Imagine
Central City

Community Strategic Plan
of Central City

February 2016
I take great pleasure in presenting to you a draft of our city’s 5-year community-based vision and strategic plan. Many hours have been invested in its creation, some of those offered by volunteer citizens with a sincere desire to contribute to the future of our community.

In looking to the creation of this plan, we were careful to seek out the input of our residents, rather than solely elected officials or city staff. I’d like to personally thank those that have shared their thoughts as well as our staff and council who invested many hours in the creation of this plan. Thank you to those that took this opportunity to share your thoughts!

I expect this plan to serve as a guide for city staff and elected officials over the coming years as we make decisions about how to best allocate the scarce resources entrusted to us by our citizens. It will guide us in determining where to focus our efforts as a city and form the basis of our annual budgeting process.

We are committed to using what resources we have in ways that advance the priorities identified in the document that follows. Imagine the future we can create if we unite our efforts in advancing those things that our citizens have identified as most important. I look forward to joining with you in building that future.

Mayor Ron E. Engels
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Meet
Central City

In April of 1859, miner John Gregory was certain that the land along the northern fork of Clear Creek was concealing more value than the other gold panners nearby gave it credit. His instinct and tenacity soon paid off, and with his discovery of a gold vein, the vivacious Central City first emerged. More than 150 years later, this city still maintains a singular place in American history. Full of fascinating historical sites, rich cultural events, innovative attractions, and that unique Old West flavor which only graces a few towns in our nation today, Central City truly is as rare and valuable as the gold once found in the heart of its mountains.

Rooted in Central City’s history is a tradition of cultural and artistic sophistication, making for a very vibrant creative community for a city of its size. Each summer, the Central City Opera House holds a Festival featuring upwards of 80 events for the season, attracting tens of thousands of patrons each year. The Opera House holds an annual Yellow Rose Ball and features classic and modern programs year-round in addition to the historic tours of the building itself. Across the street from the Opera House is the Gilpin County Arts Association Gallery, a 4,800 square-foot art space complete with a sculpture garden and museum. The city also celebrates the people who worked hard to keep Central City alive and well with events such as the boisterous Madam Lou Bunch Day and an outstanding Independence Day parade. These attractions are in addition to the many historic features, the abundant gaming venues, and natural beauty which is so readily found here. Though Central City is a relatively small city, its population and community is the largest of those in Gilpin County, and it receives over 100,000 visitors annually, harking back to the heydays of the Gold Rush era when the city was literally the center of the mining commotion.

Over the years, this city has been host to P. T. Barnum’s traveling circus, President Ulysses S. Grant, Buffalo Bill, and a number of other significant people and companies. But, in standing the test of time, Central City proves that it’s not only the presence of gold and fame that make this place great—it’s the people, past and present, who make it a home to any who come this way.
Central City’s Strategic Plan

The central purpose in this undertaking was to provide Central City with a tool that can be used by elected officials and city staff to guide goal setting and focus efforts on those things that residents have identified as their highest priorities. In order to truly be effective, this plan needs to become part of how elected officials and city staff operate and think about programs and services. Ultimately, it needs to be incorporated into how we measure success. No matter how comprehensive this plan is, the test of its usefulness will be defined by how effective it is in guiding decisions and creating the future to which citizens aspire.

In the process of examining this strategic plan, the reader will encounter various terms and phrases associated with key elements of the plan. It is important that we place an understanding of the strategic plan within the context of what these elements are intended to contribute.

**Primary Directive**
This is a clear statement that describes the city’s rationale for existing. It is the product of what we in Central City are passionate about, where our competencies lie, and what we believe provides the means to realize our community vision. The Primary Directive represents the highest level directive, serving as the hub of the plan to which all other strategic directives are attached.

**Strategic Directive**
This plan contains five strategic directives. A strategic directive is a very high level priority that is articulated in a way that effectively describes a community priority. Such is not intended to describe specific initiatives, ideas, programs, or services. It merely captures in a very general way what citizens believe is most important in their community.

**Key Initiative**
Each strategic directive is accompanied by a number of strategic initiatives which assist in bringing the directive to the level of application. In other words, strategic initiatives are more specific actions, programs, and ideas designed to bring about the realization of the strategic directives. A directive is a destination and the initiatives represent the directions that will enable us to arrive at our destination.

**What Does Success Look Like?**
This section of each strategic directive is designed to describe some of the key indicators we will look to in evaluating the success of that directive. Specific targets have not been outlined in this document, but will be described in greater detail in the implementation plans adopted by city staff.
The Primary Directive of Central City

In Central City, our Prime Directive is:

“We are committed to preserving our community’s natural beauty, arts culture, and historical legacy to offer a truly unique quality of life to our residents and visitors.”

Strategic Directives are as follows:

1. Economic & Community Diversity & Stability
2. City Identity & Historical Integrity
3. Infrastructure
4. Downtown
5. Intergovernmental Relationships
Strategic Directive 1
ECONOMIC VITALITY & COMMUNITY DIVERSITY, & STABILITY

“We will help build a stable foundation for the future of our community that is not dependent on the fortunes of a single industry.”

Over its 150-year history, Central City has experienced a number of boom and bust cycles. This includes massive fluctuations in population driven by the many resource discoveries and subsequent mining claims in Gilpin County. More recently, it encompasses the boom in casino activity that peaked at 18 operating casinos within the city limits that today stands at 6 casinos. As we have conducted outreach to the public and visited with key stakeholders, it has become clear that the community is looking for a more diversified approach to economic development that can provide a foundation for sustainable growth.

This will serve three major objectives. First, residents are asking for more amenities. A more diversified economic base could lead to things like more dining options and a greater variety of activities in the area. Second, a more diversified and robust economy would provide the revenue base to better preserve and restore the community’s nationally significant historical heritage and resources. Third, a more diversified economic base will enable us to attract younger and more permanent residents to the community. Today, over 60% of occupied housing is rented, double the state average. Over 30% of our housing stock is vacant and our population of residents under the age of 30 is half the state average. Greater economic diversity and stability would help us improve in each of these areas.

Key Initiatives:
• Conduct a General Plan review.
• Clarify and simplify the development process.
• Develop and implement a comprehensive economic development strategic plan.
• Identify and find funding for key infrastructure projects likely to have a significant near-term impact on economic development.
• Reestablish and strengthen a community development function within the City.
• Become a Colorado Main Street community.
• Revenue diversification.
• Sale & development of excess city-owned real estate.

What Does Success Look Like?
• Increase in assessed valuation of commercial property in the city and alleviation of overall tax burden on commercial properties.
• Increase in retail store fronts in the city, specifically dining options.
• Increase in residential occupancy rates.
• Increase in owner-occupied housing.
• Increase in overall gaming revenue. Decrease in gaming revenue as a percentage of the total city budget.
Central City is home to a number of historical resources of national significance. As stewards of these resources, we have the responsibility to ensure that they are preserved for the enjoyment of future generations. They form the basis of our identity as a city and can provide the focal point for a growing sense of community and shared purpose among our residents. A key part of making historic preservation happen will be the arts.

Specifically, it will be very important to focus on building a critical mass of activities, events, dining, and other amenities that will create a memorable experience for visitors and residents during our busy summer season. We expect to work closely with arts groups, businesses, and others to create a more complete experience for those that come to the city during those four months of the year.

**Key Initiatives:**
- Review planning and zoning
- Secure ownership of key historical assets
- Develop sustainable funding mechanisms to restore and maintain key historical sites
- Rebranding
- Marketing and promotion
- Gateway redevelopment

**What Does Success Look Like?**
- Updated land use code
- Updated City brand and image
- Long-term plans for ownership of key historical assets
- Long-term plans for gateway redevelopment
One of our community’s greatest assets is our rich heritage and long history. Unfortunately, when it comes to the age of our infrastructure, this presents a significant challenge. We must focus resources on shoring up our infrastructure, most particularly, our aging water infrastructure in order to provide a solid foundation for future growth and development.

It is also vital that we continue to invest in amenities that will facilitate future growth. This goes beyond simply installing more water lines. It includes things like parks, trails, and pedestrian walkways. This kind of infrastructure will be critical to continue to drive sustainable growth in our community.

**Key Initiatives:**
- Conduct a complete inventory of existing infrastructure assets including ages and anticipated service lives
- Identify key infrastructure assets that will require expansion or may need to be added in order to enable future community development priorities
- Develop a capital improvement plan
- Identify mechanisms for funding the improvement plan
- Parks and trails planning and development

**What Does Success Look Like?**
- Declining or flat average age of infrastructure assets over time
- Well-funded capital improvement plan
- Sustainable funding levels for basic city services (i.e. water and trash disposal)
Strategic Directive 4
DOWNTOWN

“We want to continue the development of a vibrant downtown area for our city that builds on our unique historical and cultural heritage.”

Central City’s downtown boasts a number of historic and other vacant structures with tremendous potential for adaptive reuse or redevelopment. The city can take steps to foster development by making targeted investments in things like sidewalk and streetscape improvements, parking, and signage. The Central City Parkway sees 2,000 inbound cars per day during the busy summer season. By improving the look and feel of our downtown, we will be more successful in diversifying our economic base and attracting desirable retail amenities to the city.

Key Initiatives:
- Gateway/Arrival signage
- Wayfinding signage and maps for historical sites
- Directional signage (parking, key destinations)
- Sidewalk and streetscape improvements
- Development of additional parking options to support downtown events and enhance pedestrian traffic to attract retail

What Does Success Look Like?
- Declining number of vacant buildings and storefronts along Main Street and the immediate vicinity, enhanced appearance of all downtown storefronts
- Increasing sales tax revenues
- Increasing pedestrian traffic downtown
- Increasing attendance numbers at downtown events
- Increase in the number and variety of lodging options in the City
- Growth in community gathering spaces
Strategic Directive 5
PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

“We want our community to foster healthy relationships with other governmental and non-governmental entities in the area.”

As the largest city in Gilpin County and the county seat, Central City has an important role to play in bringing together the different interests in the area. We are committed to continuing to build and strengthen relationships with surrounding communities and county and state agencies as well as non-profit and for-profit organizations in the area. Given the rural character of the area, these relationships are vital in maximizing the services we can deliver to residents with our relatively limited resources.

In order for our City to be successful in developing the priorities we have identified, we must do something to address the substantial debts incurred in connection with the Central City Parkway construction. Although the debt is not the legal responsibility of the City, the levy that is in place to fund its repayment may hamper the city’s ability to fund other important priorities. We plan to work closely with the Business Improvement

**Key Initiatives:**
- Shuttle program with surrounding communities
- County relationship
- Business Improvement District (BID)
- Evaluation of opportunities for shared services

**What Does Success Look Like?**
- Improving relationships with other governmental entities as evidenced by increased points of cooperation and coordination
- Development of shared services opportunities
- Long-range plan in place for managing the BID
- Closer collaboration with non-governmental entities
Implementation of the Plan

Simply having a plan does not ensure its implementation. The city should take specific measures in order to implement this strategic plan and measure progress toward its realization. Specifically, the city should:

- Utilize this plan as the basis for annual strategic planning and goal setting.
- Annually establish and review outcome measures associated with strategic plan directives. Make adjustments as necessary to ensure close correlation between outcome measures and plan directives.
- Create a community scorecard for city and citizen use. This should be in a highly illustrative format, accessible electronically via the city’s website. The site should provide data associated with previously identified outcome measures. It is critical that this information is kept as current as possible.
- Annually provide the City Council and departmental decision-makers with a city business plan, which ties Council goals to strategic directives, identifying critical outcomes, measures, objectives, and expected budget impacts.
- Semi-annually, report strategic plan implementation progress and impacts.