

**STRATEGIC PLANNING  
FOR DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE OREGON SHORT LINE TERMINUS HISTORIC  
DISTRICT**

**&**

**AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF  
THE HEART OF WEST YELLOWSTONE  
CONCEPTUAL PLANNING REPORT**

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*PREPARED BY*  
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**&**  
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*for*

**YELLOWSTONE**  
**HISTORIC CENTER**

**West Yellowstone, Montana**

## **Introduction**

This document includes the strategic planning highlights between the town of West Yellowstone and the Yellowstone Historic Center (YHC). Also included is a summary of the “Conceptual Planning Report: The Heart of West Yellowstone” produced by the Portico Group for the Yellowstone Historic Center. Preparation of the report was funded by the Dumke Foundation.

In the late 1970s several people initiated a movement to secure West Yellowstone’s heritage district. By the early 1990s, the process was under way. By the later 1990s YHC was established to:

- Preserve, restore, and enhance our Town’s heritage;
- Create a museum site for interpretation and education; and
- Develop a tourism destination for increasing the economic vitality of West Yellowstone.

The Portico Group worked with the YHC Board of Directors and the Town Council to create the full report.

## **Mission Statement of YHC**

The Yellowstone Historic Center seeks to understand, preserve and interpret the unique cultural heritage of West Yellowstone, the Hebgen Lake Basin and their connection to the development of transportation and visitation to Yellowstone National Park.

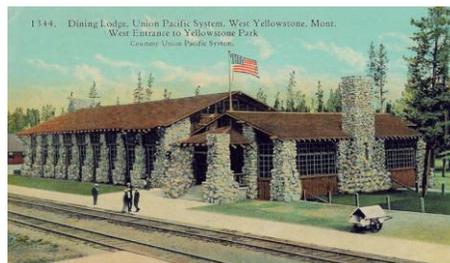
## **Background**

The first Union Pacific Train arrived in West Yellowstone with passengers bound for Yellowstone National Park on June 11, 1908. The guests were met with stage coaches run by Monida and Yellowstone Stage lines for their tours of Yellowstone Park. On August 1, 1915, Yellowstone Park allowed automobiles in the park and the stage coaches were quickly replaced with Yellowstone Park Yellow Buses. The dining lodge was completed in 1925 to further serve the Union Pacific guests. Both the dining lodge and the men’s dsormitory buildings were designed by the nationally renowned architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood. The Historic District (from the Park Boundary to Faithful Street) was designated in 1983 and features the Union Pacific depot and associated railroad structures. The district and buildings are included on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Town of West Yellowstone was carved out of forestland near the West Gate. Starting as just six square blocks adjacent to the 1909 Union Pacific Depot, the town and its visitorship expanded together. Through the first half of the Twentieth Century, the Oregon Short Line Terminus grew through the addition of sophisticated facilities to serve the visitors arriving by train. Baggage handling, electrical generation and staff dormitories were added to the railroad infrastructure. The architecturally significant Dining Lodge was built in 1925, replacing the “beaneries” with first-class accommodations seating 300 visitors at once. These railroad facilities were the “Heart of West Yellowstone”.



Depot Building



Dining Lodge

## **Goals and Objectives**

The Center will accomplish its mission through operating and enhancing the present museum as well as the restoration and preservation of the buildings located in the Oregon Short Line Terminus Historic District in West Yellowstone, Montana. Furthermore, the Center will develop a new museum to house collections, preserving and interpreting them through display and educational programs.

**Vision:** To Rediscover **The Heart of West Yellowstone** and **Enhance Economic Vitality** of the Town by:

- Bringing back a “Spirit of Place” / Re-establish the Historic District as the “heart of West Yellowstone.”
- Supporting the original town site through authentic theme and street enhancement.
- Establishing auto, pedestrian, bike, ski and snowmobile connections through the historic district.
- Creating a parade route for all seasons of the year for tourists and townspeople, alike.
- Laying track from town border to town border connecting park land and the new National Park Service Contact Center. Bringing back train travel within and beyond Montana.
- Building a year-round Yellowstone Historic Center Museum in the location of the original freight facility.
- Renovating and preserving the historic Oregon Short Line structures to use for public events.
- Creating a Compelling and Authentic visitor experience that will draw and retain visitors, providing economic benefit for West Yellowstone.

## **The Main Message for the Oregon Short Line Terminus Historic District**

“The creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 caused a stream of visitors from around the world – journeying by various means – to come to Yellowstone for the transforming experience of “wonderland.” In the context of transportation history, the gateway town of West Yellowstone has the largest and most intact historic railroad complex built specifically to serve these national park visitors.”

The **Historic District** is a place of connections, across time, across cultures and across Town and the Hebgen Lake Basin, i.e. the original Town Site of Riverside.

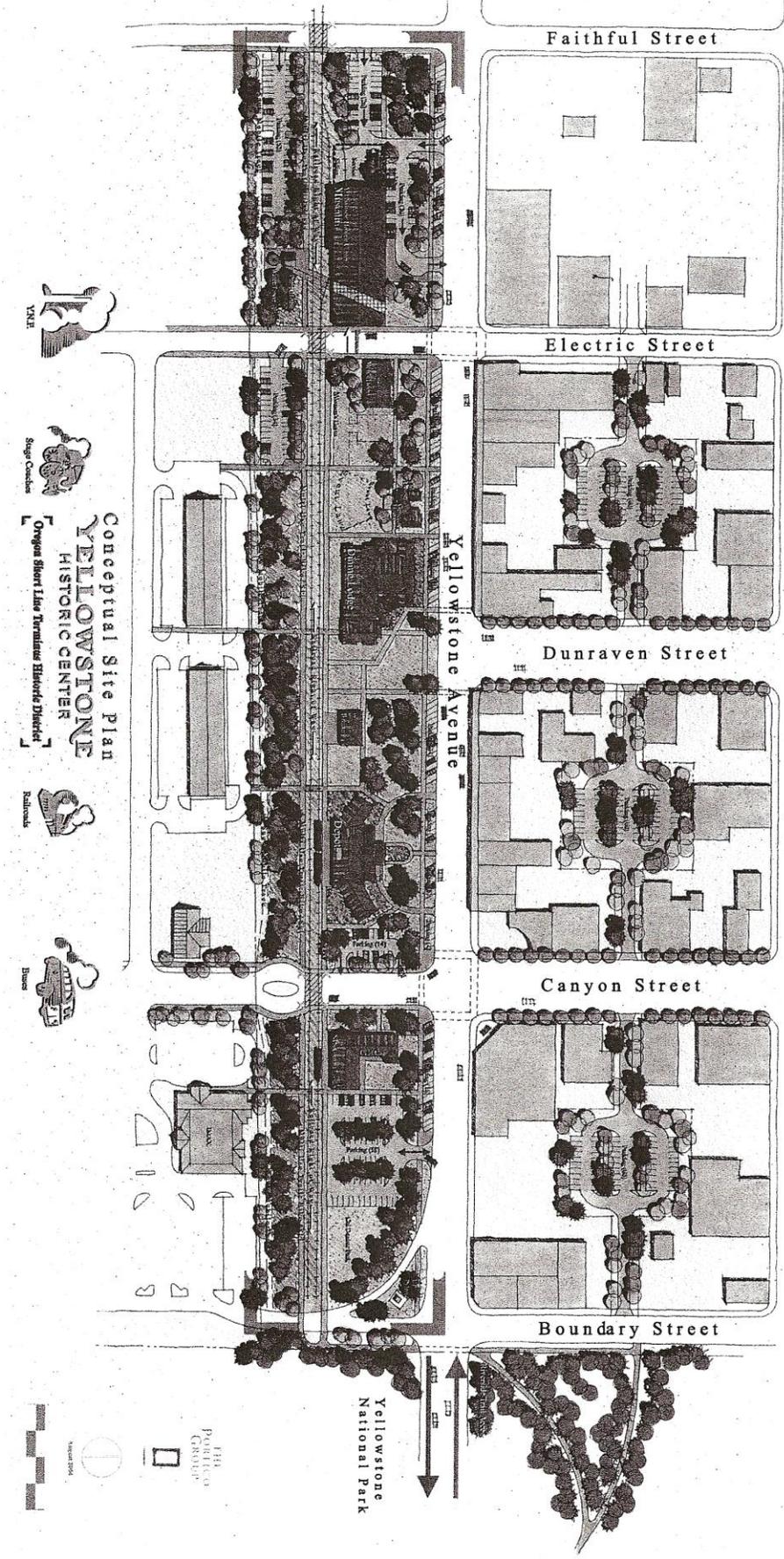
### **Four Components for the Yellowstone Historic Center**

- I. First component is the Town of West Yellowstone and the Oregon Short Line District with the extraordinary, unique buildings. The Heart of West Yellowstone Plan (Appendix 1) and the Conceptual Site Plan, (Appendix 2), take a strongly based site approach. The District will become a true National Monument.
- II. Second component is the Interpretive Plan, (Appendix 3), an educational overlay which will communicate previous cultures and the rich history of travel and visitation to West Yellowstone and into Yellowstone National Park.

- III. Third component is the Yellowstone Historic Center and the new Museum which will be the powerful tool for communicating the fascinating history of West Yellowstone, and the Basin and those who came to experience “Wonderland.”
- IV. Fourth component is the economic impact of additional visitors to West Yellowstone, not only job creation, but also enhancement of the Resort Tax. Dean Runyon and Assoc., an economic research group indicates that full development of YHC would add approximately \$400,000 per year to the town’s resort tax collections...

### **Findings and Recommendations**

1. The prospects for the future of the Oregon Short Line Terminus Historic District have not looked so bright in years. Though no longer a transportation hub, the District can become a significant cultural and recreational center by being restored with the objective of telling its story to a public hungry for authentic historic experiences. It can be transformed into “The Heart of West Yellowstone” once more.
2. The buildings in the District were originally built for summer season use only and any effort to weatherize them for year-round use would significantly compromise their historic assets. The new Yellowstone Historic Center Museum will be built as a year-round repository for the artifacts, previous cultures, and stories of the Oregon Short Line Terminus Historic District. The site that is most appropriate to the storyline that has connections to the past without compromising the right-of-way or the existing historic structures is the site of the original rail freight buildings across Electric Street. It is presently occupied by the town maintenance buildings and yards. The rail freight buildings that were on the museum site were quite simple and industrial in nature. In order to preserve the feel of the district, the architecture of the new museum should have this very simple demeanor and dressed to have the look of an old freight building. The new museum building would not compete with the history and architectural richness of the existing historic buildings. ( see Conceptual site Plan Map)
3. **Historic/Cultural Travel Market Overview** prepared by Dean Runyon & Associates  
Historic and cultural tourism is a significant part of the U.S. travel experience and generates millions of dollars for destinations by attracting visitors who will spend money on lodging, food, entertainment, and shopping. The results of a recent survey conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIAA) and commissioned by Smithsonian Magazine, highlight the importance of historic sites and communities as a valuable product for the tourism industry. Based on these findings and overall trends in North America, this section presents important demographic, travel demand, and historic and cultural tourism trends that are important to consider with regard to the Yellowstone Historic Center’s development priorities and programming decisions.



## **National Trends**

A. Nearly six in ten (56%) of adults who traveled in the past year reported they included at least one cultural, arts, historic, or heritage activity while on a trip. The most popular historic/cultural trip activity is visiting a designated historic place or museum (66%).

B. On average, historic/cultural travel parties spend more (\$623) per trip as compared to the average U.S. trip (\$457).

C. Nearly all (90%) historic/cultural trips involve an overnight stay and are most often taken by private auto, accounting for seven in ten (68%) of all trips.

D. Development of the Yellowstone Historic Center Project would attract approximately 250,000 new visitors (20 percent of the number of visitors who through west gate park entrance) into the town of West Yellowstone. This estimate of “new visitors” reflects the potential opportunity to encourage more of the visitors traveling through West Yellowstone to spend additional time (either overnight or part of the day) which translates into additional economic activity and revenue for the community. Development of the Yellowstone Historic Center Project will result in an additional \$14.4 million in visitor spending in the town of West Yellowstone, which would add approximately \$400,000 per year to the town’s resort tax collections.

E. The Yellowstone Historic Center Project will generate an additional \$2.4 million in earnings for employees and business owners which would support an additional 200 jobs in the town of West Yellowstone.

## **The Partnership**

The vision of creating a world class transportation and visitation experience for the Hebgen Basin and Yellowstone Park will require a close working partnership between the Town of West Yellowstone and the Yellowstone Historic Center.

Decisions to further this vision will include but are not limited to the following:

- 1) Continue to preserve the integrity of the historical buildings
- 2) Protect the Union Pacific rail right-of-way from future development or encroachment.
- 3) Remove the town maintenance buildings from the Historic District
- 4) Work together to showcase the downtown 3 to 6 blocks of commercial and city properties
- 5) Work together to obtain restoration and preservation grants to protect and preserve the historic buildings and the historic district.
- 6) The Portico Study outlines a number of decisions and actions required to reach the goal of full potential, including vision statements for two, four and ten years into the future.

Progress has been made toward reaching the Ultimate Vision, but much is yet to be done.