

LCDC Strategic Planning Session (2013)

By Keith Erickson/LCDC spokesman

Planning and progress

Thousands of jobs created. The potential for a big-scale community events center. A revamped gateway to Coeur d'Alene. And the beautiful transformation of a downtown Coeur d'Alene park. The possibilities and accomplishments are exciting—and growing.

During its annual strategic planning session last month, the Lake City Development Corporation (LCDC) heard from several community leaders on the impact the urban renewal agency has had on the community, took under advisement financial requests, and mapped out short- and long-term goals for future urban renewal initiatives. Here's a recap of the meeting:

NIC requests events center funding

North Idaho College President Joe Dunlap and NIC Trustee Chairman Ken Howard provided an overview for a proposed 5,000-seat events center, which they hope can be built in the Riverstone development within the LCDC's boundaries. The facility would house many of NIC sports activities, Mr. Howard told the LCDC board. However, it would also be designed to host community events, such as trade shows, concerts, club sports and other local events. Mr. Howard and President Dunlap said a private/public partnership is critical to fund the proposed events center. The college officials requested \$10 million in partnership funding from the LCDC for the 62,000-square-foot facility, expected to cost around \$15 million, including land acquisition. The additional \$5 million would come through fundraising efforts. An endowment of \$5 million would be secured for operating costs. President Dunlap told the LCDC board that studies show the facility could generate \$7 million annually for the community, with a "ripple effect" of \$15 million a year for the local economy through lodging, dining and other expenditures. LCDC board members said they understood the need for such a facility and took the funding request under advisement. "There really isn't anyplace locally to hold large events so this makes sense," board member Brad Jordan said. A commitment has not been made by the LCDC board, but they expect to take up the issue over the summer with feedback to the college sometime in late summer.

Jobs Plus: LCDC partners to generate thousands of jobs

Steve Griffitts, president of Jobs Plus, told the board that the LCDC has provided an immeasurable impact on the job market over the past 15 years. "Your involvement with Jobs Plus has helped to contribute 6,000 jobs in this area since 1997," Griffitts told the board. "There is such a great level of momentum generated by the LCDC." Griffitts added that urban renewal is the best means the state of Idaho has to attract jobs in a competitive national market. Public works improvements funded by the LCDC have supported and sustained that growth, he added. "We've attracted companies here and kept them here because of your involvement with creating necessary infrastructure," he said. Listing two examples, Griffitts said the LCDC helped bring in 500 jobs via the U.S. Bank call center on Seltice Way within the agency's River District,

and 700 employees at Riverstone, which is thriving. "That area (Riverstone) has created so many jobs and included a tax base increase of more than \$100 million," Griffiths said.

Cd'A Mayor Sandi Bloem: LCDC 'crucial' to local economy

Mayor Sandi Bloem applauded the agency's efforts in stimulating the economy and ~~underscored that many of the major economic development projects in the Coeur d'Alene area~~ would not have been possible without partnership from the LCDC. The mayor discounted recent public comments that growth should occur "organically," without urban renewal or any public assistance. "So many great projects have occurred in Coeur d'Alene with help from the LCDC ... that otherwise would not have happened," Bloem said. Some level of growth would occur without LCDC funding, the mayor said, but not at nearly the rate the LCDC has created through its partnership initiatives. Regarding the LCDC's future, the mayor, who recently announced she would not seek a fourth term in November, said the agency must move forward and resist political opposition. "You must continue to share your message with the community on the great things the agency has accomplished," she said. The mayor also said she supported creation of a new urban renewal district to enhance East Sherman Avenue, calling it the "perfect area" for urban renewal financing.

Creating an alluring entry to the Lake City

The potential to positively transform the western entryway corridor into Coeur d'Alene is huge, city parks director Doug Eastwood told the LCDC board. When people approach Coeur d'Alene on Northwest Boulevard off Interstate 90, they are greeted by the appealing Riverstone development. As you enter downtown, City Park, the Coeur d'Alene Resort and manicured properties offer an appealing approach. However, what lies between Riverstone and downtown needs work, Eastwood said. "We've got some eyesores along Northwest Boulevard as you enter the city and this is a great opportunity to do some master planning," Eastwood said. "We have an incredible opportunity to link public and private spaces." Community leaders have directed the city's Parks and Recreation Commission to take the lead in analyzing future uses and development for the high-profile area to attractively connect Riverstone to the McEuen Park area. "It's all about connectivity and that first impression as people enter the city," Eastwood said. Development of the 4-corners area will likely include LCDC financing. Last month, the LCDC published an overview of the so-called 4-corners entryway possibilities involving the city and federal Bureau of Land Management. You can review the report here <LINK>.

Looking ahead ...

Following the presentations, board members discussed priorities in the upcoming months.

- Continue planning for a parking facility in the downtown area, most likely on the former Federal Building block located on Lakeside Avenue and Fourth Street. Parking considerations downtown may also include discussions with Kootenai County officials for possibilities near the courthouse.
- Continue to work with housing officials and stakeholders in Midtown on plans for workforce housing in that area. The LCDC continues to work closely with The Housing Company on possibilities.

- Explore funding rationale for the proposed North Idaho College events center at Riverstone. The LCDC's finance committee will formally consider the request soon.