

COMMISSIONERS COMMENTS

By Dan Kirkbride, 9/16/10

The High Plains Initiative

Citizens will have several opportunities to help shape Platte County's future this next month through participation in community meetings which are part of the High Plains Initiative.

The first is scheduled at the Wheatland High School Auditorium Tuesday, Sept. 28 at 6 p.m.

The High Plains Initiative is an offshoot of the Building the Wyoming We Want meetings Gov. Dave Freudenthal promoted in 2008. Those discussions brought hundreds of Wyoming citizens together to talk about the valuable things about life in Wyoming that need to be preserved well into the 21st century.

Platte and Goshen Counties were subsequently chosen to serve as pilot projects for the same kind of discussion process on the local level. Gov. Freudenthal will attend the Sept. 28 meeting which will serve as a kickoff event. October 11-15 discussions will be held in eight of the municipalities in the two counties to further involve more people.

A steering committee co-chaired by Cindy Witt of Wheatland and Julie Kilty of LaGrange heads the effort which is being conducted in several phases.

--A number of individuals in both counties have already been contacted through phone interviews to determine some of the core values and important issues in this locale.

--The September 28 meeting will help explain the process more broadly to the public at large.

--The October meetings around the counties will give a greater number of citizens and students the chance to participate. Part of each evening will be devoted to electronic polling and the rest to small group studies of maps showing current and projected growth patterns.

--An implementation task force will ultimately finalize the findings into a document that can be utilized by local government and community leaders as they provide leadership in the future.

That may all sound a bit overwhelming, but I urge folks to attend the September 28 meeting to see what the High Plains Initiative is all about. Other than through voting it will be one of your best chances ever to express opinions about future direction for the county. We all tend to surround ourselves with people who think like we do. Here will be a chance to hear different viewpoints and ultimately come together on a vision for the future.

I think you'll also find the process to be fun. The electronic polling allows people's opinions to be instantly recorded and tabulated (like the audience's on Who Wants to be a Millionaire?) demonstrating

measureable trends. Some wonderful maps are currently being prepared to illustrate where current growth patterns are leading. It will be a chance to deal with many of the same issues faced by elected officials and consider how to proceed.

During the recent election campaign, I heard a citizen quoted as saying they would just like to see the county "be the way it used to be." The High Plains Initiative seeks to quantify just what it is we all liked about those simpler times and still value today.

Ironically, however, the way to preserve those good qualities may involve earnest, creative thought and action regarding scenarios, strategies and vision for life as our children and grand children will know it. Please seriously consider being a part of the High Plains Initiative discussions beginning September 28. We're hoping to see hundreds of citizens contribute to the process in the month ahead.

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