

DOWNTOWN COLORADO INC. PRESENTS

COLORADO CHALLENGE PROGRAM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COLORADO CHALLENGE COMMUNITIES MAKE STRIDES DESPITE THE CHALLENGES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

December 8, 2020 -- DENVER, CO – Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) celebrates the successes of Colorado Challenge Communities including Cañon City, Center, Durango, Old Colorado City, and Rocky Ford in moving objectives forward during the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic. DCI has been inspired to witness and provide support for these five communities with overcoming pre-existing challenges, creating a COVID response, and building a plan to create stronger communities into the future. Each community has a unique profile and challenge. The Challenge Program approach has helped each community move the needle.

“It has been incredible to work with the Challenge Communities throughout 2020. The Colorado Challenge Program was created as a dynamic approach capable of adapting to specific community needs. The pandemic has showcased how this program, when paired with amazing community partners, is able to address unexpected challenges. The 2020 Challenge Communities have demonstrated innovation and provided their businesses and residents with hope during this time. The whole DCI team has been honored to be a part of it.” said Katherine Correll, DCI Executive Director.

2020 Colorado Challenge Communities include Cañon City, Center, Durango, Old Colorado City, and Rocky Ford. Each community worked with DCI to engage the Economic Development Class at the School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado Denver to identify and connect with stakeholders, outline opportunities, and establish a plan of action. When faced with COVID-19 mid-semester, the Colorado Challenge Communities, DCI, and the students adapted the plan and have demonstrated the resiliency of Colorado ingenuity! Below are some of the incredible accomplishments from these communities in 2020.

Cañon City Challenge: Loving the Local

Population: 16,750

Through the Challenge Program Assistance at the beginning of the pandemic, Cañon City established a Recovery Taskforce, an auction to support small business, and garnered \$70,000 worth of grants to support permanent restaurant patio expansion. Since then, the town has hired a Main Street Program Manager who has worked to identify catalyst sites and incentives to spur reinvestment as well as cultivate unique Cañon City events and symbols to get more businesses and people downtown.

“I am so grateful to be a member of the DCI Challenge Program,” said Ashley Smith, Mayor of Cañon City. “It has been a great asset to us in Cañon City to have DCI as intensive mentors and also all of the resources they’ve provided for us to help us get through COVID-19 and help us advise our small businesses. We’ve been able to secure

funds and programming support our small business during this pandemic.”

Durango Challenge: Affordable Housing

Population: 18,985

The City of Durango was selected as a DCI 2020 Challenge Community to address the challenge of “Creatively Financing Development”. As the pandemic emerged, DCI and the City of Durango were able to quickly adapt to develop a strategic approach to slowly reopening of the community to ensure economic viability of re-opening their economy once and responsibly. DCI and Durango are now exploring next steps for a strategic approach to affordable housing.

“Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) played an integral role in La Plata County’s economic recovery. The Challenge Program brought community leaders together during our Challenge Community Virtual Studio Workshop to plan for a safe and efficient economic reopening,” Alex Rugoff from The City of Durango remarked. “The Workshop led to the formation of the La Plata Economic Recovery Task Force, which has been instrumental in providing local businesses resources to survive and adapt to the changing environment. I would strongly encourage other communities to get involved in DCI’s Challenge Community Program.”

Once the recovery effort was well underway, The City of Durango was able to approve the formation of their Urban Renewal Authority in May. Since then, The Durango Renewal Partnership has been working closely with DCI to connect with DCI’s network of statewide leaders in urban renewal and affordable housing development. Durango has taken great strides recently to support place-sensitive, creative redevelopment to address pressing community needs such as attainable and affordable housing. DCI is excited to continue working with the City of Durango and the Durango Renewal Partnership.

Center Challenge: Business Attraction

Population: 2,304

DCI and the Town of Center in the San Luis Valley, a 2019 Colorado Challenge Community, has continued to flourish following a temporary placemaking installation to engage around attracting investment. The Town has seen impressive impacts including change of ownership and investment in six long-standing vacant buildings, two commercial and two housing units currently under renovation, approval of funding for beautification, a partnership to bring an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Hub to the Town of Center, funding for a Downtown Capacity Building AmeriCorps VISTA, and connecting with property owners who will donate a property for youth run coworking.

“The Town of Center decided to shape our own future and stop kicking the can down the road,” said Brian Lujan, Town Manager. “The Challenge Program and DCI has helped the Town build a team of dedicated partners, consultants, and resources that keep momentum going and help us move our strategy forward.”

The Town of Center has also embarked on a series of trainings for long-term financing mechanisms, taking part in a \$270,000 Valley-wide housing study, and considering two annexations. The Town of Center will begin working with Mass Design, an international housing and design firm, to develop a proposal for assistance to plan for a 90 acre parcel the Town owns with housing, broadband infrastructure, and a civic and educational campus.

Old Colorado City, Colorado Springs Challenge: Community Engagement.

Population: 5,259 (district population)

DCI works with districts in larger cities as well as smaller communities, and has worked with the Old Colorado City Partnership (OCCP) President for several years. The Old Colorado City 2020 Challenge has been to build awareness, a unified voice, and resources for this historic, creative, and foodie district in Colorado Springs. One target focus of the challenge was to build stronger partnerships with Manitou Springs and Downtown Colorado Springs to link the physical districts and the dynamic leadership in this corridor.

“The Old Colorado City Partnership is excited to be a part of the Colorado Challenge Program and partner with Downtown Colorado, Inc. as part of the continued effort to connect OCC with regional partners and revitalize the district,” said Jonathan Neely, OCCP President. “The work done through DCI this past year has created a foundation for the OCCP to enhance our advocacy efforts and connect with regional efforts.”

The OCCP is now engaged in the corridor planning, participating in collaborative events and marketing, and supported business through the pandemic with events like Virtual First Friday. To-date the OCC Partnership has completed a utility-box wrap program, created a welcome center in a historic building in Bancroft Park, and secured over \$148k in grants to create appealing and engaging outdoor spaces and options for business expansion and social distancing.

Rocky Ford Challenge: Building Identity

Population: 3,828

The City of Rocky Ford is dedicated to building a stronger sense of place and sustainable job economy that supports job growth and opportunities for the community to invest and grow. The Colorado Challenge program has worked with a dedicated team, to establish a strategy for engagement and inventorying opportunities so the City emerges from the pandemic stronger than before. The City of Rocky Ford has established a broad working group that brings expertise, training, and identifies resources to support potential entrepreneurs, property owners, accessing information technology, and helps employees upskill for enhanced work opportunities in the future.

“The City of Rocky Ford is seeing more interest in skills that allow residents to invest in the community.” said Shannon Wallace, City Manager. “The role for the City is to help build public private partnerships that will empower our citizens to make the change they want to see with businesses, buildings, and collaboration for a sustainable economic future.”

The City of Rocky Ford is establishing partnerships and resources to eventually foster new business development through a business incubator. For the initial phases of the work, The City has received a grant to guide property owners and real estate professionals in conducting due diligence and marketing vacant opportunity spaces and another grant to facilitate training and business creation within the community. An initial training was held in Rocky Ford in November, and a virtual session will be held on Dec 11. In 2021, the City will host a wide range of training expanding dialogue around Entrepreneurship, Information Technology, Workforce Training and Upskilling, Development Readiness, and Building and Construction Trades.

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About the Colorado Challenge Accelerator Program

Since 2017, Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) has worked with 30 communities around the state with the Colorado Challenge Accelerator Program to consider solutions for challenges including housing, historic building rehabilitation, business attraction, seasonal economies, and more. DCI's Colorado Challenge Accelerator Program is a team building accelerator focused on establishing a plan of work and proposal that engages public, private, and non-profit partners to address a significant community challenge over the course of twelve months. The Colorado Challenge Program works to transform the community's challenge into an opportunity, to establish a proposal, financing approach, and team of community partners ready to implement their plan of action.

About Downtown Colorado, Inc.

Established in 1982 as the Colorado Community Revitalization Association, Downtown Colorado, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit membership organization that aims to build better communities by providing assistance to downtowns, commercial districts and town centers in Colorado. Organization members represent downtown organizations, local governments, development and improvement districts, consultants, individuals and others involved in downtown and community development.

Downtown Colorado, Inc. is an equal opportunity employer. DCI employs personnel without regard to race, creed, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental handicap, veteran status and marital status.

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