



A Strategic Plan for Developing and
Maintaining a Strong Economy
in Sheridan County, Wyoming

November 1, 2007

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Section 1 - Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP)

The EDSP establishes direction for Sheridan County's short- and long-term economic development, setting forth realistic and strategic goals and actions for the economic development of the County. Specifically, the Plan identifies challenges to economic development in Sheridan County and outlines strategic initiatives to address those challenges in order to enhance business retention, expansion, and attraction efforts. By leveraging Sheridan County's existing strengths and working proactively to address its challenges, the EDSP aims to create a vital, diverse economy in the County.

The EDSP was developed under the direction of Forward Sheridan, Inc., the economic development organization for Sheridan County, to support its mission of developing and maintaining a sound and sustainable economy in Sheridan County, Wyoming.

1.2 EDSP Process

The EDSP reflects nine months of planning among the Forward Sheridan Board of Directors and staff, the members of the EDSP Task Force, and other potentially affected community members. Over the course of this process, Forward Sheridan and the EDSP Task Force met multiple times to review economic data, discuss goals and strategic initiatives, and formulate and evaluate the Plan. The Plan contains input from a diverse set of stakeholders, including business owners, residents, City and County officials, educators, healthcare professionals, real estate experts, developers, and other community leaders.

The EDSP builds on findings outlined in the Wyoming Rural Development Council *Rural Resource Team Report for Sheridan, Wyoming* (January 2004) ("Community Assessment") and in *Vision 2020: Sheridan County Growth Management Plan* (July 2001), and reflects the values and priorities of the Sheridan County community.

1.3 EDSP Format

The EDSP is a dynamic document to be updated regularly as the plan is implemented. The EDSP consists of Goals, Strategic Initiatives, and Implementation Actions. The Goals describe overarching objectives that Forward Sheridan hopes to achieve through the EDSP. Each Goal has a series of supporting Strategic Initiatives to further define the Goals for the implementation task forces charged with accomplishing each Goal.

The EDSP also contains an Implementation Plan, which is a dynamic document to be updated regularly as Forward Sheridan works with the implementation task forces to develop specific action steps to support each Strategic Initiative. The Implementation Plan outlines the timing of each Implementation Action and the lead party or agency responsible for completing that action.

Beginning with fiscal year 2007-08, and over the next five years, Forward Sheridan will take action to align economic development efforts in Sheridan County with the community vision as set forth in the EDSP.

Section 2 – Forward Sheridan Background

Forward Sheridan, Inc. is the economic development organization in Sheridan County, Wyoming.

2.1 Organizational History

In December 2002, seeing the need to bring more resources to bear in support of economic development, community leaders created the Sheridan Area Development Alliance (SADA) from a committee of the Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce. In January 2005, SADA embarked upon a formal 4-year economic development fundraising effort entitled *Forward Sheridan*. SADA's name was formally changed to Forward Sheridan in December 2005, and a 17-member Board of Directors was seated from the Investor base.

2.2 Funding

Forward Sheridan is funded by an Investor base with 68% of the funding coming from local business investment and 32% coming from City and County investment.

2.3 Organizational Vision

Through forward-looking leadership, strong local partnerships, and an effective community and economic development plan, Forward Sheridan is the “go-to” organization for businesses needing assistance in start-up, expansion, and retention; and for new business and family recruitment.

This vision is reflected in the goals and priorities of action set out in the EDSP. The Plan provides the mechanism to align economic development with the community's visions and values.

2.4 Strategic Plan Genesis

In August 2006, the Forward Sheridan Board established a one-year plan that included:

- Working with partners in the community to address issues such as workforce shortage, childcare, and workforce housing shortages
- Developing an aggressive business retention and expansion effort with local business
- Conducting a Target Industry Study (completed in May 2007) to direct business attraction efforts
- Developing an Economic Development Strategic Plan for Sheridan County

Section 3 – Overview of the Sheridan County Economy

This section of the EDSP summarizes current and future demographic, economic, and market conditions in Sheridan County. These trends offer a perspective on the community's economic strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities, giving context to the EDSP Goals and Strategic Initiatives outlined later in this document.

3.1 Demographic Trends

Population

In 2006 the estimated population of Sheridan County was 27,720. It is estimated that the population in 2008 will be 28,310; by 2010, it is anticipated the county will reach 28,750. The current population is 48.26% male and 51.74% female.

Population Projections

	Sheridan (City)	Entire County
2006	16,510	27,720
2008	16,861	28,310
2010	17,124	28,750

Median Age:

In 2006, the median age of the population was 41.8, up from 40.0 in 2003.

Households:

In 2006 there were an estimated 12,034 households in Sheridan. The 2000 Census showed household counts at 11,167, up 18.5% from 1990. It is estimated the number of households in Sheridan in 2010 will be 12,556, up 12.4% from 2000.

3.2 Local Economy

The slowing national economy in the years prior to September 11, 2001, combined with national slowdowns following that date, had minimal effect on the economy in Sheridan County.

- Annual Cost of Living slightly above average (106%)
- 2-3 bedroom house rents for approx \$857/mo
- Since 2002-03 sales tax revenues in Sheridan County have increased 36.6%

Income

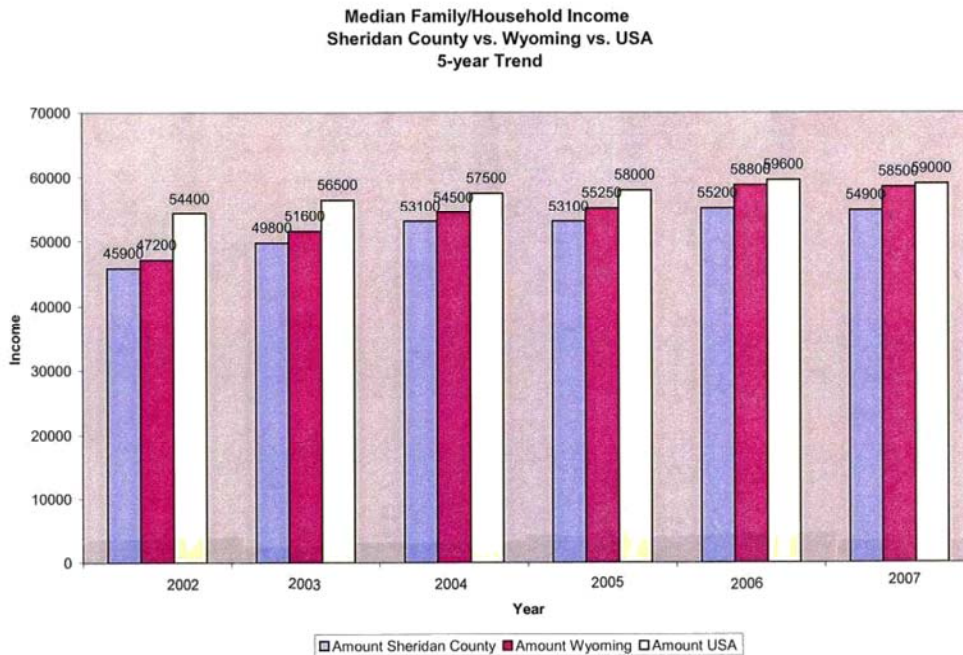
Per Capita Personal Income -- 2005

Sheridan, WY	\$38,999
State of Wyoming	\$37,305
Rocky Mountain Region	\$32,889
USA	\$34,471

(Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis www.bea.gov)

The Median Household/Family Income has trended upward at a constant rate over the past four years, outpacing the national average. The graph below shows Sheridan County's estimated median family income increasing by approximately 3% over the last 5 years.

(Source: US Census Bureau, Wyoming Economic Analysis Division/Wyoming Housing Database Partnership, and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.)



Housing

As reported by the Sheridan County Assessor, the average home price in Sheridan County has risen 27% between 2003 and 2005.

Average Home Price in Sheridan County

2003	\$146,776
2004	\$163,000
2005	\$186,000

From 2000 to 2005, Sheridan County has experienced an 80% increase in the number of building permits for single family dwellings (new construction).

2000	95
2001	90
2002	106
2003	215
2004	184
2005	171

3.3 Area Workforce

Sheridan's workforce is stable, with an average age of 41.8. The workforce is characterized by a mature, stable population with a strong work ethic and low unemployment rate.

With 27% of Sheridan's workforce being entrepreneurial, Sheridan boasts the second highest number of federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants in the state of Wyoming.

Workforce Availability:

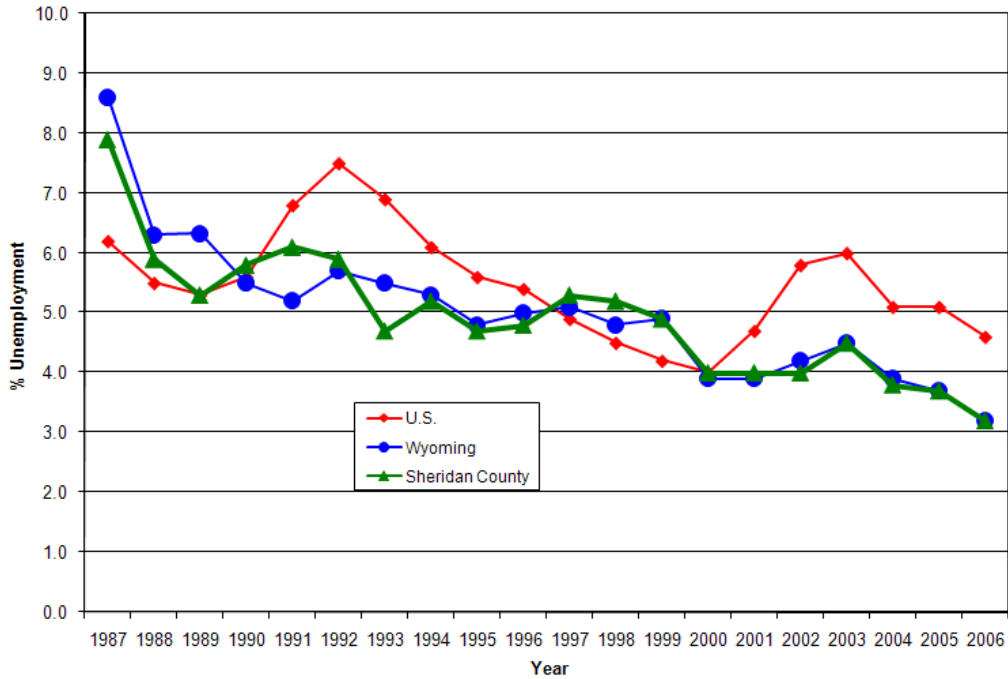
Sheridan County's unemployment at the end of 2006 was 3.5%. Since 2000, Sheridan County's unemployment rate has trended at or below the state and national averages.

Labor Force Estimates in Sheridan County (Annual Averages 2000-2006)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Labor Force	14,755	14,683	14,982	15,203	15,281	15,462	15,860
Employed	14,168	14,094	14,379	14,520	14,693	14,893	15,304
Unemployed	587	589	603	683	588	569	556
Unemployment Rate (Average)	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.5	3.8	3.7	3.5

Sources: Wyoming Department of Employment, US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

U.S., Wyoming, and Sheridan County Annual Average Unemployment Rates

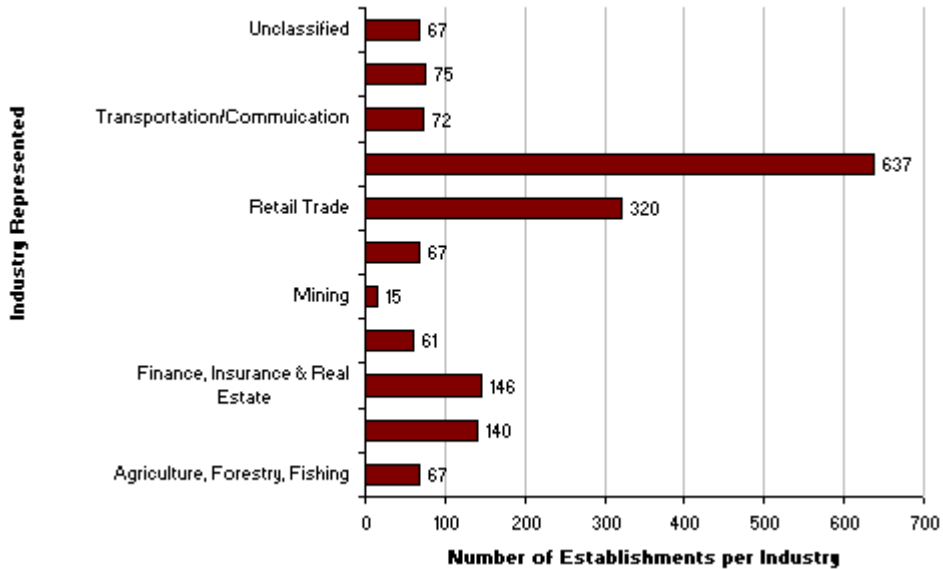


3.4 Employers & Existing Industry

Overview of Area Employers

Sheridan County currently has a diverse employment base of over 1,650 employers with a workforce of over 17,500 (includes WC & UI covered and non-covered jobs). Approximately 27% of Sheridan's workforce is entrepreneurial.

Industries Represented in Sheridan County



Top Employers in Sheridan County

Company	Industry	City/Town	Employees in Sheridan County
Sheridan County School Dist #2	Public School District	Sheridan	600
Sheridan Memorial Hospital	General Hospital	Sheridan	460
Veterans Health Administration	Government Medical Center	Sheridan	400
Wal-Mart Store	Department Retail & Grocery	Sheridan	333
Sheridan College	Community College	Sheridan	275
Spring Creek Coal	Coal Mine	Decker, MT	205
Sheridan County School Dist #1	Public School District	Ranchester/ Dayton/Big Horn	195
SSC Sheridan Operating Co/Sheridan Manor	Skilled Nursing Care Facility	Sheridan	160
Decker Coal Mine	Coal Mine	Decker MT	156
Sheridan County YMCA	Family Physical Fitness Services, Childcare	Sheridan	152
Holiday Inn	Hotel/Motel/Hospitality	Sheridan	150
Rehabilitation Enterprises of Northeast	Job Training/Related Services	Sheridan	141
Normative Services, Inc.	Private Elem/Secondary School	Sheridan	130
Bighorn National Forest Service	Government Ag/Forestry	Sheridan	110
Westview Health Care Center	Skilled Nursing Care Facility	Sheridan	106
Home Depot	Retail - Building Supplies	Sheridan	92
Volunteers of America		Sheridan	92
Pearl Development	CBM	Sheridan	90
Wyoming Sawmills, Inc.	Manufacturing (sawing & planing mill)	Sheridan	89
Wyoming Girls School	Government/Education	Sheridan	86
First Interstate Bank	State Bank	Sheridan	85
Intermountain Construction	Construction Materials	Sheridan	80

Top Employers in Sheridan County (continued)

Company	Industry	City/Town	Employees in Sheridan County
Craig Scheckla LLC	Trucking/Transportation	Sheridan	80
Sheridan Senior Center	Senior Services/Healthcare	Sheridan	80
Albertson's Grocery Store	Retail Grocery	Sheridan	72
Tomahawk Pipeline Construction	CBM Support Services	Sheridan	70
RockWell Petroleum	Whole Petroleum products	Sheridan	64

3.5 Education

Sheridan County residents place a high value on education. Sheridan boasts a workforce of at least 88% with high school diploma or higher, with approximately 22% having received a bachelor's or higher degree. Many of Sheridan's labor force are underemployed.

Residents tax themselves to the limit for education and have modern educational facilities for the benefit of our students and teachers alike.

Sheridan College continues to grow and prosper with broad community support, offering its students modern, up-to-date facilities and beautiful new dormitories. The community college offers classes that will prepare its students for the technological future.

Section 4 – Strategic Planning Process Overview

Forward Sheridan called on a pool of dedicated community volunteers to guide the development of the EDSP. The Plan was created with input from over one hundred committed and concerned citizens from various backgrounds and walks of life, as well as information from past assessments conducted in the community.

This plan will focus on goals and strategic initiatives for the next five years, including:

- Sheridan County's strengths (those assets that define the County)
- Challenges that must be addressed in order for the County to achieve its economic goals
- Specific goals to be met within a designated time frame
- Organizations and individuals whose input and cooperation are needed to achieve those goals

4.1 SWOT Analysis

The assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) as they relate to economic development began in the fall of 2006 with a series of three in-depth workshops. Participants in these workshops included elected officials, business owners, representatives of civic and non-profit organizations, and ordinary citizens. A separate series of meetings focusing on governmental entities, such as volunteer and appointed municipality and County boards, sought the perspectives of those most actively involved in the community. The goal of these meetings and workshops was to understand and incorporate the perceptions of as many community members as possible.

During these meetings and workshops, participants identified Sheridan County's top 10 strengths and top 10 challenges related to economic development:

Strengths

- Arts Community
- Downtown Sheridan
- Education
- Entrepreneurship
- Foundations and Not-for-Profit Organizations
- Healthcare
- Knowledge-Based Workers
- Location
- Tax Structure
- Western Identity

Challenges

- Airline Service
- Careers for Young Professionals
- Childcare
- City/County Communication and Collaboration
- Design Planning
- Drug and Substance Abuse
- Event and Convention Facilities
- Workforce Housing
- Workforce Shortage
- Zoning and Land Use Planning

4.2 Economic Development Strategic Planning Task Force

The EDSP Task Force was organized in the spring of 2007 to quantify community strengths and identify their related vulnerabilities before identifying goals, and to quantify challenges and identify specific methods for converting each one into a strength. The overarching mission of the EDSP was to develop an economic development plan for implementation by Forward Sheridan, Inc., in order to make Sheridan County an economically thriving and financially prosperous community for all its citizens.

From March through June 2007, the Task Force conducted weekly workshops on each of the twenty strengths and challenges in turn. Area individuals, task forces, or committees with expertise in each of the subject areas were invited to relevant workshops to participate in discussion and subsequent initiative development. Resulting strategic initiatives were then documented by Task Force members to form the foundation for this EDSP. The draft EDSP was presented to the Forward Sheridan Board of Directors for review and endorsement in July 2007, and the consolidated findings are presented in this document.

The complete documentation produced by the EDSP task force is available for review in the Strategic Plan section of the Forward Sheridan website at www.forwardsheridan.com.

4.3 Strategic Plan Implementation

Forward Sheridan staff will oversee the formation of issue-specific implementation task forces necessary to successfully execute the solutions identified in the EDSP. Throughout the winter of 2007-2008, Forward Sheridan will conduct a public information campaign to promote a thorough understanding among citizens, businesses, and public officials of the EDSP findings, goals, initiatives, desired outcomes, and accountability.

The EDSP Task Force, in conjunction with the Forward Sheridan Board of Directors, will continue to monitor the implementation of the EDSP through quarterly review and measurement of progress. Following each quarterly meeting of the EDSP Task Force, a progress report will be provided on the ongoing efforts and accomplishments of the implementation task forces. This report will be distributed by email to the EDSP Task Force members as well as to the Forward Sheridan Board of Directors.

The chairs of all implementation task forces will meet regularly to discuss the overall plan and to collaborate and align efforts as appropriate and necessary to meet their goals.

Minutes of all EDSP task force and implementation task force meetings will be available on the Forward Sheridan website at www.forwardsheridan.com. The Implementation Plan will also be posted at this site and will be updated regularly to inform the public, businesses, and government officials about the progression of the EDSP.

EDSP progress will be reviewed and assessed annually at a joint meeting of the EDSP Task Force, Forward Sheridan Board of Directors, and invited guests.

Section 5 – Economic Development Strengths

The economic development strengths identified by the EDSP Task Force represent those characteristics that define the community, and in which the community takes great pride. Opportunities for improvement have also been identified for each strength, so that the community may proactively protect, maintain, and strengthen these key community assets.

The EDSP Task Force worked with individuals in the community who have recognized expertise in the various subject areas to quantify each strength and to identify opportunities for protecting or improving these existing community assets:

- Arts Community
- Downtown Sheridan
- Education
- Entrepreneurship
- Foundations and Not-for-Profit Organizations
- Healthcare
- Knowledge-Based Workers
- Location
- Tax Structure
- Western Identity

5.1 Arts Community

Sheridan County has a strong, growing community of performing and visual artists and art organizations. This rural community offers exceptional opportunities for professional and amateur artists, and is well supported by patrons of the arts.

- The WYO Theater, a fixture on Main Street for nearly 85 years, is 90% privately funded. Current events and performances include:
 - Professional touring events (20-22 annually), ranging from music to theater to dance
 - Use by many local groups and organizations for civic events and fundraising
 - Educational opportunities in the performing arts for youth K-12 via Children's Educational and Family series with 7-8 free matinees for area students
- In addition to events at the WYO Theater, other performing arts opportunities are available in Sheridan County through the school districts, the Civic Theater Guild, Sheridan College, the YMCA Arts and Humanities program, and private instruction. Opportunities available include:
 - 10-12 local amateur theatrical events annually
 - Music and movement classes for students K-5th grade

- Sheridan County Children's and Youth Chorales
 - Summer theater camp
 - Associate of Fine Arts degree program at Sheridan College that includes visual arts, music, and theater
 - Big West Arts Festival at Sheridan College, as well as approximately 30 additional art shows at the college featuring staff, student, community and regional artists
 - Public school system music programs starting in the 1st grade
 - Strong high school music and theater programs
 - Private instruction available for children and adults in piano, voice, guitar, band instruments, and dance
 - Opportunities for amateur musicians to join the Sheridan College choral groups, jazz and concert bands, and the community Cloud Peak Symphony
- Sheridan is home to more than 500 professional and amateur visual artists (mediums including paint, sculpture, pottery, glass, fiber, woodwork, jewelry, and photography), as well as writers and poets.
 - Over 125 annual opportunities for access to the visual arts are offered throughout the year (festivals, exhibitions, art installations, etc.)
 - Youth visual arts educational opportunities are available through the Bauen Camp, the Sheridan Artists Guild Et Al (SAGE), Project Youth (an after school and summer art program), the YMCA arts program, and the Sheridan County school districts.
 - Sheridan County has two nationally recognized artist residency programs: the Jentel Artist-in-Residency program and the Ucross Artist-in-Residency program.
 - The Bradford Brinton Museum and The Ucross Gallery, as well as various privately owned galleries throughout Sheridan County, exhibit the work of local, regional and national artists.
 - Formal and informal visual arts groups include:
 - Sheridan Artists Guild Et al (SAGE)
 - Sheridan Arts Council
 - Fiber Guild
 - Woodcarvers Guild
 - Sketch Attics
 - Northern Lights Glass Artists Guild
 - City of Sheridan Public Arts Committee

Improvement Opportunities

- Sheridan County needs a centralized visual arts center.
- Sheridan lacks an event center large enough to present full symphony orchestras, operas, or Broadway musicals.
- Local opportunities are very limited for musicians, actors or dancers wishing to make a living through performance. Performers are forced to tour out of state or earn the bulk of their livelihood by teaching private students. Teaching opportunities are also very limited.

5.2 Downtown Sheridan

Sheridan is one of a shrinking number of small rural municipalities that maintains a viable downtown district. The downtown area creates a focus for the community.

- Sheridan's historic downtown attracts visitors and generates income in the community.
- Building and business owners continue to construct, renovate, and reinvest in their properties.
- City and County governments, as well as most of the community's banks, are located in the historic downtown area.
- The downtown area is a mix of retail and professional offices, enhanced by cultural elements including a theater, parks, library, and downtown art program.
- The Downtown Sheridan Association and Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce maintain a strong presence to assist downtown businesses.
- The majority of downtown businesses are independently owned and operated.
- Special events such as the Christmas Stroll, the Sheridan WYO Rodeo, and Celebrate the Arts make Sheridan's downtown a destination for residents and visitors alike.

Improvement Opportunities

- Easily accessible parking is in short supply in the downtown area, and no plan has yet been adopted to improve parking.
- Leasing property in the downtown is considered costly in comparison to other areas.
- The City of Sheridan lacks funds to maintain and upgrade infrastructure, because taxes haven't kept up with infrastructure deterioration.
- Sheridan County's overall workforce shortage is a problem for downtown businesses.
- Stores downtown do not stay open long enough to accommodate today's shoppers.
- Local retail customers are spending money outside Sheridan County, either by traveling to other communities or by shopping online.
- Downtown needs a greater variety and number of restaurants.
- Many, if not most, second floors in the downtown area are vacant and could be utilized as either office or residential space.
- Many buildings in the downtown would benefit from façade renovation to preserve the structure and to better integrate with the historic architectural style of the area.
- More events and activities are needed to bring people downtown in the evenings.

- Main Street is a state highway. This results in a lack of local control and attendant problems such as heavy traffic. At this time, there is no alternate state highway route.
- Public restrooms are needed in the downtown area.

5.3 Education

The overall quality of education offered in Sheridan County, including the three local school districts and Sheridan College, is a strength in Sheridan County.

- A significant percentage of Sheridan County students perform at very high levels on state assessment tests. Exact numbers vary among the three local school districts.
- Sheridan has a two-year college that works closely with the County's high schools. Sheridan College also offers four-year degrees through association with the University of Wyoming and other four-year institutions.
- Sheridan County school districts, private schools, and Sheridan College have collaborated to offer seamless transition, including concurrent enrollment opportunities, from high school to college.
- Sheridan County students have some flexibility in determining which school they will attend, including alternative middle and high schools in Sheridan County School District 2.
- The County's school districts receive state funding to replace and update many older school facilities.
- The school districts attract top teachers, principals, administrators, and other staff.
- In addition to its schools, Sheridan County boasts several organizations and foundations that complement and offer continuing education opportunities for residents. These include the County library system, YMCA, and the WYO Theater, among others.
- The County's three school districts, five high schools, and multiple curricula have collectively been identified as a strength by some and as a challenge by others.

Improvement Opportunities

- Pre-kindergarten education is not equitably available for all children. Establishing pre-school facilities that meet the needs of all children would involve forming a Joint Powers Board of appointees by Sheridan County School Districts, Sheridan College and the City of Sheridan to address the needs of pre-school facilities. Another objective is to work with existing pre-school facilities to expand their curricula to prepare their students for success in kindergarten.
- Improved communication is needed between school vocational programs and the business community.

5.4 Entrepreneurship

The advent of technology that allows businesses and individuals to work wherever they choose has brought numbers of “Lone Eagles” and their businesses to Sheridan County. The area has the reputation of fostering entrepreneurship and is well diversified with small companies.

- Entrepreneurship fits well into the goal of developing a diversified economy in the County.
- Entrepreneurs bring new jobs to the community; they bring small businesses that assimilate more easily into the community, with minimal individual impact on the labor market.
- Entrepreneurs moving from other locations can bring new culture and new ideas.
- The community has institutions and support in place for entrepreneurs. These include Sheridan College's Students in Free Enterprise and “entrepreneurial students programming” curriculum, the Wyoming Business Development Center; workforce services training funds, and funding programs through the Wyoming Business Council (e.g., Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer).
- Entrepreneurship starts at the high school level, with business clubs such as DECA and the FCCLA. At least two Sheridan service clubs – Kiwanis and Rotary – have organizations that support youth business education.
- Sheridan College is in the process of creating an entrepreneurship program.

Improvement Opportunities

- The County lacks a business incubator/accelerator and should develop a task force to investigate this possibility.
- Businesses in Sheridan County should work to strengthen relationships with high school clubs, youth business clubs, and educational/technical programs. Establishing education programs for high school students who are not college bound would prepare students for careers upon graduation.
- Sheridan lacks access to investment capitalists who would help fund entrepreneurial endeavors. There is a need to establish sources of investment funds for entrepreneurs.
- Sheridan County lacks an organized system for local businesses to share “best practice” information. Providing local access to training in up-to-date best business practices could help to improve productivity and eliminate waste in businesses.
- Because many entrepreneurs work out of their homes, the cost of purchasing a home large enough to accommodate a home office is very important to small business owners.

5.5 Foundations and Not-For-Profit Organizations

A deep philanthropic tradition enriches the Sheridan community.

- The County has approximately 41 foundations with endowments totaling hundreds of millions of dollars.
- The majority of these funds stay in Sheridan County, funding programs and projects from the arts to healthcare, education to wildlife. These efforts have earned the County a reputation as the foundation capital of Wyoming.
- Scholarships and endowments from these foundations allow many County students to attend Sheridan College, the University of Wyoming, or other schools of their choice.
- Gifts from these foundations have funded hospital needs, the YMCA, multiple Sheridan College programs, the Historic Sheridan Inn, Whitney Commons park, and many other efforts.
- There are more than 50 nonprofit organizations in Sheridan County. Nonprofits provide a number of services that the community otherwise would not be able to afford – including but not limited to the homeless shelter, the Free Clinic, and public transportation (Sheridan Senior Citizens Center mini-bus program).

Improvement Opportunities

- In some cases, funding recipients have become overly dependent on foundations, losing the ability to be self-sustaining as they rely on foundations for operating funds.
- Foundations can be unaware of what other foundations are doing in the community, due in part to a lack of communication. At times, this leads to duplication of effort and inefficient use of funds.

5.6 Healthcare

Sheridan County residents are assured of quality healthcare at all ages with the services provided by Sheridan Memorial Hospital, Sheridan Veteran's Administration Medical Center, and the Sheridan Surgical Center, as well as the many nursing homes and assisted-living facilities in the area.

- Care available from the area's quality physicians ranges from general medicine (family practice) and pediatrics (including pediatric dentistry) to surgery and specialized care (including neurosurgery and radiation oncology).
- Sheridan's medical facilities boast state-of-the-art equipment and procedures that cannot be found in many larger hospitals, including those in Billings, Montana, and Casper, Wyoming (the nearest larger cities).
- Quality nurses work throughout Sheridan County, including the public health offices; nursing programs at Sheridan College and the University of Wyoming continue to graduate skilled nurses.
- Sheridan College has an up-to-date dental hygiene program.
- A solid mix of community providers assures access to quality mental healthcare.

- Physical, occupational, and other therapies are available.
- Community health fair events promote prevention and early treatment.

Improvement Opportunities

- Many of the County's primary-care physicians are nearing retirement age. Recruitment efforts need to be increased in those areas that will be affected by retirements.
- Nursing recruitment faces challenges nationwide. In order to attract nurses to jobs in Sheridan, jobs must be found for the spouses who accompany them.
- The shortage of housing affects the medical community as it does other employers in the County. Doctors, nurses, and other hospital personnel will not stay if they cannot find places to live.
- Physician recruitment is particularly needed in the areas of psychiatric services, gastroenterology, and cardiology.
- The Sheridan Veteran's Administration Medical Center lacks a transitional/halfway house for its patients, many of whom come from elsewhere in Wyoming or from other states to receive care.

5.7 Knowledge-Based Workers

Sheridan County is primed for growth in technology and communications. Due to the quality of life the Sheridan area offers, there has been an increase in the number of knowledge-based workers in high-end fields such as financial, medical, engineering, and technological services.

- A new organization, StartWest, is bringing together knowledge-based companies and local individuals who possess skills and expertise in technology and communications to develop a means to communicate and share resources.
- In addition to bringing expertise in their chosen fields, knowledge-based workers are perceived to be active in the community and are an excellent resource for mentoring future knowledge-based workers.
- Knowledge-based workers are entrepreneurial and fit Sheridan County's entrepreneurial spirit.

Improvement Opportunities

- An assessment needs to be conducted to determine what kinds of knowledge-based workers already exist in the community and what is needed by specific industries.
- Sheridan County lacks the educational facilities to fully develop a knowledge-based workforce.
- Methods need to be devised to improve communication between businesses to allow for networking and sharing of ideas among knowledge-based workers.
- Future development of a knowledge-based workforce is challenged by a workforce shortage. Methods need to be devised for continued recruitment of a knowledge-based workforce.

5.8 Location

Sheridan's abundance of recreational and historic sites gives businesses a competitive edge in attracting employees.

- Sheridan's natural amenities include the Big Horn Mountains on the western edge of the County and open plains that extend to the eastern border.
- A broad range of natural habitat exists within the borders of Sheridan County, providing a diversity of wildlife for viewing, hunting, and fishing.
- The County is rich in public lands and in history, especially from the Indian Wars period. Battle sites, historic trails and military outposts make Sheridan County a destination for visitors interested in that era.
- The County is located on one of the major routes to Yellowstone and the Grand Teton National Parks to the west and the Black Hills to the east.

Improvement Opportunities

- Sheridan County's weather is perceived as being extreme in both summer and winter. In fact, Sheridan County's weather is much less extreme than in much of the rest of Wyoming. More in-depth information on the area's weather needs to be provided to tourists and potential residents.
- Because much of the state and federal land in Sheridan County is surrounded by private lands, public access is limited. While access is improving, additional work needs to be done to improve access by developing access easements and walk-in access areas.

5.9 Tax Structure

In general, the existing tax structure in Sheridan County is favorable for businesses.

- Wyoming has no state income tax. The total sales tax in Sheridan county is six percent (6%), which includes the four percent (4%) state sales tax, one percent (1%) optional (local) sales tax, and one percent (1%) project-specific capital facilities improvement tax. This tax structure, combined with relatively low property taxes, results in the lowest personal tax burden in the United States.
- Business taxes are extremely low or nonexistent. There is, for example, no corporate profits tax, no corporate continuation fee, and no tax on business inventory and rolling stock.
- Licensing fees for businesses are minimal. Wyoming is rated sixth in the nation as offering a favorable tax climate for businesses and industry.

Improvement Opportunities

- Because Wyoming and its counties and municipalities depend heavily on taxes paid by the minerals industry, there is little incentive for diversification during energy "boom" periods. During periods when mineral development is in a "bust" cycle, tax revenues fall significantly.
- Low taxes inhibit long-term planning by local governing agencies. These same agencies cannot raise taxes because that power is reserved for the Legislature under Wyoming's constitution.

- From a business perspective, Wyoming's history has demonstrated that low taxes alone are an insufficient lure to bring businesses into a community.
- Because taxes are low in all Wyoming communities, this “strength” does not give Sheridan County a competitive advantage over any other community in the state.

5.10 Western Identity

Sheridan County’s ranching heritage continues to influence its culture. The area boasts several dude ranches and is home to the Sheridan WYO Rodeo, one of the top 50 Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association rodeos in the nation, which draws thousands of people to the area every July.

- With two National Historic Districts, two National Historic Landmarks, battle sites, historic trails and some of the best museums in the state, Sheridan County can capitalize on its Western heritage to attract tourists year-round.
- The County can emphasize its modern Western identity to bring potential businesses and employees to live and work here.
- Attractions include several rodeos and the Buffalo Bill Days Wild West Show annually, as well as area dude ranches, horse-training clinics, and trail rides for equestrian enthusiasts.
- Big Horn is home to two polo clubs and has a reputation as “the” place for high-goal polo games during the summer months. High-goal players come from countries including South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Argentina to play and to buy locally-trained ponies.
- The area is home to a number of Western writers and artists.
- There are strong 4-H and FFA programs for youth, who showcase their projects every year at the Sheridan County Fair.
- History enthusiasts are attracted to Sheridan County due to its proximity to the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Indian reservations, and to Indian Wars battle sites including Fort Phil Kearney, the Little Big Horn, the Fetterman Massacre, and the Wagon Box Fight.
- Good local Western wear and ranch supply stores are found in the area, including King’s Saddlery, world famous for the quality of its ropes and saddles.

Improvement Opportunities

- The Western image, while attracting some, could repel others. Emphasis should be placed on finding ways to promote the community as a place where people can get back to basics while still enjoying the conveniences of the 21st century.
- The Western identity can become stereotyped as being backward and behind the times.
- Interest in history may be fading among younger generations.

Section 6 – Economic Development Challenges

Building on the foundation of dialogue and relationships that began with previous community assessment efforts and continued with the EDSP process, the Sheridan community has identified the following challenges as having the highest priority:

- Airline Service
- Careers for Young Professionals
- Childcare
- City/County Communication and Collaboration
- Design Planning
- Drug and Substance Abuse
- Event and Convention Facilities
- Workforce Housing
- Workforce Shortage
- Zoning and Land Use Planning

6.1 Airline Service

Sheridan County has a modern airport but lacks adequate airline service. More seats are needed on larger planes. The small planes currently in use are uncomfortable and lack restrooms and baggage space, increasing occurrences of delayed baggage arrival. Flights are limited. Consequently, many area residents travel to larger regional airports instead of flying to or from the Sheridan County Airport.

Airline Service Goal:

Recruit airlines that will increase the number of seats available, with the ultimate goal of larger airplanes with better services (restrooms, flight attendants, nonstop flights to more destinations, modern and convenient ticketing services worldwide, and more code-sharing).

Airline Service Initiative:

- Reuse data collected for the proposal sent to Frontier Airlines in January 2007 to solicit other airlines.
- Work with current providers to plan for more available seats, more flights, increased equipment size, and additional code sharing.
- Demonstrate to larger airlines that a demand for their services exists by creating marketing programs that entice Sheridan and Johnson County residents and businesses to fly into and out of the Sheridan County Airport.
- Work with qualified consultants whenever services are needed to help implement strategies.

Collaborative Partners:

Dude ranches, travel agencies, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Sheridan Association, Sheridan Travel & Tourism, hospitality industry, Powder Horn Golf Community, Sheridan County Airport, City of Sheridan, Sheridan County, businesses and residents in Sheridan and Johnson counties, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: January 2007

Complete: December 2010

6.2 Careers for Young Professionals

Many young professionals have difficulty finding work commensurate with their experience, expertise, and career plans.

Young Professionals Goal:

Retain young professionals already living in Sheridan County and recruit additional young professionals to move into the community.

Young Professionals Initiative:

Assist employers with recruitment and retention of young professionals.

Collaborative Partners:

Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, HYPE (Helping Young Professional Engage), Society of Human Resource Managers, Sheridan County businesses, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, Sheridan Jaycees, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: July 2007

Complete: December 2010

6.3 Childcare

Lack of childcare has been identified as a challenge for Sheridan County in terms of attracting and retaining employees. Parents cannot accept jobs if they have no place to leave their children while they are at work. Existing childcare facilities in Sheridan County are operating at capacity and have waiting lists. Many parents are on multiple waiting lists. Existing childcare facilities also do not operate outside a traditional 8-to-5 weekday time slot, are not open on weekends or holidays and do not accept infants.

Childcare Shortage Goal:

Provide a major childcare facility in the City of Sheridan that will accept children of all ages including infants and pre-schoolers and will operate 24 hours a day 365 days a year. Summer programs for elementary children will also be developed. Additionally, this facility will provide training in childcare and early childhood development as well as technical assistance to existing childhood development providers.

Childcare Initiative:

Identify grant sources and apply for infrastructure funds to build a facility in the City of Sheridan for a childcare center. Submit requests for funding to the Whitney Benefits, Inc. to institute childcare and early childhood curriculum programs at Sheridan College.

Collaborative Partners:

Sheridan Economic and Educational Development Authority Joint Powers Board, City of Sheridan, Sheridan College, Whitney Foundation, Child Development Center, Sheridan Early Childhood Association, the County's three school districts, YMCA, Project Youth, the Ministerial Association, childcare providers, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: October 2006

Complete: December 2010

6.4 City/County Communication and Collaboration

Sheridan County communities have not often enjoyed the benefits that effective communication and collaboration between local governments can provide.

City/County Communication Goal:

Improved communication and collaboration between municipal and County government that will result in more efficient and effective governing services for the entire community.

City/County Communication Initiative:

Explore options for a liaison group, which would share the perspectives and governing options available to each entity, and seek opportunities for collaboration.

Collaborative Partners:

City and County agencies, elected officials, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: April 2007

Complete: July 2008

6.5 Design Planning

The City of Sheridan does not currently have a design plan. This has resulted in inconsistent and aesthetically haphazard design usage.

Design Planning Goal:

Create an implementation-oriented design plan for the physical look of the City of Sheridan (including entryways and areas immediately adjoining city limits) to manage city design in a manner desired by the City's residents.



Design Planning Initiative 1:

Engage an urban design consultant to establish an urban design plan.

Collaborative Partners:

City and County planning departments, elected officials, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Sheridan Association, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: January 2008

Complete: January 2008

Design Planning Initiative 2:

Engage community leadership and the general public in creating a design plan for the community that includes implementation strategies, developing a pattern book to guide the review process, and modifying existing code to reflect the design plan and incorporate the pattern book.

Collaborative Partners:

Sheridan Design Review Board, elected officials, City and County planning departments, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: March 2008

Complete: December 2012

6.6 Drug and Substance Abuse

Substance abuse affects not only the individual, but families, businesses, and, ultimately, the local economy. Healthcare costs, public safety issues, worker productivity, attendance on the job, employer liability and revenue are all affected. In light of the current workforce shortage, some employers accept or ignore substance abuse in the workplace on the premise that an employee using drugs is better than no employee at all. The community's response to the issue of substance abuse will affect how visitors, employees and prospective businesses perceive the community.

Drug and Substance Abuse Goal 1:

Educate employers and the public to change the cultural acceptance of substance abuse as an acceptable practice that only affects the individual.

Drug and Substance Abuse Initiative 1:

- Work with lawmakers to strengthen substance abuse laws.
- Strengthen existing coalitions combating drug abuse by developing and implementing action plans with clear methods for measuring success.
- Provide education for students and adults that emphasizes not only the harm of substance abuse to the individual but its affects on families, businesses, and the community as a whole.
- Create substance-free activities and activity centers for students and adults.

- Create incentives and award programs for students and adults.
- Announce, celebrate, and build on successes.

Collaborative Partners:

Volunteers of America/WYSTAR, Northern Wyoming Mental Health, law enforcement, Cloud Peak Initiatives, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: February 2007 **Complete:** December 2010

Drug and Substance Abuse Goal 2:

Implementation of drug policies and drug-testing programs across all industries in Sheridan County.

Drug and Substance Abuse Initiative 2:

- Establish criteria for what constitutes a “drug-free” workplace.
- Create incentives and award programs for employers meeting criteria for a drug-free workplace.

Collaborative Partners:

Volunteers of America/WYSTAR, Northern Wyoming Mental Health, law enforcement, Cloud Peak Initiatives, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Sheridan Association, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: February 2007 **Complete:** July 2009

6.7 Event and Convention Facilities

Sheridan lacks a convention facility or event center that can accommodate thousands of people and can be used on a year-round basis. There is a perceived need for both types of facility.

Event and Convention Facilities Goal:

Construct convention and event(s) facilities in the City of Sheridan or in Sheridan County.

Event and Convention Facilities Initiative:

- Identify a site through the design-planning process.
- Put together a public and private venture to finance and construct the facility(ies).
- Identify private ventures that specialize in building and managing convention facilities in small communities.
- Hire a qualified consultant to facilitate the above strategies.

Collaborative Partners:

Sheridan County and its municipalities, Sugarland Enterprises, Sheridan Travel & Tourism, local representatives from the Wyoming Lodging & Restaurant Association, Sheridan County Fair Association, Sheridan Recreation District, Big Horn Events Center, Sheridan College, Sheridan County's three school districts, area foundations, urban design consultant, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: March 2008

Complete: December 2012

6.8 Workforce Housing

The Sheridan County Housing Needs Assessment of 2006 defined the need for 2,500 additional housing units in the County by 2010. Lack of workforce housing contributes to the County's workforce shortage.

Workforce Housing Goal 1:

Identify plans and policies that will create a regulatory structure for quality development and provide the tools developers need to hold down building costs.

Workforce Housing Initiative 1:

- Visit with municipal and County elected officials to discuss the need for a plan to address the goal.
- Work with developers, construction companies, lending institutions, and real estate agents to determine what they need to build affordable housing.
- Work with municipal and County planners and elected officials to institute needed ordinances, plans, and policies to expand housing opportunities and diversity.

Collaborative Partners:

Sheridan Housing Action Committee, municipal and County planning departments, municipal and County elected officials, financial lending institutions, developers, real estate agents, affected employers, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: December 2007

Complete: December 2009

Workforce Housing Goal 2:

Have 2,500 housing units, including rentals and home ownerships, in place by 2010.

Workforce Housing Initiative 2:

- Use government programs to purchase land.
- Have local government create partnerships with community stakeholders and form action plans for affordable housing production.

- Comprehensive plans should consistently place a priority on providing affordable housing. Any conflicts among policies should be decided in a way favorable to affordable housing.

Collaborative Partners:

Sheridan Housing Action Committee, developers, municipal and County planning departments, elected officials, financial lending institutions, state and federal government agencies (USDA, HUD, Fannie Mae), Big Horn Homebuilders Association, Habitat for Humanity of the Eastern Big Horns, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: January 2006

Complete: December 2010

Workforce Housing Goal 3:

Educate the community on alternative housing possibilities, and overcome the “Not-In-My-Backyard” factor.

Workforce Housing Initiative 3:

- Planning for and discussion of mixed-use areas, such as trailer parks, modulars, apartment buildings, multi-family structures, etc.
- Use an urban-design planning group to facilitate a community process for educating the public on where and how mixed-used housing fits the community.

Collaborative Partners:

Sheridan Housing Action Committee, urban design consultant, municipal and County planning departments, elected officials, developers, Big Horn Homebuilders Association, real estate agents, citizens, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: March 2008

Complete: December 2012

6.9 Workforce Shortage

Sheridan County has a low unemployment rate (under 3 percent), and hundreds of jobs remain unfilled. The County is perceived as being geographically isolated and remote. Thousands of County residents are of working age but remain unemployed or underemployed.

Workforce Shortage Remediation Goal:

Increase the County’s workforce and create a process to ensure a sustainable workforce into the future.

Workforce Shortage Initiative 1:

Utilize Sheridan County’s mature workers. Encourage retired workers who want to return to work either full or part-time. Encourage companies to hire mature workers.

Collaborative Partners:

Sheridan County Senior Citizens Center, American Association of Retired Persons, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: March 2007

Complete: December 2008

Workforce Shortage Initiative 2:

Transition military service people into the civilian workforce. Visit targeted military bases to recruit military personnel and their spouses who grew up or have lived in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Utah, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado or Nebraska.

Collaborative Partners:

Sheridan Chapter of the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), Sheridan VA Medical Center, Sheridan County businesses, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Wyoming Business Council (Human Resources Department), Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, consulting firms that specialize in military-to-civilian transitions, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: March 2007

Complete: December 2008

Workforce Shortage Initiative 3:

Provide career/technical trades training for high school youth who do not plan to attend college, so they will be ready for employment upon graduation. Establish a separate task force to achieve this goal.

Collaborative Partners:

Career/technical instructors at Sheridan County's five high schools, affected local businesses, Sheridan College I-TEC program, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: October 2006

Complete: August 2009

Workforce Shortage Initiative 4:

Ensure that the central repository for employment opportunities and available candidates is used to its best advantage for the business community by working to establish a single database or to connect existing databases. Measure and monitor successful placements to maximize effectiveness of database.

Collaborative Partners:

Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Society of Human Resource Managers, Sheridan Senior Citizens Center, local businesses, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: March 2007

Complete: December 2008

6.10 Zoning and Land Use Planning

A perception exists that development patterns in Sheridan County are random, producing an undesirable and inefficient mix of land uses. Perhaps more critical in terms of economic development, zoning and planning are not coordinated between the municipalities and County, resulting in a cumbersome permitting and approval process for developers. Developers and builders are not educated on the process. No solid, comprehensive plan exists to guide development in the County.

Zoning and Land Use Planning Goal:

The City of Sheridan and Sheridan County would work with a common consultant to create comprehensive plans for the City and County that incorporate a shared vision.

Zoning and Land Use Planning Initiative:

Work with City and County agencies and elected officials at all levels of government to facilitate cooperation.

Collaborative Partners:

City and County planning departments, elected officials, and Forward Sheridan.

Start: March 2007

Complete: December 2007

Section 7 – Conclusion

Strategic planning, like economic development itself, is a continual process. This Economic Development Strategic Plan is intended to be a dynamic document, changing as needed to address challenges to economic development in Sheridan County over the next five years. During that time, changing situations will require modifications and adjustments to the Plan. This Plan is not intended to provide a definitive “final answer”; rather, it is intended to serve as a guide for future years. Its value lies in the direction it provides to Forward Sheridan Inc., the implementation task forces, and the governments, businesses, organizations, and citizens who assist in implementing the initiatives contained herein.

Appendix B – Strategic Planning Process Participants

Thank you to the following individuals who provided input for background information gathered for this project:

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Mike Weber
Kyle Williams
Roger Wilson
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Ace Young
Phil Zerwas
Ann Zimmerschied

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Appendix C – 2006 Workforce Survey Participants

Thank you to the following employers who participated in the Workforce Survey in 2006, which contributed to the information gathered for this project:

Advanced Communications Technology, Inc.	Holly Hybrids
Albertson's	Hospital Pharmacy
Astec, Inc.	HUB-BHJ Insurance, Inc.
Baker Energy	I Can Preschool
Bank of the West	Industrial Plating & Grinding
BHJ Realty, Inc. dba Century 21 BHJ Realty	Inter-Mountain Laboratories
Big Horn Beverage Company, Inc.	Jackson Electric
Big Horn Mountain Radio	JLM Engineering
Big Sky Airlines	JM Huber
Bloedorn Lumber Company, Sheridan	Kemper-Odell & Associates
Bozeman Steakhouse	Kennon Products
Branding Iron Family Restaurant	K-Mart, Inc.
Buffalo Senior Citizens Center	Knecht Home Center
Bureau of Land Management	Margo's Pottery and Fine Crafts
Burlington Northern Santa Fe	McDonald's
C & K Equipment	Memorial Hospital of Sheridan
Children's Center, Inc.	Modern Electric Co.
City Electric	Montana-Dakota Utilities
City of Sheridan	Northwest Distributing Co.
Cosner Construction	Padlock Ranch Co.
Cowboy State Bank	PatConserv, Inc.
Craftco Metals Services, Inc.	Phoenix Fuel, LLC
D.A. Davidson	Pinnacle Gas Resources
Decker Coal	Powder River Heating & Air Conditioning
Ed Hammer Chevrolet and Oldsmobile, Inc.	Prill Brothers, Inc.
EMIT Water Discharge Tech	Safeway
EnTech, Inc.	Sheridan College
ERA Carroll Realty Company	Sheridan County
Farmer's Coop	Sheridan County Implement
Feminine Physique	Sheridan County School District #1
Fiberpipe Internet & IT Solutions	Sheridan County School District #3
First Federal Savings Bank	Sheridan Media
First Interstate Bank	Sheridan Printing
First National Bank	Sheridan Senior Citizen's Center
Fletcher Construction	Sheridan State Bank
Fry Construction	Shipton's Big R
Hardees	Smith Barney
HKM Engineering	Soundgate
Holiday Inn	Sports Lure
	Spring Creek Mine
	Sugarland Enterprises dba Perkins Restaurant

Sugarland Ridge Retirement and
Assisted Living
Thompson Master Masons, Inc.
Three Way Construction, Inc.
Tomahawk Pipeline Construction
Top Office Products, Inc.
TSP, Inc.
Tucker's Office World
Twilight Spa &Salon

Veteran's Administration Medical
Center-Sheridan
Western Land & Water
Westview Health Care Center
Wingate Inn
WWC Engineering
Wyoming Log Home Manufacturing, Co.
Zowada Plumbing & Heating

Appendix D – Strategic Planning Process Supporters

Additionally, thank you to the following for their assistance during this project:

Bella Graphics	Sheridan Jaycees
Best Western Sheridan Center	Sheridan Police Department
Big Brothers Big Sisters	Sheridan Stationery
Big Horn Granite	Sheridan Travel and Tourism
Big Horn Home Builders Association	The Book Store
Big Horn Mountain Sports	Town of Ranchester
Center for a Vital Community	Ucross Foundation
Downtown Sheridan Association	USDA
Lindemann Research Consulting, Inc.	Valley Motor Honda
Local Chapter Society for Human Resource Managers (SHRM)	Volunteers of America/WYSTAR
Sheridan Community Land Trust	Whitney Foundation
Sheridan Computer	WYO Theater
Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce	Wyoming Business Council
Sheridan County School District #2	Wyoming Children's Access Network
Sheridan Housing Action Committee (SHAC)	Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Sheridan Office
	Wyoming Innovation
	YMCA

Appendix E – Target Industries for Sheridan County

In October 2006, Forward Sheridan, Inc. commissioned Wadley-Donovan & Associates to assess Sheridan County strengths and challenges as a business location; the dominant and expanding industry sectors at national, state and local levels; the small business characteristics of the County; and the experiences and insights expressed by County employers, educators, and stakeholders. The resulting report pinpointed six target industries for consideration.

The six targets areas are:

- Information Services
- Professional, Scientific, Management and Technical Services
- Small Supportive Office (Back Office)
- Creative Arts, Western Arts, and Home Furnishings
- Small, Light Manufacturing, and Niche-Product Manufacturing
- Active Recreation and Western-Themed Tourism

These targets build on the County's unique blend of assets and challenges, and offer an excellent basis for career, skills, and income enhancement among the County's residents. The priority assignment for each target is based upon the anticipated time needed for implementation and the role it can play as a preparative developer for the other targets. Two of the targets also offer additional benefits: they enhance the County's quality of life by attracting creative residents to the area, and they enhance the County's image as a fun and attractive place.

The first three listed are the primary target areas. Though not among the top 3, the Arts sector is also recognized as very strong and an important focus for the community. Forward Sheridan is collaborating with Sheridan College as the college conducts its study of the Arts in Sheridan County.

The complete Target Industry Study is available for review in the Research section of the Forward Sheridan website at www.forwardsheridan.com.