

CHAPTER FIVE

PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

5.1 GENERAL

The recommended type and location of future land uses in Alpine should, in part, consider potential opportunities for future economic development in the community. Chapter Five provides some general guidance concerning the prospects for future economic development and realistic objectives that may be pursued by both private enterprise and municipal government.

5.2 RETAIL TRADE

5.2.1 Potential Market

The strongest prospect for future economic development lies in the expansion of retail trade and services in Alpine.

The scenic location and proximity of Alpine to Teton County continues to make the community an attractive place to live for those working in the Teton County economy, persons seeking to establish and operate a small business, as well as persons desiring a comfortable place to retire. Expanded retail opportunities in Alpine will only increase the potential volume of consumer expenditures at local retail establishments and retail services.

Alpine is also along one of the highway corridors that lead to various recreational opportunities within Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Visitors seeking recreational opportunities within Bridger National Forest, the Palisades Reservoir, and other recreational areas closer to Alpine also bring additional visitor traffic through the community during both summer, fall and winter months. Strong seasonal visitor traffic represents an additional market that the community can serve.

The Alpine Confluence Information Center reports that roughly 5,000 persons stopped at the Center in 2005 to obtain various types of visitor information. Center representatives believe that most of these visitors were destined for Jackson and Yellowstone National Park.

5.2.2 Economic Development Opportunities

5.2.2.1 Concentrate and Diversify Retail Activities

The concentration of diversified retail establishments is needed to attract a greater volume of sales in Alpine.

Workers in Jackson do not wish to spend a considerable amount of time driving their vehicles from one retail outlet to another after a long day at work. They would prefer to take care of shopping in one general area where they can purchase what they need, as well as enjoy the shopping experience. The incorporation of eating establishments, a movie theatre or other

secondary entertainment within concentrated shopping areas can also bring a new dimension and perspective toward retail areas in the community. Residents living near the shopping area will view the concentrated shopping area as something greater than just a place to shop. The shopping area becomes a place near home where residents can meet friends or enjoy entertainment when they have some free time.

Visitors passing through Alpine en route to regional recreational attractions will also be more attracted to concentrated retail areas that are easily accessible via convenient vehicular parking and pedestrian circulation patterns. Recreational shopping represents a form of leisure time behavior that social scientists have recognized for some time and continue to examine (Guiry and Lutz, 2000). While a family or couple passing through or visiting Alpine may include persons with a specific recreational interest, e.g., hiking or trout fishing, some members of the family will also seek the opportunity for a relaxed afternoon of shopping en route to or from regional national park and national forest areas.

The phenomena of recreational shopping can be viewed first hand through the observation of shoppers in the Town of Jackson, WY during the peak visitor season. The design of concentrated shopping areas should recognize the reality of recreational shopping in order to maximize the capture of future retail sales from these potential customers.

5.2.2.2 Recommended Commercial Retail Objectives

Planned commercial areas in the Alpine Meadows and the proposed Snake River Junction project represent attractive opportunities for the development of more concentrated commercial areas that can include secondary entertainment facilities and potential visitor attractions. It is important that these commercial areas are annexed into the Town of Alpine to gain greater retail sales tax revenues for municipal government. Further, it is important the Town of Alpine strongly encourage the development of diversified commercial retail areas that contain a mix of retail shops, services, secondary recreation opportunities, and visitor attractions.

At the same time, the Town of Alpine and small business owners along the U.S. Highway 89 corridor can pursue efforts to develop a more attractive commercial setting. Highway business corridors tend to generate more “stop and go” traffic where customers come and shop at one store and subsequently leave the area for another destination. The retail marketing objective should be to encourage shoppers drawn from U.S. Highway 89 and local neighborhoods to visit more than one retail establishment along the highway corridor. The establishment of walkways and bikeways that connect all commercial facilities along the corridor can encourage a greater amount of “stop and shop” traffic. The establishment of clearly defined vehicular access and parking areas, and related landscaping, can also help attract greater visual interest to the potential customer traveling along the highway corridor.

5.3 VISITOR ACCOMMODATIONS

5.3.1 Available Accommodations

Within the Town of Alpine, Three Rivers Motel offers 21 guest rooms. The yet uncompleted Bull Moose Lodge will provide an additional 23 motel units within the community. Snake River Resort Saloon and RV Park, situated on the north side of Alpine near the U.S. Highway 89 bridge, offers 36 spaces for recreational vehicles.

The Best Western Flying Saddle and Nordic Inn, which are situated east of Alpine Junction, provide additional visitor accommodations. The Best Western Flying Saddle property is currently being renovated to provide additional guest rooms and expanded dining facilities. The Nordic Inn, which is operated primarily during the summer months, provides visitor accommodations, dining facilities, and a retail shop.



Between Alpine Junction and the Idaho border, several motel rooms are available at the Alpine Inn along U.S. Highway 26.

5.3.2 Importance to the Local Economy

Visitor accommodations in the vicinity of Alpine are significant to the local economy. Overnight stays generate retail sales at eating and drinking establishments, as well as other retail outlets in Alpine. Lodging tax revenues are also generated from the sale of visitor accommodations at the two motels in Alpine.

5.3.3 Potential Market

In view of the availability of regional visitor attractions and nearby recreational opportunities in the immediate vicinity of Alpine, the community represents a logical location for visitor accommodations. These attractions are supplemented by a high scenic quality of the area surrounding Alpine that can be readily appreciated by incoming visitors.

Visitors from Utah, Idaho, California, and other southwestern states represent the primary market for visitor accommodations in Alpine. These visitors should be considered a primary market in light of likely vehicular travel routes to Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks via Interstate 80, as well as U.S. Highways 26 and 89.

Secondary visitor markets to Alpine will come from a variety of other locations within and outside of the continental United States. Unique accommodations, a favorable dining experience, responsive service, and other factors influencing customer satisfaction can easily draw repeat customers and referrals from a variety of geographical areas within and outside of the continental United States.

5.3.4 Economic Development Opportunities

5.3.4.1 Franchise Motel Operations

Potential investments in expanded visitor accommodations can likely be derived from economy and mid-rate motel operations such as Comfort Inn and Suites, Holiday Inn Express, and Super 8. To be financially viable, these franchise operations will need to contain 100 to 200 guest rooms and sustain annual room occupancies of, at least, 70-75 percent. Higher land values will tend to discourage the development of franchise motel facilities unless a considerable amount of highway traffic and potential market is available to generate a favorable return-on-investment.

Franchise operators will likely seek highway frontage locations along U.S. Highway 89 and 26. Planned commercial areas within Alpine Meadows, the Snake River Junction project, as well as the Rinehart property at Alpine Junction, represent potential sites that may be feasible for the development and operation of franchise motel facilities. As portions of the U.S. Highway 89 corridor through Alpine are gradually re-developed, additional sites may also become available and feasible for development.

The availability of lands in the community for commercial expansion along U.S. Highway 89, sufficient visitor traffic, and reasonable zoning regulations will represent the primary incentive for developers of future visitor accommodation facilities.

5.3.4.2 Bed-and-Breakfast Facilities

Bed-and-breakfast facilities represent another small and simple form of visitor accommodations. Owners of single-family residential facilities market and rent one or more rooms of their homes to incoming visitors on a short-term basis. Customers benefit from gaining the operator's knowledge of recreational opportunities and attractions, as well as greater opportunities to interact with other guests of the facility. Bed-and-breakfast operators can generate, at least, supplemental household income.

The development of bed-and-breakfast facilities in Alpine is feasible. However, the encouragement of this potential business opportunity must be coupled with reasonable zoning regulations that address, at least, the maximum number of guest rooms, vehicular parking requirements, kitchen and sanitary facility requirements, hours of operation, exterior lighting and other relevant operational issues. The planned revision of zoning regulations should address these issues and, at the same time, facilitate the future development of bed-and-breakfast facilities in selected single-family residential districts.

5.4 CONFERENCE CENTER FACILITIES

5.4.1 Potential Market

There are thousands of meeting facilities in the United States that are referred to as conference centers. These facilities support a wide variety of meetings such as business retreats associated with team building, workshops, and employee training. Conference centers differ significantly from convention centers that typically host larger conventions for hundreds of attendees.

Similar to convention facilities, conference facilities are typically located in larger metropolitan areas or nearby suburban areas. The location of conference centers in cities such as New York, Chicago and Denver is largely due to their accessibility via airports and highways, as well as proximity to a potential market in the vicinity of the facility.

5.4.2 Characteristics of Conference Center Facilities

The International Association of Conference Centers (IACC) recommends that conference centers support an average group size of 75 persons or less. The IACC maintains that conference centers can support smaller meetings more consistently and at a higher quality. Conference facilities that are certified by the IACC typically orient their operations toward smaller meetings that range from 25 to 75 persons (Mitchell, 2006).

Roughly half of the conference facilities certified by IACC are stand-alone conference facilities. The other half of the conference centers are ancillary conference centers that are part of a hotel facility or resort complex (Mitchell, 2006).

Some 30 facility and operational criteria are required for a conference facility to receive membership in the International Association of Conference Centers. These criteria encompass general standards concerning:

- priority of business in the facility where the conference center is located;
- available floor area and the relationship of facilities to guest rooms and leisure areas;
- conference room design;
- conference and business services;
- food and beverage;
- technology that is available to support conferences; and, when applicable,
- guest rooms (International Association of Conference Centers, 2004).

The facility and operational criteria associated with the preceding topical areas provide useful guidance to the development and operation of a conference facility.

5.4.3 Economic Development Opportunities

Given the distance of Alpine from metropolitan areas and regional air transportation hubs, the development of a conference center would need to incorporate a combination of meeting rooms, visitor accommodations, dining facilities, and supporting technology services. The development of an ancillary conference center that is established as part of a local hotel would be more feasible.

The Town of Alpine should confer with the owners of the Best Western Flying Saddle to inquire whether or not ongoing re-development efforts of this facility might address the criteria required for IACC membership. If so, the Best Western Flying Saddle should be encouraged to pursue membership in the IACC. Aggressive marketing by the Best Western and related membership in the IACC should facilitate the booking of future small conferences.

A second option is for the Town of Alpine to encourage a potential future developer of visitor accommodations in the vicinity of Alpine to orient their potential investment project toward the development of an ancillary conference center. The greatest challenge for any potential investor will be project feasibility. In essence, could a local hotel attract a sufficient number of meetings to support the investment required to establish a quality conference center.

5.4.4 Importance to the Local Economy

Conference center facilities can generate retail expenditures in local economies such as Alpine, as well as lodging revenues. Such facilities can help sustain retail establishments, particularly during periods of lower visitor traffic.

5.5 COMMERCIAL OFFICES

5.5.1 Potential Market

The availability of Internet technology and other telecommunication options enable the Town of Alpine to encourage the development of small professional offices in Alpine. A growing number of professionals, e.g., lawyers, accountants and consultants, seek scenic places to work and live that are situated in communities away from larger urban areas. Communities that are particularly attractive include communities that are conveniently accessible to various recreational opportunities, good schools, commercial shopping opportunities and other community amenities.

The professionals who might choose to relocate to a community such as Alpine would more likely include those who already have gained considerable experience in their field and already serve an established client base. The potential market would likely include businesses ranging from sole proprietors to companies with up to four or more employees.

Regional representatives of county, state and federal agencies that require a smaller office space also represent a potential market for the use of commercial office space. For example, discussions with a regional management representative for the Wyoming Department of Family Services suggest a potential need for office space that could support periodic visits by various program specialists (Hudson, 2006).

5.5.2 Economic Development Opportunities

The development of smaller commercial offices is feasible in conjunction with the development of concentrated commercial areas, as well as within buildings along highway business corridors such as U.S. Highway 89. Mixed commercial and residential uses often help establish some customer base for nearby retail outlets.

Various types of professional services that generate little or no vehicular traffic are also conducive within areas zoned for residential use. Zoning regulations for residential districts can be designed and applied to home-based occupations to avoid adverse impacts upon owners and occupants of adjoining residential properties.

The planned revision of the Town of Alpine's municipal zoning ordinance should enable the preceding commercial office opportunities, as well as address relevant issues such as vehicular parking, hours of operation, the number of employees and building signage. Once established, the community can market Alpine as a community that is ready to support the establishment and expansion of professional services.

5.5.3 Importance to the Local Economy

The expansion and development of new commercial office space in Alpine would create new employment and sources of income within Alpine. Such income would also generate increased retail expenditures within the community.