

TEN YEARS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN OGDEN

I was recently extended the opportunity to address a group of Ogden/Weber Chamber members about economic development in Ogden City. At the end of the presentation, a question arose that shocked me a bit. The question was, “Why doesn’t the city focus on filling our old buildings instead of building new ones?” It took me a second to respond as I tried to recall the list of old buildings that we had helped renovate and reoccupy in the city. I thought of the Egyptian Theater, the Scowcroft and Boyles Warehouse building (now the IRS Complex), a good portion of 25th Street, the Hampton Inn and Suites, the American Can Complex, and the recently renovated buildings on the east side of 23rd Street and Washington Boulevard. There were others, which I am sure I forgot while trying to answer the question off the top of my head.

Afterwards, this question made me wonder why our efforts to reinvigorate and redevelop the city were going unnoticed.--that perhaps City Personnel was so busy doing the work that it was not fully appreciated by them or by those living here for whom the work was undertaken. After all, there is no time-lapse photography that reinforces the changes around us. I began a bit of research to see what has been done. I went back to a point a decade ago which coincided with a new mayor and his vision to clean up and repurpose a city that he loved. It was at this point that the city began to implement a plan titled the "Renaissance of Downtown Ogden". Under the mayor’s direction, the Economic Development Office was tasked with developing projects that would attract new office workers, attract new hotel guests, develop new retail customers, bring new entertainment patrons into the central business each year and attract new residents. Some of the projects envisioned then were a new hotel, IRS Complex, Intermodal Hub, city amphitheater, renovation of the Ogden Temple block and rehabilitation of the Ogden City Mall block. **An overarching goal was to create reinvestment within the city, after decades of disinvestment and decay, by establishing a project-focused, strategic economic-revitalization plan.**

Many considered most of those projects impossible at the time—especially me—because at that time I was working on economic development in Layton, and the economic conditions and development hurdles that they presented were extremely challenging. But all of the envisioned projects are now in Ogden City. That work has created more than 3,800 new downtown office workers. Two new Class A office buildings have been developed—the Wells Fargo Center and Ensign Plaza. And the number of downtown office workers continues to grow since the last survey in 2007. The goal set in 2000 was 2,500 new office workers.

The target was to get at least 65,000 new hotel guests. Of those, 22,000 have come from the Hampton Inn, and additional room nights have developed at the Marriott as occupancies have trended up over the decade. There will be another hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn, that will generate the remainder of the goal in the next year.

New retail customers have been attracted along Wall Avenue with Winco and Wal-Mart as well as retail infill along 25th Street and Washington Boulevard. The Junction entertainment complex draws conservatively a million patrons annually. New housing within the city has increased. The most noticeable of these have been the Liberty Apartments at The Junction, Union Square on 25th Street and the two Colonial Court Apartment Buildings. And even the once-stalled Earnshaw

building is being readied for occupancy in the summer. The city has built 134 new homes, 87 apartment units and assisted in 1,448 home-improvement loans.

Accompanying this rebirth of the downtown area, festivals and events attracting thousands of people have been implemented. The Ogden Marathon, Hurt in the Dirt, Xterra USA Championships, Dew Tour Winter Championships, Harvest Moon Celebration, The Ogden Friends of Acoustic Music Festival, Historic 25th Street Cart Show, Juneteenth, Witchstock and the monthly gallery strolls represent many of the new events and festivals designed to create activity and economic benefit to Ogden.

If those accomplishments have gone unnoticed, look around a bit, and you will see what NAI Commercial Real Estate Services determined was nearly 300 acres redeveloped. This reinvestment started slowly between 2001 and 2007 but has accelerated since, with more than 30% of the redevelopment occurring, or in the process, in the past four years. Adding in the new developments at Business Depot Ogden, IRS Phase IV and the new Hilton Garden Inn hotel, this number will reach \$1 billion by the end of this year. This development is the result of the many projects envisioned and implemented through the efforts of business leaders and the city.

Other accomplishments beyond these goals have been achieved. In 2001 the Defense Depot Ogden had closed, and there was no one at the facility. Today there are more than 3,000 people working at the facility, fully replacing those jobs lost in the 1990s. The idea of establishing an outdoor industry had not yet rooted in the city. That industry is now alive and growing with, at our latest count, more than 17 new outdoor logos moving to or developing within the city.

Ogden has been consistently ranked as one of the top 10 communities in the nation when it comes to job creation. Ogden has consistently ranked No. 1 in the state and has been cited by Manpower Inc. as being in the top 10 in per capita job creation communities in the nation. Last year there were 32 developed projects or company relocations completed. Those companies will attract to the city over 2,000 jobs as they build their employee rolls. The River Parkway beautification project was completed, and more than 47 homes were cleared in the river area to ready development in that area when the market recovers. These projects or company relocations will create an estimated incremental property tax of \$91 million and potential sales tax revenue to the city of more than \$1.5 million annually. This progress has been made during the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression. The Business Information Center has consulted with nearly 12,000 individuals and has helped fund or start more than 50 businesses in the city.

This has happened because the citizens of Ogden elected remarkable leadership, and the citizens themselves have jumped in—in many untold, unnoticed ways to make things happen. Those of us who joined the effort in the past years have been happy to serve the community, and we have been lucky to be able to stand on the shoulders of those who figured out ways, despite the difficult market conditions, to overcome the inertia of decades of economic decay. Our Economic and Community Development staff has as one of its most important values to create economic opportunity for those who live here. That work drives us each and every day. That work is by no means complete, and we have much to do, especially in light of today's economy.

If you want to make suggestions for the next decade or learn more about those involved in this

effort, we encourage you go to Ogdenbusiness.com. The site is still under construction, but you can find a pictorial and narrative of 10 years of economic development effort under the About Us tab.



Tom Christopulos is Deputy Director of Community and Economic Development for Ogden City.