



RENEWED HISTORIC DOWNTOWN
Pagosa Springs
PAGOSA SPRINGS
CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

November 2004

A CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

for the

PRESERVATION, RENEWAL AND REVITALIZATION

of

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN PAGOSA SPRINGS

PREPARED THROUGH THE COLLABORATION OF

THE COMMUNITY VISION COUNCIL

and

HART HOWERTON

URBAN PLANNERS, ARCHITECTS & LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS



November 2004

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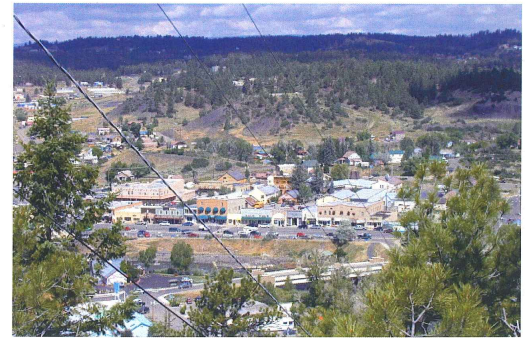
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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVES

In early 2004 leaders of Pagosa Springs set out to chart a specific course for the town's future. A group of local residents retained Marshall Strategy and L Studio, a communications and community development team, to propose a strategy for preservation and enhancement for the town. Working with the Mayor's Council for the Strategic Positioning of Pagosa Springs, the consultants presented their findings and recommendations to the Mayor's Council on the 22nd of April, 2004.

The Mayor's Council decided to follow up on this work by exploring means of improving Downtown Pagosa Spring's physical environment. The Council's three parallel objectives are:

1. Identify means of preserving downtown Pagosa Spring's historic values and character;
2. Prepare a Conceptual Plan for making best use of the unique resource that Pagosa Springs' historic downtown represents;
3. Establish priorities and identify public and private projects for early action.

It has become evident that planning for the future can be most effectively pursued by a joint public-private effort.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

The Community Vision Council co-chaired by Mayor Aragon and Mr. Brown, a prominent businessman, serves as the forum for the collaboration of the Town and private entrepreneurs. Elected official's and the Town's and public agencies' staff participation on the Council assures responsible consideration of public interests. Through participation of local business persons, key property owners and entrepreneurs, the Council fosters the means for early implementation of important projects.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT TEAM

The planning and design firm of Hart Howerton has been entrusted with assisting the Mayor's Council – recently renamed Community Vision Council – to build on its early work. The planning team will contribute the foundation for such a continued collaboration through a *Conceptual Plan* for the conservation and development of downtown Pagosa Springs and by identifying a few *initial projects* toward realization of that plan.

Hart Howerton's urban planners, urban designers and landscape architects were assisted by the Town staff, Mr. Rick Hill of Village Solutions Company, a renown retail specialist and Mr. Charles Abrams, a well-known traffic and parking consultant.

REGIONAL SETTING

At the foot of the Continental Divide, in the southern Colorado Rockies, Pagosa Springs has become a popular departure point for excursions to the surrounding mountain wilderness. The town has developed a reputation of being a great place to equip for camping vacations and wilderness tours. In the fall, hunters frequent the community. In the winter, Pagosa Springs serves as a natural haven for skiers enjoying their favorite sport at the nearby Wolf Creek ski area.

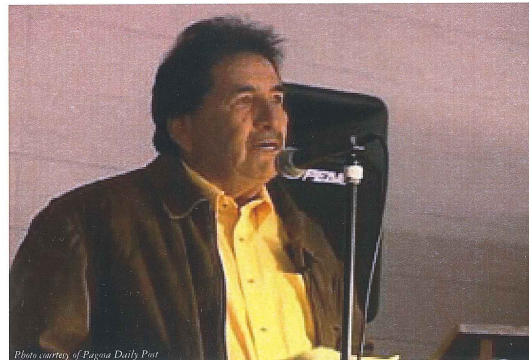


Photo courtesy of Pagosa Daily Post

The small mountain community benefits from scheduled air service and the variety of commercial and professional services afforded by Durango, about 50 miles to the west. Of course, the broad choice of retail establishments there, attract a significant portion of Pagosa Springs residents' consumer dollars.

With about 2,000 residents, Pagosa Springs is the largest community in Archuleta County. The town was established near hot springs, on the western side of the Continental Divide, in Southwestern Colorado. Early residents were miners, trappers and fur traders. With rail access, logging and lumber mills followed, together with tourists. The town is close to the border of New Mexico.



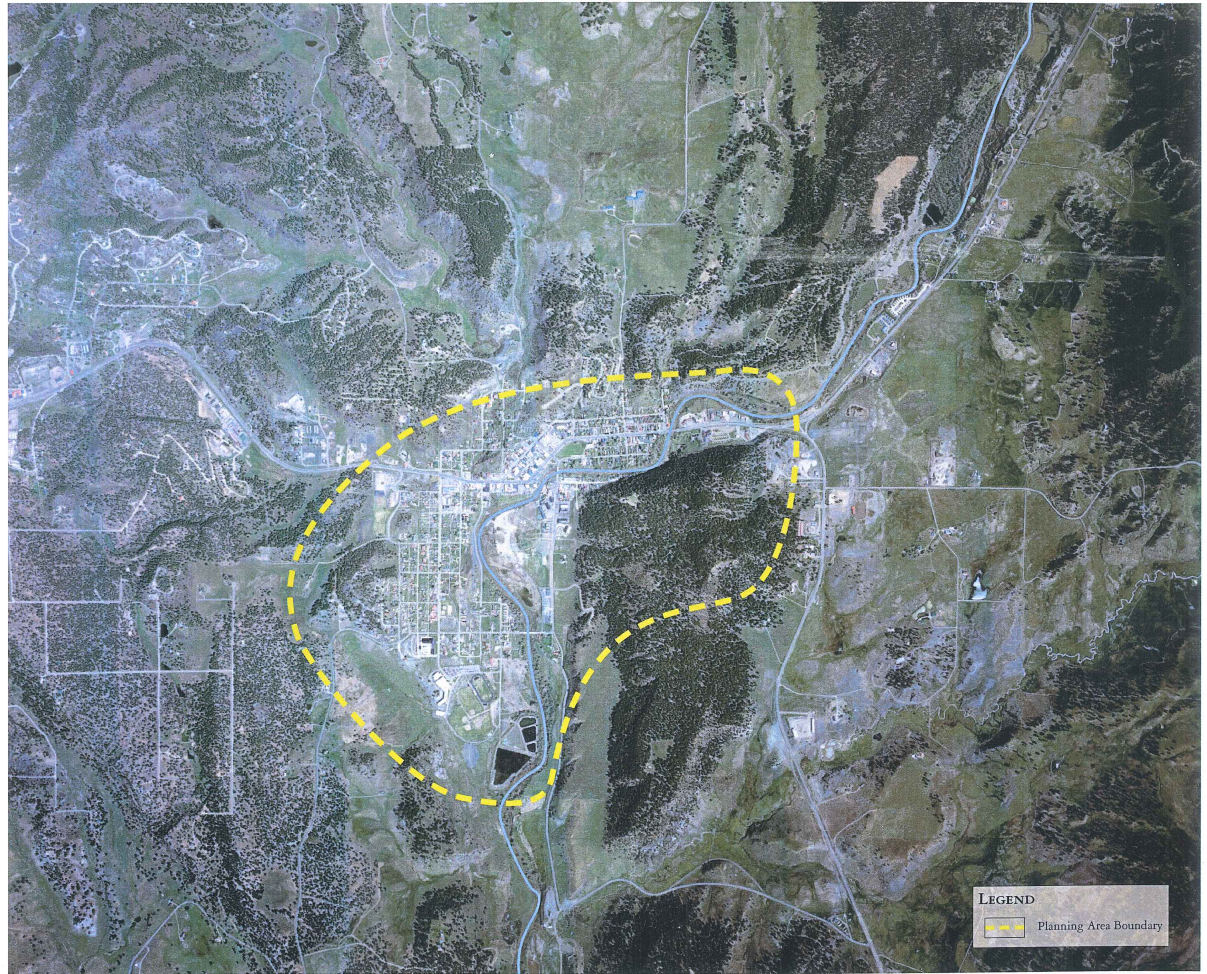
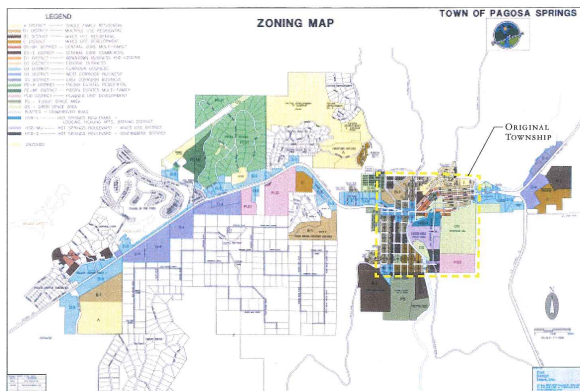
Photo courtesy of Pagosa Sun

The surrounding Archuleta County experiences a new phase of sustained growth. Pagosa Springs can expect to benefit from this growth. Much of the town's growth is expected to occur in areas that are likely to be annexed during the next two decades. However, the town recognizes that similar to other Rocky Mountain small towns, the growth may affect residents' cherished life style. The thought process initiated by the precursor of the Community Vision Council (Mayors' Council) is to equip the community for guiding this growth, for preserving its life style and identity.

PLANNING AREA

The planning area encompasses downtown Pagosa Springs. Of the incorporated area of Pagosa Springs widely spread out along Highway 160, the historic downtown area includes the square mile of urban land that constituted the original logging and mining town, with some extensions to the east, and to the south.

According to the original town plat of 1883, this 640-acre land area is centered on the *San Juan River*; it incorporates a central *commercial district* overlooking the *Pagosa Hot Springs*, and it includes two *historic neighborhoods*: one to the east and a larger one to the south. The original Township also includes a significant mesa now dubbed as *Reservoir Hill*



and a partially developed land area encircled by the *river bend* along Pagosa Springs Boulevard. After periods of logging and ranching, the community depends largely on summer, fall and winter tourism. In recent years, there is increasing evidence of retirees choosing to buy second homes and of settling in Pagosa Springs.

The planning process also addressed opportunities within the immediate vicinity of downtown Pagosa Springs: To the south, it considered opportunities within the *High School* and its vicinity. To the east, along Highway 160, it dealt with the "*eastern approach zone*" that extends along Highways 160, up to its junction with Highway 84.

WORK PROCESS

Retained in early July, Hart Howerton started work by studying the area, by interviewing key people and by identifying opportunities for pursuing the Council's objectives. The planners conducted their *first joint work session* with the Community Vision Council and selected participants on August 18, 2004. Inviting participants' comments on a host of ideas related to various districts within downtown Pagosa Springs, Hart Howerton reviewed opportunities for enhancing the downtown area and explored alternative approaches to taking advantage of those opportunities. The group also discussed physical, legal and cost constraints associated with response to possible public improvements and private development

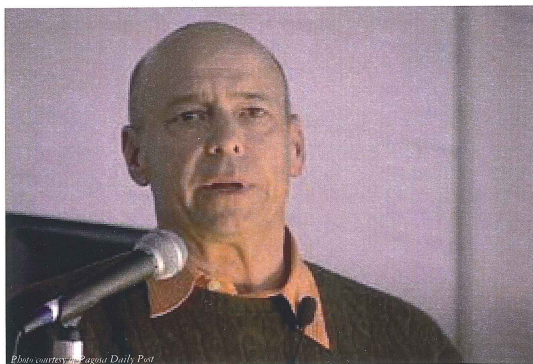


Photo courtesy of Pagosa Daily Post



Photo courtesy of Pagosa Daily Post

projects. A written summary of participants' comments and suggestions helped the planners in responding to the Council's specific requests, in noting *priorities* and in addressing *issues of particular concern*.

The August 18th work session pointed out the need for input by a *retailing specialist* and by a *traffic and parking consultant* and the need for a better understanding of the *School District's future needs and preferences*. A resource group headed by Ms. Lisa Scott set out to identify the School District's facilities requirements. The next two work sessions centered on retailing and traffic/parking issues.

On September 16th, at their *second joint work session*, the Community Vision Council and their consultants discussed approaches to improving business opportunities within the central business community related to Pagosa and Lewis Streets and along the downtown section of Highway 160. At that session, Mr. Hill of Village Solutions Company presented his findings and observations for the Council's consideration, followed by a written summary of his recommendations.

The *third joint work session* held on October 27th benefited from the expertise of Mr. Charles Abrams, the team's traffic and parking consultant. Discussion focused on means of safer management of through traffic along Highway 160, peak traffic generated by various schools, the role and design of Hot Springs Blvd. and means of parking sufficient vehicles in

the historic business district. In addition to traffic and parking issues, the Community Vision Council also heard a progress report from Mr. Aberg, Principal of Hart Howerton.

The work session pointed out the need for developing a *constructive working relationship* with the Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) District Engineer's Office, and for establishing *responsibility* for the design and maintenance of the *wetlands area* associated with the Town's Phase Two River Restoration Project. The planning team benefited from Mr. Abrams' written observations in early November.

With the benefit of Messrs. Hill's and Abram's counsel, and having met with the School District's Visioning Task Force, Hart Howerton was ready to finalize their Conceptual Plan for Downtown Pagosa Springs, and to prepare this summary report.



Photo courtesy of Pagosa Daily Post



Photo courtesy of Pagosa Daily Post

THREE COMPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTS

Planned as a logical link between the visioning and comprehensive planning processes, Hart Howerton's brief collaboration with the Community Vision Council culminated in three complementary work products:

- A *Conceptual Plan* for the conservation and development of downtown Pagosa Springs,
- Recommendations for *early improvement projects* that may have been held up, conclusions of the planning effort,
- A *plan of action* designed to identify key action items, their "champions" and timing.

The *Conceptual Plan* offers an ambitious, long-range vision incorporating the Council's aspirations in behalf of the community. This plan reflects the Council's goals for improving the Town's lot; it is designed to illustrate improvements to the services and the small town environment residents and visitors can enjoy in the future.

Selected *improvement projects* respond to opportunities for early public action and private investment; they are designed for proceeding with immediate implementation of certain elements of the *Conceptual Plan*. Early projects benefit the Town a number of ways because they:

- a) Bring early results in achieving important goals of the Commission;
- b) Represent important building blocks in the process of enhancing downtown Pagosa Springs;
- c) Provide opportunities for greater benefits of mutually complementary public and private projects;
- d) Accelerate private investment in revitalizing the downtown area, and
- e) Generate confidence in the process of coordinated planning for the future.

The *plan of action* is designed to be a tool for implementing early projects by designating logical lead persons, organizations and/or agencies for championing the cause by organizing, inspiring and leading project teams in effecting the projects. The plan of action reflects priorities expressed in the community survey and in work sessions with the Council. By necessity, the document is of short-range nature; it focuses on a few public and private "projects" that can be implemented without delay in service of the community.



Photo courtesy of Pagosa Sun

THE NEXT STEPS

The Council's commitment to revitalizing the historic downtown area is manifested by the Town's intent to build on the *Conceptual Plan* through prompt action. The next steps include:

- o Solicit broader public input in order to assure means of adopting a refined plan as the Town's public policy and to validate the related *Plan of Action* as a blueprint for implementing the plan.
- o Proceed with public improvement projects that have been halted, awaiting input from the Council's *Conceptual Planning* effort.
- o Pursue public and private actions outlined in the *Plan of Action* by implementing promising early projects.
- o Pave the way of early private development and redevelopment projects.
- o Refine the Town's *Interim Design Criteria* for Districts D1, D2 and D3 that will guide development in the mixed use areas primarily located along Highway 160.

Hart Howerton is gratified by the Council's decision to entrust refinement of the Town's *Design Criteria* into a set of comprehensive *Design Guidelines*. The firm intends to pursue this work in collaboration with the Town Staff, reporting progress to the Council.

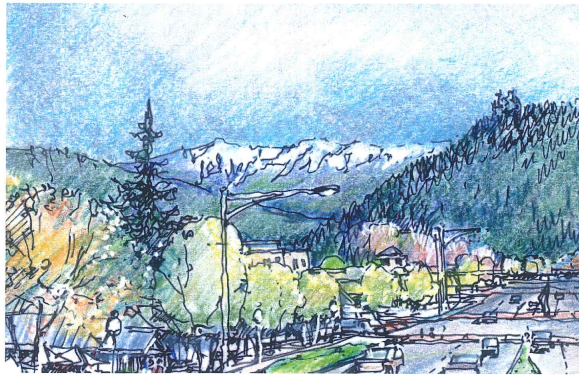
COMMUNITY INPUT & PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

THE BASES FOR PLANNING AND DESIGN

The Community Vision Council and the Project Team have built their plans on three important resources:

1. The Council's earlier work of this year centered on the identity and image of the historic Rocky Mountains community,
2. Residents' input who participated in a community-wide survey conducted by experienced professionals and
3. The planning team's findings while studying local resources, opportunities for improving the downtown environment and constraints that must be considered in realizing plans for the future.

Invaluable to effective implementation of the plan will be the ensuing Comprehensive Planning process that will assure extensive community input toward the Conceptual Plan and might serve as the procedural and legal instrument for official adoption of the plan.



PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK

Pagosa Springs is blessed with a dramatic setting; it was built at about 7000 feet in a valley surrounded by foothills of the Southern Colorado Rockies, where the San Juan River carved its way through nearby mountains, in a bend around natural hot springs. The central mesa, the surrounding hills and the winding San Juan River represent a unique physical framework for building a community. With natural hot springs in its geographical center, downtown Pagosa Springs has a strong identity and represents a very imageable small town of great character.

This distinctive physical framework suggests that it will be in the community's best interest to preserve through thoughtful, environmentally sensitive planning and development; new buildings should not compete with but complement the town's natural features, and – above all – ample visual access to San Juan River should be maintained at all times.

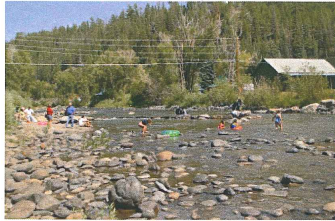
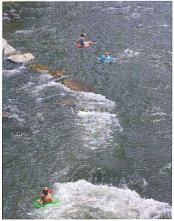
COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Research conducted earlier this year revealed that Pagosa Springs residents value and are committed to preserving what they enjoy today. Their priorities in planning for the future include:

- o Pagosa Springs' small town atmosphere
- o The pristine natural environment
- o Year-round recreational opportunities
- o A strong sense of community
- o Casual and wholesome lifestyle.



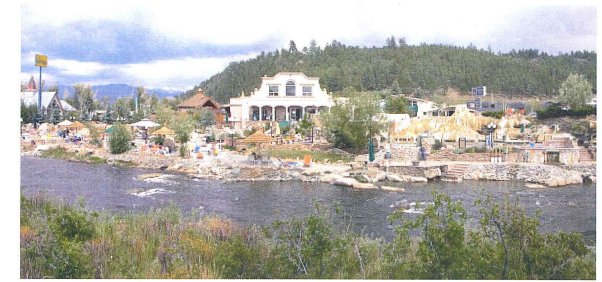
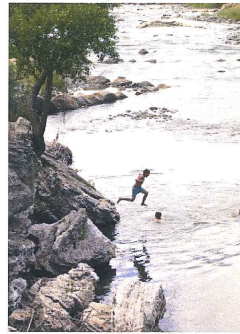
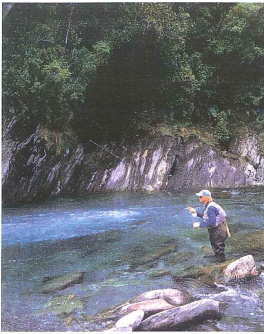
RENEWED HISTORIC DOWNTOWN PAGOSA SPRINGS
CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN



The survey also revealed that *growth is inevitable* for Pagosa Springs. This is recognized by the Community Vision Council in its statement: "Given the inevitability of growth, the Mayor's Council seeks to encourage a healthy economy while sustaining the unspoiled natural environment of the region and a vibrant diverse community."

Seeking broad community input of *priorities* and *specific ideas*, the Town has conducted a *survey* in July, 2004. A total of 808 surveys were completed. Key findings of the survey are:

- o Maintain the small town feeling and informal lifestyle in Pagosa Springs
- o Respect Pagosa Springs' historic character and identity
- o Protect the river corridor
- o Acquire more open space
- o Assure continuous public access along the San Juan River
- o Optimize Reservoir Hill's resources
- o Provide personal retail/customer services
- o Make the hot springs more affordable
- o Improve access to the San Juan River
- o Maintain and expand the paths and walkways
- o Assure cleanliness and maintenance of public and private facilities and places.

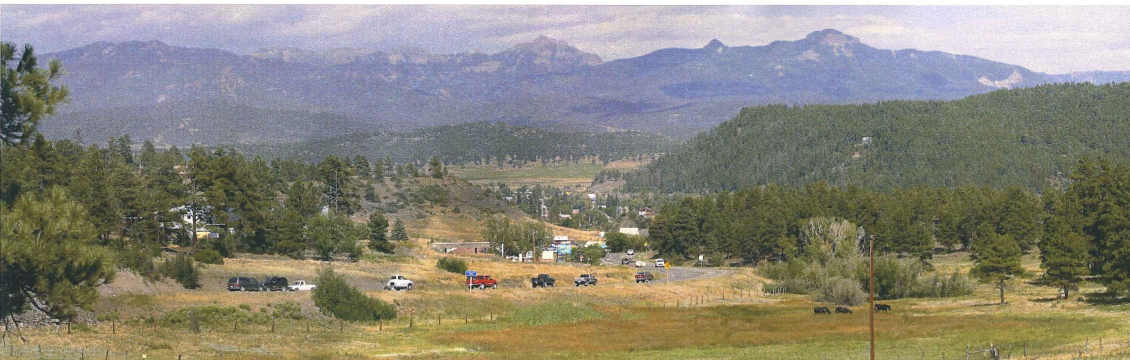


MINERAL HOT SPRINGS

With logging and ranching gone as traditional means of making a living in Pagosa Springs, many residents seek other opportunities for earning a livelihood. As Marshal Strategy & L Studio and Christopher Gerlach, President of the local Lodging Association point out in their reports, Pagosa Springs' healing hot springs might be positioned to draw year-round visitors and to provide jobs in services and businesses centered on *hospitality*. Owners/operators of the Springs Resort in Pagosa Springs have recognized this reflect it in their latest plans for future expansion of their resort complex.

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

In most cases, plans for downtowns grow out of the broader comprehensive planning process. In Pagosa Springs a reversal of this sequence is appropriate since *it is the community's historic downtown district that has the potential of serving as the town's main attraction, its service center and its economic engine for the future*. The Comprehensive Planning process to be commenced shortly has the potential of focusing on means of improving the historic downtown as an inviting gathering place for residents and visitors alike, for reinforcing its role as a sought-after spring point for outdoor recreation in the Colorado Rockies and for being widely recognized as a prominent healing spot of highest professional quality.



DESIGN GUIDELINES

Travelers derive their perception of Pagosa Springs' character and personality primarily from what they see while traveling through town along Highway 160. Therefore, it is in the community's best interest to assure that all roadside development located within view from the highway be visually pleasing, that they reflect the image that Pagosa Springs wishes to project.

The planning and design effort initiated by the Council places great emphasis on projecting the desired image of the *small mountain town*. The Conceptual Plan for the historic downtown area will address this concern, however, the planning area involved includes but a mile and a quarter of Highway 160, while the federal highway passes through five more miles of development to the west of downtown.

Concerned with this issue, the Town developed Interim Design Criteria for guiding development in Districts D1, D2 and D3, the zoning districts which flank Highway 160. Adopted as a stop gap measure, the interim document will be refined in the near future through a collaborative effort between the Town Staff and Hart Howerton's professional team.



COORDINATED APPROACH TO PLANNING & ZONING

Historically, the Town's incorporated area grows, as nearby subdivisions seek annexation. While those subdivisions are planned and approved within Archuleta County's administration, they end up benefiting from the Town's services. Concerned about uncontrolled growth, Pagosa Springs has a vested interest in all development pursued within Archuleta County. This is especially true when large-scale commercial developments are considered in the periphery of Pagosa Springs; they could threaten viability of businesses in downtown Pagosa Springs.

The Council's recent planning for the future brought to focus the need for *collaboration between the Town and the County* when pursuing land use planning and subsequent zoning policies.

MAIN STREET PROGRAM?

Plans are only as effective as the means by which they are implemented. The Plan of Action, the Comprehensive Plan and appropriate Design Guidelines will serve as legal tools for realizing ideas reflected in the plan.



In addition to these tools, the Town will have to *organize for action*, will have to establish an effective organization for implementing and updating its plans, for financing its improvement projects, and for collaborating with private developers.

The well-known Main Street program provides valuable guidance to communities when in need to organize for action. The program involves a comprehensive strategy and concerted collaboration of local staff and volunteers who are committed to pursuing action in four key areas:

1. Organization
2. Design
3. Promotion
4. Economic Structuring

as applicable.

Pagosa Springs has familiarized itself with the program, and has already adopted some of its recommendations. Perhaps the Comprehensive Planning process will serve as a suitable vehicle for generating support for Pagosa Springs' official acceptance of the Main Street Program.

ASPIRATIONS & PROJECTS IN MOTION

The Town and its residents continually strive to renew and improve the downtown area. The Council initiated planning for the historic downtown area at a time when a number of public improvement projects and private development were being planned or underway. The conceptual planning process promises to benefit all those projects by providing valuable guidance and coordination of public and private actions, and by paving the way for more beneficial and profitable implementation of those projects.

Hart Howerton's planning team especially welcomes the projects because they represent valuable thoughts, energy, resources and a welcome momentum that will accelerate realization of the ideas represented in the Council's plan.

HOT SPRINGS BOULEVARD IMPROVEMENTS

One of the public projects that was temporarily stopped, awaiting outcome of the Council's thought process is associated with Hot Springs

Boulevard. Working with the Town and with adjacent property owners, architects Albert Moore & Partners envisioned the boulevard and associated properties as a continuous, extensively landscaped pedestrian shopping street and an associated (residential?) riverfront neighborhood. Connecting the Springs Resort and the Holiday Inn with the Community Center and Town Hall, the architects' plan features a significant amount of commercial space, with ample surface parking.



The architects' design of the central portion of Hot Springs Boulevard features it as a new attractive, functional, pedestrian urban environment that would be the first of its kind in Pagosa Springs. Built as represented in the architects' plans, the new Hot Springs Boulevard would most likely become the new "Main Street" of Pagosa Springs and perhaps would replace the two historic downtown blocks as downtown's commercial hub.

SAN JUAN RIVER CORRIDOR RESTORATION

Another important public improvement project in motion is related to the San Juan River. Dubbed River Restoration - Phase Two, the project addresses only the river bed and is designed to create a substantial stretch of "white water" along the river bend between the Fourth Street and Nevada Street bridges.

This project was not stopped to await results of the Council's planning process, yet it was significantly impacted by the team's input; in response to adjacent land owners' concerns, the project will be broadened in scope and will include the design, construction and management of the associated wetlands and nature conservation area.



RIVER TRAIL SYSTEM

The river restoration project will also respond to opportunities for implementing another section of the Trails Committee's plans for scenic nature trails along the San Juan River. A key issue in planning the alignment of the public trails will be how it will address the adjacent resort's need for privacy.



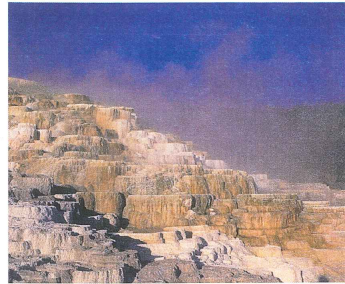
LEWIS STREET

The part of Lewis Street that links Fourth and Fifth Streets is in need of upgrading. Poised to repave the roadway and to install appropriate curbs, sidewalks and landscaping, the Town Manager's office halted the public improvements project, pending outcome of the Conceptual Planning process. As a potential resource for short-term customer parking, Lewis Street holds a promise for contributing to a better central business district.



AN EXPANDED SPRINGS RESORT

The Springs Resort has come a long way since the first settlers of Pagosa Springs made use of the springs' healing powers. The owners/operators of the resort always think about improving the appeal and expanding the scope and services of their facilities. The plans drawn by Albert Moore and Partners suggest one form of development on the riverfront property. Since that plan was made public, the property owners have spent much time thinking about alternative options for creating a successful destination resort on their land. While the program for the resort's next development



phase seems to be quite firm, the search for the most promising development scheme of the remaining lands is underway.

It is evident that the type, intensity and character of development on the "river bend" property will have a great impact on adjacent public

projects along Hot Springs Blvd. and on the nature preserve associated with the San Juan River. The Conceptual Plan provides guidance for a harmonious and beneficial interface of the public and private projects.

NEW COUNTY OFFICES

Archuleta County's expressed interest in relocating the County Courthouse, administrative offices and perhaps the Jail, from Pagosa Street represents



a dual opportunity: 1) It suggests that the site presently occupied by the buildings might be available for development designed to strengthen the downtown business environment and 2) It also means that a new Courthouse built on a donated site might reinforce the Town Hall/Community Center complex and create a magnet for building supporting private professional office development at the south end of Hot Springs Blvd.

PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS

The thought process initiated by the Community Vision Council brought school issues in focus. When the planning team inquired about the District's future plans for its school facilities, it became evident that the community would benefit from a long range view of its educational programs.

The School District presently pursues a systematic appraisal of its needs and options through its Vision Task Force.