

Our City

We probably don't do it enough. There are no substitutes for face to face conversations. My thanks to the Power County Commissioners for agreeing to meet jointly last week to discuss two specific items impacting all of us. Technology is a useful thing most would agree; but like everything else it comes with several costs. Renovation or renewal of deteriorated or deteriorating areas and developing and revitalizing those same areas comes with considerable costs. Last Monday, September 16, how to best address both items was discussed in our joint meeting.

The need for current and protected technology is essential to both the County and City. In budgets that are already tight we, the County and City, are determining how much each agency is financially responsible for as we work to stay current and safe in our use and application of several shared technology systems.

The more extensive conversation centered on urban renewal and the potential development of an Urban Renewal Agency (URA) that could allow the City to address several areas of concern. As we all learned from Pocatello Development Authority Board Chairman Scott Smith, urban renewal and revenue allocation financing are the most significant tools available to Idaho communities for attracting and retaining businesses, generating economic development, promoting job creation and encouraging development of deteriorating and underutilized areas.

The Urban Renewal Law was originally passed by the 1965 Idaho Legislature. The law allows a city or county governing board to designate areas for urban renewal projects aimed at eliminating or preventing deteriorated or deteriorating areas and developing and revitalizing underutilized areas. An urban renewal agency, governed by a board of commissioners appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council, is responsible for overseeing implementation of urban renewal plans that outline the necessary projects for specific areas. The Local Economic Development Act was passed by the 1988 Idaho Legislature, and authorizes the use of revenue allocation financing.

The State of Idaho provides limited options for cities and counties to use in financing site preparation, infrastructure and other needed incentives necessary to attract and retain businesses. Revenue allocation financing allows communities to make a site "ready" for development, including extending water, sewer, streets and other improvements that reduce the cost to businesses of relocating or expanding. Urban renewal and revenue allocation financing have proven to be particularly important in multiple Idaho communities because of the competitive nature of economic development, where Idaho communities face competition from communities in other states or countries where incentives such as tax abatements, local revenue sharing, and "war chests" for recruitment often exist. Many Idaho cities (some with more than one project area), have chosen these tools to revitalize their city. The positive impacts of urban renewal can be seen across the state and might work well here in American Falls.

IF the City Council at some point votes to form an Urban Renewal Agency (URA) and confirms the board I or another mayor may appoint that is not the end of it. That URA has no authority or power to act. YOUR voice and vote is the only thing that can grant that. A MAJORITY vote

would be needed by the residents of American Falls to pass and give authority to operate the Urban Renewal Agency. Again, the URA has no power without your say so. Should the City Council decide to proceed with the formation of a URA we will be having several conversations with all those interested in visiting about the pros and cons of a URA before it ever goes to all of you for a vote. Open and honest communication is essential, in my opinion, for positive progress and growth.

I look forward to those conversations as we, the community of American Falls and Power County, continue to do all we can to make ours the very best place to live.

Until next week...