



City of La Grande

Outreach Project with the Oregon Transportation & Growth Management Program



FINAL REPORT November 9, 2007

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City of La Grande TGM Outreach Workshop

Downtown Development and Economic Revitalization
Business, Urban Design and Transportation Strategies

Conducted October 3, 2007

Project Team

TGM Program

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Sponsors

Craig Thompson, Union County Economic Development Corporation and City of La Grande

Downtown La Grande Renaissance Committee

This project was funded by the Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Program, a joint program of the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the State of Oregon.

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Introduction

This report summarizes the Outreach workshop conducted in La Grande, Oregon on Wednesday, October 3, 2007, with the support from the Oregon Transportation and Growth Management (TGM).

Background and Process

The Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Program is a partnership of the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD). The TGM program works to expand transportation choices for people. TGM supports community efforts to expand transportation choices for people. By linking land use and transportation planning, TGM works in partnership with local governments to create vibrant, livable places in which people can walk, bike, take transit or drive where they want to go.

The City of La Grande currently enjoys an attractive downtown and effective transportation system. The City has a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities, including a movie theater, bakery, coffee shops, restaurants and other retail and professional businesses. It also has a public open space/park (Max Square) across the street from the city's new library. The downtown is about one-half mile from Eastern Oregon University. While the downtown has a strong base of businesses, buildings and amenities to build on, residents also note a number of challenges, including the following:

- Limited number of restaurants
- No downtown grocery store
- Limited clothing and shoe stores
- Relatively few businesses or activities that draw students and a significant number of nearby residents to the downtown

City and business leaders and local residents want to continue to build on and strengthen the economy, appearance and function of the downtown area. A variety of strategies have been discussed by the La Grande Renaissance Committee, Urban Renewal Agency, Chamber of Commerce, Union County Economic Development Corporation and other city leaders. They have noted a need for strategies and actions to promote good urban design, complete streetscape improvements, support existing and recruit future potential businesses, manage parking, enhance the transportation system and improve connections between the downtown and Eastern Oregon University.

The state's TGM Outreach assistance program retained Cogan Owens Cogan (COC), in partnership with SERA Architects, Kittelson & Associates, Inc. (KAI), ECONorthwest and the Oregon Downtown Development Association to accomplish the following objectives:

- Help the City improve the economic health of its downtown;
- Improve multi-modal transportation access to and within the downtown;
- Explore ways to improve signage in outlying areas with a view to channeling more Island Avenue (Highway 82) traffic into the downtown;
- Examine local parking issues and management strategies;
- Enhance the relationship between La Grande's downtown railroad station and the downtown;
- Identify opportunities for creating upper-floor housing in the downtown; and
- Improve connections between the downtown and the university.



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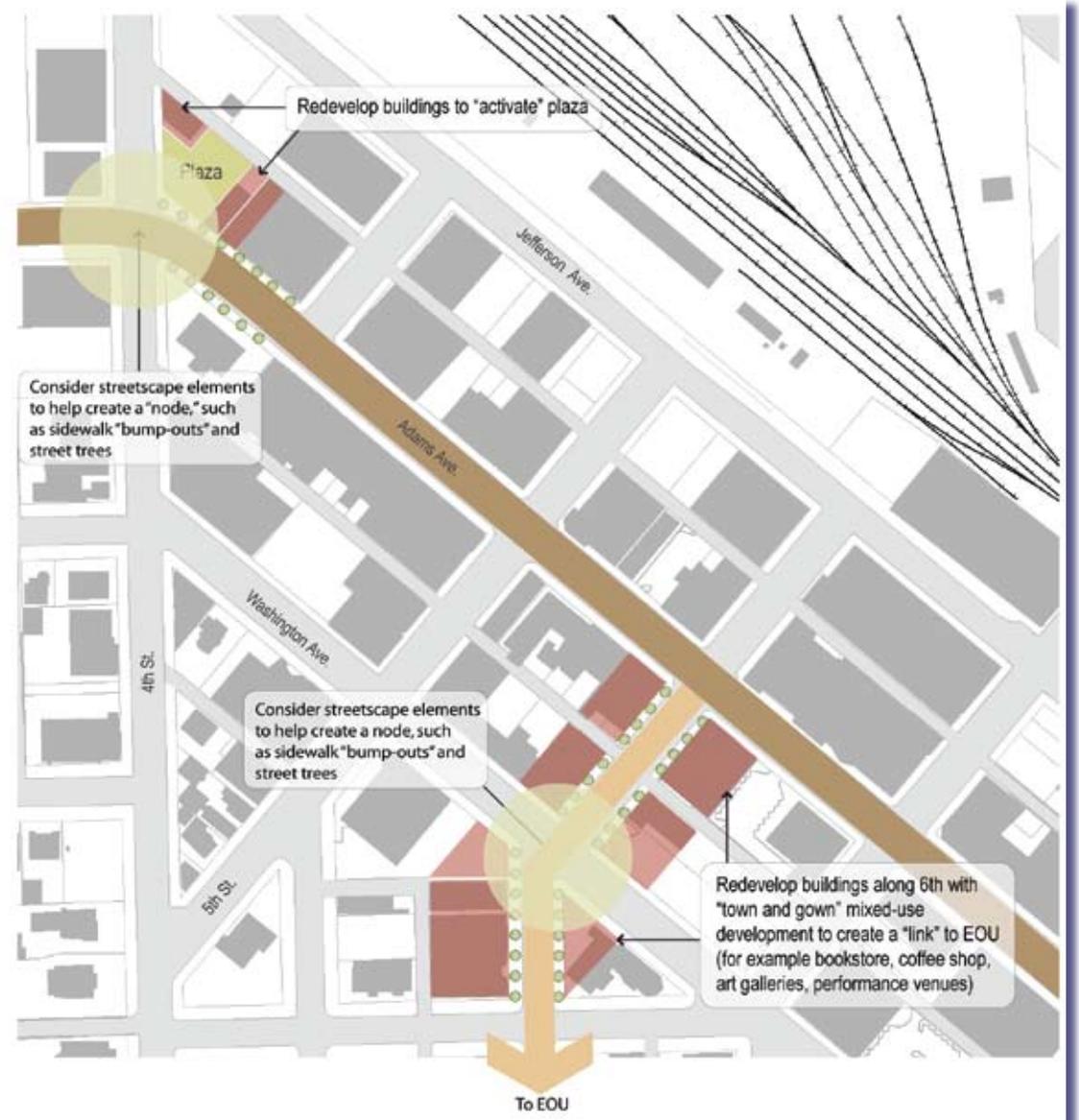
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To address the above issues, the City, Union County Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Renaissance Committee, TGM, and the COC team collaborated on an outreach workshop held in La Grande on Wednesday, October 3, 2007. In advance of the workshop, team members reviewed a variety of background materials and interviewed representatives of the following groups:

- City and Urban Renewal Agency staff
- Community business owners
- City elected officials
- Eastern Oregon University
- Oregon Departments of Transportation and Land Conservation and Development



This report summarizes results of these meetings, the workshop discussion and recommended strategies and next steps identified by the community and consultants. The PowerPoint presentation used in the workshop is included in a separate document, while a brief description of the topics discussed at the workshop is included below.



Proposed improvements at key downtown nodes.

Interview and Meeting Results

Consultant team members conducted telephone and in-person interviews and meetings with a variety of community members in advance of the workshop, including the following:

Telephone interviews

- City planning and public works staff
- Downtown business owners and Downtown Renaissance Committee members
- Eastern Oregon University interim president
- Department of Land Conservation and Development staff
- Oregon Department of Transportation staff

On-site interviews

- Mayor and city council member
- City public works, planning, building, finance and urban renewal agency staff
- Local business owners

Participants in these meeting raised a variety of issues, including the following:

- **Streetscape improvements.** A 1999 Downtown Design Plan prepared by SERA Architects identifies a variety of streetscape improvements, emphasizing curb extensions (bulb-outs) at most intersections along Adams Avenue, widening of sidewalks along the length of Adams, and other improvements. This plan was never implemented, due to the cost of proposed improvements, limited available funding and competing economic development priorities. More recently, City Planning and Public Works staff, with participation from other community members, have identified an alternative proposal. Because of concerns about issues with snow removal and cost of the curb and sidewalk extensions, this option focuses on adding a planted median strip with left turn bays on Adams Avenue as an alternative to bulb-outs. The City is now ready to implement some type of streetscape improvement plan and has some available urban renewal money with which to do so. The City is looking for guidance on the most appropriate approach to take.
- **Upper story housing.** Developing more upper story housing downtown is a key strategy for expanding the market for downtown goods and services. A number of buildings downtown already include some upper story housing and the City has had some recent success in developing additional housing as part of the NK West redevelopment project. At the same time, community members note a number of challenges to developing more housing downtown, including relatively high costs; building code issues, including those associated with historic designations; limited number of existing buildings with second and third stories; and restrictions on tenants (e.g., requirements for low income housing) associated with tax incentives.
- **Connections with Eastern Oregon University.** Community members generally agree that this is a very important component of a downtown revitalization effort. Making students, faculty and staff feel welcome downtown, creating a University presence downtown, developing businesses that attract and cater to students and staff, and fostering business and housing opportunities for faculty and staff downtown were all identified as potential actions to support this overall goal.



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- **Parking Supply and Management.**

Perceptions about the significance of this issue varied among participants. Some believe there is a shortage of convenient, available parking downtown. Others, including many business owners, think the supply is adequate. They note that while someone may not always be able to find a parking spot directly in front of the business they are visiting, this can be beneficial to other businesses and the downtown in general by causing people to discover and patronize a variety of businesses as they travel to their primary business destination. Participants agree that the City has an effective and well-enforced timed parking system. Preliminary observations by the consulting team indicate that the supply of parking seems to be adequate, although more study of this issue is recommended.



- **Urban Renewal Funding and Improvements.** The City has focused the bulk of its urban renewal funding to date on the new City library and business park projects, given that these were previously identified as the two highest priorities for urban renewal funding. There is general agreement that improvements to the downtown now top the list of priorities for urban renewal funding. A variety of initiatives may be funded through the urban renewal program to enhance the downtown, including streetscape projects, façade improvements, upper story housing or other development or redevelopment projects. The City is looking for advice in prioritizing these efforts.

- **Highway and Other Signage.** Participants note that better signage is needed to direct people to the downtown, including travelers passing through the area and those visiting other parts of the community (e.g., Wal-Mart or other businesses on Island

Avenue). Better signage is needed at the western and central (Island Avenue) interchanges, as well as along Island Avenue between I-84 and Adams Avenue and at the intersection of Island and Adams. While the western entry to La Grande provides a scenic, pleasant driving experience, it does not do a good job of announcing to people that they are nearing the downtown and the amenities it has to offer.

- **Use of Railroad Depot and Associated Issues.** Community members note that while opportunities exist to use the station or adjacent parking areas for downtown events or parking, the railroad has not been receptive to such proposals in the past. Other participants note that noise and access issues associated with the railroad detract from the overall livability of the downtown and present an obstacle to downtown revitalization.

Many of these issues also were noted by workshop participants. Proposed strategies and next steps for addressing them are described later in this report.

Workshop Summary

Approximately 40 business leaders, Planning Commissioners, City Councilors, local business leaders, residents and others participated in the workshop on October 3, 2007.

Craig Thompson, Union County Economic Development Corporation, welcomed participants. He thanked participants for attending and encouraged them to take this opportunity to discuss important economic development, urban design and transportation planning issues. He noted that the workshop also would be a chance to learn and talk about



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some general urban and street design issues to help improve the quality of the downtown, foster economic development and continue to create great streets and places for La Grande residents and visitors.

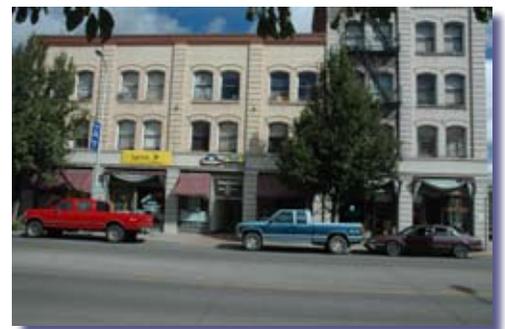
Next, Grant Young, representing Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, gave the State's perspective. The TGM Education and Outreach Program, the source of funding for the workshop, is administered jointly by DLCD and ODOT. He emphasized the program's interest in giving Oregonians more transportation choices while strengthening the economic health of downtowns and livability of surrounding neighborhoods. Grant told participants that the workshop goals were to stimulate thinking, introduce and discuss concepts and approaches and listen to community comments and ideas. Matt Hastie, principal with Cogan Owens Cogan, then introduced members of the team – Tim Smith, Director of Urban Design and Planning at SERA architects, and Beth Wemple, Engineer at Kittelson & Associates, Inc. Matt, Tim and Beth then presented a PowerPoint slideshow, discussing the following topics:

- Economic development strategies
- Advantages of mixed use development
- Functions of great streets
- Key urban and streetscape design elements, including building design, use of upper stories, street furnishings, the importance of intersections, gathering places, street trees, landscaping and other topics
- Improving traffic operations, connections and capacity issues
- Parking design and management
- Possible redevelopment opportunity sites

Group Discussion

Participants engaged in a discussion with members of the consulting team about economic development, urban design, land use and transportation planning issues discussed during the presentation. Following is a summary of comments and questions from participants, as well as responses from members of the consulting team (shown in *italics*).

- **Maintenance is an important consideration in deciding on how to make streetscape improvements. We must be able to take care of the street in winter conditions. The ice can be awful here. Winter conditions are a lot different here than in Western Oregon.**
- **We need to have an inventory of the downtown so that we can identify existing uses, missing elements and needed changes.**
The Downtown Renaissance Committee has recommended that type of inventory for the downtown. That committee also recently conducted a survey of downtown businesses and shoppers to find out why people go downtown, and what residents need there. About 355 people participated in the survey.
- **If we are trying to promote and develop upper story housing, in the long term, we'll need adequate parking to downtown to serve them. There also are new state regulations that allow for parking above retail and housing in areas like our downtown if they meet the appropriate requirements. In addition, a lot of things can be done structurally to maximize the use and efficiency of upper stories in terms of how the**



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interior walls are built, use of sprinkler systems, specific building materials, etc.

- **Livability downtown is key to attracting new residents and visitors. Until we address the issue of railroad noise, it will be difficult to encourage more people to live downtown. How can we address that?**

It is possible to establish a Federal Rail Administration “quiet zone” downtown but this requires specific improvements to railway crossings, including gates. The city could use urban renewal funds for these improvements and would need to consider their relative priority among other potential downtown projects.

- **The streetscape improvements, whether it’s a median or curb extensions, sound like expensive projects. Are there things we can do short of those larger improvements to improve the downtown.**

Possibly. You also need to decide whether it is more important to use public funding to make those types of improvements or focus on helping fund specific redevelopment opportunities that will bring more businesses and people to the downtown.

- **What does the median do for us?**

The City has identified several advantages. They include reducing long-term impacts on parking, possibly reducing costs in comparison to curb and sidewalk extensions, helping manage drainage and creating a large tree canopy in the center of the street. Although two different streetscape improvement approaches have been identified, the City may want to consider a hybrid alternative as well, e.g., a median along longer blocks where it may be more appropriate and workable and curb extensions at key intersections only. Also, rather than committing to extensive streetscape improvements along the whole length of Adams, the City might want to experiment with targeted improvements in specific areas as a first step and phase in subsequent improvements over time.

- **A median also would impact snow removal. We currently use the center of the street for the vehicles that collect snow in the winter time. A median would prevent us from doing that and would force us to change that system.**

- **What about the impact of a median on parades?**

That is an important consideration. As part of our report on this project, we will identify a number of criteria that the city can use to decide on the most appropriate streetscape improvement options (see page 11).

- **I like the idea of focusing improvements on one or two hubs or nodes. I would also recommend making more modest targeted improvements to other parts of the downtown to make the approach more equitable (e.g., pedestrian-oriented lighting, benches or street trees).**

- **Is crossing the street really an issue here. You talked a lot about the value of curb extensions in improving pedestrian safety by shortening the distance to cross the street but I haven’t really seen that as an issue here. The distance isn’t all that long, the traffic isn’t particularly heavy most of the time, and drivers tend to be very considerate to pedestrians.**

It may not be an issue for some people but frequently is an issue for older people and those with young children. It is up to the community to determine how important it is in the context of other issues here.

- **I would like to commend local business owners that have made improvements to their facades. That has made a lot of difference in improving the attractiveness of the downtown.**

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Urban renewal money can be used for façade improvements. The city has discussed this and would like to pursue it. The Renaissance Committee's plan identifies it as a strategy to revitalize the downtown.

● **How do you encourage non-local owners to do façade or streetscape improvements?**

That is a challenge. It is typically much easier to encourage local business or property owners to do that because they have a direct stake and benefit in those types of improvements. One way is to provide funding or incentives. Such programs can include Historic tax credits, New Market tax credits, urban renewal funding to purchase land or make public improvements, and technical assistance related to needed building improvements.

● **How much state funding is available for streetscape improvements?**

Transportation enhancement funds provide some opportunities for the state to contribute to local bike, pedestrian and other improvements. Cities need to have a downtown plan to be competitive in seeking those funds. However, even with a downtown plan, funds are limited and very competitive.

● **As a building owner, I'm interested in the recommendations about balconies. Are they useful? Also, trash enclosures in alleys should be encouraged or required. Is this already in the city's code? If not it should be to reduce odors, particularly during warm weather.**

Balconies help provide more "eyes on the street," improving safety.

● **Think about holding and promoting some type of cycling event to draw people to La Grande. This is a wonderful area for cycling. People will spend a lot of money to attend similar events in the Portland area. We have a lot of potential for that type of event here.**

● **What about a theme for the downtown. A lot of other communities do that to attract visitors. Examples include Winthrop, Washington, Pendleton (Rodeo/Western theme), Sisters (Western theme), Leavenworth (Bavarian theme) and Joseph (artsy theme). What about a theme here – maybe a French theme to go with the name of the city. Find ideas, events or entertainment that would draw people within a one-day drive. Make La Grande fun.**

● **We used to have a truck route that ran along Jefferson. Can this be put back in place?**

That designation was removed after changes to the road system which reduce the turn radius for trucks entering Jefferson. In addition, to identify a preferred truck route, the proposed street must have an adequate structural base and be maintained to that base. Those conditions likely will prevent that redesignation along Jefferson.

● **We need more color in downtown La Grande. The colors here are drab and boring. More color in buildings and improvements would liven up the downtown.**

● **An independent shoe store is needed. Downtown would be a good location for that. How do we get one to locate downtown?**

● **Recruiting businesses here is a key ingredient of an economic revitalization strategy. The Downtown Renaissance committee has identified its importance and begun recruiting efforts for certain types of businesses. It requires direct marketing with specific businesses and a demonstrated need for those types of businesses and their potential to thrive here.**



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Questionnaire Responses

Participants were provided with an optional written comment form to complete and return at or after the meeting. Eighteen (18) participants completed the form. Responses are summarized in Appendix B.

Next Steps and Recommendations

The next steps for the City of La Grande are based upon the work already undertaken by the Downtown Renaissance Committee, the City and the information and discussion from the TGM workshop. Participants in meetings in advance of and at the workshop identified the need to increase the types of businesses within the downtown; expand and enhance the connections between the university and downtown; create a streetscape that is practical and aesthetic; and locate and manage parking to accommodate residents, employers and customers to the downtown.

In order for the La Grande community to move forward in revitalizing the downtown there is a need to:

- Develop a cohesive, collaborative vision for the downtown
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities for implementing the vision for different community groups
- Search for models and approaches from other communities to help achieve the vision
- Identify and assess the streetscape alternatives in terms of cost, aesthetics, maintenance, access and mobility for all modes of travel (cars, bikes, walkers and transit); use the results to identify a preferred alternative, which could represent a hybrid approach
- Determine priorities and funding opportunities, including use of urban renewal funds
- Make and measure progress toward goals

Other important goals include identifying key nodes and implementing strategies to strengthen them. Preliminary priority nodes include Max Square (corner of Adams and 4th) and the intersection of 6th Street and Adams which also can serve as a key connection to Eastern Oregon University (see below).



Agree on Overall Vision

Different community groups have identified a variety of goals and actions to strengthen La Grande's economy. Many of them are included in the four-point plan prepared by the Downtown Renaissance Committee. Others have been identified in previous or ongoing planning efforts, including the City's 1999 Downtown Design Plan and a more recent proposed alternative to improve the streetscape along Adams Avenue. However, there does not seem to be a coordinated community vision that incorporates and reconciles all these efforts and that has been reviewed as part of a broader public process. In developing a cohesive, proactive community vision, we recommend the following:

- Build on previous planning efforts and community initiatives. These should include the Renaissance Committee plan, a new streetscape plan (see below), discussions with Eastern Oregon University, the recently updated Bicycle Pedestrian Plan, results of this outreach

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project and other recent planning efforts. Key themes of the vision are likely to include the following:

- Support existing businesses and recruit new ones that attract residents, students and visitors and improve the economic health of the downtown.
- Expand the supply of upper-floor housing in the downtown to enhance the market for downtown businesses.
- Improve the appearance of downtown buildings through a new façade improvement program and other means.
- Focus short-term resources on strengthening specific locations that will act as nodes of activity. Balance this with modest streetscape or façade improvements in other locations.
- Enhance physical and other connections between the downtown and Eastern Oregon University, including those identified in the new Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan.
- Improve the ability to travel to and within the downtown by driving, walking, bicycling and transit, including through streetscape and access improvements. Incorporate recommendations from the new Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan.
- Maintain and enforce an adequate supply of parking downtown, without oversupplying it and continue to refine and implement effective parking management strategies.
- Improve signage in outlying areas with a view to channeling more Island Ave. (Highway 82) traffic into the downtown.
- Involve a broad range of community members to respond to and agree on the vision.
- Identify an implementation plan, including roles and responsibilities, costs and relative priorities (see below re: priorities). (Note: This could be done as a follow-up exercise and incorporated in more specific planning efforts described elsewhere in this report.)

This visioning process does not need to be a long and involved or detailed process that would act as an obstacle to implementing key economic revitalization strategies. The community already has identified and seems to agree on many of the building blocks which are described above. A one-day, well-attended and organized event could be used to accomplish this task.

Focus Resources on Nodes of Activity

Focusing on specific areas is one recommended way to begin to prioritize and implement downtown improvements. Creating one or more vibrant, active areas in the downtown will help draw people to the downtown, with spillover effects on adjacent businesses. As these areas become successful, the city and local business and property owners can begin to make similar improvements to adjacent areas. In determining the most appropriate focus areas, the community should consider these factors:

- Build on existing successful areas of activity.
- Incorporate existing community facilities or other assets.
- Choose locations that act as important cross-roads for people traveling to or within the downtown.
- Identify areas with strong, unique buildings or architectural elements.
- Select nodes that ultimately can be connected and are in relatively close proximity to each other.



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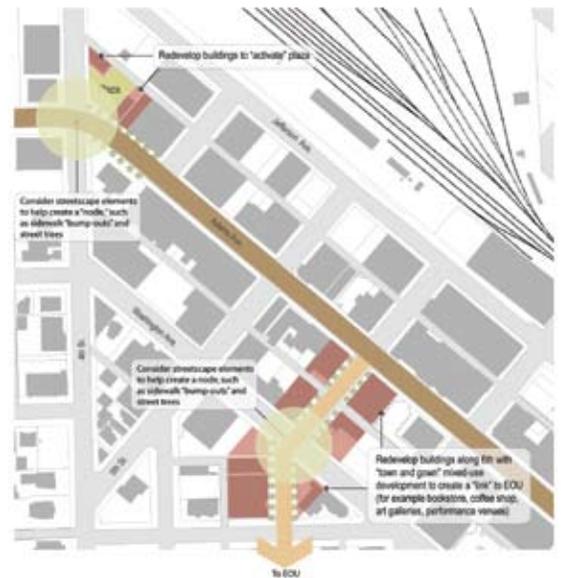
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During the course of visiting La Grande, studying background materials and plans and meeting with members of the community, the consulting team identified two key potential nodes. Opportunities and potential future improvements are summarized in the table below.

Opportunities	Recommendations
<p>1. Adams Avenue and 4th Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key community assets – City Hall and Library • Existing plaza – Max Square • Key gateway to residential areas and schools on and near 4th Street • Close to western gateway to downtown • Adjacent to popular local restaurant (Mamacitas) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement intersection and streetscape improvements to improve aesthetics and pedestrian safety at intersection – possible bulb-outs on east side of 4th, crosswalks, street trees, benches, etc. • Consider implementing median approach on 4th, adjacent to library and ODS building • Redevelop buildings to the east of Max Square to create more intensive mixed use development (retail ground floor with housing or offices above) – orient ground floor uses to Square • Consider modest changes to Max Square design, as needed in conjunction with adjacent redevelopment
<p>2. Adams Avenue and 6th Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong architectural/building elements • Key gateway to Eastern Oregon University • Popular existing business for residents and university students (Highway 30 coffee shop) • Strong view corridor from EOU toward downtown along 6th Street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider streetscape/intersection improvements (e.g., bulb-outs at one or more corners) and pedestrian amenities along Adams and 6th (street trees, benches, lighting, etc.) • Add signage directing traffic to Eastern Oregon University (move from Island Avenue) • Improve building facades • Redevelop nearby buildings and strengthen businesses adjacent to Highway 30 coffee house along 6th and/or Adams; encourage “town/gown” business opportunities • Look for opportunities to create a plaza or other open space in the vicinity of the intersection

Identify and Begin to Implement a Preferred Streetscape Improvement Plan

The community currently is considering two different streetscape improvement approaches. One is based on a plan and process facilitated by SERA Architects in the late 1990s (Downtown Design Plan). This option emphasizes curb extensions (bulb-outs), widening of sidewalks along the length of Adams, and other improvements. While the process to develop this plan included significant community involvement, some community members, including City staff, do not support specific elements of the plan or the plan as a whole due to concerns about the cost of implementing it and issues associated with maintenance (e.g., snow removal).



The second plan has been developed more recently by City Planning and Public Works staff with participation

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from other community members. This option focuses on adding a planted median strip with left turn bays on Adams Avenue as an alternative to bulb-outs, citing concerns about issues with snow removal and cost of the curb and sidewalk extensions. This alternative does not appear to have had widespread community review or involvement. The City is at a point of needing to assess and compare these options and determine a preferred alternative. The recommended choice could be a hybrid of the two options.

We recommend use of the following potential criteria to compare these options and have begun to identify advantages and disadvantages of each one in relation to these factors.

Criteria	Median Alternative	Curb Extension Alternative
Traffic Flow and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides drivers with guidance on allowed and prohibited behavior Eliminates left turn access to mid-block parking lots or driveways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for continued access to mid-block driveways or intersections Slows down traffic at narrowed intersections where most people will cross the street
Parking Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could impact on-street parking on both sides of street during construction; phasing construction could reduce/localize impacts No long-term parking impacts expected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May decrease on-street parking by 1-2 spaces at block ends, including bulb-outs and snow removal areas Provides vehicles safe pull-in/out space
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If trees or landscaping, irrigation, planting, seasonal maintenance needed Snow removal procedures would need to be modified (currently collected by vehicles parked in the continuous center turn lane) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal after construction May impede snow removal Maintenance required for new street trees (watering and pruning)
Capital Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More assessment needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More assessment needed
Maintenance Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More assessment needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More assessment needed
Pedestrian Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely difficult or not possible to provide pedestrian refuges at intersections Pedestrian refuges could be provided at mid-block for long blocks but would promote mid-block crossings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrows crossing distance at intersections; also improves safety Increases visibility of pedestrians at crossing
Street Trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for trees with larger tree canopies. May not provide as much shade for pedestrians on sidewalk as street trees on sidewalks Trees may be impacted by snow plowing or removal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for more shade for pedestrians on both sides of street Requires specific species of trees and regular maintenance to avoid interference with utility lines, sign visibility and overhanging branches
Aesthetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trees in center have potential to block vistas of nearby hills and mountains Snow plowing/removal could result in unsightly buildup of snow in median Some residents indicate preference for aesthetics of this alternative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultants and some community members find the aesthetics of this option preferable Maintains vistas to surrounding hills
Impact on Retail Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medians generally have an adverse impact on retail (examples include MLK Boulevard in Portland where the median was removed at significant cost to reverse adverse impacts) because they tend to block views of and access to businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most elements would have positive impacts (e.g., wider sidewalks, more sidewalk area at corners, etc.) Possible minor impacts from loss of parking at corners
Parades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May adversely impact space needs and visibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No adverse impact

Assess and Refine Parking Supply and Management Approaches

Opinions vary about the adequacy of parking in Downtown La Grande. The consultants' very cursory assessment is that the supply of parking is adequate and that management and enforcement efforts are successful. However, a more thorough assessment, coupled with educational efforts aimed at business owners and employees, would be beneficial and some refinements may help enhance the current situation. We suggest the following steps:

- **Conduct a parking inventory** to assess the adequacy of the existing supply and management practices. This could be conducted in large part by community volunteers and staff with targeted assistance from consultants, if needed. There are a couple of guidebooks that could be used for this effort – *Parking Management Made Easy: A guide to Taming the Downtown Parking Beast* and *Main Street – when a highway runs through it: A Handbook for Oregon Communities*. If the City uses a consultant for assistance, it should be a well-qualified transportation planning firm. The City is advised to be cautious to avoid selecting a consultant that also designs parking garages.
- **Refine parking management strategies, as needed.** The city seems to have a well thought out, effectively enforced parking management system. However, some refinements could be used to strengthen the system (e.g., refinements to timed restrictions in certain areas). The primary objectives should be to provide an adequate supply of short-term spaces for retail patrons while requiring business owners and employees to park in other areas where supply is adequate and walking distance to their jobs is not too onerous.
- **Educate the public, including business owners and employees** about the value of on-street retail-oriented parking to ensure that they are not using valuable parking spaces. Some information about the value of these parking spaces is included in the PowerPoint presentation prepared for this project. Additional information is identified in the documents listed above.



Learn from Other Successful Models

There are many successful communities similar to La Grande in scale, challenges and opportunities, from which to learn. Talking with them about the techniques and tools used to revitalize their downtowns can provide ideas and inspiration for local projects and may help in identifying high impact priorities and strategies for attainment. Possible communities to research and contact include the following:

City	Successful Approach
Canby, Oregon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban Renewal District funding priorities • Façade improvement program • Design and development standards • Business recruitment • Targeted streetscape improvements
Sisters, Oregon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful annual events and festivals • Unified theme to downtown design
McMinnville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business recruitment • Downtown development program and coordination

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City	Successful Approach
Pendleton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signature/destination business (Hamley's) – provides jobs, attracts tourists and creates activities and energy
Troutdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streetscape improvements Urban renewal district/business development coordination Façade improvements and design standards
Grants Pass/Klamath Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streetscape improvements Geothermal heating of sidewalks (Grants Pass)
The Dalles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streetscape improvements Pedestrian, bicycle improvements

Organization

La Grande has a basis for organizing business owners, property owners and other downtown stakeholder for action through the Downtown Renaissance Committee, Downtown Development Association, Chamber of Commerce and Union County Economic Development Corporation. As a community that had a certified Main Street Program in the past and has recently reaffirmed Main Street's four-point approach (Design, Economic Restructuring, Organization, and Promotion) through the goals of the Renaissance Committee, the wheels are in motion to move once again towards a comprehensive approach to downtown development. Key questions to answer as organizational efforts move forward are:

1. Who will take the private sector lead in downtown development? Right now, there seems to be ambiguity surrounding this issue and until it can be clarified and settled, efforts are likely to falter or be delayed. Strong, defined leadership to coordinate organized redevelopment activities will be a key to downtown success.
2. What is the vision for the different groups that help support economic development and how will it move redevelopment efforts forward? Identifying organizational priorities and building a work-plan to reach those goals is needed. This may occur through updating and building off the Renaissance Committee workplan. Part of this effort may include developing a detailed plan to fund and hire a downtown manager as the downtown community has voiced a desire to have professional staff to coordinate activities. To do this, the community will have to answer questions such as: Does this initiative have the support needed? What needs to happen in order to get this position funded? Does La Grande see itself participating in the new Oregon Main Street Program? What can the lead group do in the meantime to help move other downtown initiatives forward?
3. How can public and private redevelopment efforts be coordinated and complementary? Often, there is too little coordination between City redevelopment activities (i.e., through an Urban Renewal Agency) and a downtown organization. The downtown group should be a strong and willing partner that works closely with the City to tackle tough redevelopment issues such as redevelopment of catalyst sites, upper floor development and business recruitment. Too often, the downtown organization is seen as largely a promotional entity and not on equal footing with the City in downtown development.

When communities think about what is holding them back, they often focus on lack of funding. However, a range of deeper issues determine how successful a community will be



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in their bid to attain a revitalized, livable downtown. The Oregon Downtown Development Association has identified five primary barriers to downtown development. They include:

- (Appalling) Attitudes
 - Negative, exhausted and beat down; trying not to fail rather than being committed to success
 - Afraid of change
 - Gives up too easily
 - ‘Us vs. Them’ mentality – causing a break down in civic culture
 - Entitlement mentality; waiting to be saved by someone else
- (Inappropriate) Approaches
 - Reactive, crisis-driven – unable to get out in front of anything
 - Status quo is A-OK
 - Using old approaches and tools (i.e., downtown codes are out of date and do not support the downtown vision)
 - Lack of creative problem solving and calculated risk taking
 - Failing to bring the rest of the community along – leading to limited buy-in and support for projects
 - Base is unorganized and too limited – ‘the same 5 people do all the work’ syndrome
 - Clueless: don’t know when to hold ‘em, fold ‘em, walk away or run!
- (Floundering) Focus
 - No agreed-upon vision or roadmap
 - Have a vision and plan, but don’t know where or how to begin implementation
 - Everything gets equal treatment – don’t know how to prioritize
 - Can’t identify the strongest assets/catalysts to build off of
- (Dead) Sparkplugs
 - Absence of positive, inspiring forward-thinking leadership in elected officials, city staff and civic partners
 - Building and nurturing partnerships is not a priority
 - Power and information is concentrated and not shared – this will cause a lack of trust and break down in civic culture
 - Not knowing where and how to take a stand and, when necessary, accept the political heat
 - Not understanding the 20/60/20 rule (knowing that the negative 20% is 100% louder than the majority 60%) – putting too much effort on trying to change the wrong group’s minds
- (Broken Down) Skill Set
 - Unskilled in packaging and selling your community and projects; salesmanship, persuasion, deal-making, negotiation, and cheerleading are all critical attributes
 - Lack of team depth and capacity



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- ‘Forest for the trees’ syndrome – lack of a broader perspective to see and understand 30,000/15,000/7,500 foot issues
- Assumptions rule the day – where you don’t go back and retest to make sure assumptions are correct
- Just can’t ‘just do it’ – don’t have the skills or capacity to get off high center

Downtown partners should have an honest conversation about these barriers and assess themselves to better understand the issues that may be hindering them from success. From that, a realistic plan is needed to address the top issues that emerge.

Following are recommendations about appropriate roles and responsibilities of different groups:

Group	Key Responsibilities
City staff and elected officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree on an overall vision, in partnership with other groups and community members • Provide policy guidance to Urban Renewal Agency re: funding priorities • Share in funding cost of Downtown business manager , at least on a 1-3 year basis until the position can be funded by other means (i.e., EID) • Participate in implementing other strategies
Downtown Business Manager (if hired) <i>(Essential to determine where this position would be housed)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Main Street Program; apply for certification through Oregon Main Street • Implement business retention, expansion and recruitment activities – building off unique business clusters • Work with developers interested in downtown projects • Coordinate activities to finance downtown program and projects • Act as the primary liaison among local economic development groups and business owners, the City and downtown stakeholders • Work with property owners to implement economic revitalization strategies (i.e., façade grants) • Provide on-going communication to stakeholders on downtown activities, programs and initiatives • Coordinate downtown PR and marketing activities and events • Build a strong and sustainable organization and volunteer base; help develop leaders • Coordinate downtown design program in conjunction with City • Collect and maintain data related to the downtown (e.g., business and building inventory, traffic counts, opportunity sites, etc.)
Urban Renewal Agency Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a range of flexible tools and assistance for downtown property owners • Work with City, Downtown Organization (and Manager) and other community members to establish priorities • Decide how aggressively it wants to participate in downtown development projects (i.e., assemble catalyst site for redevelopment)
Downtown Renaissance Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in gathering data needed to assess effectiveness of specific strategies, including parking and building inventories • Continue to review and refine economic development strategies in concert with Downtown Manager, city and other groups • Collaborate with Chamber of Commerce to assist in gathering information and input from local business owners
La Grande Downtown Development Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out comprehensive events calendar for downtown • Take on other roles as appropriate (i.e., house Downtown Main Street Program and Downtown Manager position? – See description of activities under that category)

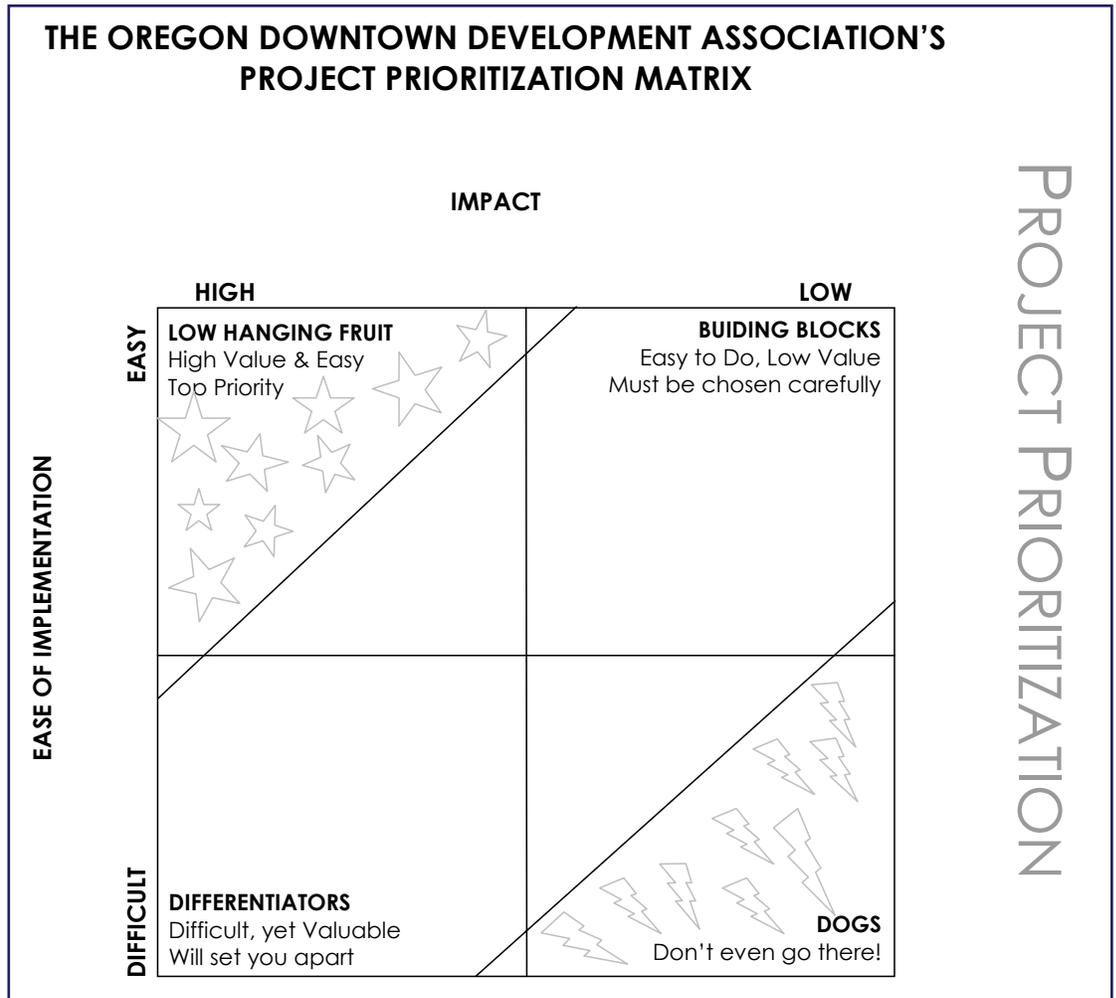
Priorities

It is very important for the community to begin to identify its top short-term priorities so that it can begin to make progress on them. This will be important in demonstrating community commitment to improving the downtown and maintaining general support for these actions. Keeping the community apprised of successes can help inspire support and pride in the achievements and additional actions to enhance the downtown.

In identifying these opportunities, we recommend use of the following criteria:

- Potential positive and negative impacts (economic, social, and environmental)
- Ability to implement in the short term (1-3 years)
- Cost and resulting cost/benefit (public and private)
- Ability to leverage other resources (e.g., public investments can leverage private sector actions)
- Potential for achieving multiple objectives

The first two criteria are the most important and are illustrated by the following matrix:



This matrix shows that projects representing “low hanging fruit” – i.e., that can be implemented relatively easily in the short term and have at least a modest impact on economic revitalization should be the first priority in the short term. In the medium term, the community should balance these projects with at least one project that may be more difficult

or costly to implement but will have even more significant impacts in meeting its objectives. Examples of potential high priority projects include the following:

High value and relatively easy

- Targeted, modest streetscape improvements at key nodes (benches, hanging plants, street trees) and other locations along Adams Street
- Follow-up community event to agree on elements of Downtown vision

These actions can be undertaken primarily by the city and Urban Renewal Agency and the costs should be relatively low.

High value and moderate degree of difficulty

- Agree on approach to streetscape improvements (median, curb, extension or hybrid)
- Agreement on organizational structure, roles and responsibilities of different community groups and agencies (see *Organization, pages 13-15*)
- Establish University presence in storefront near 6th and Adams
- Hire Downtown Manager, with agreed upon responsibilities

These actions require partnerships with at least one entity but are relatively inexpensive in terms of financial investment.

High value and higher degree of difficulty

- Redevelopment project adjacent to Max Square
- Additional, more extensive (but still targeted) streetscape improvements – hybrid approach with median and/or intersection or sidewalk improvements in specific areas where benefits are maximized and adverse impacts minimized; implement in phases

These actions require a higher degree of partnership and are more costly but also are expected to have more significant impacts.

These are preliminary suggested priorities based on our initial observations and discussions during this project. They will require more community review and discussion consistent with the approaches suggested in this report.

Conclusions

The City of La Grande has an excellent foundation on which to base future economic revitalization efforts. It has an attractive downtown, effective transportation system, beautiful natural surroundings, nearby Eastern Oregon University and a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities, including a movie theater, bakery, coffee shops, restaurants and other retail and professional businesses. It also has a public open space/park (Max Square) across the street from the city's new library. At the same time, community members note a number of challenges to enhancing the downtown, including a limited number of restaurants, no downtown grocery store, limited clothing and shoe stores, relatively few businesses or activities that draw students or residents to the downtown, and the need for a variety of public improvements. However, with a coordinated, cohesive and proactive vision and approach to implementing it, the city is poised to meet these challenges. Other conclusions of this study include:

- There is a shared community commitment to enhancing the downtown. However, the community should agree on a vision for how this is done, incorporating and building on previous planning efforts and the elements described in this report. This could be



accomplished through a single, well-attended community event and would help set the stage for a more detailed implementation plan.

- Some streetscape improvements are needed to improve the attractiveness of the downtown and enhance the retail environment. The City should assess alternative approaches using the criteria identified in this document and agree on a focused, phased and possibly hybrid approach to implementing streetscape improvements. These public improvements can help leverage private investment in the downtown.
- The City should focus investments in one or two target areas as a starting point with more modest investments in improvements throughout the downtown. This report outlines two potential nodes and associated improvements.
- It is essential to agree on an organizational approach to implementing future downtown revitalization efforts. This report identifies issues to consider in doing this, along with potential roles and responsibilities of different stakeholder groups (see *Organization*, pages 13-15).
- The City appears to have an adequate supply of parking and an effective management and enforcement system in place. A more thorough assessment of the situation, coupled with modest refinements to the management approach and education about the value of retail parking spaces will help enhance this situation.
- The community needs and desires to identify its top priorities in terms of actions and projects to enhance the downtown. This report provides a framework for that decision-making process and a preliminary set of possible priorities which the community can begin to discuss.

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APPENDIX A: POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

The presentation delivered at the design workshop has been provided in a separate document.

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APPENDIX B: Questionnaire Responses

Participants were provided with an optional written comment form to complete and return at or after the meeting. Eighteen (18) participants completed the form. Responses are described below, with questions shown in bold italics.

1. *What are downtown La Grande's most important assets and opportunities?*

- The proximity to incredible scenic roads for biking – no traffic. Mint fields, horses, cows. City folks love this. As for the actual town Max Square and the library are the big assets.
- Natural beauty area, wide streets, good parking.
- Compact downtown area, beautiful surrounding mountains and fields.
- Wide travel lanes, easy access, friendly public parking, wide sidewalks, well-defined cross-walks, clean.
- Views of the mountains; mixed use buildings; mix of old/historical buildings with new.
- The building structure.
- Solid building walls that are transparent. Buildings to sidewalk edge.
- Wide sidewalks, Max Square Park, wide right-of-way, historic district, community connection shuttle bus, urban renewal district, retail and restaurant businesses, 2nd story and up residential uses, centrally located.
- Friendliness, locations, beauty
- The beautiful architectural features of existing buildings.
- Max Square – good intersection for a bump out or two. 6th and Washington and Elm – good place for EOU and multi-use town and gown business. Development of 2nd level housing (upstairs residences).
- Open – easy access, parking and the friendly business. I feel that there are many opportunities for different shops, restaurants and service based businesses.
- Compact and easy to shop, given that parking is not a problem.
- Historical feel, connection to the University.
- The character – heart of every town is the downtown – La Grande is fairly poor in this area – look at Baker City (Joseph/Walla Walla).
- Asset – that freeway access to downtown is readily available. Downtown has tremendous opportunity – it can stretch from Oak Street to Willow and encompass Jefferson and Washington.
- Great setting.
- Wide, well-built streets and infrastructure, substantial buildings, viable long-term businesses, potential customers – EOU, housing very close, apartments and 1-84 visitors.

2. *Which groups are most important to the Downtown's economic success? (check one)*

Nearby residents *Students* *Visitors* *Other*
(please specify) _____

- Nearby residents 10
- Students 6
- Visitors 8

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- Other (please specify)
 - a. All three (4)
 - b. Shoppers
 - c. Residents from the greater community

3. *What types of businesses are most needed downtown?*

- Independent restaurants – Thai food, East Indian, Wine and coffee bar. Food and NOT Applebees!
- Clothing stores, gift shops, family restaurants, entertainment center.
- Specialty shops, restaurants, brew pub on Adams.
- Grocery store on the west end of town, Mall area, parking on the east end of downtown.
- Mixed-use buildings – more food related business – more specialty shopping
- Retail, café and restaurants.
- More artistic retail, galleries, eateries, boutiques, grocery store or market, shoe store.
- Retail specialty shops.
- Clothing stores with plus sizes; good, inexpensive family restaurant.
- More retail.
- Small scale, niche businesses – retail. Clothing, shoes, grocery store. It would be good to move service type businesses more into the upper floors.
- Diverse shopping opportunities residential needs also need to be addressed.
- Core type businesses for basic needs. User friendly businesses. Downtown grocery.
- Retail – clothing, etc. Restaurants with outdoor seating. Nightclub.
- Good coffee shop or Mad Matilda’s In Baker City – “nice” retail – civic place for events etc. (like Cross Roads in Baker City).
- Restaurants, especially ones that serve breakfast.
- More specialty shops (clothing, shoes, gifts) and restaurants (sandwich).
- A variety: grocery store, deli/bakery, clothing/shoes, hardware, restaurants, appliances.

4. *What types of businesses have the most potential to revitalize downtown?*

- Restaurants – independent. Open for lunch. Open past 5 pm.
- Restaurants, entertainment centers, business appealing to college students.
- Specialty shops, restaurants, brew pub on Adams.
- Government on roadway improvements, property owners on structures, clothing store like Emporium.
- Local artists and sign design, retail, gallery.
- More artistic retail, galleries, eateries, boutiques, grocery store or market, shoe store.
- Retail specialty shops – shoes, men’s clothing, EOU gift shop, art gallery/retail, other specialty stores.
- Restaurant.
- Antique (more of a variety).
- Small scale, niche businesses – retail. Clothing, shoes, grocery store. It would be good to move service type businesses more into the upper floors.

- Mom and pop retail or restaurants, not chains. If residential use increases their needs will need to be met.
- Ones that will have expanded business hours.
- Retail.
- Small business because the owners have a personal stake in La Grande's success.
- Exciting and fun with positive owners – superb service.
- Businesses providing essential items and service – groceries, clothing/shoes, restaurants/pubs (entertainment).

5. *Of the economic development strategies presented tonight, which do you think are most promising in terms of their potential success and/or ability to implement?*

- Money is a key – however, trees and landscaping downtown. Improved signage and facades. Increased “shy zone” – six feet for outside dining.
- Trees, benches, work on building facades.
- EOU to Downtown corridor, street lighting, narrow auto lanes, striping for parking, cleaning and painting buildings.
- Center lane landscape improvements, longer times on crosswalk areas, slower downtown speeds.
- Make La Grande unique, mix culture with business, plan for attractive streets and parking. Get people on the street.
- Sidewalks, trees, places to sit, corner stores and artistic sign work (custom). Welcome signs.
- Streetscape: trees, improve building facades, unique signage, wide sidewalks.
- Focus resources on node projects, but expand to include smaller improvements throughout downtown (benches, lighting, etc).
- Helping building owners update and enhance architectural features.
- I need to review the follow-up report. I especially like the idea of hybridizing the bulb-outs, median sections, sidewalk zones. Trees, etc – it can be lovely!
- Creating the nodes.
- Conduit to the university in the form of 6th St., widen sidewalks for outdoor dining.
- Median trees by ODS only, then widen downtown sidewalks to allow for street furniture; replace 1970s highway lighting with pedestrian lighting.
- Streetscape including room for sidewalk tables, plants - seasonal displays.
- Upper-story housing, using urban renewal funds to begin improvements.

6. *Are there any other strategies that should be considered? Other suggestions, comments?*

- Events that will attract the folks from Portland, Boise, Spokane. Bike events, motorcycle rallies. Outdoor movies on the side of a boring building. Cycle safari – cows, elk, mountain goats, mint fields and mint juleps or mojitos.
- Historical signage on buildings, expand Max Park area with visitor center, connect bike path and walkway from university, greeting to La Grande from underpass.
- City maintenance of sidewalks and trees; level, clean and widen sidewalks; add benches; removal of ice in gutters and walkways; move professional business to second floor.

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- Street maintenance, user friendly pedestrian ways, ADA building access, alley delivery, more frequent garbage pickup at restaurants, need downtown streetscape theme.
- Develop a street design that has the “eyes on the street” perception.
- Sidewalks lamps, benches, trees, implementing more art into downtown and signs.
- Bike parking. We need to attract EOU students to the downtown area – I love the idea of an EOU bookstore at 6th and Washington.
- Taking small steps and focusing on hub areas (good idea) historical lighting and signage.
- Must take all maintenance into account. Will property owners maintain larger walk areas, trees, paintings along streets? Cooperation of property owners with City on snow removal – restrict parking overnight.
- Quiet zone is imperative to the atmosphere of downtown. Make the downtown safe for pedestrians – free of bicycle and skateboard violators.
- Lighting, trees, railroad (train whistles).
- La Grande and EOU.
- The key stakeholders are downtown businesses. As this process progresses, please keep them involved.
- Consult with existing businesses, ask what they need; otherwise, ideas/strategies are good beginning.

7. On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being high, to what extent do you agree with the urban design principles presented this evening (building out to the sidewalk, human-scale architecture, parking in the rear, good window coverage, street furniture, traffic calming, etc)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Average score: 8.50

- Which principles in particular do you like, or have concerns with?
- Don't like medians or bulb-outs (too much snow – keep road wide).
- Concern with bump outs. Like canopy of trees, slowing traffic down.
- Window views street furniture, employee parking away from business store fronts.
- Town and gown focal points.
- I like the ideas of making the road from EOU to Downtown more presentable to college students.
- Like good window coverage & street furniture. Question the bulb-out, but like the shorter crossings.
- I think we need to do all we can.
- Left turn refuges need to be left to allow for traffic flow to continue along Adams or the traffic will relocate.
- Like notes. Dislike the idea of downtown manager.
- The principles focus on the human factor, making downtown more inviting to pedestrians.
- Street furniture, nice windows.
- Slow traffic on Adams Avenue, parking off Adams Avenue, improving window coverage, upper-story housing.

8. On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being high, to what extent to you agree with the parking management principles presented this evening (limiting on-street parking to short term parking, landscaping and buffering parking lots, creating shared parking areas, etc.)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Average score: 8.20

- Which strategies in particular do you like, or have concerns with?
- Liked landscaping, parking, trees on side.
- Like 45-60 minute parking on Adams, landscaping parking lots.
- Landscaping on center of street makes more sense. Bulb-outs suck: Extend signal length for pedestrians – leave curb alone. Bulb-outs affect stormwater drainage, street sweeping, ice and snow removal in a negative way.
- Landscaping and buffered parking lots, encourage bicycles with bicycle parking.
- Taking a more proactive approach to get owners/employees to “not” park in premier spots, liked shared lots.
- Again some great ideas were presented. We may be able to make further improvements. A concern – absentee landlords. It’s a problem for us (This also pertains to #7).
- I think our parking is fine.
- Like landscaping. Dislike parking structures.
- Let’s find a way to stop the “two-hour shuffle.” Perhaps fines?
- Like parking ideas, encourage walking and downtown housing.

EVALUATION

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, how valuable was this workshop for you?

Average score: 8.00

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, please rate the presenters.

Average score: 8.40

Other comments:

- Beauty of area stressed, expand regional tourism, stress biking, Tollgate skiing, Buffalo Peak, Wallowa train, Hell’s Canyon, Scenic byways, hiking, snowmobiling.
- Would have liked to see more drawings, perhaps color schemes, examples of color Vs grey concrete. Signs that hang and are visible when walking.
- Informative, there’s a lot of frustration.
- Each presenter did a great job being clear in discussion and not closed minded. Good job. Tim Smith did a great job selling pros and cons of design elements and putting issues into perspective.
- Excellent! Norm Paulus spoke to slowing down the traffic by adjusting the street/stop lights. Portland’s 12 mph timing would offer several benefits – safety, tourist interest and better accommodation for bikers who don’t need the bike paths.
- I would have appreciated more recommendations. It was all ideas.
- Need to see final report and then ask questions of presenters.

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