

## CHAPTER ONE: PLAN BACKGROUND

### Planning in Byron

The Town of Byron completed a Community Assessment in September 2004 assisted by the Wyoming Rural Development Council. At that time the residents of the Byron area discussed what were the town's assets, what were its problems and what needed to be accomplished. However, even though there were contacts identified, including contact persons and agencies, which could assist the town in community development, there was no plan of action to achieve what the town wanted to accomplish.

In May 2005, a planning and zoning committee appointed by the town council submitted a report to the council. The report recommended that the town take certain steps to institute zoning and enact more effective controls over mobile homes and livestock nuisances in town. The committee report also recommended that the town seek outside professional assistance to develop the ordinances necessary to carry out these recommendations. Lastly, the committee noted that the town's last plan, completed in 1976, is inadequate.

The town council recognized that a new plan for the town was needed. The plan's purpose would be to look at community development from a land use, infrastructure and organizational standpoint, tying the development of the community together in an implementation plan which could be used to guide and facilitate growth of the town. The town obtained a grant from the Wyoming Business Council to assist in completing the plan and in 2006 hired professional planning consultants to assist them.

### Settlement History

The Town of Byron encompasses 657 acres in northern Big Horn County. The town's small commercial area is bisected by U.S. Highway 14A. All the developed portions of town are located on a level, alluvial terrace just north of the Shoshone River, well above the river's flood plain.

Settlement in Byron began in 1900 when pioneers came to build the Sidon Canal. Development of the town initially reflected the Mormon ideals of rural life with farmers living in town on large lots and commuting to their fields each day. Lots in the original town plats are 1.77 acres. However, by the 1920's farm tenancy requirements of Federal irrigation laws dispersed farmers from town and the town population declined, reflecting the breakdown of the original settlement pattern. The 1976 Byron Plan observed:



“The large lots, however, have had lasting effects in the form of a sense of spaciousness which prevails in the Town and, less fortunately, in the form of numerous unplatted partitions of the original lots.”

Oil and gas development has also influenced Byron's economic development. Oil production first began in 1906 and gas production followed in 1911. Since that time Byron has become known for its oil and gas industry with several oil companies on location and numerous gas wellheads placed in the surrounding badlands.

In recent years, Byron's population has remained fairly stable. Previously, a consequence of the energy boom, Byron's population hit its all time high of 633 in 1980. However, by 1990, as the energy boom played out, the population fell to 470 persons. By 2000, the town's population had rebounded to its second highest level ever at 557 persons. Byron has been for some time a bedroom community providing housing for people and families working through out the Big Horn Basin, commuting to places including Powell and Lovell.

### **Summary of the Community Assessment**

In September, 2004, the Wyoming Rural Development Council Resource Team conducted local interviews and site visits in the town. Those interviewed were asked to respond to three questions about Byron:

- What are the major problems and challenges?
- What are the major strengths and assets?
- What projects should be completed in 2, 5, 10, and 20 years?

Those results were compiled into verbal and written reports that were presented to the town. The written report presents feedback from each Resource Team member about the issues that were raised during their site visit and potential solutions.

The five main needs that emerged from the community discussions were:

- ▶ Communication (between the town government and its citizens);
- ▶ Building usage;
- ▶ Economic development;
- ▶ Beautification of the town; and
- ▶ Planning and zoning.

The Resource Team made the following observations about the needs and issues in Byron:

- The issue that was uppermost in the listening sessions was the impending closure of the Byron school.
- The community would very much like to have a fire hall to protect citizens and help lower insurance cost for homeowners.
- Many residents noted the appearance of the community was a problem for locals and for visitors to the community.
- One issue is there are no businesses that can bring revenue from the surrounding areas or that offer jobs for kids or adults.
- The need for zoning is apparent in the fact that the town can not grow without it.
- Townspeople demonstrated community pride, a willingness to seek help from the outside, and a conviction that they need to improve citizen participation to accomplish their goals.
- There is a need to get more citizens involved and improved communication is a crucial means of accomplishing that.

- There is a need to unite town citizens to counter the apparent division over the school district consolidation issue.
- Byron has several old vacant log cabins distributed throughout the town that were pioneer homes. These are in a state of disrepair and will require some expense to preserve.
- Several vacant buildings, other than the old log cabins, could be restored and used for business and social purposes (such as the original school “lunch room” building located beside the Town Hall). There is a need to clean up these vacant and abandoned buildings.
- There were mixed opinions on city planning and the concept of zoning. Some felt that the ability to have livestock within the town was one of the best things about the town, while others felt the lack of city planning and zoning was the biggest obstacle to town growth and survival.
- Weeds detract from the appearance of the community.
- People commented about the need for better accessibility for the aging population in the community and people with disabilities.

### **Planning Concepts for Small Towns**

Although Byron has its challenges, the town has also shown an ability to organize itself for improvement and progress. Other small communities survived and thrived and Byron can benefit from their experience. The Heartland Institute for Community Development, which has specialized in supporting small towns in the Midwest, publishes keys to small community survival and growth. These are worth summarizing as they are directly applicable to Byron.



From the Heartland’s “Seven Secrets to Coping with Change in Small Towns:”

#### ***Secret 1 – Positive attitude***

A positive attitude is probably the most important quality small town people can have to deal with the changes and be innovative and survive.

#### ***Secret 2 – Entrepreneurial spirit***

Public and private sectors that work together and take risks can make the difference in the life of a small town.

#### ***Secret 3 – Bias for action***

In viable communities people are not waiting for someone else to tell them what to do.

#### ***Secret 4 – Focus on what is controllable***

Communities must focus on what they can control, not on factors outside their control, such as location.

### ***Secret 5 – Plan for development***

By working together to write down a plan for development, communities can take hold of their own futures and then carry out their plans with specific blueprints for towns, schools, and business.

### ***Secret 6 – Strategic outlook***

A community needs to become aware of its own competitive situation, and it needs to learn to take steps that put its competitive advantages forward.

### ***Secret 7 – Vision for the future***

A community needs to have a vision for the future, with community leaders and residents agreeing on what the community should be like in five, ten or even twenty-five years.

The Heartland Center publication, “Six Myths About the Future of Small Towns” provides a focus for the basic functioning of the community:

#### ***Myth 1 - Towns that are “too small” have no future.***

Heartland says that towns of 100 person have survived through thoughtful planning, entrepreneurial genius and hard work. Small towns can use their smallness and flexibility to their advantage.

#### ***Myth 2 - A community’s location is the key to its survival.***

In today’s Information Age, it is leadership, not location, which is the most important factor.

#### ***Myth 3 - Industrial recruitment is the best strategy for economic development.***

Small towns are better off investing time and money in retaining and expanding existing businesses.

#### ***Myth 4 – Small towns can’t compete in the global economy.***

With telecommunications advances and the ability for a town to find its own niche, small towns can often do well economically.

#### ***Myth 5 – The best people leave small towns as soon as they can.***

Small towns survive because plenty of talented people make the decision to stay and work to make the town a good place to live and work.

#### ***Myth 6 – The rural and urban economies are not interdependent.***

The urban economies depend on goods and services from the rural areas.

### **Wyoming Town Planning Statutes**

The state laws of Wyoming spell out how a town prepares the plan, what the plan should contain, how the town adopts its plan, and the effect of the plan once it is adopted. These laws are found in Title 15, Chapter 1, Article 5 of the Wyoming Statutes.

This plan for the Town of Byron conforms with those laws and is intended as a policy statement and roadmap for the future development of the town. This plan is not regulatory and does not have the force and effect of law. However, the plan is a prerequisite for the adoption of a zoning ordinance and the Town’s land use and development regulations or ordinances must be consistent with the plan.