

2020 La Junta Economic Development ***Year in Review***

Approach

2020 served as a philosophical pivot for most economic developers. Instead of contemplating landing that “next big mega industry,” developers focused more on capitalizing on what would assist in developing a sustainable local and regional economic ecosystem that can survive bumps in larger markets.

Our approach over the last three years has been to build programs and projects, establish a record of receiving and being a good steward of funding from outside sources, create a cadre of creative and dedicated community volunteers and partners, move the dial with various successes, shore up the downtown with new businesses and retain established offerings, increase our amenities, make our downtown safer and blight free, and record our downtown’s businesses and attributes with an eye towards a downtown historic district, directed business acquisition, blight control, and increased housing and more economic incentives. At the same time, we have had our eyes on the Industrial Park as well, paying attention to their present and future staffing and tooling needs. We also attempt to have a voice at the state level to influence legislation and programming that will aid rural municipalities and keep us in favor of those who control funding and programs. At the core of our efforts is an underlying sense of gratitude for all of the support from the City of La Junta, various volunteer boards, the larger community, and programs and partners who always support our attempts to better this corner of the world. Our attitude, capacity, professional demeanor and community spirit have signalled to funders and state program administrators that La Junta is worthy of support. Please note that this is a one-person shop.

La Junta Economic Development consists of four major programs and various partnerships that allow us to create and enhance community and economic sustainability.

Main Street La Junta has served as an umbrella structure for downtown La Junta Economic Development. Under that umbrella are standardized committees-- organization, economic vitality, design, and promotion. Per a 2018 consultation with a Main Street professional, the La Junta City Council agreed that it felt comfortable with Main Street La Junta working under the direction of City Manager Rick Klein and the Main Street Board, which is directed by Cynthia Nieb, to fulfill the annual plan. Colorado

Main Street staff is also integrally involved by providing consultants, funding, and technical advice that allow us to move swiftly in incremental improvements. Our 2020 achievements include:

- Colorado Main Street of the Year Award, selected by our peer Main Streets throughout the state
- Colorado Main Street Manager of the Year, selected by our peer Main Streets
- New businesses such as Kleinmakerspace, Fire and Ice, and Bocca Felice are moving into Main Street, and most established businesses are surviving COVID-19 even though we acknowledge this is a very challenging situation
- The City and Main Street are working together to beautify the downtown through
 - Livewell Park (Colorado Main Street funded the local sculpture by Richard Hale and funding and support was also provided by the Colorado Department of Transportation, the Robert Hoag Rawlings Foundation, AARP, Heal Cities, SECCP, the Rocky Ford Boy Scouts, and Otero Junior College, and the La Junta Urban Renewal Authority donated funding and support of timbers from the historic Plaza Building).
 - Street and Alley repaving
 - Working with new building owners on improvements and funding
 - Upgraded and beautiful holiday season decorations
- The creation of a new combination website, www.chooselj.com, that includes a bevy of information related to Main Street La Junta, Economic Development, the Certified Local Government Program, and La Junta Urban Renewal--funded by Colorado Main Street and developed by David S. Balicki, a local website professional.
- Purchase and visioning for the Presbyterian Church, including next steps
- Annual Review was a great success, and we have been invited to matriculate to the Designate category. This means even more technical assistance and grant monies. We are also advising neighboring communities on the benefits of Main Street affiliation and expect to see southeastern Colorado well represented in the Colorado Main Street system in the near future.
- Offered a small business marketing ZOOM webinar to all businesses in southeast Colorado through a Main Street grant in June
- Advised numerous Main Street Communities on grant writing, including providing a webinar

Economic Development has worked in concert with area economic development offices to provide relief during the pandemic and strengthen our voice throughout the state and the nation, to privately assist potential and current businesses with technical assistance pertaining to legal, marketing, financial and strategic planning, and to set the

course for the next steps to strengthen the municipality so that La Junta is a wonderful place to work, play, and live. In 2020, achieved or began working on:

- Downtown Colorado, Inc. Challenge Studio with Ben Levenger: an in-depth training funded in part by USDA to assist La Junta and Rocky Ford in understanding how to establish systems to reverse blight and under-utilized structures in the municipality. <https://developmentreadiness.org/otero-dri-training>
- Joe Minicozzi, a nationally recognized expert in downtown revitalization, echoes the recommendations of Ben Levenger: <https://virtual.savingplacesconference.org/talks/plenary-with-keynote/>
- Publicizing all of the federal and state assistance for COVID-19 and small businesses through the La Junta Economic Development Facebook page and director emails: we have a fairly comprehensive list of local business emails
- The Colorado Space Business Roundtable Road Show (COSBRSS) was set in La Junta in August 2020 to highlight our local manufacturers and to match space business entities with our business leaders and Otero Junior College. We created a 36-minute video with the assistance of volunteer Jennifer Hall and have been told that we are now the gold standard for COSBRSS and have been asked to train other cities on how to showcase their educational and manufacturing entities. FACT: The City of La Junta has the greatest number of manufacturers per capita in the United States.
- Served on the Bell Policy Center's "Future of Work Council." Final findings were that non-traditional students require augmented support from what is now available. We also documented the rise of No Collar Jobs, Gig Work, entrepreneurship, local economic ecosystems, and the need to refresh the school curriculum to reflect workforce needs and the talents of all students, including those interested in the trades.
- Completed an almost decade-long stint as the History Colorado representative for the Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Commission. I am now serving on the Byways Education Committee.
- Serving on the Santa Fe Trail Scenic and Historic Byways Committee for Canyons & Plains
- Assisted high school student Alyssa Bullock in writing a Revitalizing Main Street grant through the Colorado Department of Transportation for the creation of a La Junta bike share program. Ms. Bullock has showcased that experience by creating a video, which in turn garnered an award at the regional student entrepreneurship fair. She is also using that experience to apply for an Equitable Excellence Scholarship and the Boettcher Fellowship Scholarship, for which this office is providing letters of recommendation. The grant application was not submitted due to capacity issues, but Shealie Schmidt, another high school student, is polishing off Ms. Bullock's work and collaborating with Dr. Timothy

Alvarez from Otero Junior College to have the OJC Student Council as the grant applicant and administrators of the bike sharing program.

- We have over twenty grants in play that are currently being administered by this division including awards by the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, GOCO, the Colorado Department of Transportation, Colorado Main Street, History Colorado State Historical Fund, AARP, History Colorado Certified Local Government Program, and many more funders.
- Advised one-to-one with the creators of the Prison Study, provided requested documentation, and participated in meetings on the potential devastating economic effects to the City of La Junta on closing the penitentiaries in Bent and Crowley Counties.
- Started discussions with local educational institutions and businesses on bolstering a local effort regarding the trades, entrepreneurship, gig workers, and creative careers that benefit local needs.
- Created a regional economic development organization of economic development organizations in Rocky Ford, Kiowa, Prowers, Bent, Baca, Otero, and Crowley Counties called SECO STRONG. With the assistance of the SE SBDC, we developed an online gift certificate site to advertise and push local businesses.
- Offered a Jon Schallert Town Hall for our six regional counties focused on ways for business to survive during the pandemic. This was paid for by SEBREA and StartUp Colorado.
- Applied for and received more than 10 sponsorships and grants, including an Architectural Assessment Grant for the La Junta Brick & Tile Park, Colorado Housing & Finance Authority, AARP Foundation, Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Heal Cities, SEBREA, Start-Up Colorado, Colorado Main Street, and SE SBDC among others.
- Presented at the Saving Places Conference in Denver

La Junta Certified Government was formed by the City of La Junta in 2019 under its current iteration. Board members are appointed by the City Council and serve at their will. The board consists of [nine members](#), with a chairperson, vice-chair, and treasurer selected from the board.

The board assists city residents with nominations to the city, state, and national registers, providing preservation advice following the [Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines](#), supporting educational efforts pertaining to history and preservation, assisting with preservation projects, sharing information on tax credits, and advising the City on preservation approaches.

In 2020, we accomplished the following:

- Contributed to the 2021 Santa Fe Trail Bicentennial Symposium, which will take place in the early fall of 2021. This event provides teachers and middle school students with information and training about linear and 3-D historic resources by nationally recognized experts. It should be a boon to all in the area by augmenting our knowledge base.
- If successful with a Colorado Certified Local Government grant we have submitted, we will begin a historic resource survey of the downtown. This will provide us with a physical inventory of the building stock as well as contextual information that will guide us in listing properties and developing signage for the downtown.
- We presented at a joint webinar hosted by Colorado Main Street and the Colorado Certified Local Government program.
- Received training through online webinars on how to be an effective Certified Local Government and in person from the Otero County Historic Preservation Board.

La Junta Urban Renewal's mission is the elimination of blighted areas through creative redevelopment. At the current time, we are looking for projects that have profound public benefit and stretch our dollars to benefit all. We will consider any projects that are brought before us, but the project must meet the criteria called out in the Colorado state statute for blight and safety.

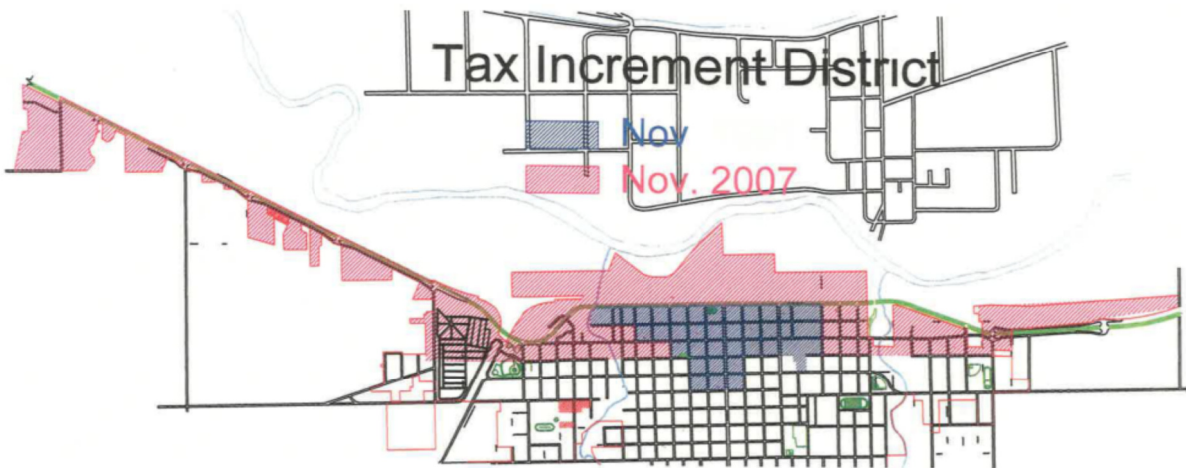
There are 11 factors of blight identified in the law, and four of them must be found for an area to be declared an urban renewal area, unless there is no objection by the property owner(s) and tenants, in which case only one factor of blight must be present. If eminent domain is used, five factors of blight must be found. The following factors are used to determine if an area is blighted:

- Slum, deteriorated, or deteriorating structures
- Predominance of defective or inadequate street layout
- Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness
- Unsanitary or unsafe conditions
- Deterioration of site or other improvements on the site
- Unusual topography
- Defective or unusual conditions of title rendering the title unmarketable
- The existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes
- Buildings that are unsafe or unhealthy for persons to live or work in because of building code violations, dilapidation, deterioration, defective design, physical construction, or faulty or inadequate facilities
- Environmental contamination of buildings or property

- Inadequate public improvements or utilities

During 2020, La Junta Urban Renewal completed the following:

- Sold two lots on Adams Avenue that were traded to us by Otero County during the construction of HWY 109
- Received training at the Saving Places Conference in Denver
- Provided the funding and the land for the creation of the parking lot next to the Chestnut Apartments. Fourth and Santa Fe is a dangerous intersection because of a concentration of parked extra-large and long vehicles.
- The LJ URA took responsibility for serving as the Board for the Certified Local Government Commission as well. The LJ URA's Board is well situated to serve as the CLG Board because of its commitment to historic preservation.



Upcoming and/or Continued 2021 Projects

- We are slated to become a Designate Main Street Community this year, which involves completing a business inventory, updating the annual plan, and polishing our structure.
- If awarded a large Colorado Main Street Grant, we will also work on Reviewing all Code, Zoning, and Ordinances and updating our legal structure to pave the

way for downtown development. It is my understanding that no cash match will be required.

- Advise and help comment on the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for our region. What is recorded in that strategy affects what we can request in federal grants and programs.
- Advise the Economic Development Council of Colorado on a yet-to-be-disclosed project they are vetting with Colorado State Government
- Urban Renewal will push to develop a 1 year, 3 year, and 5-year plan to diminish blight and continue to bolster safety in the TIF zone.
- Keeping our fingers crossed that we will receive a \$25,000 grant from the Colorado Certified Local Government program for a historic survey of the downtown.
- We received six (6) CLG Scholarships totaling \$515 to cover the registrations for our commission members to the 2021 Colorado Preservation, Inc. conference.
- We are applying, with the help of Colorado Main Street, for funding through the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design to create a charette for the Presbyterian Church.
- If successful with an El Pomar Foundation grant, we shall begin assessing and drawing up design documents for the Presbyterian Church. The next steps after that are to complete construction documents and begin rehabilitation.
- Our grant for a Economic Development Action Plan was accepted by DoLA, so we will begin working with Brad Segal from P.U.M.A. this spring.
- We as a regional group, SECO Strong, will push for further economic help for our local businesses. We have more strength when we speak as a united force.
- If awarded a SECOG Technical Grant, we will work on updating and augmenting the City of La Junta's website.
- Both the Livewell Park and the La Junta Brick & Tile Park will be completed by the end of the year.