

MISSED OPPORTUNITY PART II: THE INTELLIGENT CITY

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Answers for the Colorado Springs Economy

BY DAVE HUGHES

YOUR HUB CONTRIBUTOR

Colorado Springs badly needs an entirely fresh Economic Vision for its future. One possibility can be based on the idea of developing ourselves internally as well as externally as "The Intelligent City." It can capitalize on the only radically new economic engine since the automobile — personal computers as the means of production — and the Internet as the Highway for the Mind. In Part 1, "City of Missed Opportunities," I traced the up/down economic history of the Colorado Springs area from 1871: English money, Health, Gold, Tourism, Military bases, Tech Manufacturing. Our population climbed from 20,000 to 500,000. But it never became prosperous for all. Now we have become far too dependent on Defense dollars, whose decisions are made in Washington, not here. We gain and lose high tech branch manufacturing plants like a yo-yo because decisions about opening or closing here are made in other bigger cities. Tourism is too seasonal and small to fully support our bloated population. Now we are

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run- ning out of water. Growth for just growth's sake is no longer sustain- able. If we stick to that path, the costs for a city of one million is not twice what it is for half million. It's more than double. Already highly "con- servative" city councils and county commissions can't meet their budgets for basic infrastructure needs — main- tained roads, police, ?re, parks, utilities, government services. Costs are going up faster than citizens are will- ing or able to tax themselves to pay for them. There is NO economy of scale in big city growth. Bluntly put, the quality of life decreases the larger a city gets, while costs go up. But isn't it the Quality of Life which draws and keeps us here, even as it degrades and per capita income declines? We gotta break that mold. We need a radical new Economy. First of all we have to dis- enthral ourselves from the idea that the only way we can grow economically is to grow physically. Developers don't like such talk. For after developing, they walk away. Even from the city. And leave the rest of us to pay the dollar and psychic costs of growth. We have to be willing to ac— tually build a new economic model for the entire city and county. An "Intelligent City" model that projects, then measures and tracks over time, the ?ow of money in and out of the Pikes Peak region, and how it circu- lates within it, from and to individuals, not just institu- tions. Now who can do this? For starters we already have in Colorado Springs many quali?ed economists, aca- demics, business, govern- ment agency specialists, and independent research- ers who can contribute to and construct the model. A Pikes Peak community-wide model — not as it is now: a separate chamber of com- merce model, a city govern- ment planning model, a county government model, a utilities department model, a homebuilders model. Will developing such a For 30 years I developed and was able income from exporting my brainpower via ever more powerful to derive an model cost money? Sure. But when the chamber of commerce asks Colorado Springs Utilities for money out of your rate pay for of— ficials to go and lobby man- ufacturing ?rms to relocate here, it sure can contribute hundreds of thousands of dollar to build and refine the model. All sectors can contribute. UCCS can be the home for the public/private study, model, and meetings. We will have to gather large amounts of data, much of which is not even collected locally today, much less cor- related with anything else. For example, who knows the total defense department retired pay for residents of El Paso County? How many "home business" are there in El Paso County? How many computers, and robust networks, or independent programmers are there? How many local "distance learning" institutions are here with local instructors? All guesswork.

We need to launch a set of initiatives for a city that wants to export its brain power via telecommunications, and import dollars. How? The Internet, dummy! For the ?rst time in history, every person in El Paso County can, with personally owned, ever more affordable computers, oper- ated from home, or from a nearby of?ce, or even school, connected locally to the global Internet, wired, wireless, ?bered, sell and deliver architectural drawings, computer programs, educational services, financial advice, art work in digital form, music, novels, stories, essays, medical consulting services, web designs, technical advice, survey analyses, marriage counseling, to distant markets, over the net at trivial real communications costs. And we have a few assets to build on. We have an educated work force, even a retired-from-work force, much of whom are already "Knowledge Workers." We can attract others who don't need local jobs. And train the ones we have. We need to systematically educate our own populace on how to market them- selves online to distant em- ployers and markets. Look at the ?ood of television advertisements offering "Distance Learning -- how to get a degree online." We should

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systematically inven— tory the very large number of residents, including retired ones, who could teach, for pay, a very wide range of subjects online, and both help teach them HOW to teach online, and as a city offer their services to the rest of the world! The local cost of living is a function of the sum of all the costs for housing, utilities, food, services and, increasingly, transportation. Yes, gasoline costs and ALL the costs for buying, paying for, and then operating “go to/from work ” cars and driving.

For all the vague promises of “going green,” the reality is that owning two or more cars just so that breadwinners can “get to work” and students in the home can “get to school” is NOT going to go down. But working and studying from home, or neighborhood “work centers” can reduce those costs! To individuals AND government. By hugely reducing the daily volume of traffic, not increasing it end- lessly as we are now in the Old Economy. Both work and learning could and should be promoted from home! Both local governments and local companies and all academic institutions have to encourage and support and not prohibit their employees from doing all or part of their work and study from home!

Why should a clerk in the County Assessors office drive from Calhan just to sit in their costly (to maintain and equip) of?ce building? Why should I drive to Memorial Hospital, have a technician put a wireless device close to me to monitor my pacemaker, when I could be monitored at home just as well, and without adding to road congestion, at lower cost to me, my medical insurance, the city, and the hospital? Colorado Springs could be- come The Intelligent City. Increase income, lower costs.

It will take community leadership committed to this idea. Who’s ready? E-mail me at dave@oldcolo.com.