

City employee named Western Planner of the Year

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COMMERCE CITY - Planning an event, for most people, takes a little organization. Planning a community, however, takes organization, foresight, developing and maintaining partnerships, building consensus toward a single vision, and then making that vision a reality.

Such are the successful traits of Commerce City city planner Jessica Osborne. Those traits, plus her passion and drive, are evident in the redevelopment of Derby - and they have not gone unnoticed as Osborne recently received the prestigious honor of being named Western Planner of the Year.

"I was told I was a finalist," Osborne admits, "but I was the only person in the city that didn't know that I had won. It's a real privilege."

According to the Smart Growth Web site, the Western Planner of the Year Award "honors individuals who have the fortitude, skill, and humor necessary to recognize practitioners and outspoken advocates on behalf of planning in the West." The award is presented yearly by Western Resources, Inc., and nominations are garnered from 14 western states. Osborne, who was nominated by Carol MacLennan from Tri-County Health in Adams County and James van Hemert from the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute, accepted her award at the Western Planner Conference in August.

"I wasn't surprised at all," Chris Cramer, acting director for Commerce City's Community Planning and Development Services, said of the award going to Osborne. "Jessica is really passionate about improving the environment for Commerce City residents. When you're that passionate, it's almost inevitable that you will be recognized by your peers for your work."

After a year of planning and remodeling, Derby is home to a new Resource Center that is open to the public. Designed to serve the community and act as a civic resource for the redevelopment of Derby, Osborne says the center is the first of many exciting and innovative changes.

"This award brings more of a regional level of attention to Derby," Osborne said. "Having this type of attention focused on Derby, in my opinion, is very timely and appropriate given the exciting things we have planned."

The plans include the possibility of creating an Urban Renewal Authority for Derby, submitting capital improvement project (CIP) plans for Monaco Street and 72nd Avenue, and renovating Joe Reilly Park. The city is also talking to the Housing Authority about the possibility to develop a viable residential project.

"Derby celebrates the city's strengths, and the strengths of our partnerships," Osborne said. "Working with Tri-County Health Department, Suncor the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute, and the city's consulting team of Dana Crawford and Kemp Will with Urban Neighborhoods, and Nigel Staton with Land By Design, Commerce City is committed to building a quality community for a lifetime, and I'm excited to be a catalyst for that."

The benefits extend beyond the recognition that the city is going to receive. Osborne said that the sharing of knowledge between project partners, as well as sharing the experience of the redevelopment with other cities, will pay dividends for years.

"It's a great thing that Jessica is being recognized for her dedication and effort," Cramer said. "We've all known that she's been tireless in working toward improving Commerce City and specifically Derby. So it's nice to know that other people recognize these efforts as well. It's also another example of the type of professional staff that the city has been bringing together."

"This is very prestigious, not only for her, but for the planning division and the city."

