

Mayor Kinskey State of the City Monday, March 27th 2006

Council President Kathy Kennedy; Council Vice President Bob Webster; Council members Marc Ketcham, Mona Hansen, Tom O'Leary and Duane Farley, I want to take a moment today to reflect on our efforts from the past year and to highlight some of the priorities for our city for the coming year.

Just over a year ago, the City budget was running in the red. Salaries and benefits for our city employees were variable, with some being too high and others being too low given prevailing wages in the labor market. Much needed efforts for economic development and housing lacked the resources necessary to make real progress. Plans for Sheridan's future were vague or non-existent. Our streets were decaying due to lack of basic maintenance. Complaints and issues raised by citizens of Sheridan were often lost, ignored, or not responded to in a timely manner.

And all of this against a backdrop of challenges such as a lack of affordable housing, decaying infrastructure, and a lack of economic opportunities sufficient to keep our youth from moving away.

Though it may have been easier, in some respects, to ignore or minimize these challenges, this Council opted to address each of them head-on, in over three-dozen work sessions held in addition to regular Council meetings.

It has not been easy. We knew that difficult choices and decisions had to be made. And knowing full well that some of those choices would not be popular, we made the course correction that needed to be made for Sheridan to have a vibrant and strong future.

- We balanced the budget.
- We instituted a salary study and brought salaries and benefits in line with prevailing wages in the labor market.
- We supported key new community initiatives for economic development and housing.
- We initiated studies of our infrastructure capacity, key to charting our future.
- We instituted a streets preventive maintenance program.
- We implemented a new tracking system for complaints coming into the city—a system designed to make city government more accountable and more transparent.

This past year has not been easy. But it has been necessary. It was done by this Council in a manner that was professional, open and positive. This is a City Council of which the citizens of Sheridan can be justly proud. They give

countless hours away from their jobs and their families, and give that time to Sheridan's services

The last year has positioned us to realize our vision for Sheridan as a growing, prosperous community, while preserving all that we treasure about our unique way of life.

Translating vision into reality requires resources—money.

In that regard, it is important to recognize those who have assisted in obtaining coal bed methane development impact assistance for Sheridan County. This administration worked closely with a coalition of impacted counties, the Governor's office and our local legislators.

As a consequence, CBM impact assistance funds have been appropriated. These funds are vital to our on-going efforts to fix our infrastructure.

Those resources, along with all other revenues entrusted by the taxpayers to our care, will be invested wisely.

Based on what I have heard from folks in our community, and from you, as their representatives, I believe our budget will focus on three key areas:

- ❖ Building the Community

Investing in our citizens, our infrastructure, our heritage and our future.

- ❖ Improving Operations at City Hall

Professional, accountable governance and building capacity to serve the City of the future.

- ❖ Long Range Planning

The City is growing; we will plan-and work with our partners throughout the County-to assure that today's developments are suitable to be tomorrow's proud additions to the City.

To address each of these in turn...

BUILDING THE COMMUNITY

Repair and extend Infrastructure for housing and jobs

I'm a firm believer in the power of the free market. The free market can perform wonders for the creation of homes and high paying jobs. Yet, the City must do its part. The City is the provider of water, sewer, streets and other infrastructure. The infrastructure must be available for our town to

prosper. Yet, too often, we've seen where sewage from a proposed subdivision cannot be moved from the end of town to the sewage treatment plant due to broken or undersized pipes located throughout Sheridan. I refer to these as "bottlenecks."

Developers can and should be responsible for building infrastructure within their developments. Developers, however, cannot fix every broken bottleneck throughout Sheridan.

The highest priority in our budget, Council, must go to infrastructure repair and extension. This investment will enable the growth of our tax base, and opportunities for homes and jobs for our citizens.

At the same time, we must halt further decay in our streets. I believe the Council shares my determination to extend additional funding for the street maintenance program.

Housing

Virtually all of the local government funding for Affordable Housing in this community has come from this City Council. That, together with the dedicated efforts of the SHAC volunteers, will, with time, make a difference.

Call it affordable housing or workforce housing or simply expansion of the overall housing supply—the fact of the matter is there are too many people who cannot afford houses that cost too much. The Housing Needs Assessment, paid for in large part by this City Council, makes it clear that the solution to our problem is expansion of housing opportunities across the entire spectrum – for our seniors, for our young families hoping to stay here and for those single income and two income families working more than one job trying to make ends meet.

The housing study called upon the City of Sheridan to adopt a comprehensive plan that directs City policies to foster more housing choices. A key plan element was a commitment, by the City, to an annual goal of the land approved for development – and the infrastructure budget to make it happen.

Economic Development – Forward Sheridan

From 1980 to 2000 the average wage earned in Sheridan was on a non-stop slide. In 1980 our average wage was about \$1,000 below the National Average. By the year 2000 Sheridan's average wage was almost \$11,000 below the National Average.

We must promote Forward Sheridan, a private, non-government economic development effort, consisting of local citizens whose sole mission is the long-term prosperity of the community.

Our economic development efforts must focus on:

- Diversifying our economy to grow or attract high paying employers
- Making progress on our housing affordability issue, and
- Initiating workforce development efforts

City Clean up

We made great progress last year in efforts to clean up the community. We created additional community service officer positions. We put money toward clean up of blighted properties. These efforts will continue.

I share the view of many on this Council that still more can be done. We will look at funding to extend our hours of operation at the landfill, and creating more drop off points for yard waste. We should fund more "community clean up days" similar to the successful, but only a once a year, Tress for Trash program.

The Sheridan Community Land Trust

We must continue to promote the land trust as a means of preserving our agricultural heritage and open space, our opportunities for recreation and wildlife; as well as our opportunities for affordable housing and historic preservation.

Like many in the community, I am convinced that a generation from now it will be seen as one of the most important innovations of the last year.

The Land Trust will be self-sustaining at some point. In the interim, this group of dedicated private citizens will need the continued support of this Council, the County Commission and the citizens of Sheridan.

Historic Preservation, Downtown

This council has made significant resources available to the volunteer groups struggling to save landmarks like the Sheridan Inn and working to maintain our vibrant downtown.

I share with this council excitement to see the master plans – which have been funded by this council – come to completion.

Community Projects

There are many projects underway or to be considered that are good for the community:

New water slide at Kendrick Park; fixing the Kendrick Golf course irrigation system; the complete reconstruction of Linden Street and Sumner Street are underway. This spring, staff will complete last years' pavement maintenance, and with council's blessing will begin a new round of maintenance on sorely neglected streets.

These initiatives are overdue and necessary. I welcome Council's input as to other needed projects.

Our budget efforts will have a second major are of focus...

IMPROVING OPERATIONS AT CITY HALL

Strategic Planning with Employee Engagement. Council, as you are aware, we already have underway, with assistance from the Wyoming Business Council, a process of engaging our employees in strategic planning for the City. We have established core values. We are currently devising needed training programs. I look forward to updating you on the progress of the important initiative.

Financial Incentives for Perfomance. Last year this council committed to a program of financial incentives for employee performance. Funding of merit increases in our budget will be critical to the success of this important initiative.

Updated Benefits

As the year progresses, I would like to see us look at possible updates to our benefits package to include options for non traditional workers such as part time or job sharing options. City Hall, as one of the largest employers in town shares the concerns of all employers for the lack of available childcare. I don't propose we get into the childcare business. I do propose that, working with other large employers, we support a task force to consider what options the community may have to expand available childcare.

Other Initiatives

There are other important initiatives that we will explore in the course of our budget process:

- Operations audits – to benchmark our performance against that of other communities
- Financial system upgrades – to assure the timely flow of accurate information
- Homeland Security initiatives – working as a community with all emergency service providers
- Improved telecommunications – improving access of the public to public to public business.

The third and final area for our budget efforts...

LONG RANGE PLANNING

Vision 2020- Community Growth Plan. Much work has been done this past year on updating Vision 20/20, the community's long-term growth plan.

As has been noted many times by this council, and myself the plan we inherited was long on rhetoric and short on specifics. The plan is being made more specific with respect to housing, economic development, water supply, sewer treatment, and infrastructure capacity. Progressive reports will be brought to council in the months ahead for incorporation into our mater plan.

Sub-division process. I initiated with the County a memorandum of understanding for streamlining subdivision approval within the City's one-mile planning boundary. What I hope is the final draft is undergoing County legal review. Deadlines for delivery of that draft have come and gone. I know Council joins me in urging the County to move quickly to bring this initiative to the table.

Annexation. In the course of the coming year, we as a council will educate ourselves on the annexation process. It is critical that we understand what our options are and what kind of funding may be needed for a mutually beneficial annexation program.

Goose Creek Clean up. The problems of contamination of the Goose Creeks are well documented. A study is under way in conjunction with the Conservation District and the County to examine all the sewer and septic options available to help keep our streams clean.

SAWS Water & County Sub-Divisions. We are partners with the County in the SAWS Water Project. Since the advent of the pipeline, growth outside the city limits has "followed the water."

We will work – as SAWS partners – to assure that new county subdivisions:

- Are built to a standard suitable for future annexation to the City, or
- If too far from the City for future annexation, that the development will have adequate water supply without need for resort to the City's water in years of drought.

OUR BUDGET PROCESS

Council, this is an ambitious agenda. The budget model we adopted last year – of intense budget sessions, exploring every aspect of our finances and our future is a good one. We have already started, having held four work sessions – with more to come.

There will be two important additions from last year –

- We have 5-year budget projections to work from. This is a first for the City of Sheridan. Taking the long view is best for the community.
- Our meetings will be broadcast on television, and taped for rebroadcast. I'm certain that watching our proceedings at home is not the most exciting entertainment opportunity. Yet, this is the nuts and bolts of municipal administration. This is where the rhetoric fades and the hard work begins. The other option is to go behind closed doors and hammer out all the tough decisions out away from public view – clearly not what this City Council is all about. As awkward, tedious, uncomfortable or boring as doing the public's business in public may be, it is still the best form of government.

REVENUES

Council, Sheridan's future looks brighter. But, I'm not prepared to say that we have turned the corner. There is much work to be done. The highest propriety infrastructure projects require millions of dollars. Those resources will require our continuing focus on –

- Keeping all city budgets squarely in the black so that deficits don't erode our opportunities for success.
- Working with other cities and towns in Sheridan County, and with our County Commissioners, to obtain a fair share of the coal bed methane impact assistance and seeing that it is deployed to the highest priority projects.
- Finally, it falls to the citizens of Sheridan County to renew the Optional One-Cent sales tax this fall. We will dedicate the money to the purposes most highly desired by our citizens, especially needed infrastructure projects.

The One Cent has historically enjoyed good support at election renewal time. I hope that will continue. It is the penny worth millions. It is a tax paid largely by folks outside of Sheridan County and the mineral industry. We need to renew the One-cent to build a future for our families and ourselves. We will fall short without it.

Conclusion

The government of the City of Sheridan is in the "people business." Our job is one of service—to the needs of our citizens.

This is our focus. To always keep in mind that what motivates our efforts are the needs of those we serve – such as senior citizens, hoping to hold onto their homes, struggling to pay rising property taxes from a fixed pension; and the families working multiple jobs, and still unable to fully make ends meet;

and, those who are doing well in a thriving local economy. One and all, they share the hope of this City Council for a vision of Sheridan as a community that can push past its problems and grow and prosper.