

SCENARIO 3 – COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACES

Human Need: Many communities of the Y-T have followed traditional development patterns where the downtown core has given way to dispersed development and big box or convenience store commercial centers. This is true even in smaller gateway communities with populations less than 5,000. The reasons for this are many, but the result is a community where almost all activities are dependent on private vehicles to access services.

The human need therefore, is to be able to access basic services without reliance on a private vehicle but with the ability to use their private vehicle or alternative modes when desired - in other words the need is to have a choice.

Description of Service: The service being proposed in this scenario is to provide a location in every community of the Y-T that serves as a community gathering place, and a transportation and commercial services hub. By combining these fundamental human services in a common area a number of important benefits can be realized:

1. Transportation services become much more visible and easy to access.
2. With forethought, a common style can help brand these services and make them more identifiable to both residents and visitors.
3. Proximity of shops, transit, pathways, and social events will enhance energy efficiency as well as the economy

Each community gathering place will first serve as a place where you can leave one mode of transportation and access another. After all, you have to get there before you can do anything! This includes private vehicles so there is a park-and-ride element to the service, but depending on the traffic level the P&R could be serviced by a short transit link.

The social aspects of the Community Gathering Place help people become familiar with the nexus of services available. Whether it is a summer concert, a winter ice skate, or a family picnic, the place becomes recognized as a pleasant place to be in and of itself. Our region abounds with places similar to this concept. In many cases the only thing missing is the transportation element. Jackson's Town Square is one example, and the Idaho Falls Green belt another. While Jackson has somewhat addressed the transportation element with a new parking garage there is probably more that could be done.

Bozeman is building a new downtown intermodal facility that somewhat fills the role of the Community Gathering Place. The parking garage will also be the downtown hub for passengers wanting to ride the Streamline bus system. It includes indoor space where people can wait for the bus or get brochures about Bozeman. We also have the opportunity right now to use the indoor space for something such as an unmanned community art space. The structure also has retail spaces at street level, where perhaps a coffee shop or another gathering place can set up shop. The location is one block off Main Street.

There are also a few things that the Community Gathering Place is not. It is most definitely not a bus station, nor is it just a park within a few blocks of some shops, or a gravel lot where you can leave your car and catch a bus or carpool.

The most successful examples are when a community sees its Community Gathering Place as a central part of its identity -- as a place where anyone can stop for a while and maybe run into a friend or meet a person from across the world. A place where there is information, good food, and maybe a place to buy a band-aid.

Ok, sounds nice, but how do you do it? The keys are in flexibility and a long term vision. Each community will have a different geography, may or may not have easy land availability, and will certainly have its own personality. Perhaps there isn't funding for a transit center building in the near future, but there may well be grant availability for a sheltered stop near the pathway and street. Maybe the green space isn't adequate for a large music concert, but it can host a farmer's market distributed along a broad walkway.

Skeptics may question why a transportation system has a Community Gathering Place as a core value. It is because transportation is not an infrastructure separate from those other things that keep us alive - housing, markets, water, waste disposal, and government structures. Like these other basic infrastructures transportation is a manifestation of a fundamental human need and it can't be properly designed without recognizing how it fits into a community.