Monte Vista is working to address the needs of its community and encourage the civic pride and engagement of its citizens. There has been, over the past few years, a desire to change and move forward with a new central core and a renewed center of community. Some new businesses have sparked optimism and a growing restaurant niche is emerging. However, there is much work to be accomplished in creating a new vision for the community, instilling a sense of pride and understanding how a new niche for the downtown can bring the residents together for a strong and vibrant future. Monte Vista has capacity with available broadband, high traffic counts passing through on Colorado Highway's 160 and 285, and a more affordable real estate market. Monte Vista hopes to support this new energy, build a stronger understanding of the opportunities around vacant buildings, and tap into new emerging markets to help build entrepreneurial momentum in our community. Challenges identified by Monte Vista include:

- **Inclusion.** There has been a historical divide between the Anglo farmers and Hispanic population that has been here for generations.
- **Lacking a Sense of Pride.** Represented by the number of empty storefronts in our main street district, we would like to see a resurgence of activity and pride in our appearance.
- **Economic Sustainability.** Finding ways to support existing and attract new businesses to the downtown area.

The City of Monte Vista wants to focus on building sustainable businesses and business support partnerships that provide steady revenue streams to support municipal functions. A primary focus for the community will be to revitalize downtown with sustainable businesses and support public-private partnerships. The Monte Vista Downtown District will use this report to generate strategies and establishing action steps to promote economic potential while preserving the historical character of its downtown core. Some of the future goals of the city include working with the San Luis Valley partners and others to attract new businesses to improve the availability of services and local attractions for its community.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF STUDIO WORKSHOP //

On April 15, 2020 the first meeting of the 2020 Monte Vista Challenge Team was convened with twenty virtual participants discussing and brainstorm ideas for turning Monte Vista challenges to opportunities. Monte Vista has both short and long term economic development needs. Breakout groups discussed potential short and long term strategies to increase Monte Vista’s economic vitality. Some high-level takeaways included.

Short-Term Tactics

- **Enhanced Communication.** Strengthening communications channels will expand connectivity among stakeholders and the City.
- **Team Building.** Establishing a core group of well-organized champions to help steer the direction of future strategies.
- **Creative Placemaking.** Build a place-based effort to use Downtown Monte Vista as a platform to engage residents, businesses, and property owners to share their vision for the community vision.

Long-Term Strategies

- Enhanced cooperation among local businesses
- Increased training and resources for local businesses to adapt to ecommerce
- Communication strategy for engaging the community.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHALLENGES</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>TACTICS</th>
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<td>Enhance Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Sustainability</td>
<td>Build a Communication Strategy</td>
<td>Creative Placemaking Test Projects</td>
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Poll Questions

Poll questions were asked throughout the virtual studio workshop to gather participants input. Here are the top answers from participants.
TEAM MEMBERS* //

**Studio Facilitator**
Bill Shrum, Assistant to Town Manager, Town of Eagle

**CU School of Public Affairs Coordinators**
Heather Burger
Nic Carlson

**DCI Staff**
Kylie Brown, Challenge Program Coordinator/Rural Outreach Coordinator
Katherine Correll, Executive Director

**Monte Vista City Representatives**
Forrest Neuerburg, City Manager
Jennifer Signs, Finance Director
Larry Foster, City Council
Gary Johnson, City Council
Ken Hamko, Monte Vista Chamber/Business Manager

**Public Sector Partners**
Christy Doon, Southwest Regional Manager, Department of Local Affairs
Sophia Maes, Transit and Mobility, Development Resources Group
Brian Lujan, Town Manager, Town of Center
Jaime Hurtado, Town of Center Trustee
Bonnie & Marty Asplin, Upper Rio Grande Economic Development

**Specialists/Consultants**
Jeff Owsley, Community Relationship Manager, SLV and Southwest CO, CHFA

* This list does not include participants outside of the core team involved in the overall Challenge Process.
Thirty years ago, Monte Vista was a thriving community in the San Luis Valley of Southern Colorado. As was intended by design, the core downtown strip was home to core businesses and community meeting spaces. Unfortunately, the once bustling downtown was no match to the neighboring retail giant, Wal-Mart that began and the new, wide sweeping trend of ecommerce. Many humble mom and pop shops in Monte Vista had no option but to close, leaving vacant buildings and a disjointed sense of community. The pride of this town was formed around agriculture and “can-do” attitudes. There is a desire to restore the downtown area to represent who they are, create a new vision and instill that same sense of pride they used to have.

Colorado’s overall population began to increase in 1995, the same trend held true for the communities of Rio Grande County and Monte Vista. Colorado still continues to see an annual increase, whereas Rio Grande County and Monte Vista hit a negative growth rate in 2010 and have been decreasing since. The U-shaped age distribution based on percentage of total population indicates higher populations of the young (0-29 years old), a dip in middle aged residents (30-49 year olds) and high numbers again in 50-69 years old. After the age of 69, the population dwindles to 4% and lower. This could suggest a couple different things, but according to Colorado demographers, the likely situation for Monte Vista is young parents have children, those children grow up and choose to seek opportunity elsewhere, and their parents either follow them or also seek other opportunities during the peak years of their career. Individuals between the ages of 50-69 are likely to return. The dip in population by age (30-49 years-old) shows an opportunity to strengthen the local economy by creating incentives for middle aged adults to live, work, raise a family and thrive.

Demographics
- Education (2018): Less than High School (20%), HSD/GED (40%), Some College/Associate's Degree (24%), Bachelor’s Degree (9%), Graduate/Professional Degree (7%)
- Total Housing Units: 1,996
- Age: 0-29 (44%), 30-49 (19%), 50-69 (29%), 70-over (8%)
- Income (Median Household): $14,800
- Population Below Poverty Line: 67%
Stakeholders + Partners
This key list of stakeholders and partners was identified as a group that needs to be engaged and involved to address this challenge.
- The City of Monte Vista
- Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce
- Monte Vista Business Owners and Residents
- San Luis Valley Development Resources Group
- Upper Rio Grande Economic Development Corporation
- Department of Local Affairs
- Office of Economic Development and International Trade
- Colorado Housing and Financing Authority
- First Southwest Community Fund
- Neighboring Towns and Chambers

Assets
Monte Vista has plenty of valuable assets at their disposal. The assets in this review are considered essential in achieving the future goals of Monte Vista. The identified assets are listed below and are categorized by geographic, city amenities, and arts and culture.

Geographic Assets
- Major highway access
- Vacancies on Main Street
- National Wildlife Refuge
- Rio Grande
- Sangre de Cristo Mountains

City Amenities
Monte Vista has a rich history and deep roots with individuals who invested time and money into establishing public resources to make Monte Vista a great place to live. Many of these resources are still operable and utilized today. Of all the people who choose to live in Monte Vista, only 379 also work there. The most common scenario for residents is to work outside of Monte Vista, this is true for 1.521 individuals. This might tell us there are limited job opportunities for all of Monte Vista's residents. Fully utilizing city amenities, like the ones listed below, could provide support for local jobs.
- Available broadband
- Affordable real estate
- FAA airport
- State Veterans Center
- Skate Park
- Medical facilities
- Municipal Golf Course

Arts and Culture
Monte Vista is famous for producing a special kind of barley used in Coors beer. Coors supports this agriculture because this barley thrives in San Luis Valley's Climate and deriving their ingredients locally is valuable all while capitalizing on affordable property. Coors is a stakeholder who is invested in the success of Monte Vista's agricultural industry, which has always been an important part of
their culture. Monte Vista is also lucky enough to host two major events every year; the Ski Hi Stampede and the Crane Festival. These events have gone on for so long they have become identifiers of the area.

- Agriculture - alfalfa, barley, flax potatoes, hemp
- Diverse population
- Hosts Annual Ski Hi Stampede (July)
- Annual Crane Festival (March)
- Pride in local sports
- Indoor theatre and drive-in

**Obstacles**

- 20% poverty rate
- Underrepresentation of diversity in local business/government
- Community buy-in
- Utilization of online tools/technology
- 60% downtown vacancy rate
Monte Vista has an unprecedented opportunity to help bring together initiatives from the public and private sectors to help the people of the community engage and innovate. Monte Vista's stated challenges, inclusion, lacking a sense of pride, and economic sustainability represent opportunities that are intertwined and complimentary. In essence, as we improve one challenge, we will also be addressing the others. Consider the challenges rephrased as outcomes in the below graphic.

Monte Vista's long-standing challenge is with disengagement and a lack of connectivity between different demographics and the places where they come together. Using a place-based strategy to invite participation will simultaneously work toward the outcomes listed above. Monte Vista can use the current financial and social climate to invite people to shape the vision for the future, implement test projects to encourage the community to show their love of Downtown Monte Vista, and with that, create a more sustainable economy.
STRATEGIC GOALS AND ACTION STEPS

Following the Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) Monte Vista Community Challenge Studio on April 15, 2020, members of DCI and University of Colorado at Denver School of Public Affairs (SPA) student coordinators drafted an action plan. Strategic goals are statements that if accomplished will take you closer to your vision. The next step will be to set some milestones for the “how to” and “when” of implementing the actions. Include a focus on projects that might connect several goals and use the project planning template to strategically think through each project. The plan developed will focus on the following key tactics to drive action and move the needle toward lasting opportunity for Monte Vista:

- Strengthen communication networks
- Build teams and partnerships
- Begin creative placemaking campaign

IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

The sections of work for the process have been broken down into four areas that will allow leaders to better communicate focus roles and delegate work to partners and the community. The areas include

- MANAGEMENT involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.
- ECONOMIC VITALITY focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.
- COMMUNICATION positions the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.
- DESIGN supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.

See Action Item Matrix in Appendix B

MANAGEMENT

Consider the partners and processes working in Monte Vista to ensure clear roles for communication and implementation. Build a stronger connection with the various stakeholders and create transparent processes to engage with each group according to their interest.

1. Review the list of Monte Vista Stakeholder groups. Consider who is involved, who isn't involved, and what partnerships exist. Consider how to build stronger partnerships, how to foster cooperation between local businesses and stakeholders e.g. What can you do to make Monte Vista downtown stronger, more vibrant, etc.? Tailor content around specific assets of each stakeholder/business.

2. Share the Challenge Report + Pitch Deck to invite a conversation about the future of downtown Monte Vista. Give the presentation and then hold discussion groups.

3. Create a regular meeting of the different organizations (City, Chamber, Upper Rio Grande Economic Development, Adams State, County, DRG, etc.) who care about a vibrant downtown Monte Vista and review the list of projects. Consider forming committees by interest.
4. Connect with local realtors and banks to establish processes for sharing information with new residents, businesses, or people looking to buy or sell in the area.

**ECONOMIC VITALITY**

A successful process should start with identifying what success looks like. Consider the challenge areas and the data that will best reflect if we have successfully moved the needle on a given area. Then identify the base-line data in those areas and collect data and information to ensure that we are able to communicate our strategy and analyze success for Monte Vista.

1. Establish a tracking sheet that lists 2019 downtown sales tax, vacancy rates, number of businesses downtown, number of residents downtown, downtown event attendance estimate, downtown event revenues, etc.

2. Create a spreadsheet tracking contact information for all business and property owners in downtown. Include whatever information is available, address, phone, email, type of use/business, square footage, website, etc.

3. Begin collecting a list of resources available for small businesses (financial, training, etc.) offered by Chamber, Economic Development, local banks, non-profits, and Development Resource Group (DRG).

4. Ask the county for a list of properties in Downtown Monte Vista and start collecting information about the built environment and property ownership, including contact information, track which properties are vacant, residential/commercial, square footage, outdoor gathering space, etc.

5. Establish talking points for mailing, calling, and posting around Downtown Monte Vista to invite participation and ask Monte Vista's business, residents, and property owners to be a part of a Monte Vista Renaissance.

6. Ensure that there is consistent reporting of all progress, even baby steps. Combine all efforts and accomplishments into one list for things that benefit Monte Vista.

**COMMUNICATIONS**

Focus on positioning the downtown as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community’s unique characteristics. Establish messaging for local groups and build communication lists to share information about the downtown, businesses, and opportunities to show pride for Monte Vista and the San Luis Valley.

1. Enhance community and regional communication networks. Develop a communications matrix that will have specific messaging for local business, property owners, residents, and visitors. DCI will help to structure the matrix to focus on ideal platforms and the messaging for each group including a call to action.

2. Build a contact sheet to track contact information for all businesses, property owners, and partners (work in collaboration with property list in Economic Vitality section).

3. Develop a list of ways that community members can support downtown Monte Vista and local businesses and share it in newspaper, eblasts, social media, and flyers/postcards.
4. Create a “Monte Vista Cares” campaign. Develop and share a list of basic services and resources content for local businesses and stakeholders to help them understand how we can support them and the opportunities that exist for them in Monte Vista. Consider a visible sign or picture that businesses and property owners downtown can display. For example, use the 3/50 campaign idea to challenge residents to spend $50 at three businesses in Monte Vista that they want to support. Another idea is to invite people to give great Yelp reviews or place painted rocks with love notes to Monte Vista around downtown.

5. Establish regular communication using multiple channels (newsletter, eblast, flyer) that can be shared consistently with updates on progress, summaries of meetings or events, resources, etc. Invite stakeholders to contribute content, businesses to include marketing or specials.

**PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS**

Focuses on the physical elements that impact the image and experience of downtown. Consider the downtown transformed thought enhanced physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart. Consider the visual cues and small projects that will enhance and beautify downtown, such as the recent addition of crane silhouettes or the “Monte Vista is Open for Business” banners.

1. Create a “Monte Vista Cares” campaign (work in collaboration with Communications). Consider a visible sign or picture that businesses and property owners downtown can display. For example, paint hearts and positive messages in the windows in downtown. Another example is to use the 3/50 campaign idea to challenge residents to spend $50 at three businesses in Monte Vista that they want to support.

2. Engage building and business owners and residents to identify places they would like to see more activity, color, or a business. Consider grants for painting, signage, murals, outdoor seating, facades, etc.

3. Review ideas on a map along with signage and wayfinding that exist and consider where there is room for improvement.
DESIRED OUTCOMES //

Monte Vista Leadership has taken a bold step and focused in on the idea of building a more inclusive, pride-inspiring, and economically sustainable community. The first step is having the leadership on board. The next step will be to bring partners, including the community, into the conversation. Through these efforts, combined with a dynamic and fun place-based strategy, we can turn these challenges into opportunities. When these three areas, Partners, People, and Place are working together the community will be better places to accomplish the underlying needs expressed in the challenge statement and through the Challenge Studio discussion.

- Enhance the image and experience of Downtown Monte Vista
- Attract new businesses and investment in the downtown
- Increase awareness of opportunity to participate and access resources in Monte Vista
- Inspire a “can do” attitude for young people and potential entrepreneurs
- Upgrade the image Monte Vista shared with visitors and through online presence
- Embrace creative placemaking and beautification

DCI is pleased to be Monte Vista’s partner in implementing these ideas over the next twelve months and beyond.