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# Fort Morgan, CO

## February 8-9, 2010

**C**OMMUNITY
**R**EVITALIZATION
**P**ARTNERSHIP

*BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES BY PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO DOWNTOWNS, COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS AND TOWN CENTERS IN COLORADO THROUGH EDUCATION, ADVOCACY, INFORMATION AND COLLABORATION*

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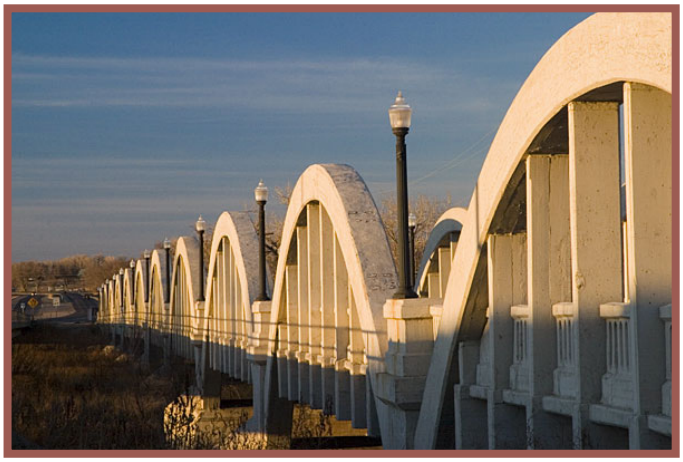


# Introduction

Community Revitalization Partnership (CRP) Program Sponsored by the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) working in partnership with Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) and the City of Fort Morgan

Welcome to the downtown assessment for the Colorado community of Fort Morgan. Colorado communities have the opportunity to apply for assistance through the Community Revitalization Partnership (CRP) program, a collaborative program between the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), Downtown Colorado, Inc., the state's nonprofit Main Street affiliate, and the local community.

Downtown Colorado, Inc. assembled a team of volunteer professionals including designers, planners, land use, and finance experts to work in Fort Morgan for two days and then contribute to this final report. The assessment team appreciated the invitation to learn about and assist your community and worked diligently to provide relevant and realistic input toward the betterment of downtown Fort Morgan.

# How to Use This Report

This report is loosely organized along the Main Street Four Point Approach ® as developed by the National Trust Historic Preservation Main Street Center. Each section of the report was written by a member of the CRP team with an expertise in one of the National Trust's Four Points. The team members' reports were assembled and edited to integrate all reports into one cohesive document; thus, each section may reflect the writing style of its writer.

# Executive Summary

The City of Fort Morgan contacted DCI and DOLA to conduct a Community Revitalization Partnership (CRP) visit to examine the downtown, and particularly the Historic Business District, primarily composed of the 100-500 blocks of Main Street and the 100-200 blocks directly east and west of Main Street along the side streets of Railroad, Kiowa, Beaver, and Bijou.

One specific request was to assess how property owners of the downtown buildings can take advantage of historic preservation programs that allow for the clean-up and restoration of building façades. Additionally, the city would like to educate the community on the opportunities available to create districts for the purpose of obtaining financing for specific projects. Finally we were asked to look at increasing downtown density by developing office space or rental units on second floors.

# Background Information

In 1882, Fort Morgan was only an unbelievable vision for Abner Baker's dream town, located on dry, sandy, treeless soil covered with cactus and sagebrush, and crossed by the South Platte River. In 1884, with the completion of the Morgan Ditch and the South Platte lateral (which ran the length of Platte Avenue) and Baker's survey of the original town site, (from Railroad to Platte A venue and Deuel to Lake Street), the town was platted.

By 1889, the town had grown into a mile-square city with dirt streets. Morgan County was created out of Weld with Fort Morgan named the county seat and located in the exact center of the county.

Fort Morgan's City Park has always been an important place on Main Street. The history of the park began in 1893 when a group of citizens cleared a vacant lot that was full of weeds and cactus to play baseball. In 1901, a group of businessmen formed the Fort Morgan Improvement Association and began developing a plan for a city park located on the north edge of the business district. Block 10 on Main Street would become a desirable place for the ladies and business community to rest in the shade when they were shopping and doing business in town. In 1902, the town board of trustees voted in favor of the City Park. The Improvement Association members sought a plat design from a Denver landscape architect.

The town developed from the railroad tracks northward with hardware and paint stores, implement and bicycle shops, grocery and meat markets, drug stores, cafes, business offices, and, of course, the undertaker. The oldest structures can be found in the 100 block of Main Street. The 200 block contains slightly later buildings; the 300 block is composed principally of buildings built in the wake of the sugar beet boom of 1906; and the 400 block is made up of the auto showroom/ garages built in the teens when the motorcar became popular

Interstate 76 was built in the 1960s, which completely reversed the dynamics of Main Street. The industrial area with the Great Western Sugar Factory and the Fort Morgan Power Plant, originally located at the back of the city, was now Fort Morgan's grand entrance.

## Observations

- High percentage of locally owned buildings with engaged owners
- Award-winning streetscape and historic architecture
- Downtown businesses support youth activities and are invested in the community
- Community recognizes value of downtown
- Nationally recognized Rainbow Bridge
- Musical history
- Downtown is walkable
- Clean and safe – very little crime or vandalism
- Community focus and engagement
- Multiple access points from major corridors to downtown
- Downtown is the center of the town and Morgan County
- Lots of downtown events
- Parks – Riverside and City are well done
- Diverse community and diverse downtown
- Specialized restaurants and clothing stores
- Movie theater is beautiful, but no place to go afterward
- Youth don't have activities
- Seniors are leaving
- Lack of affordable housing
- Kids gather at businesses that cater to them (like theater)
- Hard to find good employment opportunities
- Can close Main Street for events
- Small community
- Cautious about change
- Good place to raise a family
- Strong church presence
- K-12 school and community college
- Other locales try to create a downtown atmosphere similar to Fort Morgan
- Parking is considered a problem by some people
- River is a great asset
- No existing brand

# Organization

The first section of this report focuses on Organization, which includes developing collaboration, volunteer recruiting and management, fund-raising for the organization, and developing operational strategies. Organization involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a downtown revitalization program. The three principle components of organization are:

- Public and media relations
- Volunteer development
- Fundraising

A governing board and standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer-driven program. Volunteers are best coordinated and supported by a paid, full-time or part-time program director as well. 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 possible, it is something to strive for in the future.

Notwithstanding this fundamental description of a typical downtown organizational structure, numerous variations 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. Consider developing some form of district to dedicate resources and focus on downtown.

Regardless of the organizational structure chosen, one overriding factor is demonstrated time and again in communities undertaking a program of downtown revitalization: without first creating and developing a solid organizational component to oversee and manage the process, and despite the best intentions of all concerned, the program rarely accomplishes the desired outcomes and most often fades away before anything has a chance to succeed.

Given these realities, we cannot overemphasize the importance of placing organizational development among 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.

*Downtown Fort Morgan*

**Observation: You may not be bridging the gap between the diverse audiences and groups in Fort Morgan.** Many resources are currently untapped.

**Recommendations:**

- **Know Your Audience.** Before you began looking outward for downtown support, expand your horizons locally. If you can learn to engage your own

community, primary employers, and residents in downtown, the momentum will build. Start by identifying the diverse markets that make up your community and target your outreach to them. Find out what is compelling to the community. How do they identify with downtown? Determine the answer to these questions by:

- Meeting them for morning coffee sessions at a coffee shop
- Conducting merchant and customer surveys,
- Attending organizational meetings on a regular basis.

• **Reach Out to New or Untapped Audiences of Residents.** Focus groups indicated that there are many untapped resources in the community. Downtown must first reach out to tell all segments of the community that downtown is the core of town where things are happening, and then engage these groups in the process of revitalizing downtown. This cannot happen if clear messages are not reaching all audiences in a language they understand. Make a list of groups and contacts that can play a role, whether that role is downtown user, sponsor, or partner. Plan messages to underserved groups, including:

- Families
- Seniors
- Various ethnic groups in the community
- Youth

All community groups need to understand the identity of downtown and their role in downtown. All can have unique identities, but need to be working toward the same goal. Divide the responsibilities for strategies to achieve objectives. Only by breaking tasks into workable pieces will downtown be able to achieve community and economic revitalization.

• **Complete the stakeholder analysis in the appendices of this report.** Then use this list to develop a message for each group or individual. Think about what you should request and how best to do it. Use this to create a distribution list to which you will send materials, information, requests, etc.

• **Develop relationships with stakeholders who are unaware of your downtown.** There are numerous opportunities available to you in increasing the user base of your downtown. There are fabulous opportunities for agritourism and heritage tourism, as well as capturing workforce crowds, community college students and faculty, and the significant number of ethnic groups in town. Create materials to inform and invite collaboration with stakeholders who may be unaware of all that Fort Morgan has to offer. Think about the interests of these specific groups and how to engage them. Work with major employers in town, the community college, Latino and Somali representatives, etc. to determine what their interests are.

• **Utilize the upcoming comprehensive planning process to conduct visioning and branding campaign focused on downtown.** If you do not mold the image of downtown Fort Morgan, it will be molded for you. The downtown needs a branded image that it can control and promote with unwavering consistency. This brand must reflect what downtown was, is, and will be—the heart and soul of the community.

With a vision in mind, the city should bring downtown constituent parties together to craft a direction and work plan that ideally would involve dedicated resources of downtown

stakeholders. At the core of the plan is the city's resolve and long-term commitment to invest in downtown. However, the plan will need to be prepared to move forward with—or without—constituent group support.

As the agent in perpetuity, the City must recognize modern trends in order to play a leading role to preserve, rebuild, and revitalize the downtown core. There are many tools available to the City to gain grants, reset policy, create incentives, and partner with the public sector to improve the downtown. Long-term funding mechanisms are available in Colorado to address specific capital and promotional needs.

**Observation:** There isn't clear leadership for downtown business community. There are various programs that attempt to reach out to businesses, but there is not a clear leader in the community or in the local government that businesses know to call on when information or support is needed.

*Downtown Fort Morgan*

**Recommendations:**

- **Formalize a lead organization to manage resources for downtown.** This organization should be tasked with the following:

- **Champion downtown.** Declare downtown a priority. Identify resources available to downtown through a downtown stakeholders planning meeting. Use the downtown events meeting to determine who is invested in downtown and willing to work for downtown action.

- **Establish one point of contact.** Downtown communications may be enhanced through identification of one entity that houses all information regarding services for downtown businesses and residents, and for collecting information about services available in downtown. The organization should be responsible for marketing and communications about downtown for locals, business and property owners, employers, and tourists.

Downtown stakeholders, including local government, nonprofits, merchants, the library, museums, and property owners, should work together to identify the best "Downtown Coordinator." This contact should be independent of the government and accountable to downtown residents, merchants, and property owners. Creating a downtown leadership position or organization will assist in building confidence, credibility, consistency, and continuity. Please review the options provided in the District Matrix in the Appendices, and contact Downtown Colorado, Inc. for assistance in coordinating continued public education sessions.

Consider utilizing an existing organization that has demonstrated readiness to represent the downtown merchants and to support this organization's growth into an entity able to partner with downtown stakeholders and harness the power of downtown revitalization.

The Downtown Business Association may be a good candidate capable of becoming a Colorado Main Street Program in the future.

(Note: If public funds are designated to assist with initial stages of organizational development, build in a decreasing funding structure into planning e.g., each year the amount given to the organization decreases by 10%. As a non-profit organization develops it should become less reliant on grants and more sustainable on fees from events, investors/memberships, or fees for services.)

- **Develop committees to focus on the Main Street Four Points™.** As Fort Morgan establishes a downtown coordinating organization, be sure to build in governance through committees that specialize in Organization and Management, Promotions and Marketing, Economic Restructuring, and Design/Historic Preservation. One representative from each committee should be on the governing board of the organization that is selected to represent downtown. This will ensure that Fort Morgan's downtown is able to consistently make progress in multiple areas to ensure well-rounded development.

- **Develop clear organizational collateral materials.** Downtown, and its representatives, will only begin to build the public's and business community's confidence and garner support, when it can clearly demonstrate that there is a representative structure in place that provides a valuable, equitable, and affordable service focused on the health of downtown and the businesses that are housed in it. It is imperative that the organization representing downtown develops its own materials that clearly describe the benefits and requirements of participation. Be sure these are multilingual and encourage participation from all groups.

The organization representing downtown should carefully determine the following:

- **Fees:** Consider your objectives before arbitrarily determining fees. You must decide if membership or investor models are more suitable. Some towns have chosen to include all businesses, at least for an initial period, to assist in creating a cohesive organization that truly represents downtown. During this initial period, users are encouraged to donate or invest to support the development of a quality service. As the organization matures and demonstrates value to the users, it is possible to move to a membership fee system, or not. Tiered or sliding scale systems are often employed to allow larger and smaller businesses to contribute proportionally.

- **Boundaries:** Determine a boundary for your downtown that will incorporate the elements you deem important. The city should define the boundaries of downtown with consideration to geography, economics, and marketing; with preference to commonality of issues, problems, and opportunities. Create both the perception and reality that being located "in downtown" has benefits and privileges…a "preferred" place to invest, live, open a business, and visit. Downtown should represent opportunity and enjoyment.

- **Benefits:** Conduct an organizational visioning session to determine what the mission, objectives, and benefits of having a downtown organization are. If an organization is unable to clearly state what they offer to the community, it is impossible to convince a naysayer otherwise. Be sure that all benefits are applied equally within membership/

investor categories and are clearly explained in comparison with any associated fees. Send this material everywhere! Make sure all business and property owners receive it, link to all websites, and post it in public places.

**Observation: Fort Morgan's businesses have quality products and services that would benefit greatly from additional training.**

**Recommendation: Support the Downtown Business Association, Chamber, and Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in hosting a merchandizing and window display training for businesses.** The city or downtown organization should consider a downtown beautification program to accompany the streetscape work done on the main street. However, the downtown leadership should only be responsible for identifying a troublesome trend and providing support to business owners. The downtown businesses must actively participate in training as the first stage of a campaign to celebrate a beautiful downtown.

Start with the windows! If every store owner cleaned the windows, employed some new window display techniques, and participated in a merchandizing program, the change to downtown would be noticeable this spring. Utilize resources like the SBDC, DCI, and other organizations that can assist in developing a broader list of training for small business owners. If you are interested, ask DCI about the Mystery Shopper Program. Please review the list of educational events for downtown leaders that DCI has available at www.downtowncoloradoinc.org.

# Promotions

Promotion is another of the four key points in building a vital downtown. According to the National Trust Main Street Center, promotion sells a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play and invest in the Main Street district. By marketing a district's unique characteristics to residents, investors, business owners, and visitors, an effective promotional strategy forges 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: Residents are unaware of what is available downtown.** During the focus groups it was noted that many residents use downtown as a "last resort" when they can't find an item at Wal-Mart or other outlying stores or they are just unaware of the products and services available downtown.

**Recommendations:**

- **Develop informational material on downtown.** Fort Morgan must find a way to better present the wonderful things happening in downtown. Gather all information from the events calendar and create downtown collateral material, and post on a downtown events board that displays events in and out of town. Create one downtown Fort Morgan website with links to/from all community websites. Be sure to keep this site updated with current events, downtown activities, and news about businesses and their promotions.

Create a "Downtown Resources Directory" and hold an open house associated where every business or organization has a piece of free chocolate or a glass of wine to encourage business owners, employees, and residents to visit downtown businesses and discover what they offer. Be sure these are multilingual and encourage participation from all groups.

- **Create a "Shop Local" campaign to educate citizens on products and services available downtown.** A Shop Local campaign serves two purposes. First, educating residents of Fort Morgan on what can be purchased downtown allows them the opportunity to purchase what they can from the businesses there. Second, the campaign should highlight where tax dollars that are collected from local purchase are spent. By identifying the portion of sales tax dollars that go towards police, fire and similar services, residents will learn how their local purchases serve and benefit their community. This reinforces that shopping downtown is an investment in Fort Morgan's future.

**Observation: There is not a coordinated effort to promote retail events in conjunction with community events.** There are quite a few successful events taking place in Fort Morgan, but many of them seem to be meeting a single objective. Downtown business owners do not seem to get involved in the events and certainly do not take full advantage of the number of people who attend these events on a regular basis.

**Recommendation: Identify retail events to highlight local business.** Current downtown activities already bring a lot of people into the area, but they are not enhancing retail sales. Retailers need to tap into that group and the money that they are bringing with them. Staying open late one or two nights a week to capture the population that is already downtown should create habit-forming experiences for residents. A First Friday Sidewalk Sale will bring all the merchants together and bring residents and even tourists into the downtown. Or coordinate activities with the Concert in the Park Series, e.g., Late Nite Thursdays' coffee and ice cream. Be sure to use the Strategic Event Matrix to help you identify retail opportunities.

**Observation: The various ethnic groups in the community are not well represented in community events**. Sometimes breaking though cultural barriers can take quite a bit of time and energy, but the payoffs for including these groups in your programming are huge. New waves of Somali immigrants and the large Latino population need to be included in the event planning and implementation processes.

**Recommendations:**

- **Diversify Concerts in the Park and the International Music Festival with various ethnic programming and storytelling**. Cultural heritage programming for those who are new to the community will help them to feel more connected to the community and may entice them to participate more in community events. Currently, the music festival features salsa music, Japanese drumming, Polynesian music, and songs of European countries. At the very least, Somali music and storytelling should be introduced as well as items from the Latino culture.

- **Support organizations such as One Morgan County**. Groups such as this work with

immigrant populations and can be of great assistance. Different cultures must be included in the various events and activities downtown, using various non-profits will help in this regard.

**Observation: Advantage is not taken of the assets in and around the community.** The natural resources located in close proximity to Fort Morgan need to be accentuated and capitalized upon. The South Platte Flyway, world-class hunting and fishing, and other natural resources will draw tourists here if you learn to market them correctly.

**Recommendations:**

- **Promote the disc golf course tournaments and develop it as a regional asset.** The disc golf course is nationally recognized and should be used to its full capacity. Start a regional tournament, utilizing courses in Fort Collins, Greeley, Sterling and ending up in Fort Morgan. Make it a weekend event to bring players and their families to the city. The disc golf course needs to be promoted to the entire region as the asset that it is.

- **Target promotions to major employers.** The city has 11 private businesses that employ over 4,000 people. How do these folks use the downtown? Do these businesses get involved in the events; contribute time, money or resources? Promotional events that take place downtown need to have the buy-in and support of these large businesses.

# Economic Restructuring

The focus of economic 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 and all of the benefits of choosing to locate their business in downtown, including 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 needs to be a strategic approach to guide and support downtown economic growth.**

**Recommendations: Strengthen economic conditions in downtown by increasing household units in proximity to downtown, proactively improving the mix of goods and services available to consumers, enhancing the presence of individual businesses, and tapping into travelers and other transportation-oriented visitors.**

- **Conduct up-to-date market analysis.** A market analysis is a formal economic study that evaluates how well local businesses are serving local consumers. The study should include an evaluation of leakage/capture; that is, an analysis of where consumers shop, the amount of dollars that are leaving the community due to a lack of appropriate products, and an evaluation of the opportunity to attract and capture dollars from visitors to the community. Such a study is to ensure a synergistic mix of downtown merchants and can be used by existing businesses to further their business plans and to inform new business formation.

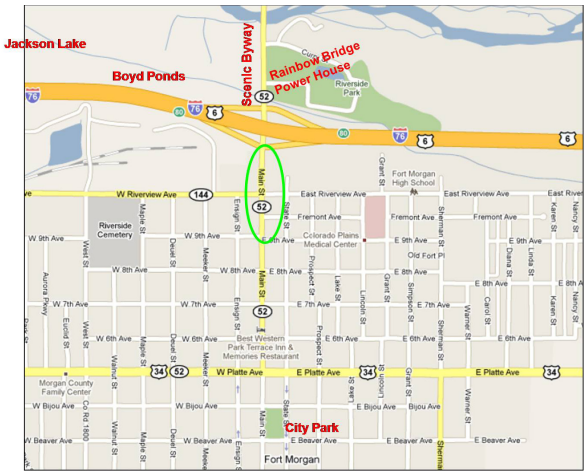
- **Develop a housing strategy.** Adding households in proximity to downtown improves the density of consumer dollars available to downtown merchants and sets up these households to shop downtown first. Housing development can be accommodated by improving underutilized second-story downtown space. Preliminary estimates indicate that downtown second-story space could accommodate about 120 new households. Also, there is opportunity to develop vacant lots in the residential neighborhoods that surround downtown. These types of infill development have the fiscal advantage of using existing infrastructure, utilities, and other community services. Second story space could also be utilized for office uses and/or work-live space.

- **Reintroduce short-term parking spaces.** One concern about adding people through the addition households or office workers to downtown is the potential for overburdening available parking. This can be addressed by improved signage to public parking lots and by reintroducing the use of "short-term parking only" signs in front of certain businesses.

**Observation: Physical connections are underplayed as a factor in downtown business growth.**

**Recommendations:**

- **Create trail connections between Riverside Park, Boyd Ponds, and downtown.** Recreational and cultural amenities can be improved and integrated into the economic character of the town through improved connections. There is an opportunity to create a unique recreational destination by improving trail connections and links between Riverside Park and Boyd Ponds, as well as more distant amenities such as Jackson Lake and the scenic byway. Creating these trail connections will likely entail addressing physical and environmental issues associated with existing businesses and trail planning should consider the integration of trail systems with minimal disruption and dislocation of exiting businesses.



*Map highlighting main street*

Improving trail connections and creating a recreational and cultural destination at the river creates an activity node. This node can be tied in with the City Park and create a reason for visitors to go downtown. The I-76/Main Street Gateway area is a jumble of land uses lacking a consistent theme, and distracts from Main Street rather than drawing one into downtown. Improved streetscaping and land-use planning may enhance this gateway area and draw consumers to downtown.

- **Clean up the lime waste.** Sugar beet lime waste next to the river creates a visual impairment and potential impacts on air and water quality. There are organizations in

the state (such as the Colorado Brownfields Foundation) which are evaluating ways to specifically address lime waste disposal. Similarly, other industrial uses on the river corridor should be addressed.

- **Utilize historic properties.** The power plant represents an interesting historic property that can be a featured landmark in conjunction with the Rainbow Bridge. The Parks Department could possibly consolidate and co-occupy the building with a visitor's center or other use that caters to visitors. There are known environmental issues at the Power Plant which are currently being managed safely for the current use. Additional environmental assessment and potential mitigation actions may be necessary for an enhanced use. There is a state and federal technical assistance and grant fund available that could be used for such a project.

**Observation: The community is very diverse.** Forty percent of the population is Hispanic, 50 percent of the k-12 students are Hispanic. The Somali population is growing. Cultural impact on the community exists as it is today. Each group has specific desires and needs that must be served by the business community. As the population expands, anticipating the purchasing power of the future population is important.

**Recommendations:**

- **The Downtown Business Association (DBA) should encourage the Hispanic and Somali businesses to actively engage in the DBA.** Utilize multilingual collateral materials and in person conversations to educate the businesses that the DBA or other entity is not government. Have current members stop by these businesses on a regular basis to become familiarized with potential new members and substantially improve the potential for collaboration and inclusion.

- **The DBA could provide language training opportunities for existing business owners.** Training retail employees to speak basic phrases in other languages will increase the comfort level of the Hispanic and Somali population in frequenting all retail outlets and will increase the Anglo population's comfort level in frequenting Hispanic and Somali retailers.

**Observation: There is a lack of collaboration with the major employers.** Regular interaction with the major employers should occur. Work to understand hours of operations, needs of the work force, developing collaboration options to further develop DBA activities and operations.

**Recommendation: Meet with Cargill, Leprino, Western Sugar and the Medical Centers on a regular basis.** Understanding the operations of these major employers will assist in determining types and hours of operation of retail services desired by the work force. Collaborative alliances could be developed with the employers to fund events and activities.

**Observation: There is a lack of youth activities.** There is a need to develop a gathering place for the youth of the community. Locating this in the heart of the community will assist in energizing the downtown.

**Recommendations:**

- **Develop a gathering place for the youth of the area.** Youth of today need a safe place to gather to interact. Any location should provide food, ice cream, coffee and WIFI at a minimum. Adding club meetings, entertainment venues or other activities would be a plus. Consider how to better connect the skate park with downtown activities.

- **Build on the library teen space and activities.** Though space may be limited, the seed for downtown youth culture has begun at the library. Utilize this resource to further increase youth activity and vitality.

**Observation: Senior activities could be expanded.** As the population is growing older, encouraging seniors to engage with the downtown is necessary. Seniors will add vitality to the area.

**Recommendation: Create special activities to attract the seniors to downtown.** Many seniors will eat earlier in the day or are attracted to matinees. Seniors are also very aware of special discounts. Providing opportunities for targeted marketing are important.

**Observation: Youth are leaving the Fort Morgan area due to a lack of employment.** Many of the area youth find greater employment opportunities out of the county. Without employment prospects, there is no long-term commitment for the youth to pursue opportunities locally.

**Recommendation: Connect to SBDC/Workforce Center and the Morgan Community College to develop an economic gardening program and mentorship program for youth and "at home" businesses.** Utilizing the bilingual youth population in retail establishments will further break down the unfamiliarity and lack of comfort in frequenting other establishments. Internships are a low-cost and successful strategy in possible retail expansion.

**Observation: The downtown closes at 5 p.m. There are missed opportunities by closing at 5 p.m.** The portion of the workforce that works 8 to 5 cannot shop downtown on weekdays. Additionally, certain shifts at the larger employers cannot shop during traditional 8 to 5 weekdays. Thursday evening concerts are a prime opportunity for evening shopping.

**Recommendations:**

- **Research hours of operation to provide all workers greater access to downtown businesses.** Include this conversation in the visioning process for downtown. Visit with target populations and large employers to determine appropriate hours.

- **Establish regular evening hours as appropriate for each business.** The evening activities and events should establish a community expectation that certain businesses will be available. Restaurants, taverns, ice cream, coffee shops, and WIFI cafes are all key components. Browsing in stores is also an important component.

**Observation: There is a perception that the city building codes as well as permitting and fees are onerous.** Numerous comments were heard regarding inconsistencies, lack of understanding and fear of the city process in updating the downtown buildings.

**Recommendations:**

- **Help the DBA to educate business and property owners and residents regarding the current codes, processes and fees; this would assist in alleviating many concerns.** The existing fees are low, which provides a great incentive to do improvements. Creating a dialogue with the property owners would also allow the city to obtain feedback regarding some of the more difficult building issues.

- **Promote the fact that building and fire officials use code requirements that meet the intent of the International Building Code.** It would benefit the community to understand that Fort Morgan is supporting broadly accepted building and construction techniques.

# Design

Design takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in downtown by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, displays, and promotional materials. The 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. At the forefront of the design effort is the restoration of historic buildings which helps provide the backdrop for downtown's sense of place.

**Observation: I-76 travelers don't have a good understanding of which exit will gain them direct access to the retail core.** There are three exits for the town and the one primary exit does not highlight the importance of access to the Riverside Park and to historic downtown Fort Morgan.

*Examples of wayfinding and gateway signage*

**Recommendation: Coordinate with Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to put priority onto the Main Street (SH52) exit with possible town logo, entry monument, and directional signage to encourage travelers to venture the mile south to downtown businesses and parks.** Signage along the interstate highway should better identify Fort Morgan downtown and the businesses and amenities that exist in downtown using Fort Morgan downtown branding logo and graphics.

**Observation: Upon exit from I-76, the "front door" into Fort Morgan downtown retail district is not inviting nor does it reflect the upgraded character of the downtown center.** Frontages along the side of Main Street reflect a more industrial character near the interstate and a unmaintained residential area for the intermediate segment down to Platte Avenue (SH34). This leaves travelers with a faulty image of the upscale character of the downtown shopping district and discourages further travel south.

**Recommendations:**

- **Expand current landscaping plans to further enhance the entrance.** Strong design elements exist within the downtown blocks. Recent streetscape improvements downtown carry strong visual elements including intersection treatments, walls, plantings (trees and perennial beds), lighting and unique historic character street signal standards. Some of these elements should be carried north along Main up toward the interstate. Planting trees and curbside landscaping will unify the streetscape along these blocks. Replacing standard highway signals and intersection lighting with the character street signal standards will also tie the north Main Street commercial district to the downtown. There is no need to continue all the streetscape treatments on this north segment but inclusion of some of the major elements (trees, lighting and signals) will improve the overall character and unify the experience.

*Landscape and streetscape examples*

- **Include landscaping plan in all future development.** Future redevelopment of some of the sites (e.g., future McDonald's site) should be encouraged to incorporate elements of their landscape buffer along Main Street. Developments closer to the interstate can carry a more suburban character with setback parking, curbside buffer landscaping and the streetscape elements of downtown. Blocks closer to Platte Avenue (SH34) should move toward residential character and blocks south of Riverside should further increase the streetscape character elements. The effort should be to create a driving experience that changes in character as one drives south yet carries some of the character of the downtown district.

**Observation: Signage to direct traffic and pedestrians into and around downtown is lacking.** Signs to direct traffic toward public parking, to identify historic buildings, and to announce local activity are missing from the downtown fabric.

**Recommendation: Initiate a signage program to direct motorists around downtown.** Directions to public buildings, parking lots, libraries, museums, and schools can be provided on tasteful signage that is designed in character with the established downtown streetscape style. Signs should also be incorporated with curbside informational kiosks that can host flyers, postings, and advertisements for public and private events. These informational stations are an important activity announcement station within the downtown district. Signage should also highlight the important history of the Fort Morgan downtown, residences, town square park, and other historic amenities.

**Observation: Streetscape work that is completed is admirable and should be celebrated.** This includes the pavement detailing, lighting, landscaping and other important additions to the downtown district. Final completion of this work is yet to be accomplished.

*Current streetscape and signage*

**Recommendation: Develop a program to explore adding streetscape amenities to the fabric of the downtown district.** Benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, and other features are yet to be added to the sidewalk. These elements are important to encouraging pedestrian traffic, creating a scale that pedestrians can relate to, relax on, and interact with. Additionally, landscaping on the sidewalk needs to be maintained for pedestrian safety. Trees should be pruned so that no branches are in the way of pedestrians. They should be pruned up so that no branches are within 7' of the sidewalk surface. This may leave some trees looking leggy for the first years but will enhance safety and make the shop windows more visible from the street.

**Observation: Back-alley parking and building access has been incorporated into the downtown district.** Shops with back-door access bring customers through storage and back-room hallways before entry into the store proper. Pedestrians are encouraged to walk by dumpsters and down alleyways before crossing around the block to get to Main Street.

**Recommendation: Encourage shops to use back door access for pedestrian passage through their businesses and to offer direct access to the street.** This access may not be good for all businesses but should be encouraged to promote added retail frontage and use. Vacant lots near the back-lot parking lots should be further encouraged to develop retail shops and restaurants and further fill out the retail district.

**Observation: Downtown Fort Morgan has a rich collection of historically significant buildings representing a number of historic styles and eras, but the historic resources survey is over 20 years old.**

**Recommendation: Update the historic building survey for downtown area buildings and adopt the local historic preservation ordinance.** Establish a local preservation commission and develop a process for designating local landmarks, including nominations to the State or National Register of Historic Places if appropriate.

**Observation: There are a number of relatively low-cost façade renovation opportunities that could make a significant difference in the appearance of downtown.**

*Current building conditions*

*Rendering of Cover Theater*

**Recommendation: Capitalize a revolving loan fund for façade renovation projects.** Utilize Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, along with a State Historical Fund grant and contributions from area banks to develop a pool of funds from which small low-interest loans or outright grants (in the range of $1,500-$5,000) could be made to help with removal of aluminum slipcover facades, restoration and tuck-pointing of brick, painting, window repair, and signage improvements on two to three key buildings per year over five years. Relatively low-cost façade improvements could be made to the J.C. Penney building, Stapleton Building, The Business Mart, the historic hotel, The Tap Room, Commercial Printing, and others.

More complicated but high impact façade projects could include the Furniture Store buildings and the Cover Theater. The latter should be the subject of a State Historical Fund grant to carry out a comprehensive historic structure report to document the history of the buildings (including changes made over time), investigate repairs to the upper floor stucco façade, identify ways to repair or replicate the carrerra glass on the lower level, and repair the existing marquee. The resulting preservation plan could recommend prioritized steps and strategies for restoration and rehabilitation, and could include repair of the historic signage at the drive-in theater as well. Consider utilizing tax historic preservation tax credits to help finance the project.

**Observation: The one-way streets on Ensign and State really serve no purpose today and encourage people to race through downtown side streets.**

**Recommendation: Explore the idea of reversing the one-way streets on Ensign and State to slow traffic and increase on-street parking in the downtown area.** While this was once needed to slow traffic, it may now have the opposite affect of allowing cars to

speed around the downtown.
The one-way couplets downtown may limit the amount that drivers actually see or stop downtown, and reversing them would allow for greater parking on both sides of the street.

**Observation: There are some underutilized corner parcels or infill development opportunities in the downtown area.**

**Recommendation: Evaluate options for these sites, ranging from pocket parks to new building construction that re-establishes the traditional corner building set-back and curtain wall alignment of the street.** Consider using students from the CSU/DOLA program to create proposals for how to better utilize empty gaps in the in the downtown storefronts and corners. Students from the community college (landscaping or planning) also might be interested in submitting some ideas for simple, affordable improvements to enhance downtown.

# FUNDING MECHANISMS

**Potential sources of funds that the Town of Fort Morgan could investigate and discuss with the town board and the public are included in the following list:**

- **Vendor fees:** These are charges applied to concessionaires at events, parades, community gathering places.
- **Business license fees:** These are fees that can be assessed when a new business comes to town. This will help generate revenues for the community and will help in identifying which businesses are located in town. Many times the fees are paid every year. These dollars could be earmarked for specific business needs, such as events, marketing, etc. Fees nay be increased, lowered, or adjusted to impact the businesses, types of businesses, and revenue generated for the town and should be consistent with surrounding jurisdictions. Be careful not to add to the burden of small or start up businesses in a down economy.
- **Heritage Tourism Office/Colorado Tourism Office grants**: The Fort Morgan 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
- **Grant opportunities for personnel:** Opportunities exist through South West Youth Corp, AmeriCorps, universities, or other agencies that provide interns. Utilization of DOLA's Best and Brightest program is a reasonably affordable program benefiting both the student and the town.
- **Tax assistance from general funds:** Allocate specific funds for the downtown improvements.
- Continue the current working relationship with CDOT 4 Planning and Management Region
- **Continue this working relationship.**
- **State Historical Fund grants** (survey, historic structure assessments, acquisition and development), **Community Development Block Grant funds, State Historic Preservation Tax Credits:** These can be utilized for RLF façade renovations.

- **Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), State Trails Program grants, TEA-21 or stimulus funding:** Each of these could be used to fund the recommended trail connections from Riverside Park to downtown (including possible bike lanes).
- **Community Development Block Grant or Rural Business Opportunity Grants:** These are federal funds that are distributed by DOLA. The Division of Housing and Division of Local Government have funds available, as does the Office of Economic Development and International Trade. Division of Local Government money is used for public facilities, Division of Housing money is used to construct housing, and Office of Economic Development and International Trade money is used for Economic Development. Visit each agency's website to learn details.
- **Energy Impact Funding for public infrastructure:** These funds could assist the community with public infrastructure improvements, including roads, streetscapes, etc.

**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

- **Governor's Office of Economic Development and International Trade:** This agency has several programs from economic development assessments to small business development centers.
- **EPA Brownfield's Program:** This program provides direct funding for brownfields assessment and cleanup.
- **Governors Energy Office (GEO) and USDA Rural Development (RD) Energy Programs:** Both agencies have new funding programs to retro-fit both public and business HVAC and lighting systems. Fort Morgan's businesses could utilize new technology and renewable energy sources to reduce costs. The town could convert streetlights to more energy efficient LED type lights.
- **Small Business Administration and Economic Development Administration:** These are two federal programs that can assist local businesses in business start-up, expansion and relocation.
- **Downtown Colorado, Inc.:** As a member of Downtown Colorado, Inc., Fort Morgan will continue to be eligible for DCI services, training, and educational programs. It would be beneficial to review programs, such as the Main Street Candidate Program that might offer some ongoing training and support to Fort Morgan's downtown efforts. Additionally, Fort Morgan should access the benefits of the collaboration of DCI and Colorado Brownfield Foundation (CBF). A half-day workshop is available to communities interested in working on downtown revitalization and brownfield sites.

**FISCAL MECHANISMS:**

- **Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA)** offers technical assistance to local governments for the establishment of Capital Improvements, Fleet and Equipment Replacement and Pavement Maintenance Programs. These are tools created to enhance budget development and strategic planning for capital expenditures.

- **Clifton Gunderson, LLC. is offering a fiscal review program analyzing 18 points of municipal government.** Clifton Gunderson is an experienced CPA and local government management company. The fee for this service is based on municipal size and is reasonably priced.

# Focus Group and Meeting Participants

- City of Fort Morgan Elected and Appointed Officials and Staff
- Morgan County Economic Development
- Morgan County Commissioners
- Fort Morgan Area Chamber
- Fort Morgan Downtown Business Association
- Morgan Community College
- Fort Morgan School District
- Small Business Development Center
- Non-Profits
- Fort Morgan Public Library
- Fort Morgan Volunteer Fire Department
- Historical Society
- Business Owners
- Residents
- Fort Morgan Times

# Participating Stakeholders

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