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City seeks to stimulate economic development

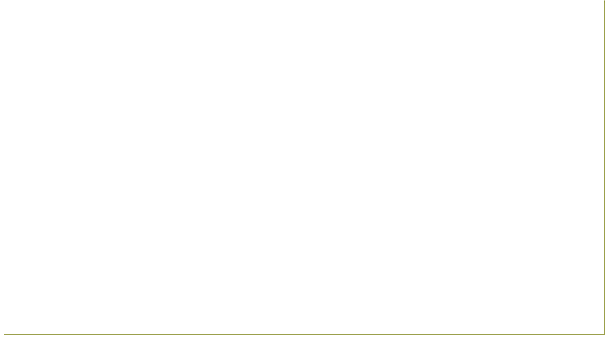
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Tools to help the City of Livingston increase business activity in town could be available for implementation in the not-too-distant future depending on the outcome of an impending planning process.

The City Commission voted on July 7 to hire Colorado-based Crescendo Planning+Design to develop a master plan, parking plan and housing study – all for the downtown area. Shortly before the unanimous vote, Commission Chair Melissa Nootz said the master plan will help guide what the city’s role should be in stimulating economic development in Livingston.

“Economic development is something that people have been wanting the city to engage in – whatever the appropriate role is for the city to be involved in economic development – so this is the perfect place for it,” Nootz said. “So I hope that the public is aware that’s finally happening.”



Crescendo will be paid \$114,640 under the contract approved July 7. The company will be paid using only funds from City’s Urban Renewal Agency and a Montana Department of Commerce grant, according to a city staff report presented before the vote.

“The citizens of Livingston are increasingly expressing a desire for methods to effectively and proactively address challenges associated with growth and change,” reads the staff report. “Many in the community are also eager to capture more tourists as they travel through the region as an opportunity to increase occupancy of downtown buildings (stores, businesses and housing). Others see opportunities to improve downtown buildings, provide wayfinding signs and make improvements to the city’s historic ghost signs. Community members want to be involved in decisions about how and where Livingston should grow.”

City planning director Jennifer Severson said one reason Crescendo was chosen is that it is a small firm that seems flexible enough to meet the city's needs, and because of its commitment to solicit input from the public in the development of the master plan.

"The outreach was a huge part of the scope of work that we sent out, and I feel like they came to us with some innovative stuff," said Severson, who will oversee fulfillment of the contract deliverables.

City Manager Grant Gager told the Commission that a website will go live and begin collecting public feedback after the contract is approved.

Crescendo's proposal will be attached to the meeting minutes and available in the near future. The Livingston Enterprise will also publish it when it's available.

"It's very exciting and I think people would be very excited as well reading it," said Commission Vice-Chair Karrie Kahle, who requested that the proposal be shared with the public.

Kahle said Crescendo has worked with communities similar to Livingston, including places that are gateway communities and railroad towns.

"I'm looking forward to seeing the work they do," Kahle said.

According to the city's request for proposals to which Crescendo responded, the downtown master plan will include the following items and tasks:

1. Conduct existing conditions and background analysis and produce a map of community assets and concerns.
2. Create a Wayfinding Plan for the downtown planning area that includes sign, content and installation locations.

3. Create a comprehensive Streetscape Improvement Plan that identifies streetscape improvements and projects such as public art displays, street furniture, and locations throughout the downtown planning area where these projects could suitably be implemented.
4. Recommendations for plan implementation that encompass both long range and “early-win” opportunities, including identification of key partners and their roles in implementation.
5. Identify priority catalyzing development and redevelopment projects and create an implementation strategy including budget and timeline estimates and project phasing, if necessary, for a variety of project types including, but not limited to: rehabilitation of existing housing units, historic preservation, parking, a low-maintenance pocket park or small public gathering space, and potential improvements to multi-modal transportation access to and within the downtown area.
6. Summary of funding resources available for creating and sustaining revitalization and economic development as identified in the Plan. This summary shall include an overview of grants, loans, and opportunities through private funding sources and local, state and federal grant opportunities.

Note: City planning board chair Stacy Jovick also was on the selection committee; her name has been added to this article.

Wayfinding Plan, Housing, and Parking Study

A Housing and Parking Study will identify vacant/underutilized housing units in the downtown area, particularly abandoned upper floor units above ground floor commercial spaces. Parking will be evaluated for existing needs and availability as well as for future needs based on the results of the housing study to ensure there will be adequate parking for additional future residential units and commercial uses in the project area. This combined Housing and Parking Study is intended to be a more detailed analysis of current downtown conditions than previous parking and space utilization studies completed for the project area.

**From an addendum to the city's project request for proposals*

Crescendo Planning + Design

The principal/founder of Crescendo Planning + Design is Colorado resident Andy Rutz, who has more than 15 years professional experience in urban design, architecture & urban planning, according to the firm's website.

"He has worked extensively in both the public and private sectors, which gives him a unique perspective that helps in fostering successful collaboration between both sides," reads the website. "As a designer, Andy's passion is rooted in bringing tangible, physical change and improvement to the communities in which he works."

How Crescendo was chosen

The company was chosen from among nine nationwide bidders by a selection committee whose members were Kris King, executive director of the Livingston Business Improvement District; Jim Woodhull, city building department director; Thomas Blurock, Livingston Historical Preservation commissioner; Allison Vicenzi, Urban Renewal Agency chairperson; Stacy Jovick, city planning board chair; and Jennifer Severson, city planning director. The committee chose two top bidders, interviewed them in early June and eventually chose Crescendo from among those two bidders.



Livingston Downtown Master Plan