

Our City

Last week I had the opportunity to travel to Soda Springs with Superintendent Randy Jensen and the Executive Director of the Great Rift Business Development Organization (GRBDO) Kristen Jensen. The community of Soda Springs had just opened a new Cobblestone hotel last November and we were to meet Rick Phillips, a board member of GRBDO, at the new hotel for a tour with Tim Shefchik, the project developer for Cobblestone. There are a couple of, to me what seemed to be, unique characteristics about the Cobblestone franchise and how it operates; both of which I think make them successful in smaller rural communities where the regular chain hotels would never have a chance to serve.

The first unique aspect of Cobblestone is that one size definitely does not fit all. However, before I talk about the first thing, I need to explain the second thing. And, that is the local buy-in and local investors. A Cobblestone Hotel is not built with outside money; it is built by local investors who believe in their community. The first step in the process before us is to get a feasibility study done by a professional firm who specializes in small town business assessments. Kristen Jensen has volunteered to write a grant that could if successful largely pay for the study. In whatever way I can I will help with that process. If the study concludes that a Cobblestone Hotel could in fact be successful here in American Falls then investors will be sought. The feasibility study will also tell us how many rooms the hotel would need to meet the demands of our community; again it is not one-size-fits-all.

The rooms, fit and finish of a Cobblestone are very much like a newer Holiday Inn, Best Western, Clarion or something similar without the 60 to 80 room minimum building size. I am optimistic about the possibilities. The tentative plan based on our trip to Soda Springs and a subsequent meeting the next day, that I could not attend, is to have the feasibility study done as soon as financially possible; hopefully by late spring. Should the study be favorable and to the extent possible as set forth by statute and ordinance the City will do everything we can to work with our local investors to make this project a reality. It is the local buy-in and community support for other Cobblestones that have made them possible and profitable.

Also last week I had a good conversation with Chris Fehringer, our Parks and Recreations Superintendent. Our conversation led us to Willow Bay; specifically the bike path. We are both determined to see improvements completed along it this summer. Right now we need your help with ideas for permanent in-place exercise equipment that will be located along the length of the path in strategic locations. If you are familiar with this type of equipment or have any ideas or pictures please share them with me, I have students at school who are excited to begin building the various pieces so that they can be installed this spring. The other thing Chris and I discussed was how to best cleanup all the weeds and invasive plants that exist in the area. With some luck we hope to work with the Bureau of Reclamation, Natural Resource Conservation Service and community members to restore this habitat back to a more native landscape that is more inviting to birds, wildlife and people.

In both the Cobblestone and Willow Bay endeavors I hope to be working with many of you as we strive and continue to make American Falls the best place to live.

Until next week...