



Elgin

Downtown Assessment Report: Elgin, Wallowa, Lostine, Enterprise, & Joseph

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November 20, 2014



Wallowa



Enterprise



Lostine



Joseph

Background

Oregon Main Street conducted preliminary Downtown Assessments for Elgin, Wallowa, Lostine, and Joseph as part of the Wallowa Union Rail with Trail Concept study process for the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority. The Downtown Assessments are part of the overall study process taking place to inform the public and guide completion of the Wallowa Union Rail with Trail Concept report.

The Downtown Assessments evaluated each downtown's assets, issues, and opportunities. An assessment was previously provided for Enterprise so a check-in with the community was conducted within the scope of this process with follow-up to happen in 2015. Recommendations are also provided for potential strategies to enhance the appeal of the downtowns along the Valley. The observations and recommendations are a snapshot in time and not meant to be an in-depth analysis. Rather, the report offers suggestions for further exploration and the process was designed to generate local discussion about opportunities for downtown revitalization efforts. Strong downtowns will help support overall efforts related to rail with trail development by giving people a place to shop, eat, relax, and learn a little more about the history and heritage of the Valley when "off trail" as well as expose people coming through the area to the recreational opportunities offered by the rail w/trail development.

The nationally recognized Main Street Four-Point Approach® to downtown revitalization was used as the basis for the Downtown Assessments for each community:

Organization looks at the appropriate local structure to support successful revitalization efforts by ensuring adequate people and financial resources are available to implement projects and activities.

Promotion looks at what creates excitement downtown. Street festivals, parades, retail events, and image development campaigns are some of the ways a downtown encourages customer traffic. Promotion involves marketing an enticing image to shoppers, investors, and visitors.

Design looks at what enhances the attractiveness of the business district. Historic building rehabilitation, street and alley clean-up, colorful banners, landscaping, and lighting all improve the physical image of the downtown as a quality place to shop, work, walk, invest in, and live.

Economic Restructuring looks at the current business mix, identifies ways to support and strengthen existing businesses, and identifies opportunities for recruiting new businesses over the long term to enhance downtown's economic base.

The process for the Downtown Assessments included:

- **Downtown Assessment Questionnaire:** each community was asked to have a small 3-5 person stakeholder group meet to complete the questionnaire. Board members of the Wallowa Union Historic Trail Consortium volunteered to assist the communities with the questionnaire and the worksheets mentioned below. Each community could ask additional key individuals to complete the survey as well.
- **Assets and Challenges Worksheet:** the stakeholder group was asked to complete a worksheet that identified each downtown's assets and challenges.
- The Oregon Main Street coordinator visited each community in mid-November. Meetings were scheduled with the stakeholder groups in Elgin, Wallowa, Enterprise, and Joseph to check-in, share information about Oregon Main Street, as well as answer questions they may have.
- The Oregon Main Street coordinator reviewed the input from the local stakeholder groups, including the questionnaires and the worksheets. This report identifies issues and opportunities as well as recommendations for moving forward.

General Observations & Recommendations

Observations

The Wallowa Valley is a place of spectacular natural beauty with outstanding outdoor recreational opportunities including hiking, fishing, and rafting. It is also dotted with a variety of small communities each with its own distinctive personality:

- Elgin has a “hometown feel” with a cluster of downtown historic buildings housing a variety of service, retail, and eating establishments. Home to the Elgin Opera House, downtown has the potential to strengthen cultural amenities to build off this significant asset.
- Wallowa has an emerging business cluster that is appealing to both local and visitor traffic. The new Pit Stop Barbecue, Little Bear Drive-in, Blonde Strawberry, and the Main Street Grill are just part of a food niche that is developing. With many buildings that maintain their historic character, downtown Wallowa has a definite potential for inviting people to stop, stay, and linger.
- Lostine has a quirky character reflected in the mix of businesses from M. Crow & Company to the Lostine Tavern to the Blue Banana. Notably, many of the businesses showcase locally made products and food items.
- Enterprise, as the County seat, has a solid mix of retail, service, and professional businesses, as well as serving as a medical hub. It has an outstanding collection of historic buildings and has already nominated all the significant, eligible buildings to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Joseph has a very vibrant downtown with strong curb appeal and pleasing pedestrian environment with a noteworthy collection of bronze sculptures. The “arts” are very much front and center in the community. A solid business mix and low vacancy rate add to the sense of vitality.

While each community has its own identity, there are also some key themes throughout the Valley:

- The history and heritage of the Valley runs deep and is a source of community pride.
- The downtowns in each community still serve as community gathering spaces – a place for events and activities and a place for community members to interact from the Bowlby Bash in Enterprise to the Lions Holiday Parade in Elgin.
- The downtowns still have viable businesses that meet the needs of residents but also have the potential to bring in outside tourist income.
- Historic buildings add to the character of each community although many are in need of repair or some level of restoration. In addition, some of the storefronts present a tired, outdated appearance which is a barrier to drawing in new customers.
- The Valley is rich with creative talent. The performing and visual arts are represented in all forms from writers to sculpture artists, photographers to painters, actors to musicians. In addition, creativity is also reflected in the talents of many of the business owners who feature locally made food and craft items from Wild Carrot in Enterprise, to the farm-to-table mission of the Lostine Tavern, to an emerging new business in Wallowa, Dry Creek Design, repurposing furniture and found items into new uses.
- Connection to nature and the sheer beauty of the Valley is an important factor in both drawing and keeping people as residents.
- Pedestrian scale improvements are needed in most of the communities – this is especially important with the highway running through all the downtowns.
- Many of the communities have already had multiple plans/reports/studies conducted with a lot of good information and recommendations. What is lacking is the organizational structure and support to move forward with implementation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are not intended to be all encompassing. Rather, they are provided to help address some of the key issues and opportunities that impact all the communities in the Wallowa Valley in a simple, low-cost manner. It is often helpful to start small and grow efforts incrementally to use local resources most effectively. The structure and services provided by Oregon Main Street could be of benefit to many of the communities who are currently not participating in the Network. We encourage Wallowa, Elgin, and Joseph to sign on at either the Affiliate or the Exploring Downtown level. There is a very simple application process. At the Exploring Downtown level, Oregon Main Street can help communities form the organizational capacity to move forward with coordinated downtown revitalization efforts.

- Simple streetscape improvements reflecting the local character in most of the communities could enhance the pedestrian environment, build community pride, and serve as a visual cue to visitors that they have “arrived.” Some suggestions include:
 - Benches or chairs that reflect the talents or character of each community (e.g., brightly colored rocking or Adirondack chairs in Lostine; metal or re-purposed materials in Wallowa)
 - Seasonal display of flowers and plantings. In addition, seasonal decorations on light poles or standalone decorations (e.g., scarecrows, holiday decorations, etc.)
 - Bike racks and bike maintenance stations.
 - Longer term – additional pedestrian scale lighting.
- Build upon the creative talent that exists in the Valley. Each community has a distinctive niche that can be celebrated through the arts.

Overall suggestions:

- Additional representation of art such as one-of-a-kind art banners used for a season and then auctioned off – maybe this could be a Valley-wide project. A good funding source could be the Oregon Art Commission’s Arts Builds Community grant program.
- Kiosks with samples of local essays or poetry representing artists & writers in the Valley.
- Displays of children’s art.
- Community art projects

Some suggestions by community:

- Elgin: Live performances at the Opera House – build on the opportunity this presents. Explore creating a “creative” space at the county-owned building near the depot to form a “creative district.”
 - Wallowa: Creative local businesses like the metal works and Dry Creek Design
 - Lostine: Build on the quirky character and add little elements through business signage, paint, etc. that reinforce this whimsical character.
 - Enterprise: Celebrate the unique businesses in Enterprise (e.g., Wild Carrot). Also, find ways to bring representations of the area’s artists into downtown.
 - Joseph: Really build on the marketing opportunity the recent creation of the “arts and culture” district provides. This is a natural extension of the brand as the community that has the wonderful bronze sculptures.
- Where vacancies do occur, work with the property owner to clean up the space and make it look more inviting. Put displays in the vacant spaces. Displays could include:
 - Mock-up of a type of business the community would like to have – you never know where your next entrepreneur will come from!
 - A temporary art gallery.
 - A pop-up business.
 - Historic photos of the area.
 - Children’s art work.
 - Ideas are really endless!

- Work with existing businesses to help improve street appeal as needed. Some things to address include:
 - Visual merchandising and window displays – one of the cheapest forms of advertising for any type of business.
 - Lighting – having good lighting in windows and for the storefront creates a welcoming environment and also showcases what goods and services a business offers.
 - Signage - some of the businesses had signs that are deteriorated or none at all! This is an important tool to use that is part of the business’ identity.
 - Paint – a little paint can go a long way to improve the visual appeal of a business. Some communities organize volunteer groups to assist with these projects to keep them low cost. Good examples and additional information can be provided by Oregon Main Street. This might also be an opportunity to partner with EOU.
 - Anything that can improve how a business looks while maintaining its character!
- Conduct a business cluster analysis throughout the Valley to identify cluster of goods and services available. A cluster analysis looks at the business mix in a slightly different way. For example, you could look at “competitive” or “comparable” clusters – those businesses that sell like goods and services such as restaurant or clothing store clusters. Another type of cluster to look at is complementary clusters – those businesses that sell related goods and services. An example would be if there was print shop, a florist, a formal wear – you would have the beginning of a wedding cluster. You take this information and identify ways to market the goods and services together in the Valley and to use the information to fill gaps in the business mix that would make a stronger cluster. This might be a good study to partner with EOU students.
- Help existing businesses to showcase locally made goods (e.g., restaurants could feature locally produced food items like honey, retailers could be an outlet for handmade items).
- Develop a wayfinding signage program to create a visual pathway to downtown and connections between the communities as well as trail access points. Each community should have its own identity, but it should have common elements for consistency.
- Embrace the concept that historic preservation is economic development and the driving force for stabilizing downtowns and helping them thrive again. Some suggestions include:
 - Identify and pursue funding sources for property rehabilitation to provide incentives for property owners to make needed façade improvements (low interest loans, preservation grants, façade/awning/sign grants, etc.). Contact Oregon Main Street for samples.
 - Develop a historic downtown tour map of all the communities in the Valley. The map should provide information on the history of the Valley, perhaps ties to a historic marker/plaque program, and provide fun information about some of the historic buildings and spaces, as well as people who lived in the Valley. Even simpler, do an architectural details contest in the downtowns throughout the Valley – contact Oregon Main Street for samples.
 - Explore the possibility and interest in listing eligible properties on the National Register of Historic Places. A survey was conducted over the summer that identified properties that are or could be eligible for listing. This will allow downtown building owners to access federal historic preservation tax credits.

Regardless of whether these recommendations are acted upon, we hope you keep in mind the importance of building on the existing character and assets the communities already have.

Downtown Assessment Survey Data

Each of the communities was asked to form a small 3-4 person group to review and complete a Downtown Assessment Survey and an Assets and Liabilities Checklist. The communities were assisted by board members of the Wallowa Union Historic Trail Consortium. Below is a summary of some of the key information by community.

Elgin

Assets:

- Active chamber of commerce
- Involved downtown business and property owners
- Good partnerships
- Direct route between La Grande/I-84 and Wallowa Lake
- Intersection of 2 major state highways, Highway 204 and Highway 82
- Historic Opera House features live performances
- Elgin Railroad Depot
- Variety of shops/restaurants
- Unique building stock
- Recently renovated downtown park
- Identifiable town entrances
- Good customer service practices/knowledgeable staff
- Outside trade
- Merchants work together/consistent store hours
- Complementary business mix
- Consistent quality advertising
- Strong community spirit/pride/willing volunteers
- Business owners interested in improving storefronts
- Good recreation/tourism potential
- Historic preservation efforts
- Views, vistas
- Eagle Cap Excursion Train

Opportunities:

- Vacant buildings
- Paint interesting old signs
- Upper floor development
- Pedestrian scale lighting
- Variety of business/retail
- Attractive to small scale industry
- Active downtown organization

Liabilities/Challenges:

- Food bank at main intersection decreases curb appeal
- Log truck traffic
- Narrow streets
- Insufficient pedestrian-scale street lighting
- Declining population
- Competitive pricing
- Business practices
- Attracting investor interest in downtown
- Obsolete signage
- Unifying design
- Clean, welcoming appearance
- Vacant buildings/condition of buildings
- Signage – both private and public
- Directional signage
- Traffic flow
- Public amenities (e.g., benches, trash cans)
- Vacant lots
- Quality of goods
- Fundraising
- Communication between partners
- Four vacant office spaces

Why downtown is important to the community: The history of downtown brings a sense of pride and nostalgia. The downtown is a common place for the community to gather, watch and partake in many events throughout the year. From an economic standpoint, it is vital to many of the local businesses and owners (i.e., shops and restaurants that employ local residents.) The establishments depend on the tourist and other local commuters that travel through the main downtown.

Current Business Mix:

9 retail

7 service

9 professional

5 government

4 non-profits

5 other/restaurant

Downtown Buildings: 43+

Vacancy rate: 11.6%

Building improvement/historic preservation projects in past 3 years:

- Elgin Opera House
- New Elgin train depot
- Wheatland building
- Restoration of Park

Events:

- Riverfest
- Elgin Stampede Grand Parade & Rodeo
- Elgin Lions Annual Holiday Light Parade
- Merchant Trick or Treat
- Stampeders Crab Feed
- Elgin City-wide Clean Day

Please share any additional information: Elgin is a small area, but there is much here in the way of recreation, entertainment, and relaxation; and many could benefit from a trip to our area. In fact Elgin was twice selected as host town for Cycle Oregon; once in 2008 and 2010 making our town and the surrounding region one of the most desirable and accommodating places. The town is in close proximity to Spout Springs Ski Resort, The Umatilla National Forrest and Eagle Cap Wilderness Area, all of which provide some of the best outdoor recreation in the world; also there are multiple rivers for fishing, rafting, and other river activities. Elgins potential for the future is endless, and with the dedication of the community, organizations and volunteers, Elgin will be able to stand out as one of the best places to live, work and visit.

Wallowa

Assets:

- The people of the community who want their town back, the merchants who want to move forward.
- The Senior Center is only a block over as are the Post Office and Community Bank. The Library is also right in the downtown corridor. School is within walking distance.
- Sense of community
- Strong community spirit
- Willing volunteers
- Forward looking government
- Historic buildings/some made from Bowlby stone
- Sufficient parking
- Good access to downtown
- Compact business district
- Special events are well attended/interesting
- Unique history/heritage
- Gathering spaces
- Identified target markets/draw business from outside area
- Updated utilities

Opportunities:

- Identifiable entrance to community
- Views/vistas
- Quality window displays/interior
- More public amenities needed (benches)
- Infill opportunities
- Customer service training
- Both public/private signage
- Quality goods/Merchants work together, complementary businesses
- Could encourage more small scale industry
- Good recreation/tourism potential
- Historic preservation efforts in place
- Investors taking an interest in downtown improvements

Challenges/Liabilities:

- Lack of restaurants
- Lack of warmth
- Lack of cohesiveness
- Lack of green space that is being used effectively.
- There is a lack of reasons for people to stop on their way through to other places, such as Joseph or Wallowa Lake.
- Empty or rundown buildings
- Mismatched architecture
- Appearance not as clean/welcoming as it could be
- Building interiors/window displays/visual merchandising
- Business signage
- People exceed speed limit
- Crosswalks not marked
- Pedestrian scale lighting
- Business mix/need more retail
- Upper floor redevelopment needs
- Business challenges include stagnant businesses, competitive pricing
- Declining population
- Workforce
- No downtown organization
- Business/property owners not involved
- Lack of communication
- Fundraising
- Lack of partnerships

Why downtown is important to the community:

- Economic center of the community.
- It is the hub of the community. It needs to be more of a gathering spot.

Current Business Mix:

11 retail

0 service

0 professional

1 government

2 non-profit

Downtown buildings: 18

Vacancy Rate: 11%

Building improvement/historic preservation projects in the past 3 years: There is one, Dry Creek Design, taking place in the Old Hardware Store.

Events:

- Old Fashioned Fourth of July
- Softball Tournament
- Fiddle Camp
- Tamkaliks Celebration
- Volunteer Fire Dept. Steak & Oyster Dinner
- City-wide yard sale

Please share any additional information: We're just extremely excited to have someone who is willing to help up us in our efforts. We have the manpower and interest, but direction is sorely needed.

Joseph

Assets:

- 1999 revitalization program: new lights, better walkways, underground wires, trees, garden boxes in street bump-outs, bronzes
- scenic view
- Authenticity – buildings look great
- Destination businesses and amenities
- Sculptures – not just random art, but art that matches our character & history
- shops- quality & variety
- Joseph is designated now (since June) as an Arts & Cultural District (only 1 in Oregon)
- Landscaped open spaces

- Unifying design/interesting architectural details, historic buildings
- Identifiable downtown entrances
- Clean, welcoming appearance
- Views, vistas
- Well maintained buildings
- Utilities are good/pedestrian lighting
- Quality visual merchandising/window display
- Good public and private signage
- Clear directional signage
- Good traffic flow/downtown access
- Strong community spirit
- Willing volunteers
- Government and businesses cooperate
- Business owners interested in improving storefronts
- Good recreational/tourism potential
- Historic preservation efforts in place
- Good variety of retail uses

Opportunities:

- Public amenities (recycling containers)
- Vacant buildings/land
- Upper floor development
- Good customer service
- Knowledgeable business owners

Liabilities/Challenges:

- Small town – limited storefront spaces (not enough space for some wanting to open a store)
- Truck traffic

Why downtown is important to the community:

- Provides both services and jobs
- Need tourism to support it
- Small businesses are the backbone of businesses in America

Downtown Events include (among others):

- Chief Joseph Days Rodeo
- Taste of Joseph, Bronze

Current Business Mix:

50 retail

30 service

10 professional

Downtown Buildings: 58

- Investors take an interest in downtown
- Downtown is the social center of the community
- Well attended special events are held downtown
- Unique history/heritage is a focus
- Variety of gathering spaces
- Active chamber of commerce
- Active business and property owners
- Good partnerships
- Willingness to fundraise
- Good communication between partners
- Quality goods available
- Merchants work together
- Complementary businesses
- Creative business people
- Competitive pricing
- Parking good

- Good zoning
- Funding to implement plans
- Forward looking government
- Identified trade market
- Business practices

- Consistent store hours
- Workforce

- 55% of people here are self-employed
- No huge employer in valley
- No box stores or alternate places for people to do a lot of shopping in town

- Blues, & Brews Fest

5 government

5 non-profits

Vacancy rate: 10%

Building improvement/historic preservation projects in the past 3 years:

- Joseph Hardware
- Stewart Jones Gallery
- Winding Waters River Expeditions
- Red Horse Coffee Roasters
- Simple Sandy's
- Sheep Shed
- Norman Gallery
- Local Loaf Bakery
- Phinney Gallery

Projects in the works:

- Rodeo Grounds Renovation
- Planning for museum at Rodeo Grounds
- Wallowa County Museum Façade
- Expansion of Joseph Library
- Planning Grant to build up the Arts more in our community

