

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Project Background

Buffalo faces change on a daily basis; it's a matter of where and to what level of intensity. In order to be poised to meet the challenges that change can bring, the City has revisited its past planning documents and taken a fresh look at what Buffalo hopes to become in the years that follow. The trick is to hold on to what the City holds dear, while positioning local residents and businesses to be ready to handle the likely impacts from shifting economies and changing demographics.

Beginning as the offspring of an area frontier fort, Buffalo has grown into a community with strong ties to agriculture, ranching, energy development, tourism, retail, and services. What it is not is isolated: The City sits beside the intersection of two major Wyoming roads: Interstate 25 and Interstate 90. Sheridan is relatively close to the north at 35 miles, Gillette is 70 miles east, and Casper is 112 miles to the south.

The City's prime location at the foot of the Big Horn Mountains has made it an increasingly popular destination not only for visitors but also for those who wish to stay permanently, many of whom are retirees. At the same time, emerging energy development potential throughout the region is likely to have a significant impact upon the community's housing stock, infrastructure, and services.

With the likelihood for increased growth rapidly becoming fact, the City decided that it was time to update its 1975 Comprehensive Plan. The update began in 2006 with the selection of a project consultant team, formation of the Buffalo Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, and ultimately the development of this planning document.

Legal Basis of the Plan

Comprehensive plans or master plans (used interchangeably) have their basis in Wyoming State Statutes (W.S.). It begins with the establishment of a planning commission and leads to the creation, adoption, and ultimately the implementation of a community master plan. W.S. 15-1-501 through 15-1-507 which provides the legal basis for master plans are included in the Appendix.

Planning History

Buffalo's planning commission has been an established presence for decades. They and their planning staff have followed the ups and downs of the city's growth through boom periods associated with energy development and times of population loss due to recessions and decreased mineral activity. More recently the city government has faced difficult dilemmas related to growth or its potential, including water-related issues that directly impact consumers and county land development on the outskirts of the city limits.

The City has also polled its citizens in regard to the problems confronting Buffalo. For example, in February 2001, the City participated in a community assessment conducted by the Wyoming Rural Development Council (WRDC). The Council provided a Resource Team to evaluate the City's assets and liabilities, as well as to make suggestions for improving the local environment and character. The Resource Team came to Buffalo for three days to tour the town and conduct about 240 interviews. Those interviewed were asked to respond to three questions about Buffalo:

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

The team then condensed the comments into eight major themes: capital facilities; housing; planning/growth management/economic development; telecom/technology; transportation; workforce; recreation/tourism; and human services.

Capital Facilities

- Multi-Purpose Center
 - Cultural events
 - Meeting spaces
 - In-door arena
- School expansions
- One-stop social services center
 - Law enforcement
 - Crisis center
 - Emergency shelter/transitional housing
 - Food bank
 - Public health
 - WIC
 - Etc.
- Storm drainage - Build one
- Added water storage facility - Build
- Expansions to:
 - Senior center
 - Hospital
 - YMCA
 - Public health/nursing
- Replace two bridges
- Disposition of landfill

Housing

- Increase number of units:
 - Low cost/low income
 - Affordable
 - Assisted living
 - Rentals

More senior housing

Planning/Growth Management/Economic Development

- Adoption of county-wide land use plan and map
- Develop county land use controls to implement plan
- Strong city growth plan
- Downtown streetscape improvement - Historic
- I-90 & US 16 Interchange - Improve signage
- County addressing
 - Business recruitment
 - 5 – 15 employees/clean [industries]
 - Database of graduates
 - Existing business retention/expansion
 - Entryway improvements
 - Coal bed methane
 - Environmental concerns
 - Prepare for impacts
 - Re-invigorate economic development group
 - Agriculture
 - Preservation/enhancement
 - Air/water quality

Telecomm/Technology

- Task force/coalition - Study/recommend
- Economic incentives for T companies to serve Buffalo
 - Leverage resources to enhance services
- Direct contact with utilities
- Better wireless services to fill in voids with wire communications

Transportation

- Public transportation
 - In/out of town
 - BATS expansion
- Air
 - Low capacity
 - Expense
 - Reliability
 - Hangers
- Expensive gasoline

Workforce

- Recruitment of professionals
 - Teachers
 - Nurses
 - Medical technicians (allied professionals)
- Determine livable/sustainable wage job amounts for Buffalo

Increased jobs with benefits – i.e. health benefits
Training/education - More offered
Increase offerings from Sheridan College
Child care alternatives
 Very young children
 After school/nights/weekends

Recreation/Tourism

Marketing

Hospitality training
Internet/website
AAA
Expand to year round recreation
Recreation other than sports/alternative sports
Lake DeSmet
Mountain biking
Destination
WBC Region – Big Horn

Facilities

Extend/expand trails
Recreation district
Baseball/soccer complex - North Park, expand parks, new equipment

History

Preservation of buildings
Resurrect Historical Society
Historical resource coordinator

Culture

Arts & music festivals
Art museum
Transport to Casper or Billings

Human Services

Seniors

Lawn care, etc.
Multi-age contacts
Snow removal
Volunteer resources

Youth/Families

Arcade/place to loiter
Activities
School/neighborhood center
Bike trail

After school program expansion
Younger people to volunteer/serve
Retain youth in Buffalo
Health

- Drugs
- Maintain
- Telemedicine
- Dentist
- Nurses/CNA's
- Insurance
- Low federal reimbursement hurts providers/care
- Law enforcement
 - Equipment
 - Staff
 - Training
 - Community policing
- Communications
 - Limited media
 - Increase awareness of available programs
- Attitudes/Diversity
 - Perceived class by socio/economy
 - "Price tags limit thinking"

At the conclusion of the site visit, a written report was delivered to the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce. The report included a wide assortment of recommendations for resolving the issues identified during the site visit and interviews; however, not all of the recommendations have been followed, and many of the problems remain unresolved.

Plan Organization

The Buffalo Comprehensive Plan consists of 13 chapters, including the introduction. These include:

Planning Process: The chapter discusses how the plan was developed, including identification of the public participation opportunities.

Community Issues Identification: Steering Committee members and citizens identified the community issues that were important to them, and this information was used to pinpoint what concerns need to be addressed either by the Plan or the City.

Mission Statement, Goals and Policies: The Steering Committee developed a mission statement for the City, providing citizens and elected officials with the image of what Buffalo should look like in the future. Goals and policies to use to accomplish that image are listed.

Economy: A snapshot of the local economy is presented, and suggestions for further economic development are given.

Population: Population projections and characteristics are outlined. This information is particularly important for future land use projections.

Housing: A summary of housing characteristics and issues are given. The question about housing affordability is investigated as well.

Community Resources: Buffalo's public infrastructure, public services, and parks are highlighted. Water and sewer capacity is particularly important for future land use development.

Historical Resources: This chapter focuses on Buffalo's historical resources.

Development Limitations: The geographic setting of Buffalo and the area's natural resources and constraints are discussed.

Land Use: The City's existing land use, development opportunities, and potential growth areas are analyzed. Alternative land use scenarios are described and the future land use map is displayed.

Transportation and Circulation: Discussion includes traffic patterns, identified transportation bottlenecks, major street issues, potential bypass locations, and future needs.

Implementation: The Plan concludes with recommendations regarding intergovernmental coordination, annexation strategies, utility line extension, local subdivision processes, nuisances, and the existing City zoning ordinance. Finally, an implementation plan is outlined for achieving the goals of the Buffalo Comprehensive Plan.

Updating the Plan

Comprehensive plans are not intended to be one-time documents. Situations change, consumer preferences shift, land use patterns become established, and growth rates ebb and flow. It is therefore critical that the Buffalo Comprehensive Plan be the subject of periodic reviews and updates. Taking a look at the Plan on a five-year basis will assure that it remains relevant and useful to the community it is intended to serve.