

CHAPTER 1 — PLAN BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

The Cowley Master Plan is a long-range plan intended to guide the growth and development of the community. The master plan includes background studies and analyses that lead to recommendations for the community’s future in terms of environment, housing, economic development, public services, infrastructure, parks, transportation, and land use. The recommendations are intended to help Cowley achieve its goals for the future of the town.

The master plan process was initiated in 2006 when the Cowley Town Council applied for and was awarded a Wyoming Business Council planning grant. Later in 2006, the Council hired Ken Markert AICP, a professional city planning consultant from Cody, Wyoming to prepare the plan. In early 2007, the Council appointed a planning committee of 18 Cowley area citizens to work with the consultant in producing the plan. The committee and consultant began work in February and produced a draft of the plan in July, 2007.

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

The Town of Cowley encompasses 511 acres at an elevation of about 4,000 feet. Cowley is in Big Horn County, Wyoming. U.S. Highway 310 is Cowley’s Main Street and connects the town to Lovell to the east and to locations in Montana to the north. (See Table 1.)

TABLE 1. DISTANCE TO SELECT CITIES

Lovell, WY	6 miles
Powell, WY	23 miles
Basin, WY	46 miles
Cody, WY	47 miles
Billings, MT	84 miles
Casper, WY	257 miles
Cheyenne, WY	436 miles
Salt Lake City, UT	485 miles
Denver, CO	534 miles

SETTLEMENT HISTORY

Cowley was established in 1900 as a colonization project undertaken by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The town was incorporated seven years later. 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 plat are 1.23 acres with four to a block. 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 1977 Cowley Plan observed that the large lots have given the town a feeling of spaciousness.

The original town plat included additional features that continue to shape the form and function of the town. Most street rights-of-way in Cowley are 99 feet wide (purportedly to accommodate the turning

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radius of a four-horse team and wagon). One town block was set aside for schools and is the present site of Rocky Mountain Elementary School. The next block to the north was set aside for the use of LDS Church. The next block north across Main Street was split with the south half being the town's commercial district and the north half reserved for the town park.

With the influx of the original pioneer settlers of the town, Cowley's population hit its all-time high of about 800 people in the 1910s. Population declined from then until the 1970s when the town's population started rebounding as Cowley began serving as a bedroom community for people working in Lovell and Powell. Since 1970, Cowley's population has increased at a slow but steady rate, reaching the present (2005) population of 582 residents. Cowley has had significant numbers of new homes constructed since 2000. With the imminent construction of the new Rocky Mountain High and Middle School in Cowley, the town is expecting continued growth and development.



Cowley's historic town office building

1977 COWLEY PLAN

In 1975, the Wyoming Legislature required all communities to develop master plans. A Cowley Planning Committee was established and plan was produced in 1977 as part of the Big Horn County Comprehensive Plan. At 12 pages in length, the plan provides basic information about the town, discusses future community development needs, and recommends policies for guiding future growth and development. At the time the plan was prepared, most Cowley streets were gravel, irrigation water was delivered by open ditches, individual septic systems were the means of wastewater disposal and the town's drinking water came from the Deaver Reservoir. The plan noted that installation of a central sewer system was underway and that the town had decided to enclose open ditches in pipe. The plan recommended hard surfacing the town streets and investigating additional drinking water sources for the town. In terms of land use policies, the plan suggested Cowley appoint a permanent planning commission and adopt a development code and building code. The plan appears to have set a good course for Cowley in the 1970s. However, it is now clearly out-of-date and no longer serves its stated purpose of guiding future development.

PLANNING CONCEPTS FOR SMALL TOWNS

Although Cowley has shown an ability to organize itself for improvement and progress, the town also has challenges common to many small towns. Other small communities have survived and thrived and Cowley 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 applicable to Cowley.

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

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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.



Cowley's welcome sign reflects the town's pioneer heritage

WYOMING TOWN PLANNING STATUTES

The state laws of Wyoming specify 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 Cowley 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 ordinances including zoning must be consistent with the plan.