

## Sierra County Economic Development Strategic Plan



PREPARED FOR

**Sierra County, New Mexico**

PREPARED BY



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## Executive Summary

Sierra County, New Mexico is facing transformative growth. The purpose of this Economic Development Strategic Plan is to provide a framework to guide and leverage planned growth in the county. It is of the utmost importance that Sierra County implement key economic development strategies as soon as possible. These strategies fall into eight categories; strategies to develop adequate infrastructure, downtown development strategies, large development strategies, small business and rural business strategies, workforce development strategies, strategies for organization, marketing strategies and tourism development strategies. These strategies are interconnected and interdependent.

Recommendations presented for each of the eight categories. In the last section of this plan, implementation strategies and a scorecard outlining parties responsible for implementation are presented. Below is a listing of all recommendations presented in this plan with page numbers for reference. The success of this economic development plan is dependent on tracking progress and not letting key economic development strategies “slip through the cracks.”

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## Foundations for Economic Development

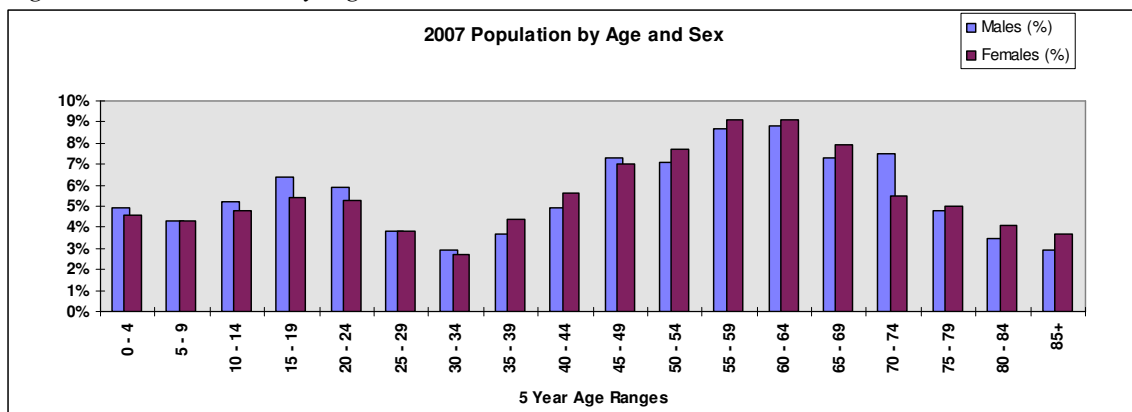
Sierra County is a county with a relatively small population that has a unique character and is facing significant opportunities and challenges over the coming years. The county will be home to several large developments, including Spaceport America, Hot Springs Motorplex and Turtleback Mountain Resort. These new developments offer the potential to realize a more diversified economy, higher wages and increased tourism activity. However, they also represent change and elicit a number of questions about how the county will deal with increases in population, changing demographics, possible increases in cost of living, infrastructure demands and workforce development limitations.

This economic development strategic plan is concerned with leveraging the opportunities presented by proposed development and increased interest in Sierra County while mitigating negative impacts to current residents' quality of life. Sierra County is in a position to transform its demographics, infrastructure, image and economic diversity. The foundations for economic development in the county include understanding the basic demographics of the county and the county's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints, and then developing a vision for where the county is headed.

### Basic Demographics

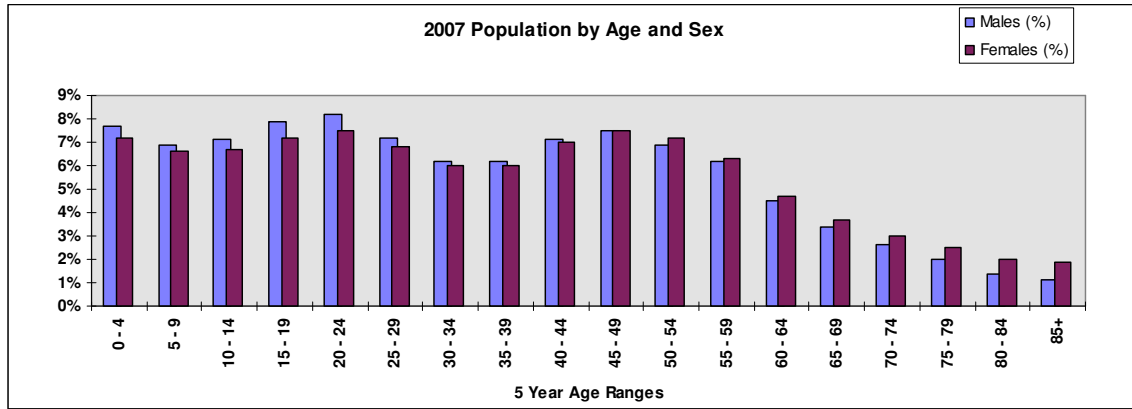
Sierra County demographics are driven by a skewed age distribution. The following graphs illustrate the difference between Sierra County's age distribution, which is dominated by a 55-and-up population, and the age distribution of New Mexico as a whole, which is quite the opposite, showing a relatively young population. It is important to understand this phenomenon if one is to be able to appropriately interpret other demographic data such as household income.

Figure 1 - Sierra County Age Distribution



Source: ESRI

*Figure 2 New Mexico Age Distribution*



Source: ESRI

According to ESRI business solutions, the 2007 population in Sierra County was 13,368 and household income was \$28,947. Household income for New Mexico, on the other hand, is estimated at \$43,397. This dramatic disparity in annual income is driven, in large part, by the substantial retiree population in the county. If we examine household net worth, the disparity is much less significant. Sierra County has an average net worth of \$343,104 while the state has an average net worth of \$407,602. Furthermore, the net worth for those ages 55-64 in Sierra County is \$650,843.

The most significant piece of demographic information is the projected population growth for the county. Using Census data results in no significant projected population growth for the county. While it is obvious that a significant growth will occur (at a minimum, planned development will move forward), the demographic data used by most businesses does not reflect this change.

The fact that a significant change in population will occur is something that needs to be marketed. Some estimate a change as great as 200 percent over the next 15 years. This is something that the county and the jurisdictions within the county must prepare for and must market to ensure that appropriate businesses and public funding closely follow any increase in population.

## ***Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Constraints***

During a January 3, 2008 workshop with Sierra County stakeholders, the following SWOC analysis was developed.

### ***Strengths***

- Proximity to Interstate 25
- Proposed development (including Hot Springs Motorplex and Spaceport)
- Historic downtown Truth or Consequences
- Outdoor recreation opportunities



# Sierra County Economic Development Strategic Plan



- Cooperation of all four government entities and SCEDO
- Arts and Hot Springs
- Overall interest in and participation in economic development process
- Inexpensive land and buildings
- Proposed new hospital
- Agriculture
- Tourism board

## *Weaknesses*

- Limited infrastructure
- Lack of a clear vision for the future
- Lack of adequate development controls
- Less diverse entertainment and retail options than in areas with larger population
- Deterioration of many properties
- Lack of higher education
- Lack of technical education
- Lack of workforce

## *Opportunities*

- Expansion of the Airport in conjunction with Hot Springs Motorplex development
- Motorplex related industry
- Development of retail and hotel uses along Route 195 in Elephant Butte
- Development of additional small businesses in downtown T or C and throughout the County
- Tourism – arts and hot springs
- Tourism – outdoor recreation
- Tourism – Spaceport
- Spaceport related industry
- Creation of a Mainstreet /Arts and Cultural District program for downtown T or C
- Existing school system and workforce development programs that can accommodate improved workforce development initiatives

## *Constraints*

- Limited budget for economic development activities
- Limited infrastructure (especially telecommunications)
- Lack of skilled workforce
- Lack of higher education options
- Limited political representation at the State level
- Availability of water resources to support population increases

## **SCEDO's Vision for Sierra County**

It is important to note that tourism and tourism related small business, and large developments dominate the opportunities list above. An appropriate vision for Sierra County must address these

items. However, the vision for the county must, in its most basic form, be to improve the quality of life for existing residents. In order to understand what this entails, one must understand what is important to the residents of Sierra County. The following items were identified as being most important to county residents:

- A low cost of living
- The historic character of the community
- The uniqueness of the community, including the hot springs, art community, rural community and Hispanic cultural influence
- The ability to be unique without having to face harsh judgment from others or strict government controls

Therefore, a vision for the future of Sierra County begins with preserving and improving those qualities residents value most, but the vision must also provide for management of changes occurring in the county. Specifically, the county must be prepared to:

- Provide adequate infrastructure for existing and proposed development
- Leverage new development and increasing interest in the county to diversify the county's economy
- Provide some form of development control to guide the anticipated large influx of new development
- Continue to promote tourism in the county

## ***SCEDO's Vision***

Sierra County will provide high quality infrastructure and services to existing and future residents, accommodate large scale development while continuing to promote existing and new small businesses, preserve the historic character of downtown T or C while promoting appropriate infill development, and expand the tourism industry while maintaining the low-cost, great value reputation of Sierra County tourism attractions.

The Sierra County of the future will be a place where residents can earn a living working in a diverse economy while still enjoying a high quality of life. The county will remain a tourism destination, successfully coupling existing tourist draws such as the historic hot springs with new tourist destinations such as Spaceport America and Turtleback Mountain Resort. The Sierra County of the future will have a well-planned, modern infrastructure system that supports all activities in the county while also providing excess capacity sufficient to quickly accommodate new development opportunities. The county will strike a balance between providing the cultural, entertainment and retail amenities of a larger community while maintaining the unique character and quality of life that residents value.

## **Eight Types of Strategies Necessary for Successful Economic Development in Sierra County**

The eight types of strategies that must be implemented if SCEDO is to realize its economic development vision are:

- Strategies to develop adequate infrastructure
- Downtown development strategies
- Large development strategies
- Small business and rural business strategies
- Workforce development strategies
- Strategies for organization
- Marketing strategies
- Tourism development strategies

While each set of strategies is important, some items are more pressing than others. Developing appropriate infrastructure, for example, will be necessary regardless of the type of development that ultimately occurs in Sierra County. Other strategies are designed to guide and optimize economic development, but developing infrastructure is essential to attracting any substantial new development and is, in fact, essential to maintaining the current quality of life in the county.

Therefore, strategies for developing adequate infrastructure will be placed near the top of the list of immediate implementation items and will be the foundation for many of the other strategies discussed in this plan.

Tourism has long been the major economic driver in Sierra County and will continue to be one of the primary industries. There are many opportunities for expanding the tourism market, which will be discussed in the tourism section later in this plan. Refining tourism efforts is a reliable way to build on the strengths of the county and generate additional revenue. Tourism development will support small business development and improve the quality of life for existing residents by supporting restaurants, shops and entertainment that can remain open longer and offer a wider variety of services. Tourism development will also generate tax revenues that will be channeled directly into economic development activities via lodging taxes. Finally, preserving and enhancing downtown T or C will not be possible without leveraging the economic potential of tourism.

Downtown development also needs to be a priority. The quality of life in the county is directly linked to the quality of downtown T or C. New, large development on county or recently annexed land will help spur the county economy, but could also compete with downtown business and stifle downtown development. Downtown is not only a place with historic significance, moderately-priced services and unique character, it is also an asset that can be developed to help Sierra County successfully compete with other communities for tourist dollars, businesses and workforce.

If downtown T or C is not developed to its full potential an important opportunity to create a truly unique downtown success story is being missed. A much worse scenario, however, would be if

the downtown area were not developed at all or even left to deteriorate in favor of new development. In this scenario, the county will lose a large part of its identity and ability to distinguish itself from other communities.

Development of small businesses is essential for supporting both the tourism industry and downtown development. Small businesses include hotels, restaurants and shops, as well as startup companies that can help retain and attract a talented workforce. Agriculture and rural business also fall under this category and with Sierra County's large rural area, these businesses cannot be ignored.

Large development strategies will deal primarily with reacting to the several large projects that have already been proposed and planning to accommodate additional projects that may be proposed in the future.

Workforce development is essential for new economic development in much the same way as infrastructure. A new business cannot be built without adequate sewer, water and electric, but it cannot operate without appropriately skilled workers. Workforce development strategies focus on incrementally improving the existing workforce development model in Sierra County and implementing strategies to expand the number of residents who may be able to participate in the Sierra County workforce.

Finally, organization and marketing are essential for any successful economic development strategy. Better organization of the economic development advocates in Sierra County is essential to maintain momentum and implement this strategic plan. Marketing efforts will be required to reposition Sierra County. Just as many people do not realize the growth potential of the county, people are not going to be aware of business successes or tourism or career opportunities if no effort is made to publicize these items.

The purpose of the implementation items at the end of this strategic plan and the implementation suggestions throughout the plan is to provide a framework for organizing many tasks that need to occur, often simultaneously, to provide the best chance for success.

## Infrastructure

Sierra County, the City of T or C, City of Elephant Butte and Town of Williamsburg are all aware of current infrastructure needs and all have prepared infrastructure capital improvement plans. Sierra County and T or C have prepared comprehensive plans that outline needed water, wastewater, roadway and landfill improvements that will be necessary in the near-term. Elephant Butte is in the process of building its sewer system which will accommodate commercial growth.

It is not the purpose of this plan to rank specific infrastructure projects, but rather to provide a framework for identifying necessary infrastructure needs to support the remainder of the economic development strategy. Needless to say, currently identified wastewater infrastructure shortcomings need to be addressed as soon as possible. Furthermore, infrastructure improvement issues need to be incorporated into every general economic development discussion. The goal is to bring the issue of infrastructure needs to the forefront and to tie this issue to overall economic development in the hopes of realizing sufficient support from both the citizens of Sierra County and state legislators.

It is often difficult to gain support to spend money on things that can't be seen, like sewer lines. When discussing more glamorous projects, like a Spaceport Visitors Center or downtown redevelopment, it is important to stress the need for underlying infrastructure to be improved first.

### **Recommendation 1: Continue to Plan for Expansion of Water and Sewer Capacity**

Water and sewer capacity planning should be integrated into all economic development planning efforts, even if only to note that a project would have minimal impact on water and sewer infrastructure. This is the first step in conducting a thorough due diligence of economic development projects. It is important to know the true cost of projects and programs to determine the return on investment to the taxpayer.

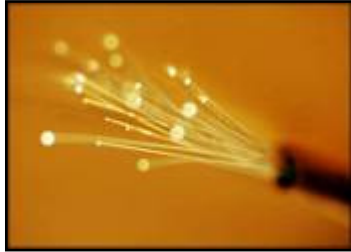
SCEDO will make a top economic development priority of implementing infrastructure improvement strategies presented in the following documents:

- Sierra County Comprehensive Plan
- T or C Comprehensive Plan
- Sierra County Infrastructure Capital Improvements Plan
- T or C Capital Improvements Plan
- Elephant Butte Capital Improvements Plan
- Williamsburg Capital Improvements Plan

### **Recommendation 2: Create an Infrastructure Master Plan**

Water and sewer development, along with telecommunications, transportation, and other pressing infrastructure needs should be identified and planned for in an infrastructure master plan. This plan will serve a number of purposes, including:

- Identifying required infrastructure and supporting the need for improvements with existing and projected demand data as well as for desired development



- Identifying specific capital improvement projects and their associated costs. This will include currently planned-for capital improvement projects as well as newly proposed projects.
- Prioritizing projects by analyzing their relative costs and benefits, and the immediacy of projected demand

The infrastructure master plan can cover any period of time, but should provide for at least 10 years of infrastructure development with a timeframe and methodology for updating the plan.

The infrastructure master plan differs from current infrastructure planning documents, including the infrastructure capital improvements plan, in that it covers a longer timeframe and is more of a complete wish list of desired capital improvement projects.

The infrastructure master planning project should identify the maximum likely new development and include a land planning component. Areas of the county that can best accommodate new water and sewer infrastructure should be identified. These areas will provide the basis for any county land use regulation. The county must plan for an expansion of high-density development into unincorporated land and the only efficient way to do this is to plan for where this new development should be located.

### **Recommendation 3: Ensure Appropriate Impact Fees are in Place**

Impact fees in all jurisdictions can help to fund necessary infrastructure improvements. However, the impact fee programs need to be consistently re-evaluated to determine their effectiveness. Specifically, the programs should be evaluated to determine:

- Are the impact fees sufficient to provide a meaningful offset for infrastructure costs?
- How are impact fees affecting development feasibility?
- How do Sierra County impact fees compare to other New Mexico communities?

### **Recommendation 4: Promote Renewable Energy Sources**

SCEDO should promote renewable energy sources whenever possible and implement an environmental dialogue to any infrastructure discussion. This will provide several benefits, including a cleaner environment (better quality of life) and almost certain long-term savings as fossil fuels become obsolete. Incentives, whether in the form of tax credits or impact fee waivers, for use of renewable energy sources should be explored.

**Recommendation 5: Explore the Costs and Benefits of City-Provided Wireless Broadband Internet Access in T or C**

Providing wireless broadband access in downtown T or C is a strategy that should be explored with a careful assessment of the costs and benefits of such a program. The overall business model for the program also needs to be developed. The following are some of the key questions that will need to be answered:

- Will the city sell internet ads to help fund the network?
- Will the network be free to all or only in certain areas?
- What area will be covered?

Finally, wireless infrastructure does not take priority over other necessary infrastructure. Specifically, implementation of a wireless network will occur only after current wastewater needs are met. Returns from an investment in wireless infrastructure is uncertain while needs for wastewater system improvements is obvious.



## Downtown Development

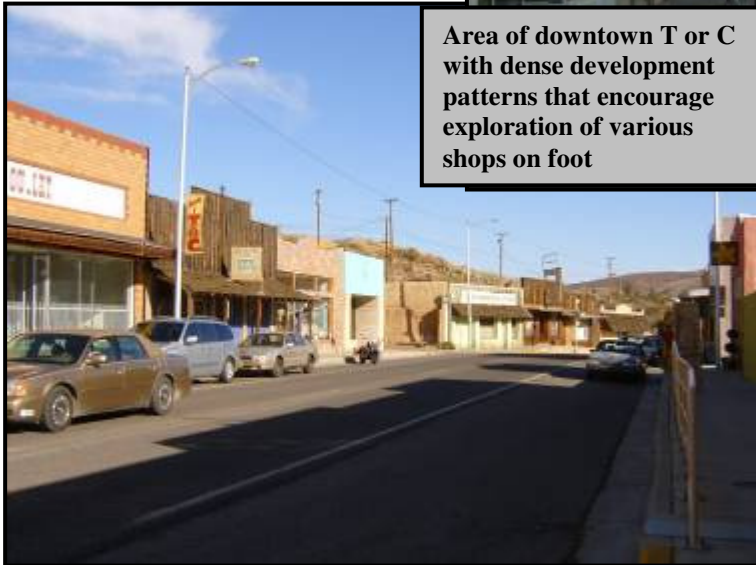
### *Current Conditions*

Downtown Truth or Consequences is home to the Hot Springs Bathhouse Historic District, two streets with significant commercial activity and at least nine bath houses. The character of the downtown area nearly equally affected by the historic character of downtown buildings, and “the loop,” the one-way thoroughfare that travels east along N Broadway and loops back to the west along Main Street. This one-way traffic pattern and wide streets promotes speeds higher than posted speed limits and reduces the attractiveness of downtown as a pedestrian-oriented space.

The street network throughout downtown T or C is much wider than necessary. Lanes are ill-defined and parking on both sides of the street still does not reduce the width of most travel lanes to a typical urban scale. This is problematic for a town wishing to create a sense of place that encourages people to get out of their cars and spend some time



Area of downtown T or C with dense development patterns that encourage exploration of various shops on foot



exploring what T or C has to offer. Fortunately, one block of N Broadway Street and one block of Main Street do have typical urban density and an interesting mixture of businesses. Furthermore, opportunities exist to promote infill development in strategic locations to create a more cohesive downtown.

Downtown T or C possesses the following strengths:

- A historic district and appealing historic character
- Historic and newer bath houses and associated hotel rooms
- Ample parking

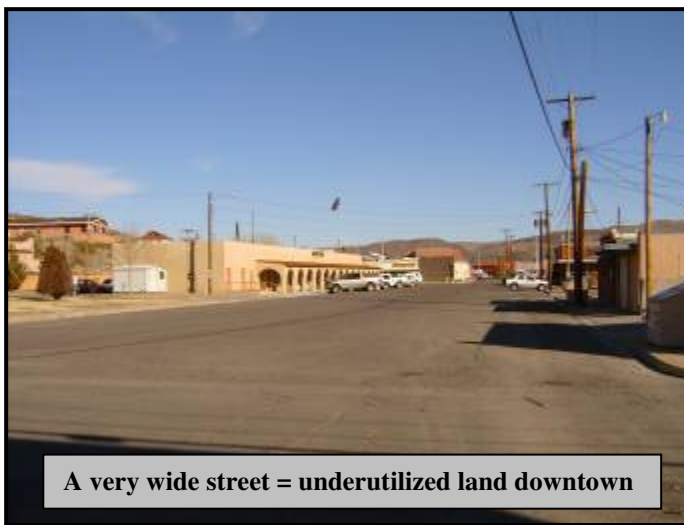
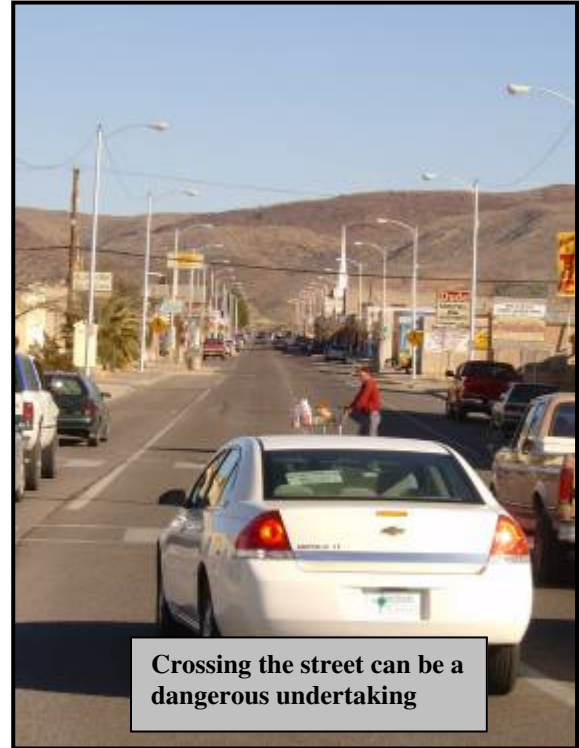


- Existing businesses, included a grocery and a bank
- Available land for new development

However, the downtown is faced with a number of challenges, including:

- Vacant land and low density development patterns over much of downtown
- Streets that encourage speeds higher than posted limits
- Wide streets that act as an impediment to free-flowing pedestrian traffic
- A lack of defined boundaries and vacant land at the entrances to downtown
- Inadequate public signage delineating downtown and providing directions to the downtown and hot springs

Figure 3 through Figure 6 show the strengths and weaknesses of downtown T or C relative to New Mexico cities of comparable size. However, there are a set of basic urban design principles that be best demonstrated by looking at other famous historic downtowns. The following pages show basic urban design and streetscaping in downtown Annapolis, MD. Sierra County and T or C should not attempt to mimic the character of Annapolis, or any other town, for that matter. T or C should seek to complement the existing character of its downtown by applying basic design principles seen in other towns in a unique way. T or C is already a unique city worth exploring. The purpose of evaluating downtown T or C and suggesting improvements is to create a downtown that is pedestrian-oriented. The purpose of creating a pedestrian-oriented downtown is to make people feel as if



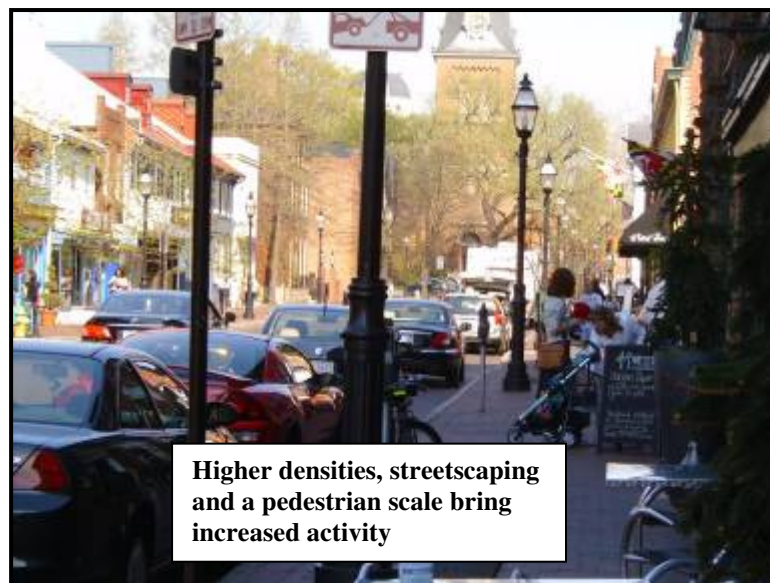
they have missed an opportunity if they simply drive through without leaving their vehicles. Some places seem to exert an irresistible pull to get out and explore, or just sit in a public place and take in the surroundings. Downtown T or C is an auto-oriented downtown that has not yet realized its potential as a pedestrian-oriented destination.

## *Comparison with Other Communities*

Downtowns across the country have had to compete with increasing levels of suburban development during the last several decades. Now, downtowns are beginning to make a comeback for a number of reasons. Primarily, people are looking for aesthetically pleasing, unique places where they can safely walk between destinations without having to use their cars. Most downtowns meet these criteria better than an average suburban location. However, downtowns continue to compete with newer space in suburban locations that often offers convenient parking and lower prices than downtown equivalents.

Some downtowns are obviously doing better than others and it tends to be those locations that meet urban design guidelines that are doing best. A downtown's best means of competing with suburban development is to provide a unique, high-quality experience. The design guidelines that are most important include:

- Creating a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment where pedestrians obviously have the right-of-way
- Creating a sense of scale that is pedestrian-oriented. When one is traveling in a car, points of visual interest are ideally spaced out so that a driver can travel at speed and still take note of these points. In a pedestrian-oriented environment, the opposite is true. Points of interest that are spaced widely apart are boring for a pedestrian who is traveling at a much slower speed and therefore experiences extended periods of walking between points instead of being engaged by points of interest.
- Creating a sense of scale is typically accomplished by building at a high density
- Streetscapes should have continuity. That is, setbacks should be uniform and streetscape items should be uniformly placed. Architectural styles can vary, but not so much as to make a street aesthetically unappealing.



- Public spaces are necessary to create a sense of place and to entice people to relax and enjoy a downtown
- Signage is necessary to point people to a downtown, but should also be used to create a brand for the downtown

The following pictures show two types of crosswalks and a banner sign being used to denote a place and create a brand. The crosswalks show two different strategies. The first is near a public place at the center of a downtown and uses an elaborate brick and stone pattern along with islands to offer the necessary visual pedestrian traffic and many intersections, and is on a narrow street with a lot cues to get drivers to slow down. This is in an area with continuous of activity. Drivers do not need any additional help slowing down enough to react appropriately to pedestrians wishing to cross the street. The second type of crosswalk is much less expensive to duplicate and can be nearly equally effective. In this crosswalk, a raised area is used to denote the crossing and traditional painted white lines alert drivers. The addition of an inexpensive yellow sign alerting drivers to their legal obligation to stop for pedestrians can significantly increase the number of drivers willing to stop.



In order to evaluate downtown T or C relative to other comparable communities in New Mexico, we examined the urban form of T or C as well as the urban form of Silver City, Portales and Artesia. These cities were chosen because they are similar in size (though all a bit larger) to T or

C, all had an identifiable downtown and demonstrated some of the basic urban design principles that A black and white diagram showing buildings in each city was created from satellite images. This exercise is not intended to suggest that T or C should model its downtown based on any of these example. Rather, this exercise should be used to identify basic principles that are currently in place in T or C and areas for improvement.

As seen in figure 4, Silver City produced the best image of organized, pedestrian-oriented design. It has a defined main street with urban development patterns extending continuously for at least six blocks. Cross streets are also developed to a similar density. Residential areas surrounding the core are also urban in nature and open areas are not taken up with parking lots. Silver City is slightly smaller than the other two cities, yet manages to create a more urban feel.

Portales and Artesia both suffered from an insufficient area developed with consistent density and urban form. Artesia in particular has areas characterized by wide streets and large parking lots. In both cases, density deteriorates quickly outside of the core downtown area. Portales has the advantage of a public space at the center of downtown. This creates a focal point that a planner or economic development professional can point to as the place around which future efforts should be centered. T or C has several areas that could be considered the “center” of downtown, but not one definitive place.

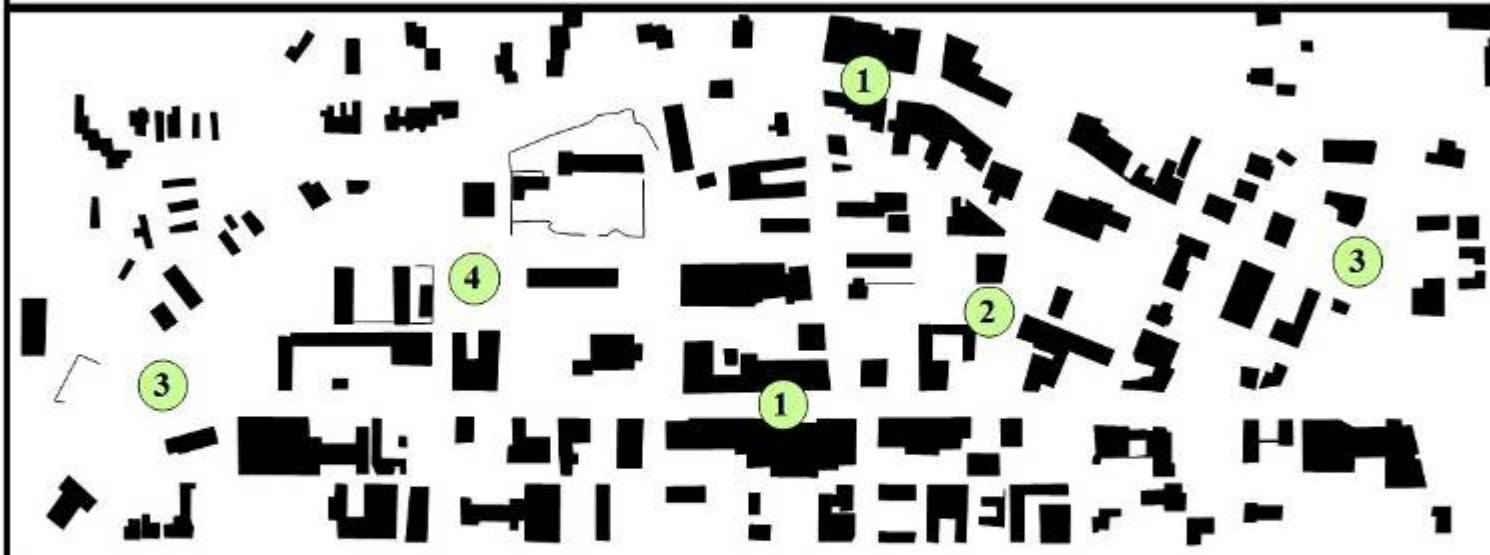
It was obvious throughout this exercise that it is not easy to develop an interesting urban environment in a state where land is plentiful and populations tend to be small. However, Silver City provides one good example of a town slightly larger than T or C that has been able to create this atmosphere and leverage it into economic benefit.

T or C demonstrates a lot of potential, with several blocks that have consistent density and urban form. However, these areas are separated by areas of scattered development. Furthermore, there are no defined gateways to downtown. In other words, one does not know where downtown begins or ends. Finally, areas of vacant land or sparsely developed land exist downtown. Most troubling are the two “gateways” to downtown at the far western and far eastern edges of “the loop” which lack development or any sense of being in a downtown.



Figure 3

Downtown Truth or Consequences Urban Form



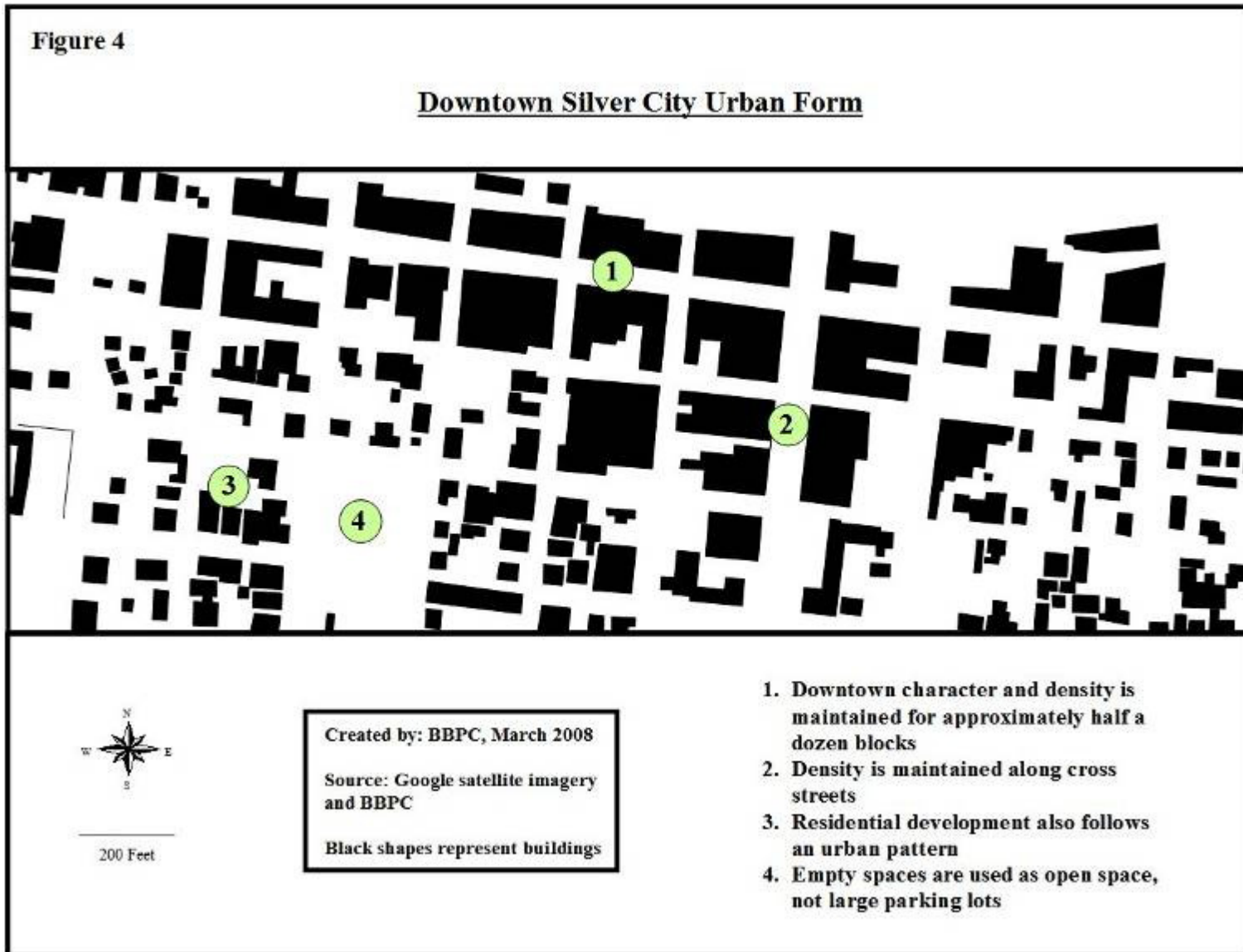
200 feet

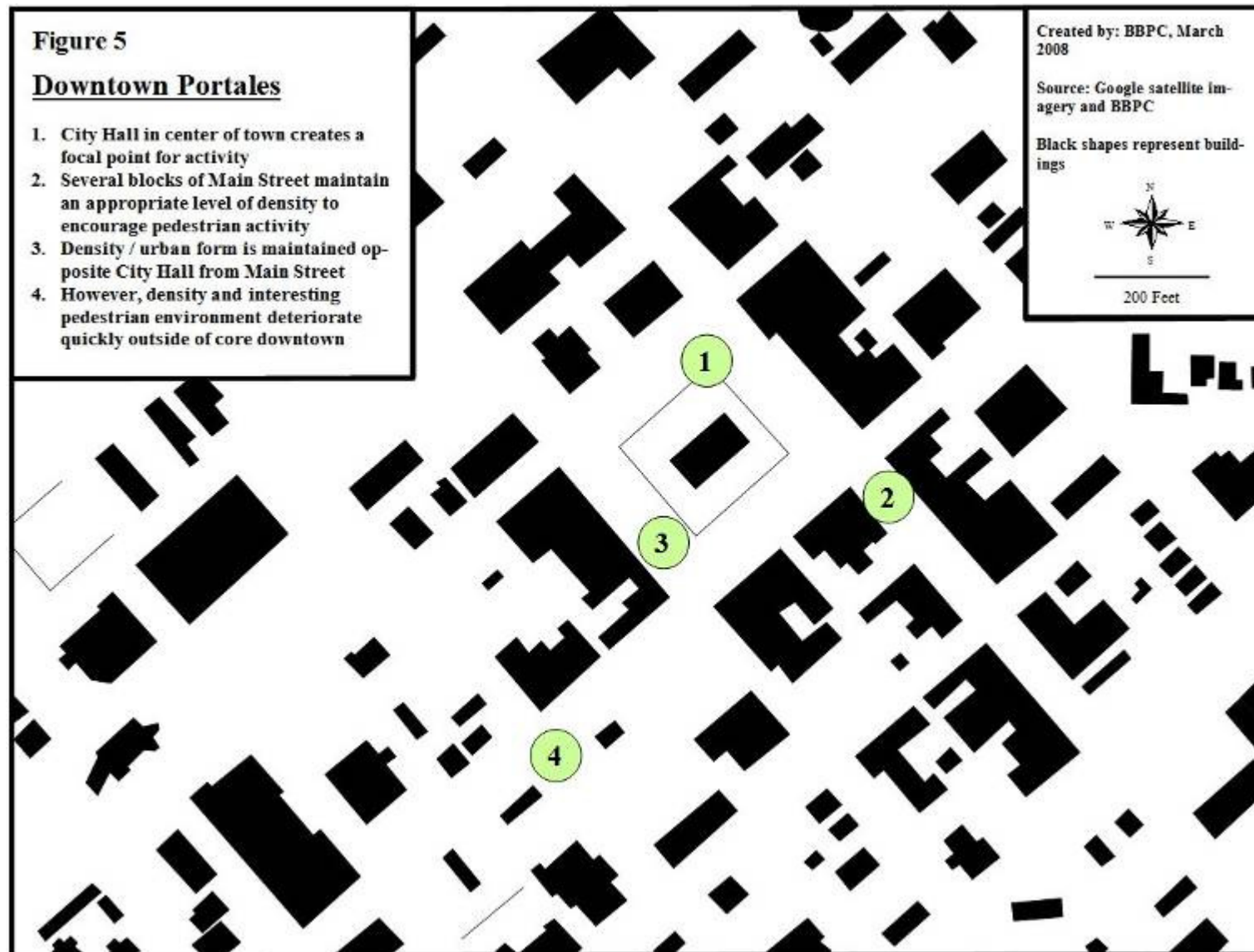
Created by: BBPC, March 2008

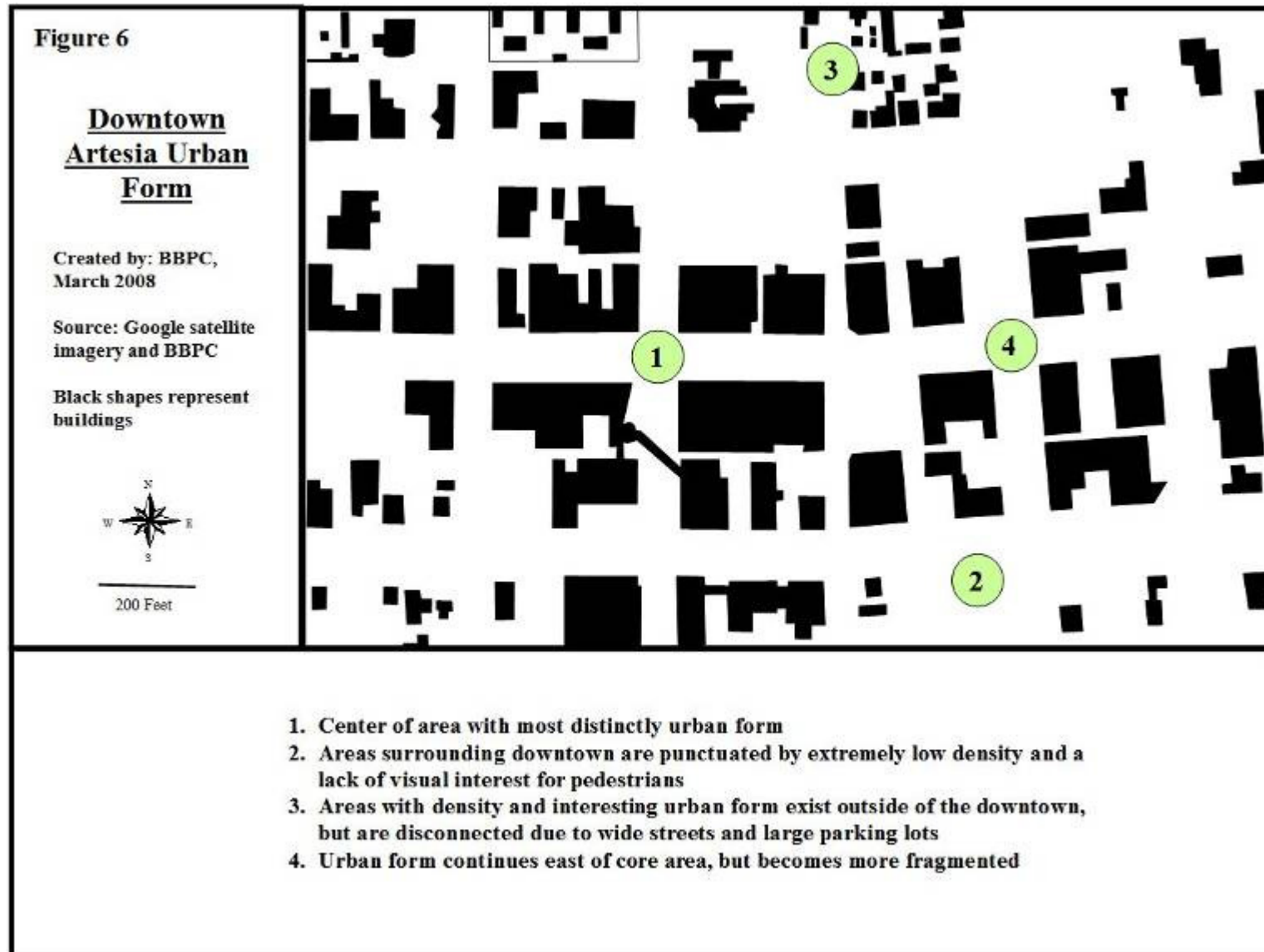
Source: Google satellite imagery  
and BBPC

Black shapes represent buildings

1. Several blocks have consistent density and urban form, and promote pedestrian activity
2. However, these areas are disconnected and separated by areas of scattered development
3. Entrances to downtown are characterized by significant amounts of vacant land and indeterminate boundaries
4. Areas of vacant or underutilized land exist within downtown T or C









## *Recommended Strategies to Optimize Downtown Development*

### **Recommendation 6: Encourage Infill Development at Densities Consistent with Successful Comparables**

Truth or consequences should encourage infill development throughout its downtown at densities seen in successful comparable cities, like Silver City. In order to do this, the city must first define “downtown.” One possible definition would be to refer to all areas within the Hot Springs Historic District as being the downtown. Within the downtown, Sierra County stakeholders should identify areas where infill development is most desirable. As shown in figure 7, the areas of Main Street and N Broadway Street with the highest densities are separated by an area of Foch Street with lower densities and less organized development. This is one logical area to encourage infill development.

T or C should hold a design charette to explore options for downtown development and to define those areas best suited to infill development. To save cost, the City should approach a university department of architecture and planning, such as the one at the University of New Mexico, and inquire about having a student-led project that explores development scenarios. This can usually be arranged at little or no cost to a community. The City needs guidance in making decisions about the future urban form of downtown T or C, but at this point does not necessarily need a seasoned expert to make design recommendations.

The next step to encouraging infill development involves identifying properties that can support additional development and starting a dialogue with owners. The City of T or C should create an inventory of parcels that would be ideal for infill development, including publicly owned parcels. Once demand for certain types of development increase, there will be interest in downtown development. However, most developers are wary of seeking out downtown sites because of difficulties identifying appropriate parcels and facing opposition from property owners, city staff and elected officials. If decisions are made regarding a preferred future scenario and parcels are identified, the city is on its way to creating a development-friendly environment. The city may want to go the next step and catalyze development with public/private partnerships.

### **Recommendation 7: The City of Truth or Consequences Should Explore the Feasibility of Re-Establishing a Main Street Program**

T or C should identify why the Main Street initiative failed. Assuming it was because not enough businesses existed downtown at the time to support a program, the city should identify the likely support they can receive from existing businesses and the number of businesses that would be needed to support a full-scale program. It may be in the best interest of the city to attempt to subsidize the program for a defined time period with grant funding or general funds to help spur downtown development. A Main Street program could be useful in implementing the other recommendations in this section.

## **Recommendation 8: The City of Truth or Consequences Should Pursue Public / Private Partnership Opportunities**

The City of T or C has the option to encourage downtown development by providing incentives through a public / private partnership. The city controls land downtown that can accommodate increased densities. T or C can go beyond looking at only publicly owned land by exploring the feasibility of assembling land for a developer. Ultimately, the city would issue a request for proposals (RFP) to develop a site. The RFP would include a general development plan for the site as well as a list of things the public sector would be willing to contribute to the site.

If the city controlled land, it would contribute the land at a reasonable price. However, the city does not need to control a site for a project to enter into a public/private partnership. Simply having identified a site and a desired development program for a site, and committed to working with a developer to see a project completed are the first steps in pursuing a public / private partnership.

## **Recommendation 9: The City of T or C Should Explore Streetscaping Options to Create a More Pedestrian-Friendly Downtown and Otherwise Enhance the Character of Downtown**

T or C should explore streetscape options consistent with the general downtown design guidelines described in this section. These streetscape features should include:

- Improved crosswalks
- Signage directing people to downtown
- Signage identifying areas within downtown

Attempts should be made to make crosswalks more conspicuous and therefore more effective at slowing and stopping motorists. A plan for providing signage directing people to downtown should begin with Interstate 25 and end with a gateway to downtown. Signage should have a consistent appearance regardless of location (although size can and should vary). This means the look of the signs needs to fit with historic downtown while still being conspicuous enough to catch motorists' attention on higher-speed roads. The same signage initiative that examines directional signs should also examine signs identifying downtown itself. These signs could be in banner form, as is seen in many historic downtowns. The arts community in T or C should be involved in the development of the signage program.

Additional streetscape items that should be considered include:

- Lamp posts
- Trash receptacles
- Benches
- Shade devices – given the desert climate in T or C, planting and maintaining street trees is infeasible. However, providing shade in a downtown accomplishes two things; it provides relief for pedestrians and it provides a more interesting streetscape and a human

- scale. T or C could explore shade providing sculpture, which would also serve to advertise the city's art community.
- Façade improvements – this is an item that a Main Street program will often provide assistance with. The city can encourage building façade improvements by providing various incentives to property owners.
  - Traffic calming strategies – these strategies include artificially narrowing the travel lanes at key locations to slow traffic and promote pedestrian traffic. The city should explore traffic calming solutions supported by the Urban Land Institute. When implementing traffic calming, it is important to not design traffic calming devices that can accommodate speeds twice the legal limit (as is the wont of many traffic engineers). The traffic calming must be safe to navigate at legal speeds, but must create a sense that it would be dangerous to navigate at higher speeds. Aesthetically pleasing, successful traffic calming provides a dual purpose, such as a planter or a place for shade devices.

Finally, streetscape improvements should consider the streets themselves. Throughout T or C streets are much wider than necessary. In some areas it would be possible to double park two small cars in the parallel parking lane without impacting the travel lanes. Changing the format of the roadway is the most expensive streetscape improvement suggested in this plan, and therefore should be coordinated with planned future street improvements and implemented where the greatest benefits can be realized.

## **Recommendation 10: T or C Should Consider Establishing a Tax Increment Financing District for Downtown Improvements**

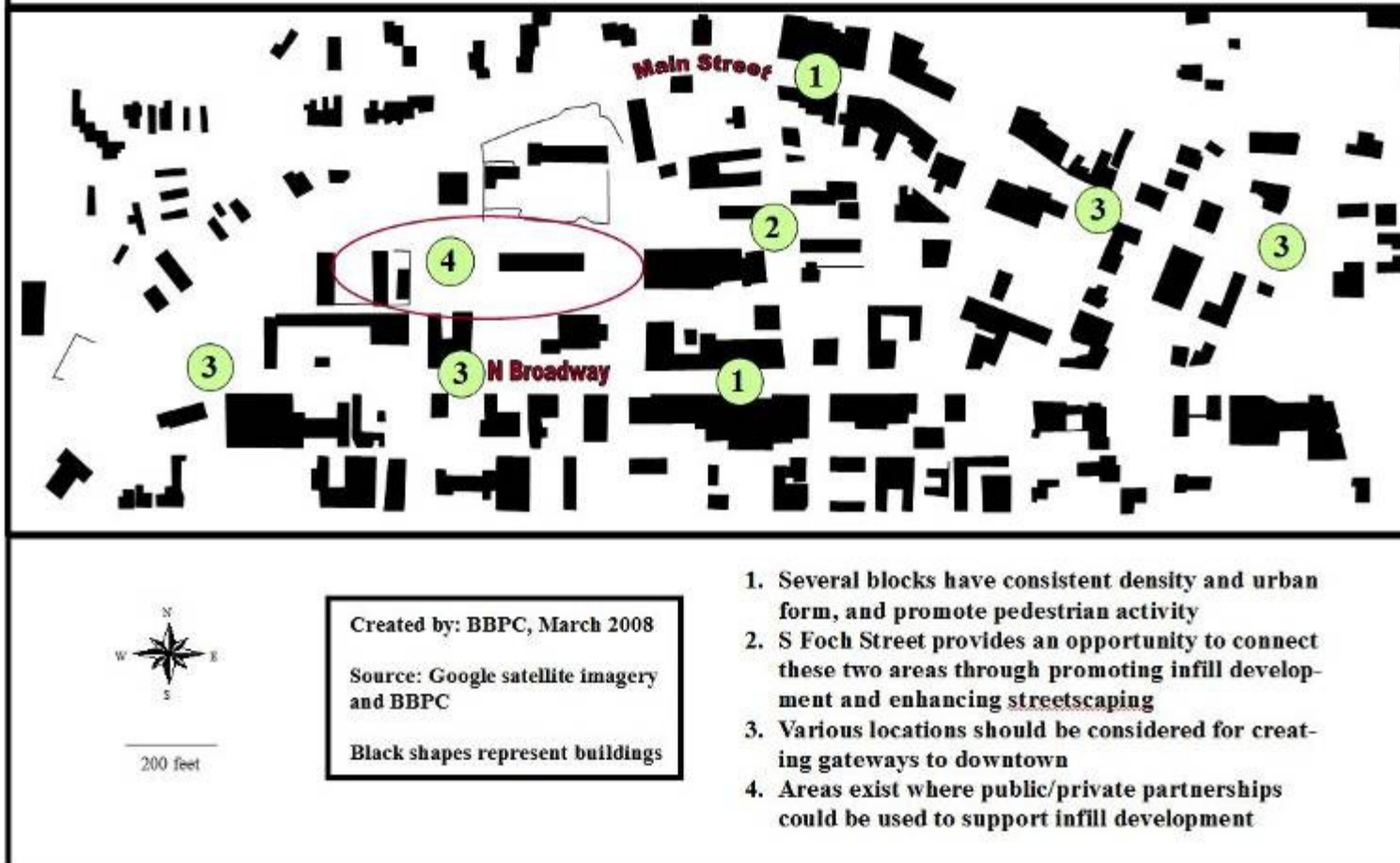
A tax increment financing (TIF) district could provide the necessary funds for completing improvements suggested in this section. State statutes allow for the creation of a tax increment development area with support of at least fifty percent of the property owners and the creation of a tax increment development plan. TIF is a tool to provide necessary funding for improvements, ensure that increased tax revenue from private investment in an area is retained for public improvements in the same area, and negotiate public/private deals with the intent to use tax revenues from a project to fund public improvements that will benefit the project. When considering establishing a TIF district it is important to consider the impact to general obligation funds and determine whether projects of higher priority exist.

## **Recommendation 11: T or C Should Continue to Promote and Develop Public Spaces**

T or C has developed public park spaces downtown, such as the Las Palomas Plaza Fountain. Small, interesting public spaces are essential for creating a vibrant downtown. Of course, it is much easier to create these spaces sooner rather than later as land will increase in value and demand for land for private projects will increase. Infill development planning that occurs should include public spaces.

Figure 7

Downtown Truth or Consequences Key Locations



## Large Development

### *Existing Large Development Opportunities*

The existing large development opportunities in Sierra County are Spaceport America, Hot Springs Motorplex, and Turtleback Mountain Resort. Spaceport America will be home to a variety of commercial space flight operations. Opportunities exist for tourism development as well as engineering and aerospace industry development associated with the Spaceport.

The Motorplex project proposed for recently annexed land north of developed T or C will included an industrial park, R & D park, retail, leased residential, single-family residential, resort / hotel / conference space, water theme park, golf course, luxury RV lots, and a motorplex with road and off-road courses. Additionally, an expansion of the municipal airport is planned. This development will accommodate a significant amount of industrial and retail space, in addition to the residential and recreational uses. The Motorplex developers will act as an economic development entity themselves when they attempt to attract tenants.

Finally, Turtleback Mountain Resort will feature approximately 1,250 residential lots, and a championship golf course. Most lots will likely be occupied by part-time residents building a second home in Sierra County.

### *Strategies to Support Large Development*

<b>Recommendation 12: Work With Large Development Prospects Such as Hot Springs Motorplex to Help Find Tenants and Overcome Development Obstacles</b>
---

SCEDO can assist developers of large projects by working closely with them to identify likely tenants and overcome obstacles to development. SCEDO should, in working with the New Mexico Economic Development Department, evaluate recent business prospects and enter into a dialogue with Sierra County developers regarding possible tenants and how SCEDO and NMEDD can help connect developers with possible tenants.

For example, SCEDO should continue to work to realize optimal development of the Hot Springs Motorplex project by managing a dialogue with the developers, NMEDD, city and county officials, and state officials involved in permitting. In addition to helping the developer identify likely tenants, SCEDO can help coordinate discussions regarding infrastructure requirements and permitting.

<b>Recommendation 13: Evaluate the Feasibility of Spaceport-Oriented Development Within the County and Close to the Spaceport</b>
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While opportunities for developing close to the Spaceport will be limited by environmental, historic preservation, workforce and infrastructure constraints, opportunities for small-scale tourism and business development are likely. As the county conducts planning exercises such as

infrastructure master planning and future land use planning, the feasibility of Spaceport-oriented development should continue to have a place in these discussions.

## **Recommendation 14: Conduct a Location Analysis for a Spaceport Visitors Center in or Near T or C**

Before a Spaceport Visitors Center can be built near T or C, a location analysis should be conducted to compare potential sites. The center needs to be strategically located so as to provide the best opportunities to capture potential tourism income, but should not negatively impact downtown T or C. The Spaceport Visitors Center will involve a substantial amount of automobile traffic, required parking and bus traffic. Therefore, a central downtown location could actually limit the tourism potential of downtown T or C. On the other hand, the location must offer convenient access to downtown, either by direct proximity or routing of buses through downtown.

Some criteria that should be considered are:

- Ability of site to accommodate sufficient parking
- Access to site via major highways
- Impact on road congestions and ability of roads to accommodate increased traffic
- The value of foregone uses – in downtown this would be various tourism-related uses, while in other areas it could be highway-business uses or industrial uses
- How the location fits into a future land use plan

## **Recommendation 15: Consider a LEED Certified Building for the Spaceport Visitors Center**

SCEDO should encourage exploring the feasibility of building a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certified building for the Spaceport Visitors Center. Administered by the Urban Green Building Council, LEED certification is a highly sought after designation that distinguishes a building as being very energy efficient and environmentally sound in a number of categories, including:

- Sustainable sites
- Water efficiency
- Energy and atmosphere
- Materials and resources
- Indoor environmental quality
- Innovation and design process

LEED certification occurs at one of four levels; bronze, silver, gold or platinum depending on how closely the building conforms to LEED guidelines. All new New Mexico state buildings over 15,000 square feet must now be certified green at at least the LEED silver level. The New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department has put together a report entitled,



“How-To Guide to LEED Certification for New Mexico Buildings” that explains the business case for pursuing LEED certification and the process for gaining certification.

A LEED certified building generally costs more to design and build than a typical building, but this investment can be recaptured with energy cost savings over the life of the building. Furthermore, grant funding exists that can help offset the increased cost of pursuing LEED certification. The US Department of Health and Human Services and Kresge Foundation Green Buildings Initiative Program are two sources of funding. The New Mexico Chapter of the Urban Green Building Council can provide assistance and direct the county to various additional resources.

Obtaining LEED certification is a powerful marketing tool. People are becoming increasingly interested in green buildings and creating and marketing a unique visitors center that is an exhibit in and of itself will draw people to the T or C center. This is also an opportunity to create national press for the building. The visitors center can feature prominently in a marketing campaign that stresses the county’s commitment to “going green.” Advertising ideas might follow a strategy similar to the following:

- Pictures of SpaceShip2 and Spaceport visitors are shown on top of an image of the Spaceport Visitors Center with the tag line “Sierra County – Taking Care of Planet Earth While You’re Away.” Additional text in the ad would describe the environmental benefits of the center and invite people to spend time in T or C and Sierra County.
- A satellite image of Sierra County is the background for an ad with the tag line “Sierra County – You Can’t See the Green From Space, But It’s Here!” Additional pictures would feature the center and T or C with an invite to explore the county.

Additionally, the currently proposed design for the Spaceport itself has a minimal environmental footprint and incorporates a number of energy saving concepts. The Visitors Center, regardless of LEED status, should be as energy efficient and environmentally friendly as possible.

## **Recommendation 16: Focus Efforts on Key Businesses and Emerging Industries**

The key industries; tourism, healthcare, outdoor recreation and agriculture identified by the county have historically been the primary types of business that support Sierra County’s economy. As Sierra County moves forward in an effort to realize its economic development vision, these industries will continue to be important. In particular, tourism will continue to be a primary driver of economic growth. Emerging industries targeted by the county include warehousing, light manufacturing, exporting and telecommunications.

While this list of key businesses is appropriate and is supported by historic economic activity and county strengths, it should be expanded to include all types of industries proposed in conjunction with new large-scale development or supported by this development. Additional industries that are supported by currently proposed large-scale development include:

- Golf tourism
- Aerospace

- Theme park tourism (Spaceport and Motorplex combined)
- Motor sports

With regards to large scale development, the county should have a policy of prioritizing industries represented in or supported by currently proposed development (when these industries are consistent with the goals of the county).

## **Recommendation 17: Evaluate Business Prospects Before Offering Incentives**

Offering incentives in any form, including direct incentives, and infrastructure and land investment, should only occur after an appropriate due diligence analysis has been completed. Items that must be analyzed to complete due diligence include:

- Overall capital investment from business prospect
- Jobs created
- Quality of jobs created
- Total required public investment
- Annual benefit to the County
- Return to the County over a standard timeframe (e.g. 10 years)
- Time to break even on the investment
- The health of the business and their likely commitment to the proposed location (e.g. a large business investing minimal capital into a distribution center has little incentive to stay if market conditions change)
- Environmental impact of the proposed business to both the natural environment and the overall quality of life for county residents

In addition to evaluating these items, the county may wish to evaluate the potential overall economic impact of the proposed project. A large project may not appear to make economic sense from a purely fiscal impact perspective. However, it may generate substantial additional investment in the county. To evaluate additional impacts the county must estimate the likely expenditures that will be made within Sierra County. Input-output models such as the RIMS II model supplied by the Bureau of Economic Analysis provide an estimate of the effects of the circulation of money among sectors related to the proposed project in the local economy. With many projects, such as the Spaceport, much of the benefit for the county will be in the form of increased tourism.



## Small Business and Rural Business

Rural and agricultural businesses continue to be an important part of the Sierra County economy. While development of agricultural businesses is not a key component of this plan, it should be stressed that impacts to rural and agricultural businesses must be taken into consideration when pursuing any economic development strategy. Furthermore, any agricultural or other rural business should be able to expect full support from SCEDO and Sierra County when requested.

Small businesses are currently the cornerstone of Sierra County's economy. Several key components of the economic development strategy are strongly dependent on small business development including, obviously, tourism development and downtown development. While large-scale development has recently taken center stage in Sierra County and should continue to receive strong support, small businesses are equally important to create a vibrant economy and also need individual attention to thrive.

### *Strategies to Support Small Business*

#### **Recommendation 18: Focus Development of Hotels and Restaurants in Downtown T or C or the Core of Elephant Butte When Possible**

In conjunction with downtown development strategies described in this plan, development of hotels and restaurants should be focused in downtown T or C, or clustered together in Elephant Butte when possible.

#### **Recommendation 19: Target Williamsburg for Highway Business Uses**

Businesses that are not appropriate for a downtown location or desire better highway access should be located in Williamsburg if possible. These businesses will help to support downtown T or C and possibly Spaceport tourism. Other businesses will choose to locate in new suburban development such as Hot Springs Motorplex.

#### **Recommendation 20: Encourage Small Business Lending by Local Banks, Including the Use of SBA Loans as an Economic Development Tool**

The United States Small Business Administration (SBA) provides loans to small businesses for a variety of needs. Nearly 20 million small businesses have received direct or indirect help from SBA programs since its establishment in 1953. SBA's current business loan portfolio of roughly 219,000 loans worth more than \$45 billion makes it the largest single financial backer of U.S. businesses in the nation. The definition of a small business varies from industry to industry as defined by the Small Business Act.

Sierra County businesses may be able to benefit from a variety of loan programs available through the Small Business Administration. While there are several diverse programs available, the following provides a basic overview of most basic loans offered.

The basic 7(a) Loan Guaranty serves as the SBA's primary business loan program to help qualified small businesses obtain financing when they might not be eligible for business loans through normal lending channels. It is also the agency's most flexible business loan program, since financing under this program can be guaranteed for a variety of general business purposes.

The loan is designed for start-up and existing small businesses, and commercial lending institutions. Individual commercial lending institutions then deliver the loan to the correct institution.

A Basic 7(a) loan can be used for most business purposes including working capital, machinery and equipment, furniture and fixtures, land and building (including purchase, renovation and new construction), leasehold improvements, and debt refinancing (under special conditions).

A Certified Development Company (CDC) under a 504 Loan Program provides long-term, fixed-rate financing to small businesses to acquire real estate, machinery or equipment for expansion or modernization. Typically a 504 project includes a loan secured from a private-sector lender with a senior lien, a loan secured from a CDC (funded by a 100 percent SBA-guaranteed debenture) with a junior lien covering up to 40 percent of the total cost, and a contribution of at least 10 percent equity from the borrower. The maximum SBA debenture generally is \$1 million (and up to \$1.3 million in some cases). Certified private, nonprofit economic development corporations deliver the individual loans to qualifying companies.

A Microloan under a 7(m) loan program provides short-term loans of up to \$35,000 to small businesses and not-for-profit child-care centers for working capital or the purchase of inventory, supplies, furniture, fixtures, machinery and/or equipment. Proceeds cannot be used to pay existing debts or to purchase real estate. The SBA makes or guarantees a loan to an intermediary (certified non-profits), who in turn, makes the microloan to the applicant. These organizations also provide management and technical assistance. The loans are not guaranteed by the SBA.

Further, the SBA offers a Loan Prequalification program allowing business applicants to have their loan applications for \$250,000 or less analyzed and potentially sanctioned by the SBA before they are taken to lenders for consideration. The program focuses on the applicant's character, credit, experience and reliability rather than assets. An SBA-designated intermediary works with the business owner to review and strengthen the loan application. The review is based on key financial ratios, credit and business history, and the loan-request terms.

In addition, the Certified Lenders Program (CLP) is designed to provide expeditious service on loan applications received from lenders who have a successful SBA lending track record and a thorough understanding of SBA policies and procedures. Other types of loans available through the SBA include funds for businesses headed by women, minorities or veterans.

Local banks can become certified to issue SBA loans. Sierra County should work with local banks to explore a range of small business lending opportunities. The New Mexico district SBA office can provide guidance with bank certification and loan application procedures.

Albuquerque District SBA Office  
625 Silver SW Suite 320  
Albuquerque, NM 87102  
Voice (505) 248-8225  
Fax (505) 248-8246

Office Hours 8:30-4:30

## **Recommendation 21: Encourage the Chambers of Commerce to Establish a Network of “Gray Eagles” to Mentor Entrepreneurs and Young Business Leaders**



By connecting young business owners and entrepreneurs with established and successful entrepreneurs in the community, knowledge can be transferred and passed on to aid other businesses. Often a Chamber of Commerce provides such a service through the establishment of a “Gray Eagles” program connecting young businesses to retired business people in the area. “Gray Eagles” can impart knowledge concerning management, growth, loan sources and other issues new businesses may face.

In addition, some communities turn not just to those retired to mentor businesses in their area. The Gainesville, FL, Chamber of Commerce established a mentoring program between new businesses and current owners. The Chamber connects volunteer mentors with volunteer protégés who are both Chamber members. The Chamber maintains guidelines for mentors that apply. They must be at least a business owner, chief executive officer or senior executive for at least five years, and be willing to donate an average of two hours per month for a minimum of two years. The Chamber touts this program as beneficial to both parties. The protégés receive advice and guidance while the mentors often find they can use their protégés for sounding boards for new ideas. By working with protégés through their problems, they often discover answers to their own business issues.

Sierra County has a unique opportunity to turn the workforce constraint of a large retired population into an entrepreneurial asset. This strategy should be coupled with the workforce strategies described later in this plan, especially strategies to provide access to employment opportunities for Sierra County’s older population.

## **Recommendation 22: Promote Development of Key Small Businesses Once Population and Demographics Support Development of These Businesses**

Certain businesses cannot be established in a community until a certain population threshold is reached. SCEDO should determine population thresholds for desired businesses and promote the development of these businesses once these thresholds are met. As shown in the basic demographics section of this plan, demographic information typically available to those making business location decisions does not always reflect current realities. Part of the SCEDO economic development effort should be to inform potential businesses of new development that brings a larger population and different demographics to the area.

Some types of small business that will have threshold populations / demographic requirements that differ from current Sierra County conditions and also will help to support tourism development include:

- Nightclubs and music venues

## Sierra County Economic Development Strategic Plan



- Clothing stores
- Bike shop / outdoor outfitter
- Increased bus service or other public transportation

There are two key small business ventures, rural business and the film industry, that should be immediately promoted as they can be successful with the current population and demographics in Sierra County.

SCEDO will serve as a liaison for rural business initiatives such as those currently underway or proposed by the Jornada Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc. These initiatives include capital improvement projects to support cattle ranching, as well as the development of small wood utilization businesses. SCEDO should contact rural business advocates on a regular basis and insure that the concerns of these stakeholders are represented throughout the economic development process. SCEDO should also promote continued and expanded funding for rural business initiatives.

The recent successes attracting film companies to Sierra County are due in large part to efforts of individuals such as the Sierra County film liaison, in conjunction with the New Mexico Film Office. SCEDO should explore projects to support the continued expansion of the film industry's presence in the county. Specifically, SCEDO should explore strategies for providing warehouse space for set building and a soundstage in Sierra County.

## Workforce Development

### *Strategies to Improve Workforce Development*

The overall strategy to improve workforce development in Sierra County is one of incremental improvements. There is no point in developing extensive workforce development training programs for industry that does not yet exist in Sierra County. At the same time, industry will not typically locate somewhere that cannot provide a sufficient workforce. An appropriate strategy is to attempt to phase in workforce development strategies slightly ahead of either planned industry development or an anticipated demand if an existing training program is essential to catalyze business location.

#### **Recommendation 23: Ensure Funding for Workforce Development Training and Program Innovation Continues to Grow**

Current programs include the Western New Mexico University Gardner Learning Center and several existing and proposed programs at Hot Springs High School. Sierra County should ensure that funding and program selection continues to grow. This will require continuous assessment of the merits of individual workforce development programs. Underperforming programs need to be re-assessed and possibly eliminated. Success should be primarily defined by placement of graduates into industries in Sierra County. However, placement into industries in other areas of New Mexico can also be seen as a success if the program supports an emerging industry in Sierra County.

Underperforming programs at the Gardner Learning Center will require an assessment of individual courses and possibly an exploration into working with multiple universities to provide the best program possible.

#### **Recommendation 24: Explore the Use of Public Transit and Child Care Assistance to Boost Workforce Availability**

SCEDO should explore a regional rideshare and/or vanpool program to provide transportation from the Las Cruces area. This could help provide an interim workforce while Sierra County's workforce catches up with new skill set demands.

Low-cost child care services function economically much the same way as public transit programs by removing a financial barrier to working in Sierra County. An assessment of the likely number of families or single women who would make use of this type of program should be the first step.

#### **Recommendation 25: Publish Workforce Success Stories in Marketing Materials and Mainstream Media**

As with entrepreneurial success, SCEDO should attempt to profile workforce development success stories whether they be profiles of individual workers who have leverage program resources into new careers, or profiles of new programs that have proved popular and have

supported new industry. As with other successes, publishing workforce development successes will help secure support from the community and from legislators who will hopefully see the value of increased funding for workforce development in Sierra County.

## **Recommendation 26: Implement Aerospace and Renewable Energy Curriculum into High School and Workforce Training**

Two industries that deserve immediate attention are aerospace and renewable energy. Aerospace careers will be associated with the Spaceport and industrial and R & D development at the Hot Springs Motorplex development. Opportunity for a long-term shift to solar and geothermal energy is possible in Sierra County and there is no better way to spark homegrown entrepreneurs than implementing a strong high school program.

## **Recommendation 27: Conduct Workforce Surveys in High School, Learning Center, Local Businesses and Targeted Industries**

After brainstorming with Sierra County stakeholders regarding possible future workforce development programs, personnel from the Southwestern Area Workforce Development Board should conduct workforce surveys at Hot Springs High School to learn the following:

- What careers are students most interested in?
- If presented with several possible future workforce development programs, which ones are students most drawn to?
- What workforce development programs would local businesses most like to see?
- What workforce development programs would businesses in targeted industries (not yet located in Sierra County) most like to see?

After answering these basic questions, a long-range plan for implementing new programs should be developed.

## **Recommendation 28: Create a Link Between Retiree Population and Appropriate Employment Opportunities**

SCEDO should explore establishing a new program that links retirees wishing to work any schedule from occasional to full time with businesses across the country that can use a part-time, remotely located workforce. This program would work much like a temp agency, but would also have a small business “incubator without walls” quality. That is to say that the program would provide the services of business incubator (minus available space for rent) to retirees wishing to start their own business, such as a consulting business. The program should also be open persons not of retirement age wishing to participate.

## Organizational Strategies

### *Strategies for Improving Organization to Successfully Implement Strategic Plan*

#### **Recommendation 29: Consider Creating a Special Planning Area Surrounding Currently Incorporated Areas Where Zoning Regulations May be Implemented or Annexation May be Mandatory for Certain Project Types of Sizes**

Sierra County should consider developing a special planning area that encompasses those areas identified in the infrastructure master plan as areas targeted for future public sewer or water service. This limits the extent of government regulation while still allowing some control over future land use in the highest-density area of the county. Any type of planning area would result in de-facto zoning, but could involve limited regulation. The primary goal would be to guide higher density development to those areas ideal for public infrastructure. This planning effort should be met with minimal resistance since it will likely increase the value of land it affects.

#### **Recommendation 30: Focus on Continuing to Expand Presence with State Legislators**

SCEDO and other Sierra County officials need to maintain and attempt to expand their presence with state legislators. It will be somewhat difficult to maintain the presence afforded to other communities with larger populations and more representation. This underscores the importance of marketing. Instead of marketing tourism assets or the virtues of economic development, Sierra County must brand itself as the *up and coming community that deserves attention because it is growing and is committed to economic development efforts*.

Making sure that state legislators are aware of economic successes should continue to be a priority. Legislators must be made aware of marketing materials and success stories, especially if the success stories involve previously allocated state funding.

#### **Recommendation 31: Pursue Increased Coordination Among Local Organizations**

SCEDO should facilitate increased coordination among local organizations, including each contributing government, government departments and initiatives, and other local stakeholders such as the Arts Council and Elephant Butte State Park. SCEDO should recommend meetings and initiatives when necessary.

#### **Recommendation 32: Develop Advocates for Economic Development in Sierra County**

Many individuals and entities directly and indirectly affect, and are affected by, the economic development effort. There must be a solid base of advocates for economic development in the community for the ultimate success of the program for many reasons. For example, relocating



businesses obtain input from a variety of public and private organizations when making their location decisions. Finally, implementing economic development strategies can only be of assistance if businesses choose to participate in these efforts and active advocates can increase such participation.

Large commitments are not required from all advocates – nor are they reasonable to expect. Rather, Sierra County should have a set of strategies appropriate to different types of advocates and their varying levels of support. First, the number of community members who actively oppose initiatives should be understood. Then, there should be a core that supports economic development, and can be called upon to assist in times of need. There should also be several strong advocates who are ongoing active leaders working in Sierra County in other capacities.

Sierra County already has a significant number of individuals who are very involved in supporting and promoting economic development in Sierra County and have regular contact with SCEDO. It will be useful to develop formal roles for these advocates for the purposes of organization and recognition. One of the most common mistakes economic development organizations make is to rely on a few dedicated advocates without actively recruiting additional volunteers or formally defining the contributions of existing advocates.

Sierra County Economic Development Organization should create a directory of everyone who has volunteered their time or supported SCEDO in a professional capacity and seek to continually expand this directory. Further, the directory should be organized according to areas of specialization. Certain advocates, such as the County’s film liaison and arts council, can be easily identified. While it may be obvious who to contact if a movie studio is interested in Sierra County, it may be less obvious who could help out if a business was seeking an SBA loan, a company was looking to locate a distribution center, or small businesses were looking to create a purchasing pool to lower the cost of employee benefits.

Sierra County is a small community and it is likely that those with appropriate expertise could be located. However, it is important to formalize the process of facilitating the network of knowledgeable people in the County in order to provide a timely, professional response when questions arise and to involve as many people as possible in the economic development effort.

## **Recommendation 33: Create a Permit Process Handbook**



One of the primary complaints about the permitting process in Sierra County is the fact that State agencies are responsible for issuing permits and it is therefore difficult to determine who is responsible for issuing permits and the likely timeframe for getting a project approved. Sierra County should make an effort to work with State agencies to identify individuals responsible for issuing permits, estimate typical timeframes for approval, and work with State officials to improve efficiency and transparency for the permitting process.

The permit process handbook will be offered online and can be in a format that provides customized information to a user. The online format can allow a user to enter information about a



project and receive permit information specific to an individual project. However, this type of online support system is more expensive to develop than a traditional brochure or web page style handbook, and the latter is sufficient. Permit applications should be available on the same page or site as the handbook.

Many municipalities have posted permitting information online and have attempted to organize this information in a logical fashion. The City of Richmond, VA has assembled a particularly well organized web page with links to required permit applications. However, this site does not provide a handbook and therefore misses an opportunity to further increase efficiency.

A permit process handbook should identify all relevant permits, provide information regarding application timelines, identify common mistakes in the permitting process, and include a list of fees and estimated total fees for development examples.

### **Recommendation 34: Develop a Reputation of Offering Good Customer Service in all County Departments**

County departments that deal with business representatives on a regular basis should be reminded of the importance superior customer service plays in meeting the economic development goals of the County. One quarterly workshop should be devoted to exploring the role of good customer service in expanding a regions economy, with case studies and a discussion of how Sierra County, T or C, Elephant Butte and Williamsburg staff can all improve their interactions with the public.

Creating a positive business climate is essential to meeting County economic development goals. In the short term, resources should be geared toward gaining a better understanding of what improvements will yield the most benefits. Going forward, additional resources will be needed to implement those strategies.

Sierra County departments should consider the following strategies to aid the economic development process:

- digitizing information for easier and faster access, and making it available online
- providing additional support to “counter clerks” – the front line of customer service: counter clerks should be knowledgeable in providing, or directing inquiries to, the source of economic development information requested, along with making professionals/technicians readily available to support the counter clerks
- defining expectations: informing customers up front how the process works, what their responsibilities are, and what Sierra County's responsibilities are, differentiating among customer types to recognize the need for varying levels of service

## **Recommendation 35: Develop GIS Capabilities Throughout Local Governments**

SCEDO should coordinate development of a countywide geographic information system (GIS) that includes infrastructure, land use, ownership, land cover and economic development data. Individual organizations already use GIS to organize their own spatial data. However, additional coordination is needed to ensure that every entity has easy access to updated data. This system could be through a web based GIS application, such as an ArcIMS based site. However, a less technically challenging, but still effective solution would be for each organization to periodically post updated GIS files to an FTP site for sharing.

## **Recommendation 36: Identify Where Negotiating and Organizational Authority Lies**

Economic development organizations vary in how they apply incentives. A structure in which a political entity has final approval over certain incentives is not uncommon. Many organizations include this check on the process. However, these boards/leadership generally do not involve themselves in negotiations with business prospects, leaving the negotiating to economic development professionals. Many incentives are applied to all companies that meet established criteria, eliminating the need for oversight. Other incentives are discretionary and tend to have a heavy political element. Sierra County should evaluate each incentive as it is developed and assign it to one of these categories.

It is important to clarify the process both internally and externally for business prospects to avoid confusion over responsibility and authority. The final negotiating authority will likely continue to rest with the SCEDO board of directors and / or local elected officials.

## **Recommendation 37: Conduct a Quarterly Economic Development / Planning Workshop Featuring Keynote Speakers or Relevant Training**

SCEDO should sponsor a quarterly workshop with a keynote speech followed by discussion or training provided by a qualified professional. These quarterly meetings can cover any topics relevant to economic development or planning. The purpose is just as much to provide another forum for key stakeholders to become involved as it is to disseminate information. To save costs, the professional leading the workshop can be from the community in most cases. However, an effort should be made to at least occasionally invite a professional from outside Sierra County to provide training or information.

## Marketing

### **Recommendation 38: Create a Unified Brand that Integrates Tourism Assets and Other Competitive Advantages**

SCEDO should facilitate the development of a Sierra County brand that is consistently recognizable regardless of the context. Brand recognition is created when a person sees a brand presented in a variety of contexts, but with a consistent message.

### **Recommendation 39: Sell the Availability of Suitable Land in Sierra County**

SCEDO needs to market the fact that there is ample vacant land in Sierra County that may be suitable for a number of industries needs. This effort should be started in conjunction with the infrastructure master plan and land that is identified as being ideal for infrastructure improvements should be marketed as land targeted by Sierra County for infrastructure improvements.

Specific vacant parcels, especially any parcels that have existing infrastructure improvements, should also be marketed aggressively.

### **Recommendation 40: Create a Polished Information Packet for Business Prospects**

SCEDO currently has marketing materials that can be distributed to business prospects. However, we recommend updating materials to provide a single, polished package that includes the following:

- Industry specific pages outlining why specific types of businesses should locate to Sierra County
- Permit process pages for typical industry specific development. These pages should be developed after the permit process handbook is developed
- Success stories outlining recent recruitments to the county. These should only be developed for companies with leadership that may be willing to act as economic development advocates should the need arise.

### **Recommendation 41: Strengthen the SCEDO Website by Updating to Include Information Included in This Plan and Creating the Best Possible Linkages to Other Organizations**

The SCEDO website should be periodically updated to include the most recent information possible. An update following the adoption of this strategic plan should be scheduled within the

context of the communications plan described below. The SCEDO website should be considered the primary economic development website for Sierra County and the portal to other economic development related websites in the county.

## **Recommendation 42: Provide Recognition of Local Entrepreneurial Success**

Any time a local entrepreneur experiences noteworthy success, SCEDO should attempt to publicize this success. If the entrepreneur's success can be linked to an economic development effort in Sierra County, this linkage should feature prominently in any publicity. A "success stories" page should be added to the SCEDO website once several noteworthy success stories are available.

## **Recommendation 43: Attend a Minimum of One Conference or Trade Show Annually**

Since there are already several large proposed developments and SCEDO has very limited resources, it would not be an efficient use of funds to attempt to attend many events. However, it is important for the county to have some presence at key industry events. Therefore, it is recommended that SCEDO selects one key trade show or marketing mission annually. This event should change to match the goals of the county in any given year.

## **Recommendation 44: Develop a Communications Plan to Successfully Implement the Economic Development Strategic Plan**

Creating an economic development strategic plan is an important process that marks a new beginning for economic development in Sierra County. The public must know about this initiative so that they can be aware of the actions of their government and can support those actions.

*Short-Term: Publicize the Plan*

Key activities might include:

Presentations at community organization meetings -- a ready-to-go script, handouts, transparencies/slides and training should be provided to facilitate their presentations.

Media relations -- A media relations plan geared toward offering wide exposure of economic development strategic plan components and benefits should be implemented.

Distribute strategic plan highlights -- Make copies of key elements of the plan available upon request and/or provided on the SCEDO website.

*Long-Term: Create a "scorecard" to track progress in Plan implementation*

This is a way to keep the strategic planning effort in the public eye. Major strategies (for example, “create a permit process handbook” or “create an infrastructure master plan”) would be listed in a table. Items would be checked off as they were implemented. SCEDO would plan to periodically present its scorecard to the four participating jurisdictions and the media, and report on its progress. The scorecard could also be provided to other stakeholders, perhaps in an article for a periodic newsletter. When displaying the “score” and reporting on implementation progress, information can also be provided for Sierra County economic development achievements.

Since expectations would be outlined and performance regularly assessed; failures to perform would be not only evident but also publicized. However, it would provide a means for performance appraisal, reassuring stakeholders who have given time and effort to participate in the strategic planning process, and wish to see fruits from their labor.

This scorecard would list the various goals and products to be accomplished in a given time period. Its ease of understanding and viewing would aid economic development efforts. Its one page format would be simple, and small enough, to be published in articles about Sierra County economic development. Its nature also allows residents to gain a quick glance understanding of the programs to be initiated, the responsibility of those involved (including them) and a designated timeframe.

## **Recommendation 45: Ensure the Economic Development Scorecard Includes All Invested Economic Development Parties**

While concerns about putting SCEDO “on the line” may arise, the benefits of developing a scorecard are significant. The scorecard illuminates the *total* community effort needed for economic development success. The scorecard will include entities such as the Truth or Consequences Municipal Schools and Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board. The scorecard would identify all facets of Sierra County economic development entities (public and those private organizations that have committed resources) and their needed contribution in the upcoming year. An all-inclusive scorecard is also an example of “critical path planning”. This type of planning provides identification of where a program can wither without necessary support, or the critical step on its path to completion.

The City of Snohomish, Washington presents an excellent example of an inclusive scorecard. The City’s full scorecard includes the following:

- *Tasks:* The scorecard will outline the broad tasks necessary to foster economic development and provides subtasks to contribute to that overall task. For example, and overall task of “Planning” would have subtasks of “develop a comprehensive infrastructure plan” and “conduct planning / economic development workshops” (among other subtasks).
- *Priority:* Each subtask will be given a priority of high, medium, or low.
- *Invested Parties:* All invested parties will be identified on the scorecard as having either a leading role or participating role.

# Sierra County Economic Development Strategic Plan



- **Schedule:** An overall timeframe will be chosen and anticipated completion dates for each task will be given. We recommend a timeframe of five years, recognizing that some tasks will take longer than five years. It is best to focus on timeframes between three and five years so that a new scorecard can be developed at regular intervals and the tool does not become irrelevant.

Below is a sample scorecard from Snohomish, Washington. In this case, the corresponding roles are shown as “A” for approval role, “L” for leading management role and “P” for participating role.

		City Council	Planning Commission	Economic Development Department	Community Services/Support Services Departments	Chamber of Commerce	Snohomish County EDC	Washington State CTED, DSHS, MRC etc.	Snohomish School District	Private Employers	Public City residents/property owners	private realtors/developers	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<b>General</b>																
Establish economic coordinating function	high	A		L	P								x			
Improve Development Procedures	mdm	A	A	L	L	P					P	P	x	x		
Develop GIS database and maps	high			P	L	P	P					P	x	x	x	
Develop website capability and linkages	high			P	L	L	P	P	P	P		P	x			
<b>Bickford</b>																
Create Neighborhood Program and Plan	high	A	A	P	L	P	P			P	P	P	X			
Initiate annexation agreements	mdm	A			P						L			X		
Initiatite packaging/marketing program	mdm			P		L	L	P				L			X	

A = Approval Role  
L = Leading Role  
P = Major Participating Role

Entities that will have some responsibility assisting with the economic development plan implementation include:

1. Sierra County Economic Development Organization
2. Truth or Consequences / Sierra County / Elephant Butte Chambers of Commerce
3. Sierra County
4. The City of Truth or Consequences
5. Williamsburg
6. Elephant Butte
7. Sierra County Arts Community
8. Sierra County Hot Springs Community
9. Elephant Butte State Park



# Sierra County Economic Development Strategic Plan



- 10.** Truth or Consequences Municipal School District
- 11.** South Central Council of Governments
- 12.** New Mexico Economic Development Department
- 13.** Sierra Electric Cooperative
- 14.** Southwestern Area Workforce Development Board
- 15.** Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board

In many cases, these entities will be able to meet their obligation simply by meeting existing commitments.

## Tourism Development

### *Tourism Marketing and Current Tourism Efforts*

The Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board (SCRTAB) recently created a tourism director position and have established a website. The website is a good first effort that presents all of the necessary information. The site has a substantial collection of articles and videos on the press page. One particular video, “Southern New Mexico 5 Day Journey,” which is presented on the home page, sells Sierra and Socorro counties by presenting a five day itinerary of things to see in both counties. It doesn’t list everything that one could do, but rather markets the counties to an identified audience.

Historically, the hot springs, ghost towns, arts community, and Elephant Butte Lake and other outdoor recreation have been the mainstays of the tourist industry. Currently, golf has been added to this list. Future tourist additions include the Spaceport and motor sports tourism. The county has taken an important step in further developing its tourism potential by hiring a tourism director. A next step will be to refine the tourism effort by becoming better organized, thus streamlining the work of several entities. The Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board, City of Truth or Consequences, Sierra County and Elephant Butte Chambers of Commerce, Sierra Community Council, Inc. and Sierra County Arts Council are all involved in tourism, though in different capacities and not always with tourism as their mission.

### *Strategies for Leveraging Tourism Opportunities*

<b>Recommendation 46: Continue to Update Tourism Website and Other Marketing Materials</b>
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The best tourism websites do not simply list information, they market an area, painting a picture of an ideal destination using a variety of media. The SCRTAB should continue to update their website, creating additional material that targets key demographics and sells the Sierra County experience. Other marketing materials, including brochures and maps must also be kept up to date. Before embarking on an update, SCRTAB should evaluate award winning comparables. A good site to begin with is The Webby Awards at [www.webbyawards.com](http://www.webbyawards.com). This site lists notable sites by category, with tourism being a category.

As with the urban design guidelines exercise presented in the *downtown development strategies* section of this plan, the purpose is not to mimic what others have done, but rather to see through the individual websites to the underlying marketing and design fundamentals. The web site needs to be:

- Aesthetically pleasing
- Easy to navigate
- Action oriented (the action being spending money in Sierra County)
- Engaging
- Either fashionably designed or visually striking so as to leave an impression
- A successful vehicle for creating a brand for Sierra County

Similar websites and publications exist for print materials. Since tourism-related print materials are generally sent free of charge upon request, it is a good idea to create a collection of materials from different markets and to periodically assess the effectiveness of Sierra County's materials relative to the competition.

## **Recommendation 47: Improve Targeting of Specific Niche Markets**

There is a great deal of potential to develop niche tourism markets in Sierra County. Consider the fact that Albuquerque is considered by many to be the hot air balloon capital of the country. If hot air ballooning were not currently popular in Albuquerque, simply marketing the area as "a great place to take a balloon ride" would be an insufficient marketing campaign. In fact, many balloonists on the east coast find flying over a checkerboard of lush forests and historic farms to be more visually interesting than the desert landscape in Albuquerque.

However, balloonists still flock to Albuquerque for two reasons. First, box winds, which are unique to a few places in the world, including Albuquerque, mean that with ideal conditions a balloon pilot can take off and land in nearly the same location by riding opposing winds at different altitudes. This never happens on the east coast. Second, the wide open spaces around Albuquerque make large balloon festivals more feasible, tracking balloons from the ground much easier, and landing in high winds much safer. It is only by knowing what is important to this niche market that Albuquerque can successfully market itself.

While Sierra County might not have multiple niche markets where it is globally unique, it does have many opportunities to do niche marketing. The Sierra County Arts Council has begun niche marketing by listing individual artists on its web site and providing links to artists' web pages. An art connoisseur will likely not book a ticket to visit a place knowing only that it has a "large arts community" but may book a ticket after seeing individual examples of artists' work.

Likewise, a mountain biker won't visit a place simply because it has "miles of trails nearby." A mountain biker needs to know if those trails are open to biking and whether they suit the biker's skill level. An ideal mountain biking destination can suit a range of ability levels and provide a range of challenges. In mountain biking terminology, a place with a mix of single and double track that has both technical terrain and fast, smooth trails would be a great place for an experienced mountain biker to bring her eager, but clumsy husband for a biking vacation (and also get some challenging riding in on her own).

Learning the terminology of a niche market is the first step. With the mountain biking example, if Sierra County also provided maps of trails, directions and trail descriptions, it wouldn't matter whether or not the trails in Sierra County were the best in New Mexico or just average. The fact that all the necessary information is easily available puts the county ahead of most of the competition.

Sierra County should explore niche markets in each of its historically strong tourism markets, including the arts community, outdoor recreation, ghost towns and hot springs. Likewise, new opportunities such as motor sports and the spaceport bring an ever greater range of possible niche markets. It is not advisable to try to market to every niche market, but rather to first explore the

possibilities and then target several markets where Sierra County's assets make it especially competitive.

## **Recommendation 48: Use Search Engine Optimization to Make Sure Search Engines are Indexing Tourism Pages and Displaying on the First Page of Results**

If you are looking for an inexpensive hot springs community, google.com will not show you Truth or Consequences. In fact, using several variations of the phrase "inexpensive hot springs" will result in information about communities from Arkansas to South Dakota and even the Sierras, but not Sierra County. Using the word *cheap* instead of inexpensive results in a short paragraph about Truth or Consequences at the bottom of a page accessed from page two of the google results.

There are a number of legitimate methods of boosting the likelihood that web pages will be displayed in the first few pages of online search engine results as long as one understands the keywords that should be targeted and the basics of web page construction. The process is known as search engine optimization. SCRTAB should work to ensure that county tourism pages are displaying in search engine results. If the web designer developing the tourism web pages is not familiar with search engine optimization, it is worth hiring a professional. However, avoid companies that charge a recurring monthly fee as this is an unnecessary expense.

## **Recommendation 49: Continue to Promote and Expand Events and Create Linkages to Economic Development Themes**

A number of annual events are currently being promoted on the tourism website, including the 59<sup>th</sup> Annual T or C Fiesta. The theme for the fiesta, "Go Green," is an important economic development theme that should be embraced by the county. Other linkages should be explored and, resources permitting, additional events should be welcome.

## Implementation

A plan is only of value if it can be implemented. A simple implementation plan is provided to show which items are of critical importance and which ones can wait if necessary. The very first priority, in terms of both importance and timing, is obtaining the political support of all political jurisdictions and economic development advocates in Sierra County so the community can begin a concerted effort to implement the strategies outlined in this plan.

The SCEDO director will serve as the key leader for the implementation of the recommendations outlined in this plan. However, every effort should be made to delegate responsibilities to other entities, when appropriate. A primary implementation goal is to have as many people involved in the implementation process as possible.

The recommendations in this plan are grouped into five categories; immediate implementation of most vital recommendations, recommendations to be implemented within two years of the adoption of this plan, recommendations to be implemented within four years of the adoption of this plan, ongoing efforts, and guiding concepts. Recommendations falling under the immediate implementation category are either absolutely essential for successful economic development in Sierra County, or are time sensitive, requiring immediate action lest an opportunity be lost. Do to the urgency associated with these strategies, there may be less opportunity for delegation and cooperation.

Recommendations falling into the two year timeframe for completion should be evaluated as soon as possible and a plan should be developed for quickly delegating responsibility for implementation. Ongoing efforts include recommendations that are already implemented in some form in the county as well as strategies that will be integrated into the everyday operation of Sierra County.

Recommendations falling into the four year timeframe will either take longer because certain events need to occur before they can be implemented, or the recommendation is non-essential and a judgment call was made regarding available resources and likely time of completion.

Guiding principle recommendations do not require any specific action and are provided as policies to guide the overall direction of economic development efforts in the county.

### *Timeline for Progress Evaluations and Economic Development Strategic Plan Updates*

The progress of the Sierra County economic development effort should be evaluated on an annual basis using the scorecard provided on page 56. During these annual evaluations a special emphasis should be placed on evaluating which responsible parties have been involved in the process. Every five years the economic development strategic plan should be updated to reflect changes in goals, accomplishments and the economic environment.

*Implementation Timeline*

**Immediate Implementation of Most Vital Recommendations**

Recommendation 1: Continue to Plan for Expansion of Water and Sewer Capacity

Recommendation 11: T or C Should Continue to Promote and Develop Public Spaces

Recommendation 12: Work With Large Development Prospects Such as Hot Springs Motorplex to Help Find Tenants and Overcome Development Obstacles

Recommendation 17: Evaluate Business Prospects Before Offering Incentives

Recommendation 36: Identify Where Negotiating and Organizational Authority Lies

Recommendation 37: Conduct a Quarterly Economic Development / Planning Workshop Featuring Keynote Speakers or Relevant Training

Recommendation 38: Create a Unified Brand that Integrates Tourism Assets and Other Competitive Advantages

Recommendation 44: Develop a Communications Plan to Successfully Implement the Economic Development Strategic Plan

Recommendation 45: Ensure the Economic Development Scorecard Includes All Invested Economic Development Parties

**Recommendations to Be Implemented Within Two Years of Plan Adoption**

Recommendation 2: Create an Infrastructure Master Plan

Recommendation 47: Improve Targeting of Specific Niche Markets

Recommendation 48: Use Search Engine Optimization to Make Sure Search Engines are Indexing Tourism Pages and Displaying on the First Page of Results



**Recommendations to Be Implemented Within Two Years of Plan Adoption (CONT)**

Recommendation 8: The City of Truth or Consequences Should Pursue Public / Private Partnership Opportunities

Recommendation 13: Evaluate the Feasibility of Spaceport-Oriented Development Within the County and Close to the Spaceport

Recommendation 14: Conduct a Location Analysis for a Spaceport Visitors Center in or Near T or C

Recommendation 21: Encourage the Chambers of Commerce to Establish a Network of “Gray Eagles” to Mentor Entrepreneurs and Young Business Leaders

Recommendation 22: Identify Population Thresholds for Key Businesses and Promote the Development of Key Businesses Once Thresholds are Met

Recommendation 27: Conduct Workforce Surveys in High School, Learning Center, Local Businesses and Targeted Industries

Recommendation 29: Consider Creating a Special Planning Area Surrounding Currently Incorporated Areas Where Zoning Regulations May be Implemented or Annexation May be Mandatory for Certain Project Types of Sizes

Recommendation 33: Create a Permit Process Handbook

Recommendation 35: Develop GIS Capabilities Throughout Local Governments

Recommendation 40: Create a Polished Information Packet for Business Prospects

Recommendation 41: Strengthen the SCEDO Website by Updating to Include Information Included in This Plan and Creating the Best Possible Linkages to Other Organizations

**Recommendations to be Implemented Within Four Years of Plan Adoption**

Recommendation 5: Explore the Costs and Benefits of City-Provided Wireless Broadband Internet Access in T or C

Recommendation 7: The City of Truth or Consequences Should Explore the Feasibility of Re-Establishing a Main Street Program

**Recommendations to be Implemented Within Four Years of Plan Adoption (CONT)**

Recommendation 9: The City of T or C Should Explore Streetscaping Options to Create a More Pedestrian-Friendly Downtown and Otherwise Enhance the Character of Downtown

Recommendation 10: T or C Should Consider Establishing a Tax Increment Financing District for Downtown Improvements

Recommendation 15: Consider a LEED Certified Building for the Spaceport Visitors Center

Recommendation 24: Explore the Use of Public Transit and Child Care Assistance to Boost Workforce Availability

Recommendation 26: Implement Aerospace and Renewable Energy Curriculum into High School and Workforce Training

Recommendation 28: Create a Link Between Retiree Population and Appropriate Employment Opportunities

**Ongoing Efforts**

Recommendation 3: Ensure Appropriate Impact Fees are in Place

Recommendation 46: Continue to Update Tourism Website and Other Marketing Materials

Recommendation 49: Continue to Promote and Expand Events and Create Linkages to Economic Development Themes

Recommendation 6: Encourage Infill Development at Densities Consistent with Successful Comparables

Recommendation 11: T or C Should Continue to Promote and Develop Public Spaces

Recommendation 16: Focus Efforts on Key Businesses and Emerging Industries

Recommendation 17: Evaluate Business Prospects Before Offering Incentives

**Ongoing Efforts (CONT)**

Recommendation 20: Encourage Small Business Lending by Local Banks, Including the Use of SBA Loans as an Economic Development Tool

Recommendation 22: Identify Population Thresholds for Key Businesses and Promote the Development of Key Businesses Once Thresholds are Met

Recommendation 23: Ensure Funding for Workforce Development Training and Program Innovation Continues to Grow

Recommendation 25: Publish Workforce Success Stories in Marketing Materials and Mainstream Media

Recommendation 30: Focus on Continuing to Expand Presence with State Legislators

Recommendation 31: Pursue Increased Coordination Among Local Organizations

Recommendation 32: Develop Advocates for Economic Development in Sierra County

Recommendation 34: Develop a Reputation of Offering Good Customer Service in all County Departments

Recommendation 37: Conduct a Quarterly Economic Development / Planning Workshop Featuring Keynote Speakers or Relevant Training

Recommendation 39: Sell the Availability of Suitable Land in Sierra County

Recommendation 42: Provide Recognition of Local Entrepreneurial Success

Recommendation 43: Attend a Minimum of One Conference or Trade Show Annually

**Guiding Concepts**

Recommendation 4: Promote Renewable Energy Sources

Recommendation 18: Focus Development of Hotels and Restaurants in Downtown T or C or the Core of Elephant Butte When Possible

Recommendation 19: Target Williamsburg for Highway Business Uses

**bbpc**  
ASSOCIATES

**P = Primary responsibility**  
**S = Support**  
**X = Strategy complete**  
**Z = Strategy initiated**  
**A = Excellent**  
**B = Above average**  
**C = Adequate**  
**D = Barely satisfactory**  
**F = Unacceptable**

# Sierra County Economic Development Strategic Plan



	SCEDO	T or C / Sierra County / EB Chambers of Commerce	Sierra County	Truth or Consequences	Williamsburg	Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board	Sierra County Film Liaison	Jornado Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc	Elephant Butte	Sierra County Arts Community	Sierra County Hot Springs Community	Elephant Butte State Park	Truth or Consequences Schools	South Central Council of Governments	New Mexico Economic Development Department	Sierra Electric Cooperative	Southwestern Area Workforce Development Board	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Grade
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## Strategies to Be Implemented Within Two Years

Create an infrastructure master plan			P	P	P				P							P							
Improve targeting of specific niche tourism markets	S					P	S																
Use search engine optimization to make sure search engines are indexing tourism pages						P																	
Pursue public / private partnerships	S			P																			
Evaluate the feasibility of spaceport-oriented development within the county	S		P																				
Conduct a location analysis for a Spaceport visitors center	S		P	P																			
Establish a network of "Gray Eagles" to mentor entrepreneurs and young business leaders	S	P																					
Promote Development of Key Small Businesses Once Population and Demographics Support Development	P	S					P	P															
Conduct workforce surveys in High School, Learning Center, local businesses and targeted industries	S												S				P						
Explore creation of special planning area or zoning regulations in portions of county most suitable for high-density development			P	P	P				P														
Create a permit process handbook	S		P	P	P				P														
Develop comprehensive GIS capabilities			P	P	P				P														
Create a polished information packet for business prospects	P	S	S	S	S				S														
Strengthen the SCEDO website	P																						

# Sierra County Economic Development Strategic Plan



	SCEDO	T or C / Sierra County / EB Chambers of Commerce	Sierra County	Truth or Consequences	Williamsburg	Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board	Sierra County Film Liaison	Jornado Resource Conservation & Development Council	Elephant Butte	Sierra County Arts Community	Sierra County Hot Springs Community	Elephant Butte State Park	Truth or Consequences Schools	South Central Council of Governments	New Mexico Economic Development Department	Sierra Electric Cooperative	Southwestern Area Workforce Development Board	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Grade
Explore costs and benefits of city-provided wireless				P											S								
Explore feasibility of re-establishing Main Street Program		P		P																			
Explore streetscaping options for downtown T or C				P						S													
Explore exstablishing a TIF district for downtown T or C				P																			
Consider a LEED certified building for the Spaceport visitors center	S		P	P																			
Explore the use of public transit and child care assistance to boost workforce availability	S																						
Implement aerospace and renewable energy curriculum into high school and workforce training													P										
Create a link between retiree population and appropriate employment opportunities	S	S																					



# Sierra County Economic Development Strategic Plan



	SCEDO	T or C / Sierra County / EB Chambers of Commerce	Sierra County	Truth or Consequences	Williamsburg	Sierra County Recreation and Tourism Advisory Board	Sierra County Film Liaison	Jornado Resource Conservation & Development Council	Elephant Butte	Sierra County Arts Community	Sierra County Hot Springs Community	Elephant Butte State Park	Truth or Consequences Schools	South Central Council of Governments	New Mexico Economic Development Department	Sierra Electric Cooperative	Southwestern Area Workforce Development Board	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Grade
Ongoing Efforts																							
Ensure appropriate impact fees are in place			P	P	P			S	P														
Continue to update tourism website and other marketing materials						P																	
Continue to promote and expand events and create linkages to economic development themes	S	S	S	S	S	P			S			S											
Encourage infill development at densities consistent with successful comparables				P	P				P		S												
Continue to promote and develop public spaces			P	P	P				P	S	S												
Evaluate business prospects before offering incentives	P		P	P	P				P						S								
Encourage small business lending	P	P																					
Ensure funding for workforce development continues to grow	P																					P	
Publish workforce success stories in marketing materials and mainstream media	P	S																				P	
Focus on continuing to expand presence with state legislators	P	S	P	P	P				P					S									
Pursue increased coordination among local organizations	P	P	P	P	P	P	S	S	P	P	P	P	P	P	S	P	P						
Develop advocates for economic development in Sierra County	P	P				S	S	S		S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S						
Develop a reputation of offering good customer service in all county departments	P	S	P	P	P	P	S		P				S										
Sell the availability of suitable land in Sierra County	P	P	P	P	P				P														
Provide recognition of local entrepreneurial success	P	P																					
Attend a minimum of one conference or trade show annually	P																						