jobs come from existing businesses. If the town wants a vital economy and if a business is considering opening in La Junta, it is likely they will talk with other business and residents. It's important that what they hear is positive. The most effective message will come from existing successful business owners. Make sure your existing business receive consistent communication about business services that are available to them. Make sure there are open lines of communication.

Observation: There is a need for reuse, redevelopment, and new development in the community. Many buildings downtown have not been maintained and fallen out of use, often negatively impacting the marketability and use of nearby buildings as well.

Recommendations:

- Identify projects for the Urban Renewal Authority to focus on that will help build character in the community while ensuring a return on investment for the URA funds. Focus on your downtown as the heart and soul of your community. Concentrating efforts in a particular area helps show progress. Consider catalyst sites that are very visible and will make the most impact to your community.
- Update your zoning code. Reuse, redevelopment and new development must comply with the city's zoning code. If particular uses are not permitted, redevelopment will be too costly, and new development will be too difficult. Reinvestment will be stifled. A zoning code update should be completed shortly after your comprehensive plan has been updated. Consider including provisions for tiny homes, outdoor dining downtown, mixed uses, and other items identified in your comprehensive plan. The zoning code can include some provisions that are form-based in areas like the downtown. Form-based codes pay particular attention to the form of the building rather than the exact use. Many communities are now adopting a hybrid code that includes some traditional (Euclidian) zoning as well as some form-based provisions. Consider the following when revising your zoning code to promote downtown revitalization:

- Loosen up on use regulations - keep the use categories broad; just ensure there are no health, safety and welfare concerns.
 - Permit and incentivize offices or housing on downtown upper floors.
 - Ensure parking requirements are not too high for new uses, new development and redevelopment. Requiring too many spaces can make projects infeasible.
 - Be sure the process for development/redevelopment is clear and simple.
 - Loosen up on nonconforming uses unless it is a public safety concern.
 - Make the process easy and create incentives for development that is desired: ensure those uses are permitted by right, allow expedited permitting, etc.
- Develop a program to improve housing options in the downtown. There is a strong demand in the community for affordable, quality housing. Implement the volunteer engagement and partnership strategy described in the Management and Organization section to renovate livable spaces and fill vacant second floors. Housing is an essential component to any vital downtown.

Cultural Heritage

The city has an opportunity that not all communities have – a rich cultural heritage with two great museums, a rail road station, a National Historic Site, forest service site, dinosaur tracks, historic airport and more. This is what makes your community unique and attractive to visitors and residents. It sustains your community character and increases community pride. Celebrating, conserving, and preserving your cultural heritage and built environment is an opportunity that is not fully taken advantage of. In addition, this will be a determining component if you intend to apply to become a Colorado Main Street community.

Observation: La Junta has incredible history, both built and cultural, but there is a gap at the local level to advocate your culture and heritage.

Recommendations:

- Form an independent historic commission/board/committee/society group that can help further the other recommendations in this section and really be the champions for La Junta’s cultural heritage.
- Consider becoming a Certified Local Government (CLG) through History Colorado. Otero County is a CLG and has a Historic Preservation Advisory board. La Junta can sign on with the county or pursue their own CLG certification. CLG status ensures the municipality is conducting preservation properly and opens up a pot of money just for CLGs. This funding can pay for a historic survey, for example. In addition, CLGs have the authority to locally designate historic properties, more local control on preservation, and easier access to state and federal tax credits.
- Host educational opportunities for the community to learn about the importance and benefits of cultural and historic preservation. This is especially important for the URA, city, and the new preservation group to understand. DOLA and/or History Colorado may be able to provide training(s).
- Host a field trip to another community where successful cultural and historic preservation projects have been completed to better understand the impact on the community. Host this trip for the city, URA, economic development folks, and the new historic group. Consider opening this trip up to other active community members as well.

Observation: La Junta has a number of great historic buildings that need reinvestment. Reinvestment in these buildings can increase your tax base, improve livability and add significant character and culture to your community.

Recommendations:

- Update your historic building inventory starting with your downtown. An updated survey will help the community better understand the inventory of historic buildings. A comprehensive survey will help identify local, state, and/or national significance for historical designation. It will also help determine the availability to create potential historic districts. Designation can provide access to the state and federal preservation tax credits programs. The survey can also help determine if resources are better applied as a new CLG for La Junta or better to share responsibilities with the county.

An updated survey will identify important buildings and may begin to describe what shape they are in. Once this information is available, the city and community can have a better plan for reinvestment by prioritizing available resources. History Colorado has offered staff time to help complete a windshield survey or an initial survey. In addition, History Colorado and the State Historical Fund (SHF) offer grants to help pay for surveys. A minimum 25% cash match is required and needs to be in hand when applying for the grant. There are two grant rounds: April 1 and October 1. Be sure to get in touch with SHF if you are thinking of submitting a grant application to be sure you leave yourself enough time to complete a competitive application. A survey update similar to this should take about six months to complete.

- Use the Plaza Block building to set a precedent for a public-private partnership to save important cultural resources. Show the community the potential for buildings which are important to the identity and heritage of the community. Seek grant funding from sources such as History Colorado and DOLA for this project and as recommended in the Feasibility Report.
- Create incentives for building owners and ensure that city regulations promote saving and reusing existing buildings. Update current ordinance language, such as the zoning code, regarding historic buildings to better reflect community values. Focus on building stabilization (mainly roofs), exterior façade rehabs, and the reactivation of upper story spaces. See recommendation in the Economic Development and Restructuring section on updating the city's zoning code.
- Review local building codes as it relates to existing buildings. Consider adopting the 2012 International Building Code (IBC) and certain localized amendments to streamline processes for existing buildings. A more recent building code may open up some federal funding sources. The IBC contains an Existing Building Code chapter which allows alternate code compliance methods to reuse older buildings. Consider creating a program to help building owners get up to code.

Observation: Bent's Fort National Historic Site brings about 25,000-30,000 heritage tourists through La Junta each year. These and other tourists may appreciate seeing and learning about your history.

Recommendations:

- Create a tour of your community's history to help capture the heritage tourists that are already driving through your community. This tour could be a brochure, phone application, volunteer-led walking tour, driving tour, or something else. Your historic survey can help inform this tour. Include significant buildings, sites and interesting community stories. According to History Colorado's publication *The Economic Power of Heritage and Place*, heritage tourists spend more money and stay longer.
- Install informational plaques on important historic buildings or at significant historical sites. Your historic tour (in the recommendation above) can lead to these informational plaques. These plaques will help tell your community's story and allow people to better connect with your city.

- Work collaboratively with other historic communities and groups along the Highway 50 corridor, such as Canyons & Plains of Southeast Colorado and the Santa Fe Trail Scenic Byway, to develop a regional approach to heritage and cultural tourism. There are many communities along Highway 50 with interesting cultural heritage. Build upon each other and help the entire corridor become a rich cultural attraction.
- Reach out to Colorado’s Tourism Office and learn how to best utilize their Heritage and Agriculture Tourism program to help market your historic and agriculture assets to a broader market.

Observation: La Junta citizens contain a treasure trove of fascinating history which has not been fully documented.

Recommendation: Engage your older native citizens to complete oral histories. Consider engaging students to record and publish them. Play parts of the oral histories on the radio. Include them as part of a historic tour. Just be sure to capture and catalog this wealth of information and cultural heritage before it is gone. A grant for a project such as this may be awarded from History Colorado, the State Historical Fund.

Physical Improvements & Design

Design takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in downtown by directing attention to all of its physical elements, including: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, displays, and promotional materials. Its aim is to stress the importance of design quality in all of these areas, to educate people about design quality, and to expedite improvements in the downtown in order to improve the experience of visiting downtown for residents and visitors.

Observation: The downtown streetscape has become outdated, and there is a desire to add more life and color to it.

Recommendations:

Short Term

- An inventory and analysis should be conducted by the City of La Junta, with significant citizen input, to identify the existing assets and opportunities to attract people downtown. The analysis should include identification of what physical elements would attract more residents and visitors downtown, particularly for adolescents and families with children. This may include updating existing park and plaza spaces, providing additional plaza spaces (such as surrounding the court house), and providing outdoor games for young and old alike (such as a children’s splash pad, horseshoes, corn hole, ladder ball, and others).
- Prior to undertaking a complete streetscape master plan, preliminary streetscape and placemaking ideas and concepts should be identified. This could include potential locations for new benches, bike racks, street lighting, banners, or other pedestrian amenities.
- A “quick win” in downtown to improve the safety of pedestrians, enhance the overall appearance, and to alert motorists that downtown La Junta is a pedestrian zone would be to re-stripe crosswalks at major intersections along Colorado and Santa Fe Avenues.

Long Term

A follow up step to the preliminary streetscape and placemaking concepts would be to prepare a downtown streetscape master plan with the goal of implementing new streetscape in most of downtown, particularly on Colorado and Santa Fe Avenues South to Fourth or Fifth Street. In addition, improvements should be made on: First, Second, Third, and Fourth Streets. New streetscape should include but not be limited to:

- new curb and gutter
- sidewalk improvements
- curb extensions

- street furniture such as benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, newspaper racks and others
- improved street lighting and year round banners
- additional street trees
- specialty paving at important intersections

Observation: La Junta has several destinations drawing people to and around the city, including the college, hospital, outdoor pool, museums, etc.; however, these destinations can be difficult to find and there are no evident directions or connections to the downtown.

Recommendations:

- The City is currently working on a signage and wayfinding plan for downtown. It is important that this plan include significant signage for motorists traveling on Highway 50 as well as Santa Fe and Colorado Avenues.

Wayfinding signage should be provided for:

- Parks
- Schools
- Otero Community college
- Civic uses
- Hospital
- Koshare Museum
- Regional attractions (such as Bent’s Old Fort, Vogel Canyon, etc.)
- Parking

- Access between destinations could be improved by providing bicycle facilities which currently do not exist throughout the city.

- Short Term: Many of the streets in downtown La Junta have ample right-of-way to implement on-street striped bike lanes. In the short term, striped bike lanes should be provided on Colorado and Santa Fe Avenues from Highway 50 to City Park and the Otero Junior College. The bike lanes will provide opportunity for both commuting and recreation. In addition, bike racks should be installed at strategic locations.
- Long Term: A longer term recommendation would be to prepare a citywide bicycle master plan to identify other important connections not only in downtown but throughout the entire City of La Junta. The City is in the process of identifying a recreational bicycle and pedestrian trail along the Anderson Arroyo connecting the Arkansas River to 22nd Street. While this trail is being implemented, several east west connections should be made between downtown and this trail. These connections could be made on Fifth, Sixth, Tenth, Fourteenth, and Twenty-Second Streets. The streets with direct connections to the schools should be prioritized in order to create safer routes to schools. In addition to the bike lanes, sidewalks should be implemented or improved to all of the schools.



Observation: There appears to be adequate parking in the downtown. However, because there is no parking time limit for on-street parking, employees, business owners, court visitors, and others are parking for extended periods in front of the stores. This takes up valuable parking spaces that could be used by customers. Various parking studies have shown that an on-street parking space can generate \$20,000 to \$300,000 in sales – depending on the city.

Recommendations:

- Initiate parking control and enforcement. The city should reinstitute and enforce time limits for on-street parking to discourage long term parking and encourage turnover. This will result in more customers and more income for the affected businesses.

- Long term parking should be limited to off-street parking lots. Employees, employers, and long-term court house visitors should be directed to use the off-street parking lots for long-term parking. The wayfinding signage program started by the city should include signage that identifies public parking lots and directs downtown visitors to these lots.
- In time the city should consider reinstating parking meters (coin operated meters or “smart meters” that accept credit cards), or pay stations for on-street parking in the downtown. This is a more efficient and effective means of controlling parking. It would also generate funds to pay for the parking enforcement personnel - or other downtown needs, such as streetscape improvements or maintenance. Parking in off-street parking lots should remain free to encourage their use.

Observation:

There is not a strong visual or physical draw from U.S. Highway 50 to the downtown and the community desires downtown to become more of a destination. There is nothing to draw attention and entice people travelling along the highway to pull off, stop, and spend time in downtown La Junta.

Recommendations:

- The sidewalks in front of the stores along Highway 50 were covered with snow and ice as a result of CDOT snow plows pushing snow to the sides of the highway. Work with CDOT to see if they will push the snow to the center of the highway where City crews could remove it and take it to a snow depository site. Another option might be to have the CDOT plows push all of the snow to the north side of the highway where there are no stores.
- Once the Visitor’s Center opens, wayfinding signage for the Center will need to be installed so that visitors know that there is a Visitor’s Center and where it is located – before they pass it. Incorporate Visitor Center wayfinding signage into the City’s wayfinding signage plan. Work with CDOT to identify acceptable formatting and location for the signage along Highway 50.



**VISITOR
CENTER**



WAYFINDING SIGNAGE PLAN EXAMPLE

- Short Term: Enhance and activate the park located at Highway 50 and Santa Fe, which is the U.S Highway center piece to downtown La Junta. Initially this could be done on short-term, temporary or test basis. Activation could include the creation of an event (or events) that would make use of the plaza and other open space areas located within the park. The event should be designed to attract and entertain families, and the activities should be clearly visible from the highway. Enhancements could include the inclusion of up to four colorful shade tents in the plaza area, game or play areas, a picnic area, on-street vender rows, a “T” shaped pedestrian paseo that would make use of the existing north-south and east-west alleyways, and colorful/fanciful crosswalks. Art could be temporarily (or permanently) installed on blank building walls along the paseo. The temporary pedestrian paseo and crosswalks could use water-based paints for the paving patterns that could be easily removed. If a design was developed that the community really liked then it could be installed with more permanent materials like colored concrete or pavers.



CROSSWALK EXAMPLE

PEDESTRIAN PASEO EXAMPLE

- *Long term:* A longer term improvement would be the streetscape enhancement of Highway 50's right-of-way, initially from San Juan to Cimarron. Improvements should include street tree and landscape plantings; new curb, gutter, and sidewalks; upgraded building facades (could be as simple as fresh paint); curb extensions at crosswalks; new, enhanced medians; expanded pedestrian-level street lighting (same "historic" style that has been used on the downtown streets); and downtown wayfinding signage.

Creative Placemaking & Creative Economy

Creative Placemaking is the practice of employing arts, culture and creative assets to transform the look and feel of places, improving quality of life and creating a unique identity (Artplace America, www.artplaceamerica.org). Creative Economy is the business of art, culture and creativity encompassing nonprofit organizations, commercial businesses and self-employed individuals. These "creative enterprises produce and distribute creative content that defines their market position" (*The State of Colorado's Creative Economy*, Regional Technology Strategies, 2008).

Selecting artists to create art and design is a simple process that has a big impact on the community. Therefore, it is important to develop a strategy that is unbiased, fair and democratic. See Appendix 3 for information that will help determine the best selection method for you community.

Observation: Local artists have already organized to incorporate original and interesting designs into La Junta's streetscapes. As the city upgrades and improves the streetscape, there will be further opportunity to incorporate local work that will make La Junta's visual character truly unique.

Recommendation: Make it a priority to hire local or regional artists to design/fabricate streetscape elements. For example, artists could create or refurbish existing benches, fencing, trashcans, tables, awnings, shade structures, planters, lighting poles, banners, electrical boxes, paving/stamped concrete, bike racks, crosswalks, etc. Use the preparations for a streetscape master plan to identify locations where artistic elements could be installed safely in the public right-of-way or on private property. Included should be a phasing plan to accomplish a wide-range of elements, starting with the most impactful elements.

Observation: Artists in the area can help create a buzz downtown by energizing the streetscape through temporary art installations that encourage people to visit and see what's new.

Recommendation: Support current efforts by the local artists group to implement a temporary art program downtown. An excellent way to energize a downtown environment is to start a rotating sculpture series. Displaying sculpture on a temporary basis (six months to one year) brings a visual vibrancy that changes regularly. A volunteer group assisted by the city could easily take charge of a program of this nature. The first step is to identify locations where art could be installed safely in the public right-of-way or on private property. Start with two to three locations in the first year and phase in additional locations over several years. Displaying art on property is possible and entails executing a license or an easement agreement between the City or another organizing entity and the building owner, which allows the City or other entity to borrow private property to place art that is owned or borrowed by the City or other entity.

It is highly recommended that the project budget include a stipend for artists to lend their artwork. At the onset, the stipend could be \$100 and could increase to as much as \$500 as more donors or sponsors participate. This stipend would include, at minimum, delivery of the sculpture, and could additionally include installation.

Observation: There are numerous blank walls and empty windows in downtown that present an opportunity to brighten the visual appeal of downtown.

Recommendations:

- Support current efforts by the local artists group to implement mural projects downtown. The key element is identifying these buildings then negotiating with the building owners for either permanent or temporary display of a mural. Permanent murals could be painted directly onto the buildings while temporary murals could be painted on board and moved from building to building. Displaying art on property is possible and entails executing a license or an easement agreement between the city or another organizing entity and the building owner, allowing the city or other entity to borrow private property to place art that is owned or borrowed by the City or other entity. There are many considerations to take into account when developing this project. Murals must be able to withstand the elements; therefore, painted on a sturdy surface that is coated with sealer. Finished outdoor paintings should be coated with a sacrificial graffiti coating to allow for easy removal of graffiti, and coated with a UV protectant to mitigate sun exposure damage; example product: Golden MSA Varnish. Be sure to consider the historic nature of the building before painting directly on it. It should be determined who will own the murals, who is responsible for cleaning/fixing the murals, and how long the murals are expected to last.
- Empty or unused storefronts are a downtown eyesore that add to the degradation of the downtown environment. Many cities have created successful partnerships with property owners to improve the look of and feel of empty spaces by inviting artists to display artwork or create site-specific installations during the transition of finding new tenants. It is highly recommended to offer a stipend to artists for this service. This type of effort is an excellent way to engage high school or college-age artists to become engaged in downtown revitalization.

Observation: A fun and playful atmosphere was created by the outdoor music playing from speakers in front of the courthouse.

Recommendation: Expand the outdoor music feature to encourage play, walkability and vibrancy. The music feature presents an opportunity to engage local musicians in downtown by curating or advertising an open call for music submissions to be considered for play on the speakers. This would encourage people to visit downtown to hear the ever-changing music. A tour of the music selections and a partnership with music classes at OJC and the school district could also be developed. Consider offering a stipend or a prize to the local musicians whose music is featured.

Observation: Arts education is offered to La Junta students starting in 7th grade creating a missed opportunity for younger students.

Recommendation: Identify a path to integrate arts education into classrooms for grades that do not currently have access. Begin by convening a committee that will take the lead on researching the possible program directions and make a recommendation to the school district.

Arts education is more than teaching students how to be artists. It teaches students how to work in teams, think critically, think out-of-the-box, and experiment. It also assists in teaching State Standards. Throughout Colorado, arts education is provided to meet Colorado's standard educational goals. This means employing art integration – integrating visual, digital, music, dance, and video into the curriculum to teach math, science, language arts, history, and social studies. There are statewide resources to train teachers in the use of arts integration, including Think 360, www.think360arts.org and University of Northern Colorado Greeley, <http://www.unco.edu/arts/ciae>.

The Arts is identified as an important element of Colorado's education standards, <http://www.cde.state.co.us/coarts>. A 2010 State law, *HB-1273 Arts Education for Workforce Development Act*, encourages all public schools to provide courses in performing and visual arts. Schools are encouraged to use innovative ways to deliver arts education, such as technology, software and forming partnerships with other school districts or community colleges.

Observation: Shared space for creatives has proven a successful model in La Junta, e.g., 1st Street Emporium, both to incubate artistic activity and to activate a formerly vacant building.

Recommendation: Identify vacant buildings downtown where an affordable co-working space could be offered to creative entrepreneurs. There is a unique synergy that is shaped when creatives work in close proximity to each other. Developing a partnership with property owners to offer affordable spaces for creatives will prove to be a successful way to bring energy and vibrancy to downtown. This could be in the form of a co-working space for graphic designers, a shared studio space for visual artists, or a place for a nonprofit arts organization to run community programming. It is important to keep in mind that your downtown will improve with this method, and that one day when it does, there needs to be a mechanism in place to ensure that the creatives that lent a hand in redevelopment are not displaced. See Appendix 5 for examples of co-share spaces.

Funding Mechanisms

Potential sources of funds that the staff of the City of La Junta should investigate and discuss with the city council and the public include the following recommendations:

State Historical Fund Grants: History Colorado offers competitive grants for Acquisition and Development, Survey and Planning, and Education, as well as non-competitive grants for Historic Structure Assessments, Archaeological Assessments, and emergency stabilization of severely endangered buildings. Depending on the type of grant, 0%, 25%, or 50% cash match is required. You may request up to \$200,000 for competitive grants. For detailed information, see the State Historical Fund Grant Application Handbook available for download on DCI's resource library.

Historic Preservation Tax Credits: A tax credit is a dollar-for-dollar reduction in the amount of tax owed to the government. Tax credit projects create jobs and provide financial incentives to revitalize buildings with federal historic designation. Federal and state tax laws offer tax credits for historic preservation projects that follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties. The federal government offers a tax credit between 10 and 20 percent, which can be paired with the state tax credit.

- Colorado's state historic preservation tax credits are transferable: you can sell them upon completion of your project. Selling credits can bring in additional funds for your project, for a cash match for a grant, or for a loan.
- Using preservation tax credits gives you access to additional federal and state funding pools, grant programs, and further tax credits.

For more details, see Appendices 6 and 7.

DOLA Energy Impact Fund Grants (EIAF): These funds may be used for streetscape improvements which are owned by a local government. This is an excellent way to obtain funding for historic buildings which are owned by a local government as a match with State Historical Fund Grants.

- Local Governments are the only eligible applicants
- May be used for studies, equipment, and infrastructure
- Generally require matching funds on a 50/50 basis

Heritage Tourism Office/Colorado Tourism Office Grants: The La Junta Chamber should work together with other chambers, the county and regional entities to apply for a Colorado Tourism Office Marketing Matching Grant Program, which provides funding to not-for-profit organizations in the State of Colorado for the purpose of promoting the state or

a region as a tourism destination. For more information, visit the website <http://www.colorado.com/ai/MarketingGrantCriteriaFY2009.pdf>

Office of Economic Development and International Trade, Rural Economic Development Initiative Program (REDI): Funds community asset analysis to determine potential economic development opportunities; stakeholder convening for solution development resulting in new or updated local plans; competitive grant funding for community infrastructure, business facilities and job training.

Community Development Block Grant: These are federal funds that are distributed by DOLA. The Division of Housing (DOH) and Division of Local Government (DLG) have funds available, as does the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT). DLG money is used for public facilities, DOH money is used to provide gap financing for affordable housing projects, and OEDIT money is used for Economic Development. Visit each agency's website to learn details.

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO): Uses a portion of lottery proceeds to help preserve, protect, enhance and manage Colorado's wildlife, park, river, trail and open space heritage. Consider applying for these funds to fund the Arroyo Trail project.

Safe Routes to School: Investigate the Safe Routes to School program to find potential funding for sidewalk and bicycle facility improvements that increase connectivity between schools, neighborhoods, and other destinations in town.

- Mini-grants offered each year for items such as helmets for students to bike safely.
- MAP-21 Transportation Alternatives Program: In July 2012, Congress passed a transportation bill: Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). Since October 2012, Safe Routes to School (SRTS) activities have been eligible to compete for funding alongside other programs, including the Transportation Enhancements program and Recreational Trails program, as part of a new program called Transportation Alternatives. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is charged with putting the legislation into practice, and it provides information about MAP-21 on its website. Some State SRTS programs have developed a call for proposal process using one or a combination of Transportation Alternative Program, Highway Safety Improvement Program, and Surface Transportation program funds to support Safe Routes to School-related projects and activities.

The following are funding sources to consider for short term improvements:

- Vendor/Booth Fees: These are charges applied to concessionaires at events, parades, or community gathering places.
- Tax Assistance from General Funds: Allocate specific funds for the downtown improvements.

In order to tie creative placemaking into revitalization initiatives, most communities find funding for public art in their capital construction budgets when they build or renovate (including street and utilities projects). Many communities also have a fee on private development projects. While La Junta builds capacity for redevelopment and construction, a combination of the following options should be considered:

- Dedicating a percentage of lodging tax or sales tax revenue to public art projects.
- Hosting fundraising events, such as the [Chicago Cows Parade](#) where artists decorated cow statues sponsored by local businesses.
- Seeking out corporate sponsorships (banks can be a good option for this).
- Pursuing grants. While it is challenging to find grants for public art specifically, public art projects can often be bundled into other construction project funding. For example:
 - Art in parks can be funded by the [Conservation Trust Fund](#) as part of a park renovation project.

- Streetscape projects funded by Community Development Block Grants can hire artists to design the streetscape elements.
- Identify foundations with an arts & culture focus in their grants giving, such as [Wells Fargo](#) or one of Colorado's [Community Foundations](#).
- Ensure La Junta is participating in the Community Resource Center's Rural Philanthropy Days.
- Creating a Kickstarter page to collect individual donations for an innovative project.
- Using the [Public Art Toolkit](#) online and [Grantmakers in the Arts](#) for more resources to support art projects.

The following resources can assist with business development:

- [Office of Economic Development and International Trade \(OEDIT\)](#): This agency has several programs from economic development assessments to small business development centers.
- [CDPHE Brownfields Program](#): This program provides direct funding for brownfields assessment and cleanup.
- [Colorado Energy Office \(CEO\) and USDA Rural Development \(RD\) Energy Programs](#): Both agencies have new funding programs to retro-fit both public and business HVAC and lighting systems. *La Junta businesses could utilize new technology and renewable energy sources to reduce costs. The town could install the new streetlights to more energy efficient LED type lights.*
- [Xcel Energy Rebate Program](#): Xcel provides numerous rebates for various energy-saving retrofits. They also provide individual building assessments at steep discounts. More information on their website.
- [Rural Business Opportunity Grants](#): The USDA provides funds to public entities, authorities, and non-profits to support small and emerging enterprises. Funds can be applied towards a plethora of business development activities including trainings, strategic planning, incubation, acquisition of land, and building renovations.
- [Small Business Administration and Economic Development Administration](#): These are two federal programs that can assist local businesses in business startup, expansion and relocation.

Other Funding Elements

Local governments may institute improvements districts to fund various localized infrastructure.

1. "Taxing districts" are generally defined as financing entities having the authority to impose property taxes. These types of improvement districts are called Public Improvement Districts (PIDs) in counties and General Improvement Districts (GIDs) in municipalities. These districts are created to construct, install, acquire, operate and maintain certain public improvement facilities (specifically excluded are solid waste, industrial waste, trash and garbage facilities, treatment and transfer facilities). They are also authorized to provide any service that the county or municipality that forms the district is authorized to provide. These districts may include noncontiguous tracts.
2. The assessment types of local improvement districts are called Special Improvement Districts (SIDs) in municipalities and Title 32, Article 1 special districts and Local Improvement Districts (LIDs) in counties. These districts' primary purpose is to assess the costs of public improvements to those who are specially "benefited" by the improvements. "Benefit" includes, but is not limited to, any increase in property value, alleviations of health and sanitation hazards, adaptability of the property to a superior or more profitable use, etc. The costs are payable from assessments.
3. Business Improvement Districts (C.R.S. § 31-25-1201) – A BID is a separate political subdivision created within a municipality upon petition of owners of real or personal property in the service area of the proposed district for

the purpose of constructing public improvements and supporting economic and business development within the district.

Other Resources – As a member of Downtown Colorado, Inc., La Junta will continue to be eligible for DCI services, training, and educational programs in addition to two follow-up technical assistance visits agreed upon by the City. It would be beneficial to review programs such as the Main Street program through DOLA that might offer additional on-going training and support to La Junta’s downtown efforts.

Participating Stakeholders

- Business Owners
- Chamber of Commerce
- City Staff
- City Council
- Community Members
- East Otero School District
- La Junta Economic Development
- La Junta Fire/EMS
- La Junta Police Department
- La Junta Tourism
- La Junta Urban Renewal
- National Park Service
- Non-Profits
- Otero County Economic Development
- Otero Junior College
- Planning Commission
- Residents
- Service Providers
- Small Business Development Center
- Southeast Colorado Creative Partnership
- Woodruff Memorial Library
- 1st Street Emporium

Team Member Bios

Katherine Correll, Downtown Colorado, Inc.

Katherine Correll has experience spanning the fields of community outreach to advance downtown and community development, not-for-profit administration, project development and management, local government planning, marketing, financial and economic development services, and education. Katherine joined Downtown Colorado, Inc. as the Director of Communications and Operations in 2006; in 2007 she became the Executive Director. Katherine received her Master's Degree in Public Administration from Rutgers University and her Bachelor's Degree in Politics with a Minor in Urban Studies from New York University.

J.J. Folsom, Progressive Urban Management Associates

J.J. Folsom leads placemaking planning and design services to create healthy places and more livable downtowns. He facilitates community outreach processes, conducts quantitative and qualitative best practice research and participates in strategic planning projects. A seasoned urban designer and transportation planner, J.J. brings 20 years of experience that includes transit oriented development, downtown planning, streetscape design, complete streets and alternative transportation projects. J.J. has worked in several of Colorado’s most respected transportation planning and urban design consulting firms, including Charlier Associates, Civitas and MIG. J.J. is an active member of the Colorado Chapter

of the Urban Land Institute and serves on both the transit-oriented development and healthy places committees. He holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Colorado Denver and a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Arizona.

Shawna Hodge, City of Lamar Main Street

Shawna Hodge offers management experience in marketing, public relations, special event planning, community outreach and development and economic development services. Although her formal education was received from University Nevada, Las Vegas and the University of the Pacific, Ms. Hodge returned to the city of her birth, Lamar, Colorado, to discover her niche, working on several levels to develop a solid, community-wide economic foundation for the city. She has put her 22 years of experience to work in her current position and was instrumental in the development and execution of national award-winning, strategic and creative public relations programs. Prior to her current position, Ms. Hodge served as the Marketing, Community and Guest Relations Manager for Prowers Medical Center and the Marketing Communications Manager for Pac-West Telecomm, Inc. in California.

Michael Hussey, Nolte Vertical 5

Michael Hussey is the manager of planning and landscape architecture for the Colorado Springs office of Nolte Associates, Inc. Michael has over 30 years of experience in a wide variety of urban design, landscape, planning, environmental engineering, and architectural projects. He has worked on urban development and renewal, and downtown streetscape improvement projects including Billings, Montana (downtown), Colorado Springs (Downtown BID), Avon (Town Center), Manitou Avenue (Manitou Springs downtown), Monte Vista (downtown), Broomfield (US 287), and Fountain (US 85). Project responsibilities have included grant opportunity identification and application, master planning, urban and site design, and construction observation and management. Michael has participated in numerous DCI workshops and conference programs, and has served as a DCI/DOLA team member on several Community Revitalization Program (CRP) visits. Michael is also the co-author of "Grow Native," one of the earliest Colorado xeriscape landscape guides, and has worked on a number of award winning projects – including the Colorado Springs Downtown Business Improvement District and Manitou Avenue.

Shay Ives, Department of Local Affairs

Shay Ives is a Community Revitalization Specialist with the Community Development Office. She has four years of experience working on land use planning projects across the country including historic preservation studies, comprehensive land use plans, development codes, design standards and guidelines, and affordable/fair housing analyses. Shay has a Bachelor's in Environmental Design from the University of Colorado Boulder and a Master's in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Colorado Denver.

Lee Merkel, Department of Local Affairs

As a member of DOLA's field staff, Lee works with local governments in southeast Colorado to assist them in finding solutions to their needs and challenges. DOLA offers technical and financial assistance to communities, especially those in the rural areas of Colorado. He has twenty five years of experience with local government project planning, financial and budget administration, public works, water and sewer utility issues, community development, and intergovernmental relations.

Lee was born and raised in Northeastern Ohio and moved to Colorado in 1974 after graduating from Wittenberg University with a B.A. in Political Science. Attending the University of Colorado, he earned an MPA with an emphasis in Urban Administration in 1977. He has served as a local government administrator for Rifle, Garfield County, Basalt, Granby, Englewood, Dillon, and Ouray. He joined the Colorado Department of Local Affairs in 2002, serving the southeast region from the Pueblo field office. Lee enjoys camping, hiking, skiing, running, music, movies, and traveling.

Deana Miller, Art Management & Planning Associates

Deana Miller is a dedicated and accomplished community builder, planner, and project manager with 20 years of experience working with communities to harness the power of the creative economy for economic and community

development. She possesses an in-depth understanding of the positive impact that arts and culture can have on communities—and the know-how to implement programs that achieve this goal.

As a Senior Associate at Art Management & Planning Associates, Inc., Deana manages projects for clients that center on creative approaches that vitalize the places where people live, work, and play. She has experience in creative placemaking, strategic planning for public art, arts districts, Transit Oriented Developments, transit hubs, Business Improvement Districts, and Metropolitan Districts, implementing community engagement and input activities, creating and evaluating arts and culture programs, developing policies and procedures, and managing art assets.

Previously, Deana was the Creative District Program Manager for the State of Colorado, the Public Art Program Manager for the City of Aurora, and the Business and Membership Manager for the Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver. Deana received a master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Colorado Denver in 2009 and a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from the University of Colorado at Denver in 1996.

Emerging Leader Team Support

Nancy Sprehn, Downtown Colorado, Inc.

Nancy graduated with a BS in Urban and Regional Studies in December, 2013 from Cornell University where her studies focused on community engagement and placemaking. She brings experience in design, communications, and organizational development from Engaged Learning + Research, in Ithaca, NY, in social services and customer service from NYC Public Service Corps, and in events coordination and operations from the City Parks Foundation, in New York City. She is currently serving as the AmeriCorps OSM/VISTA and Community Assessment Coordinator at DCI.

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