



WORK SESSION MINUTES

Thursday, February 19th, 2026
Western Vista Conference Room
1920 Thomes Avenue, Cheyenne, WY 82001

I. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 10:00 AM

II. ROLL CALL

Members Present: David Teubner (President); Brian Bau (Secretary); Janelle Rose; Stan Hartzheim; Jeff White (Council Appointee); Linda Heath, LCC. **On Zoom:** Wendy Volk (Vice President); Lorrell Bellotti (Treasurer)

Members Absent: Candice Wisdom; Amber Nuse; Jamie Winters

Staff Present: Sophia Maes, DDA Executive Director; Miya Debusk, DDA Marketing and Engagement Assistant; Cass Raffa, DDA Operations & Project Coordinator.

Members of the Public Present: Larry Wolfe, Council member; Glenn Garrett, Architect. **On Zoom:** Julie Tucker, City Council of Disabilities; Erin Fagan, Planning and Development; Amber Ash, City Chief of Staff; Jason Sanchez, Director of Community Recreation and Events.

III. STRATEGIC PLANNING

A. Brief Overview/ Discussion of Draft 5- Year Strategic Plan (2026-2031)

Maes provided an overview of the 5-Year Strategic Plan Draft, beginning with the need for a new plan. She explained that at the West Edge 2025 Summit, it became apparent there is a disconnect between the perception and reality of the DDA's role among both external stakeholders and internal board members. Some believed the DDA would implement the entire 2024 Plan of Development, which is not the case. This misunderstanding has led to perceived mission creep, creating friction between the DDA and the community. Maes stated that narrowing the DDA's focus and improving communication will help address this disconnect.

Maes outlined the reasons for developing a new strategic plan: clarifying the DDA's purpose, addressing mission creep, refocusing priorities, defining the DDA's role in the Plan of Development, modernizing the organizational framework, aligning board and staff, strengthening public trust, and guiding decision-making. She noted that the last strategic plan was completed in 2021, when the DDA operated under Visit Cheyenne with a stronger Main Street focus. She clarified that the strategic plan is intended to provide



staff with direction and operational clarity and asked the board to focus this work session on the DDA's internal structure and how it can best implement the Plan of Development, rather than on broader downtown needs.

The five-year plan is intended to establish stability and foundational structure over the next five years, with a reassessment of the broader organizational direction after that period. The updated mission, vision, and values are based on the communications strategy developed with West Edge. Maes also shared that the framework for the new website has been initiated and is progressing well. The strategic plan emphasizes strategic priorities, communications strategy, financial stability, and organizational capacity.

Maes reviewed the DDA's statutory role, noting that it is an urban revitalization organization that advances economic development by reinvesting in place. While economic development is a significant component of the DDA's work, she described it as a result of its efforts rather than its sole function. She referenced state statute, which establishes the DDA by the Cheyenne Governing Body to carry out certain duties on behalf of the municipality. The statutory purpose includes serving a public use; promoting health, safety, prosperity, security, and general welfare; preventing deterioration of property values and structures within the Central Business District; preventing the growth of blighted areas; assisting in development and redevelopment; supporting the overall health of the district; and providing special benefit to properties within DDA boundaries.

Maes then presented the revised mission, vision, and core values for board consideration. Board discussion followed. Teubner commented that the draft mission appeared focused primarily on blight and deterioration and did not sufficiently reflect economic development or land-use infrastructure, which are important components of economic development. Hartzheim suggested revising the phrase "economic growth" to "economic development." Volk expressed concern about the tangible ways the DDA can prevent property deterioration and blight, noting that revitalization depends in part on property owner cooperation. Bau stated that while the DDA cannot physically stop blight, its grants and programs contribute to its prevention. Maes emphasized that preventing blight is the statutory umbrella mission, and that projects, programs, and resources are the means by which that mission is achieved.

Rose noted that some hesitation around the mission statement may stem from language that reads as enforcement-based, which is not the DDA's role. Bau suggested using the word "encouraging" to better reflect the DDA's function. Maes referenced the current mission statement—"be a catalyst for economic development, redevelopment, and revitalization"—and explained the desire to avoid confusion that "economic development" equates to business marketing. Rose asked how the DDA directly addresses property deterioration beyond encouraging surrounding growth, and Hartzheim cited programs such as the Façade Improvement Program and Sidewalk Improvement Grant as examples. Hartzheim further clarified that the mission represents the goal, while programs represent the steps to achieve it. Rose suggested revising the mission language from "and" to "by" for clarity.

Bellotti commented that the mission statement should be concise and easily communicated, noting that the current draft felt too wordy and governmental in tone. Maes asked whether a more concise, "elevator pitch" style mission would be preferable. White agreed that simplicity is best and suggested shortening the mission to its first line, with additional detail reflected in the vision and core values. Bellotti agreed with



this approach but cautioned that the mission should still reference preventing blight to avoid confusion about the DDA's role, particularly regarding events. Additional discussion focused on clarifying the DDA's strategy to address the perception that it primarily organizes events. Teubner noted that while the DDA may not have the capacity to host events directly, it continues to sponsor and support downtown events and may recruit partners to do so in the future. Rose suggested revising the language to "spark economic development through downtown revitalization" instead of "spark economic growth and new energy."

Following discussion, the board reached an agreement on the wording of the mission, vision, and core values.

Maes reviewed the 2024 Plan of Development Focus Areas: Building and Street Character; Economic and Cultural Development; Infrastructure and Land Use; and Transportation and Parking. She explained that while these are the priority areas for downtown, the ongoing disconnect centers on the DDA's specific role in implementing them. The DDA's approach includes direct action through projects, programs, and resources; partnerships with other organizations; and empowering the community to help facilitate the Plan's goals.

Maes presented a graphic developed by West Edge to illustrate the DDA's role within the downtown ecosystem. The visual places the DDA at the center of urban revitalization and economic development, rather than direct business support. She explained that the DDA partners with and outsources to other organizations and community groups to address gaps such as events, business support, and tourism, while its primary scope remains focused on revitalization and the built environment.

Teubner noted that programs such as the Façade Improvement and Sidewalk Improvement Grants are examples of direct business support. Maes responded that these programs fall under urban revitalization, as they improve the built environment rather than supporting a specific business. She provided the example that if a sidewalk is improved and a business later relocates, the improvement benefits any future tenant, demonstrating indirect rather than direct business support. Teubner maintained that even when working primarily with property owners, the DDA is still supporting businesses. Maes cautioned that focusing too narrowly on that distinction can lead to mission drift and scope creep, reiterating that the DDA's focus should remain on the built environment. She clarified that while items such as exterior signage may indirectly support businesses, they must be public facing; the DDA does not provide support for items such as logos or interior improvements. Teubner agreed that interior improvements do not directly affect the broader community but emphasized that grants still indirectly benefit businesses.

Rose suggested that the DDA should help bridge gaps for property developers by providing clear resources on its website, including process guides for property owners. Maes agreed, noting that this aligns with urban revitalization efforts. Rose commented that the discussion may be largely semantic, and Bau responded that semantics are important, as lack of clarity at the board level can create confusion among stakeholders. Bau added that he would like the DDA to be the first organization stakeholders approach with ideas or concerns, with the DDA directing them to appropriate resources. Maes stated that this resource and connector role is already reflected in the strategic plan through partnerships and referrals. Bau suggested refining the mission language to reflect supporting stakeholders in creating a vibrant



downtown primarily through urban revitalization and economic development, while also serving as a resource for small businesses, and encouraged incorporating more optimistic language.

Maes then reviewed a “why, how, and what” graphic for the strategic plan. She clarified that the DDA serves as a project facilitator on City-led projects—providing educational campaigns, stakeholder feedback, and alignment among partners—and as a project manager for DDA-specific initiatives, such as capital improvements, wayfinding signage, and gateway enhancements.

Volk shared that a downtown business owner had asked how the DDA would help minimize disruption to her business during the Hynds and Hole construction project. Volk noted that while the project is not a DDA initiative, the DDA can assist by communicating timelines and processes to downtown stakeholders. She acknowledged that confusion can arise when stakeholders assume the DDA controls such projects rather than serving in a supportive role. Bau suggested connecting affected businesses directly with appropriate project managers and resources. White stated that the developer, contractor, and City should be responsible for project-specific communication. Maes added that it was beneficial that the business owner reached out, as the DDA can elevate concerns to partners such as LEADS and help direct inquiries appropriately. Teubner emphasized the importance of proactively communicating traffic closures, disruption timelines, and the long-term benefits of projects to all downtown users. He noted that construction-related disruptions can significantly impact businesses, particularly due to parking and pedestrian access challenges, and stressed the need for consistent communication.

Maes concluded by reviewing the DDA’s ongoing programs, categorized as public improvement programs and property grant programs, which are directly administered by the DDA. She stated that due to organizational capacity, the DDA intends to limit new initiatives and instead focus on its strengths—particularly grantmaking. She identified the mill levy as a key organizational strength, emphasizing the goal of deploying funds to empower the community to carry out revitalization efforts. Maes reiterated the DDA’s role as a resource by promoting the downtown district overall, providing toolkits and information repositories, sharing market reports, and fostering community partnerships. Hartzheim stated that producing a State of Downtown Annual Report is important for tracking progress and addressing concerns from unsatisfied stakeholders. Maes briefly reviewed the DDA’s target audiences, partners, and key stakeholders. Bau commented that board members could take a more active role in engaging partners and stakeholders and acknowledged he could improve in that area.

Maes shared that during a previous staff meeting, it was determined that clarity, focus, and grounding in the DDA’s mission are the most critical priorities at this time. She emphasized the importance of ensuring both staff and board members are aligned. Maes also reviewed the DDA’s structure, reiterating that the DDA will always be associated with the City, as it’s created by and can be dissolved by the Governing Body, making it inherently connected.

Maes then reviewed the proposed financial projections, highlighting its heavy reliance on mill levy funding. She reminded the board that the next mill levy election will take place in October 2027, leaving just over a year to demonstrate the effective use and impact of those funds. She emphasized that this timeline makes the strategic plan particularly important. Maes presented a graphic outlining her strategy to deploy as



much funding as possible into the downtown community through grants and public improvement programs between now and next June.

As a case study, Maes discussed Fort Collins, noting that its primary funding source is Tax Increment Financing (TIF). She advised the board to consider greater use of TIF, which is authorized in the DDA statute. She noted that TIF was previously utilized by the URA board for the STENCIL apartments project on O'Neil. However, she cautioned against direct comparisons, as Fort Collins generates approximately \$1.7 million in mill levy revenue compared to Cheyenne's \$413,259, reflecting a significant difference in capacity.

Maes briefly referenced the SWOT analysis completed by DDA staff several months earlier as part of the strategic planning process, including identified risks and proposed mitigants.

Bau expressed support for Maes' strategy to deploy as much funding as possible in the near term. Speaking as a property owner, he stated he is not concerned about the mill levy failing in the next election. White responded that some property owners may disagree. Bau acknowledged differing opinions but stated the DDA cannot operate out of fear of the mill levy not passing. Instead, he emphasized the importance of demonstrating impact and clearly communicating the value of DDA programs.

Hartzheim added that the DDA must be more vocal than the property owners who oppose it. Rose noted that some opposition stems from the perception that the DDA is too closely tied to the City; however, she believes the organization functions more effectively under City support and that this message needs to be communicated more clearly. Bau reiterated that the DDA was created by the City and operates as a City board, and therefore its relationship with the City is not a conflict of interest.

Teubner referenced past mill levy election data, noting support has historically not dropped below 65% approval. He stressed the importance of compiling a clear report of accomplishments—such as grants awarded and infrastructure improvements completed—to support the next election effort. Teubner also expressed concern with the phrase “pushing money out,” noting that grant funding is typically driven by property owner need, aside from efforts to promote and communicate available programs. Maes responded that increasing marketing efforts will likely result in more grant applications, and the DDA should be prepared with adequate budget capacity to meet that demand.

Councilman Wolfe asked how the DDA is involved in the proposed downtown improvements included on the 6th Penny ballot. Maes responded that the DDA is not taking credit for those improvements, as it is not leading those projects. Wolfe suggested that the DDA should consider collaborating more closely. Teubner stated that board members were surprised to see downtown improvements included in the 6th Penny proposal without prior discussion, and noted that without being included in early conversations, it is difficult for the DDA to effectively educate the public. He identified this as another reason to strengthen relationships with City partners. While expressing general support for the proposal, Teubner stated that the board lacks clarity on its specific impacts.

Wolfe clarified that although the project is being led through CRE by Jason Sanchez, the improvements benefit downtown and align with DDA goals. Maes stated that the board needs additional clarification



regarding what the “downtown improvements” specifically include. Jason Sanchez, attending via Zoom, emphasized that the initiative is a collaborative effort among City partners working toward shared goals. Teubner suggested that Sanchez and relevant City staff present to the board to provide additional detail and address outstanding questions.

Before breaking for a five-minute recess, Maes asked the board if there were any preliminary questions.

Teubner expressed concern about expanding grant programs or staff capacity before refining existing programs. He emphasized the need to streamline current offerings, improve communication, and manage application volume before pursuing new initiatives or forced growth. White agreed and suggested that utilizing interns could provide meaningful support to DDA staff capacity.

Bau noted that a potential new infrastructure grant program to assist property owners with vaulted basements would address a legitimate downtown need. He suggested that, rather than creating an entirely new program, the DDA could consider modifying or expanding an existing grant to meet that need. Maes stated that one of the post-break activities would involve determining which programs to expand and how.

Volk, attending via Zoom, referenced data from the previous mill levy election, noting that approximately 80% of the votes came from 20% of downtown property owners. She emphasized the importance of maintaining an accurate database distinguishing property owners from tenants and identified that some individuals own 20 or more properties downtown. She suggested board members serve as ambassadors by proactively engaging property owners but stressed that the DDA must first update its database to minimize risk and ensure comprehensive outreach.

Teubner agreed, stating that relationship-building should occur well in advance of election cycles, rather than only when a vote is approaching. Maes added that the board and staff should strategically determine expectations for board involvement versus staff responsibilities. While acknowledging that board members have other commitments, she noted that the DDA operates with a staff of three, and partnership-building efforts may need to be more evenly distributed.

Heath asked how the DDA compiles its property owner list. Maes responded that staff relies on the Laramie County Assessor’s website, though some mailing addresses appear outdated due to delays in deed updates or GIS issues. She noted there are approximately 280 properties within the District. Heath shared that she has spoken with individuals involved in updating the records and that they are still working through a backlog from November. Rose suggested creating a dedicated email list specifically for property owners to communicate not only about the mill levy but also other downtown initiatives. Bau and Rose discussed dividing outreach efforts among board members to collect phone numbers and foster personal connections. Heath noted that outreach to out-of-state property owners may require mailed communication, which could increase costs. Maes stated that the DDA has previously sent postcards, though some have been returned. She added that approximately 80 of the 280 property owners are located out of state.

Wolfe and Teubner briefly discussed leveraging DDA communications to highlight the scale of public and private investment occurring downtown. They emphasized the importance of showcasing major projects



and progress in order to counter perceptions that downtown is not developing and to discourage business and property owners from relocating.

B. Board Strategic Priorities and Action Plan Exercise

Following the break, Maes facilitated an exercise asking board members to respond to the question: *“Given the Strategic Plan, what does the DDA need to ensure execution of the Plan of Development?”* Board members were asked to focus specifically on internal strategic and operational needs. Maes read the responses aloud, and discussion followed.

Key themes identified by the board included strengthening cohesive partnerships with stakeholder organizations; improving internal databases and resource management; exploring the creation of sub-organizations such as business improvement districts (BIDs); and increasing promotion of the DDA in relation to downtown events.

Rose emphasized the importance of mutual advocacy among partner organizations and layering resources to maximize impact. She noted that Cheyenne often develops strong plans but struggles with implementation due to limited collaboration and communication. Rose shared observations from a recent visit to Casper, stating that its downtown appears to be thriving. Teubner attributed Casper’s success to strong City Council buy-in and sustained public and private investment in downtown revitalization. Heath noted Casper’s mid-block crosswalks as an example of infrastructure improvements that enhance mobility and connectivity. Rose also mentioned strategically located small parking lots near activity centers in Casper, suggesting that this approach appears more effective than reliance on a single large parking garage in Cheyenne.

Maes briefly discussed the concept of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), explaining that Wyoming is currently the only state without a legal framework to establish them. She described BIDs as public-private partnerships in which property or business owners within a defined area pay into a dedicated mill levy and serve as voting members. Unlike the DDA’s publicly appointed board, a BID board is appointed by the members who contribute to the levy. Maes explained that the DDA would focus on shaping and improving the built environment, while a BID could focus more on activation and programming. She noted that a BID could be tailored in size, potentially as small as a Lincolnway district, but would require legislative action to establish. Maes suggested that pursuing enabling legislation for BIDs could be an effective long-term strategy over the next five years and noted stakeholder interest in the model.

Due to time constraints, the board was unable to complete the planned Action Plan Exercise and agreed it would be addressed at a future session. Rose stated she would like further clarification regarding expectations of board members and expressed openness to Maes assigning specific responsibilities if needed.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 PM