

Assessment Findings  
& Suggestions  
June 2007



# Pincher Creek, Alberta



## INTRODUCTION

### First impressions and some ideas to increase tourism spending

In June of 2007, a Community Tourism Assessment of Pincher Creek, Alberta was conducted, and the findings were presented in a two-hour workshop. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the community – how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signs, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public wash rooms, overall appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the “Community Assessment,” we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area were “secretly shopped.”

There are two primary elements to the assessment process: First is the “Marketing Effectiveness Assessment.”

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the community or area? Once they find information, are your marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment, we assigned two (or more) people to plan trips into the general region. They did not know, in advance, who the assessment was for. They used whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just as you might do in planning a trip to a “new” area or destination.

The community has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows)
- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We tested all of these methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, searching the internet for activities, requesting and reviewing printed materials, looking for articles and third-party information, and questioning regional contacts. We reviewed both commercial and organizational Websites promoting the area, state tourism Websites, read travel articles, and looked at CAA and AAA Tour Book reviews and suggested activities.

The marketing assessment determined how visible the community was during the research, and how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the community would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have



a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip. The question on most visitors' mind is: what do you have that I can not get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities fail is when they merely provide a “list” of what the community has, whether it's truly “unique” or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, unique shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation (bird watching, hiking, biking, and boating), historic downtowns, scenic vistas, and

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so on. Of course, nearly every visitor can do this closer to home. So, what makes your community worth a special trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip, then your diversionary activities. Would to go to Anaheim, California, if Disneyland was not there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knotts Berry Farm get upset that Disneyland gets all the glory? That they are diversions? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with diversionary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities ride on those coattails.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for things that make you worth a special trip and an overnight stay. The secret shoppers look for details, details and more details. To be successful you must provide itineraries and specifics - not just generalities. Are your marketing efforts good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent several days in the community, looking at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public wash rooms, visitor information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The community benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift shops, restaurants and hotels. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost "suggestion," where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed "recommendations," as they were developed without consulting the community first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully, this assessment process will open dialogue within the community; leading it to adopt some or all of the suggestions; taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It is important to note that to increase the community's tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact. Implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the community's ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a community-wide effort,

involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and state agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) can not be successful, if the tourism effort is not community-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are painfully aware of but can not mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities that cater to their interests within your community? Does your community have truly unique attractions the visitor can not get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises. Otherwise visitors might come once, but they would not come back. It is much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. "Been there, done that" communities eventually run out of visitors and find they do not have a sustainable tourism industry, or simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the community, we have looked at all of these issues, developed some suggestions and ideas the community can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

### SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Tourism is successful when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash - often referred to as "leakage." Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive "balance of trade." Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors - providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the costs.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This does not happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it does not happen when visitors go swimming in your city's lake while sunning, and eating the lunch

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they brought from home. And it does not happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and you do want your visitors to do these – but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafés, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, hotels, and ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it. You need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities in an attractive setting. You want to give them reason to visit you in the first place.

### THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

#### 1. Visiting friends and family

The number one purpose for travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do local residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signs, gateways and advertising.

#### 2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, conventions and meetings, corporate travel and vendor travel. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do “after hours” while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or “diversions,” not because of their convention and exhibition facilities. DisneyWorld, Disneyland, San Antonio's River Walk are great examples.

#### 3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative type of visitor, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will

do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day for a total of four hours. During the other ten hours, the visitor will participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

### THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

#### 1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for services, but the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

#### 2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50 percent of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway for gas and spent an extra 30 minutes getting ice cream for the family?

If there is a strong pull, imagine the money spent by folks staying two hours; extra time spent (always) translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.

#### 3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community, you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. Those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

### THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community, when there are enough activities that appeal specifically to them. And remember - you need enough activities to keep them busy four times longer than the length of their trip.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes).

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If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay and spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip.

Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you will be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

### SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors could not care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Andy Williams, I do not care whether he is in Muskogee, Oklahoma or in Branson, Missouri. Visitors, by the millions, head to Disneyland, DisneyWorld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity or the experience and then the location.

### LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can not find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had “something for everyone?” Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance. They are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. What is in the buildings makes a downtown a destination.



The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance. They do not translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plymouth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

Thousands of communities are the “capitol” of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capitol of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capitol. Modesto is the tomato capitol. Gridley is the kiwi capitol. Oxnard is the strawberry capitol. Fallbrook is the avocado capitol. But here is the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capitol of a fruit or a vegetable?

Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. But to the vast majority of potential visitors, it is not a reason to make a special trip.



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### BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your community, if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote “outdoor recreation” as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.



If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began a Shakespeare Festival. It now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is



now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. Like, “Pinch yourself, you’re in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent.” This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you’ll see that in being unique, you will become a greater attraction.

### CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is where visitors spend the most amount of money.

Do you have a pedestrian-friendly shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian “village” including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information and wash rooms, — all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10. You start with ten destination retail shops, which includes: galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafés, bistros, delis and the like. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 PM: bars, dance clubs,

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theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop) and other evening entertainment.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors and locals, making it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to critical mass – the opportunity to have multiple choices and multiple experiences in a convenient and attractive setting.

### TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for folks to come into the community, spend money and go home. Tourism is nearly a \$650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., supporting millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry businesses are small businesses of which 90 percent have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists and crafts. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors — key in revitalizing a community’s downtown. A tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others. New businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.

### NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report can provide your community with many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the community and becomes a springboard for the community in enhancing its tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the community should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed “Community Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan” builds on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and community input to develop a unique brand and implementation

program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today.

The next steps in the planning process is interviewing local stakeholders, providing public outreach, and reviewing past and current planning efforts. This determines where you want to go as a community.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the “development” portion of the plan or the “how to get there” program; determining what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village with everyone pulling in the same direction, each with a “to-do list.”

Finally, there is the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

This Branding, Development and Marketing Plan should be an “action plan,” as opposed to a “strategic plan.” You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:

1. A brief description of the recommendation
2. Who would be charged with implementation?
3. When it would be implemented?
4. How much it will cost?
5. Where the money will come from?
6. The rationale for making the recommendation

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your community to be successful in attaining its goal of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry, becoming a more attractive and enjoyable community for both visitors and citizens.

If you move forward with the development of the Action Plan and hire outside services, always hire the most qualified team you can find (issue a request for Statement of Qualifications) and then negotiate the scope of work and cost. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the community, building its unique image in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment to live, work and visit.

## First Impressions Are Lasting Impressions

### The rule of perceived value

We all make judgments about restaurants, shops, attractions, and communities based on first impressions. We form our expectations based on what we see first. It's the only thing we have to go by unless we've heard otherwise.

The entryways into Pincher Creek give visitors their first impression and what they might expect once they arrive. They will begin to judge the character and quality of Pincher Creek by the gateways into the community. This applies to both the community and local businesses and attractions.

Would you eat at the restaurant in the photo top right? Perhaps not. It does not look inviting, comfortable, clean, or very safe. And yet this little barbecue in Texas has been written up in Gentleman's Quarterly Magazine as one of the best places to fly to, in the world, for dinner. We were as surprised as you are, but as visitors what else can we go by? Have you ever said the words "that looks like a good place to eat." Unless we know otherwise, we go by what we see. By the way, the New Zion Missionary Baptist Church Barbeque is exceptional. It's an experience, as you can imagine.

What is your impression of Lakeport? (bottom, right) Would you be surprised to find out that the photos (next page, top two photos) is downtown Lakeport? Its "gateway sign" along the highway does not do the town justice.

Many communities make the mistake of creating sign clutter at their entryways. This can include auxiliary organization signs, listings of events and other pieces of information. Sign clutter creates a less-than-desirable impression (next page, bottom left). In the case of Ellensburg, Washington (next page bottom left) they are replacing this sign with one that states "Historic Shopping District - ahead 2 miles" in essence, saying, "don't judge us yet! You still have two miles to go." If you put signs at your city limits, make sure they include directional information on "where" the main attractions are.

Your entryway gives prospective customers their first impression - they will judge the quality of Pincher Creek by the entrances. Be sure to make a good first impression, just as the small town of Oroville does with their entry sign (next page, bottom right).



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

### Note:

Overall, the first impressions coming into Pincher Creek are outstanding from just about every direction. The windmills are fun to look at from a distance, and the gateway displays (the cowboys, Aboriginals, teepees, and cattle) do a great job of “setting the stage” and creating a nice ambiance for this “western” themed area.

It definitely looks like cowboy country.

As you continue developing your visitor amenities and attractions, keep in mind the “cowboy” ambiance. Be consistent with your “theme” throughout the area. In the case of Pincher Creek, you seem to promote the area as cowboy country, but when you get downtown there’s nothing to back that up. The theme on pole banners seems to be about energy. There’s little to support the cowboy theme. Even the museum has a focus on pioneers with little mention of cowboy heritage.

This is why communities need to go through the branding process. What do you want to be known for that will differentiate you from everyone else? Once you have a solid unified direction, people will start pulling in the same direction and that will translate to your gateways, entry points and downtown.



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### Suggestion:

This monument entry sign (above) is very nice, but the display clutter should be removed. The rule of thumb for gateways signs: the simpler and cleaner, the better. Add a directional sign “Shopping District - left at light.”

The “Welcome to Pincher Creek” sign (bottom left) seems out of place. It is much too busy and does not fit the cowboy brand at all. Your welcome signs should fit the image you are hoping to portray and should promote an activity-based reason to visit downtown Pincher Creek. Hospitality is not going to cut it. Nearly every town in the world says that they are friendly or hospitable. And most of them really are, but that is not a reason to visit.

While the line “our hospitality will blow you away” is a clever play on the windy conditions, we didn’t find the hospitality in Pincher Creek any better or different than anywhere else in the region, or in Canada or the U.S. Instead, use the billboard to point out a solid reason a visitor should see downtown Pincher Creek. The Pioneer Museum? Six great restaurants? An anchor tenant (dining, a great shop, an attraction)? A weekend farmers market, in season? Take this opportunity to sell people on why they should make the turn into downtown Pincher Creek.



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### Suggestion:

The “Alberta’s History” interpretive signs are very nice and well-placed throughout the region (near, right).

The empty services signs give the impression that there are no businesses in Pincher Creek - no restaurants or lodging. Work at getting businesses on those signs. It’s possible these were just put up while we were assessing the area. It’s important to make sure they are full so that it looks like the community has a lot to offer.

This is not a bad first impression (bottom, left), but not all that impressive either. Unfortunately, it goes “downhill” from here.



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### Suggestion:

“Downtown” Pincher Creek is a lot like other strip mall and auto-related towns, i.e. Claresholm. There is nothing cowboy about this (right).

The heart of downtown (bottom left) gives a good first impression: lots of shops, clean sidewalks and some trees. It looks nice. We had high hopes as we drove into downtown.

The murals are very nice and reinforce the “Cowboy Country” theme of the town although the facades don’t really reflect any theme but are a mixed bag of historic, 50s, 60s and 70s architecture.

### Suggestion:

Consider adding interpretive signs (bottom right mural) explaining what the “pinchers” were used for and how they were found. Every mural should tell a story, which should be written on an accompanying interpretive panel or display.

Stories are an important ingredient in supporting the brand and history of the town and endear visitors to the town.



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### Suggestion:

Explain the scenes in interpretive displays, letting visitors (and locals) know what each scene displays and when it took place. Stories help visitors feel connected to the town. They get visitors to “adopt” the town and the lifestyle while here.

While the murals are nice, they send mixed messages as to the brand of the town. While some date back to the ranching (top right) and historical themes, some are more modern (top left) and don't seem to fit. Find an era and have every mural promote that one era, or theme.

The “windows” (left) are an excellent way to turn a nondescript building into an attraction in terms of appeal. Once again, perhaps a story can go with each window scene to make it fun and engaging.

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### Suggestion:

Curb appeal can account for 70 percent of sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, golf courses.

Add trees, landscaping, hanging baskets, and color to the motel (below, left). This motel would benefit from façade improvements and landscaping to give it a “face lift.” From a first impressions standpoint, it looks like a low-budget, low-end motel, which may or may not be the case. Does it “look” like a nice place to stay? Not really.

Note the restaurant (bottom right). Would you want to eat there? This is not in Pincher Creek but demonstrates how we decide on places to eat or stay.

### Suggestion:

The pincher monument is great. Add an interpretive sign to explain their significance and tell the story. The more stories you tell, the longer you keep people engaged and that can translate to additional spending and time in the community. It also creates photo opportunities, which then attract other visitors to the community.

The beautification at this spot and at other city parks and display areas are excellent. Great job!



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### Suggestion:

Would you stay at the Big Pillow Motel? (top right) located in rural Nevada. It has no curb appeal and looks un-cared for. Curb appeal counts for a lot with golf courses, lodging, and restaurants.

The Parkway Motel gives a very good impression from the outside (left 3 photos). It easily looks like the place to stay in Pincher Creek.

The sign is well done, the teasers are good, and the landscaping is excellent. It looks like the people really care. Visitors judge the interior by their impressions of the exterior. It looks very well maintained.

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### Suggestion:

Curb appeal is critical for golf courses, and an entry sign is the customer's first introduction. It makes a statement about the quality of the course. What is your first impression of the Jackpot Golf Course in Nevada from their highway sign? (top right) Probably not very favorable. But take a look at their entry sign and clubhouse (bottom two photos.) They need to replace their highway sign with one like their entry sign. Once again, we judge the book by the cover as visitors. Particularly when it comes to golf courses, restaurants, hotels, and retail shops.

The golf course sign top right tells visitors "This is a second-rate golf course - cheap," which is not true. Would you pay \$100 to play 18 holes here if the only thing you saw was the billboard (upper right)? Would you pay \$50? How about \$10? Once you see the clubhouse and sign AT the golf course (bottom two photos), your perception changes and it suddenly looks like a great place to play a round of golf and perhaps one worth that \$100. The fact is, it is a stunning course, but green fees are in the \$40 range - a bargain. But every year the billboard stays up, the visitor, public play, revenues go down.



## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



### Suggestion:

The golf course sign top left tells visitors “This is a second-rate golf course - cheap.” Which is not true. It would be best to remove this sign, until the course is able to put up a nice readerboard and monument sign like the one shown below left. Make a statement. Perceived value translates to increased play, increased visits for food and other amenities, and creates stronger community pride.

Once approaching the golf course, the entryway landscaping (below) is outstanding. A good first impression when approaching the clubhouse.



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### Suggestion:

Unfortunately, the first good impression disappears quickly (bottom left). Consider adding a welcome sign, rather than just listing the rules and regulations. Public play? How many holes? Is there a driving range?

Put the boarded up areas to work. Screen the dumpsters and “junk,” and use the screening to provide information for visitors about the course. Is this the back? (top right) Where is the front door - the entrance to the club house?

Consider adding planters with shrubs, trees, flowers. Use the readerboard to promote anything in Pincher Creek, modernize the signs, remove the trash and weeds. (bottom right) Is this really the golf course entrance (bottom right)? A very poor first impression.

### In a nutshell:

The entrances into the community and valley area are exceptional, but the town does not “deliver on the promise” - except for the efforts of the city.

The business community, for the most part, is doing little or nothing to bring in business or to convince visitors to “come on in.” And they have the most to gain from the city’s beautification and marketing efforts.



## Invest in Beautification

### Nothing sells like beautiful places

#### Suggestion

Curb appeal is an investment with tremendous return, and can account for 70 percent of sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, resorts, and golf courses. (This needs to sink in.)

LaRue in Whistler, BC is a wonderful example of creating a beautiful place. Although Whistler is a ski resort, it now does more business in the summer than the winter, and their beautification efforts are a big part of the reason.

Sisters, Oregon, (top right) has created stunningly beautiful streetscapes, and now can boast of having the highest retail sales per capita of any city in Oregon. Not bad for a mountain town of 1,100 residents.

Studies have shown that the ambiance created by street trees (bottom right) even makes customers willing to pay more for products and services.

Adding flowers, potted plants, water features, hanging baskets creates a beautiful downtown that people love to frequent, and love to return to. People love being in beautiful places. They will spend more time there, and that translates to spending more money.



## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

### Suggestion

Add “softscapes” throughout downtown - soften the transition from storefronts to concrete and asphalt. This harsh environment is not appealing. In the case of the restaurant (top right) we assume it's permanently closed.

The planters (bottom right) are a good start. Add hanging baskets and lush foliage. Make it shine. Give the building some appeal, perhaps fitting a theme, once the town decides on one. Keep the planters painted and looking new.

### Suggestion

Curb appeal is one of the things that will help a visitor determine whether or not a business is actually still in business. Note how the restaurant (bottom left) has added outdoor seating and planters. This makes the restaurant much more inviting and tells us instantly that it is still in business.

The property owners in Pincher Creek need to add some color and life downtown. It seems generally drab and uninviting. Make it a place people will want to “hang out” in. Remember, if locals won't hang out downtown, neither will visitors.



## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS



### Suggestion

Add benches set against the buildings, planters, and decorative trash receptacles. (near left) Note what a difference the planter barrels, baskets with flowers, decorative lighting, and decorative signage makes in the photo far left, taken in Leavenworth, Washington. They placed old wine barrels every two meters along the curb, added additional planters and hanging baskets against the facades. This creates a “sense of place” that draws both local residents and visitors to downtown. The most successful small communities in Canada you will find are beautiful - 12 months of the year.

Extend window displays to outdoor spaces as in the photo below left. This pulls customers into the store. In this case, in Blaine, Washington near the British Columbia border, the merchant spends 20 minutes each morning setting up the displays. The effort dramatically increased her sales, pulling customers into an otherwise relatively nondescript store. Blackburn Jewellers (below), understands the importance of beautification and curb appeal. But even they can add planters to soften the transition between facade and sidewalks.



## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

### Suggestion:

To bring downtown to life, add benches, planters, hanging baskets. Add color to buildings and replace 1950s signs with signage that will reflect the overall theme.

The photos on this page were taken in Jonesborough, Tennessee in October. This small town's merchants, (the town is about the size of Pincher Creek), have done an outstanding job making the town a destination for both locals and visitors. Does this look like a nice place to spend some time?

Merchants should work together to create a "buying cooperative" for planters, topsoil, seasonal plantings, blade signs, and other improvements that would make Pincher Creek a "destination city" for the tens of thousands of visitors who pass through the area each year.

The potential for the downtown is outstanding.



## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

### Suggestion:

The photos to the right are both in Neenah, Wisconsin. Note how the streetscape in the top photo is clean, and relatively nice looking, but how the addition of planters filled with blooming color (bottom right) and more street trees make the streetscape much more attractive. They saw their retail sales in that block increase three times faster than in other non-landscaped blocks of downtown.

The merchant of the shop (bottom left) has created a display that makes the store nearly irresistible. This is a great example for shop owners to emulate. Yes, it takes about ten minutes each morning to set the plants outside, but the results are well worth the effort.

People are drawn to beautiful places, and will spend more time there. And that translates to increased sales.



## ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

### Suggestion:

The Swiss Alpine restaurant was recommended by locals, but without that information, we would have passed on by (right). Add more hanging baskets and planters to make the business really stand out.

What is the “Long Branch”? (bottom, left) We thought it was the Swiss Alpine. Pick one name and go with it. Pick a single theme. Signs should be consistent - you do not want to confuse visitors. The “old west” style sign doesn’t fit the Swiss menu or theme.

Making downtown beautiful does not just mean landscaping. Façade enhancements or decorations can add a tremendous lure to retail shops and restaurants too. Note the entrance to this restaurant (bottom right), taken in Banff.

### In a nutshell:

Develop a façade improvement program - once you have a “brand” or theme for downtown. Then create a merchant-driven beautification program to create consistency and a co-op bulk-buy program for implementing the effort.

