

## Rifle, CO

Smaller, rural communities like Rifle, CO that have been suffering from changes in the American labor market are rethinking development patterns to better attract and recover from the loss of residents and talented workers.

Rifle's past development mirrored 20th century trends of "leap-frogging" housing and retail inefficiently in single-use zones, stretching along wide and long arterial streets. Sprawling growth patterns, coupled with the decline of the region's energy-based industry, have brought the community to a crux. Rifle must take into consideration the impacts that future development can have on the community's fiscal sustainability.

Yet traditional main street communities like Rifle are well suited to rebuild strong downtowns. Neighborhoods on the edge and periphery of downtown Rifle are only a short distance from amenities available in the core. By providing better connections between neighborhoods, many Rifle residents would be able to reach downtown by a short walk or bicycle ride. Infill development that includes diverse housing options can also plug gaps in Rifle's downtown to create higher density and support a diverse mix of spaces for shopping, living, and working.

On July 6-7, 2016, the Smart Growth America technical assistance team visited Rifle to deliver a workshop pursuant to a USDA grant for the Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health tool. The visit included a walking tour of downtown Rifle along with a tour by van of the neighboring communities. The latter portion of the first day included an evening public presentation that also coincided with a City Council session. The second day of the visit brought together an invited group of stakeholders for a daylong workshop.

Participants at the workshop identified three discussion and problem-solving areas: revitalizing downtown; building on existing infrastructure; and connecting neighborhoods and public spaces.

### Actions for success:

- Turn Rifle's historic town center into a destination
- Use, leverage, and develop city-owned properties to create additional retail space and higher density
- Convert surface lots near Rifle city hall into affordable housing
- Prevent leapfrog development
- Create additional walkability and bike connections
- Create more density and additional retail space in downtown with existing infrastructure
- Consolidate downtown properties adjacent to Valley Lumber property
- Improve riverfront access

### Obstacles:

- High construction costs due to competing higher value jobs in neighboring communities
- State and railway control of major roadways and train tracks near southern portion of city near I-70
- Coordinating with Garfield County
- Gallagher Amendment requiring commercial property taxes pay 73-74 percent of the mill levy

- Lack of hotels in the area
- Impact fee structure

#### Opportunities:

- Trail network
- Airport
- Community college
- Library
- Centennial Park
- Scenic location

### **Recommendations**

Smart Growth America's observations and community feedback from facilitated small group sessions informed the following recommendations:

#### 1. Focus on downtown properties

Rifle should prioritize the infill development of catalytic downtown sites such as the vacant lot across the street from City Hall. At the time of the workshop, this site was intended to become a workforce housing project on the upper levels. The redevelopment of this underutilized site can provide affordable housing to entry-level workers, boost the downtown residential population, and support downtown businesses. The City should work with developers to find financing solutions for downtown development projects including Low Income Housing Tax Credits, New Market tax credits, and city subsidies.

#### 2. Build on existing infrastructure

As the city anticipates decreased population growth, Rifle should consider how development patterns could impact its fiscal sustainability. To discourage leapfrog development, Rifle should enact and enforce policies that require developers to build and maintain all infrastructure costs of new development outside the current tier until 75 percent of that land is built out.

#### 3. Connect downtown adjacent neighborhoods

Before extending infrastructure to new, yet to be built neighborhoods, enhance existing trail networks to enhance last mile connections. Neighborhoods on the periphery and edge of downtown are just a short distance from amenities available in the core, including shops, restaurants, retail, and services. Explore infill opportunities in edge neighborhoods along with public programs to incentivize homeownership in those areas.

#### 4. Enhance connection to river and parks

Many towns are considering how to take advantage of their natural amenities, and riverfront access can be particularly beneficial to downtown businesses when incorporated into the urban fabric. Rifle should focus on ways to repair the historic bridge for pedestrian and bicycle connections on both sides of the river, and explore opportunities to community facilities such as boat and watercraft launching areas.