

I-25 CORRIDOR

Developer-friendly policies help Johnstown go big-time

I-25 corridor propels growth for the town that won't stay small

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JOHNSTOWN — It's the little town that decided not to be little anymore.

And with Interstate 25 just a few miles to the west, the logical and fastest way to achieve that goal was to start annexing land along the state's premier north-south transportation artery.

Lots of land.

Since 1999, the town of Johnstown has annexed about 2,000 acres adjacent to and within one mile either side of I-25, from County Road 56 on the south to U.S. Highway 34 on the north.

"Many years ago the elected officials here said if they wanted to do anything with the town they needed to go to Main Street Colorado," said John Franklin, Johnstown town planner, referring to nearby I-25.

County Road 56 marks south border

Franklin said the town decided to annex

the 120-acre southwest corner of the I-25/County Road 56 interchange when it was approached by the landowner several years ago. Directly across the interstate to the east lies a parcel owned by Loveland-based McWhinney Enterprises. Neither property has been developed.

Franklin said the Johnstown parcel is zoned residential but the landowner has discussed rezoning it, and the town's master plan calls for the area to be zoned commercial. One hurdle to development is wastewater treatment, Franklin said, and McWhinney and the town of Berthoud just to the west are working on a sewer plan that could eventually pave the way for development of the interchange.

"We're hopeful the economy will get better and development start to take place," Franklin said. "We look south and see a steady march north up the (I-25) corridor from Denver."

Heading north to the I-25/County Road 60 interchange, Johnstown has annexed about 160 acres that are in various stages of development. On the northwest corner is the I-25 Gateway Center, a light industrial area with commercial and mixed-use areas adjacent to the highway. Across the interstate on the northeast corner is the Pratt

See **FRONTAGE, 19**



Chris Jeracki, Northern Colorado Business Report

SLIDING TO THE NORTH — The intersection of Interstate 25 and U.S. Highway 34 marks the current northernmost boundary of the rapidly expanding town of Johnstown, which annexed the southeast corner of 2534 West in November, bringing the total acres annexed since 1999 to nearly 2,000.

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John Franklin, town planner
Johnstown

FRONTAGE, from 15

Technology Center, a mixed-use commercial and employment area owned by Pratt Management Group in Longmont.

Franklin said nothing's happening there yet but added, "We know the Pratts are actively marketing it, so it's just a matter of time."

The interchange's southeast and southwest corners are not yet annexed into the town, but Franklin said discussions are ongoing with landowners. He said the southwest corner is of particular interest to the town. "They haven't petitioned for annexation, but we're definitely interested

in bringing it in and having it develop."

Just north of the Pratt Center on the east side of I-25 is Great Plains Village, a 160-acre parcel zoned for commercial on the western half nearest the interstate and multi-family residential on the eastern half.

Johnson's in Johnstown

A bit farther north on the east side of I-25 is Johnson's Corner, the iconic truck stop that's part of a 250-acre parcel annexed in 1999. The area is zoned for commercial and light industrial. Franklin said Johnstown is also interested in annexing land on the west side of the interstate but so far the opportunity hasn't been there.

A little farther north is County Road 402, which turns into County Road 18 across I-25 to the east. Franklin said Johnstown has annexed both the northeast and southeast corners of the intersection. On the southeast corner is the Village at Johnstown, a mixed-use, commercial zone next to the interstate with a residential component about a half mile to the east.

On the northeast corner is a 40-acre parcel called the 402 Exchange Business Park, which Franklin said has an application under review for a preliminary platting for commercial development. While there's nothing yet happening on the interchange's west side, Franklin said Johnstown is "getting ready to serve properties west of I-25."

The town is building a wastewater treatment plant along the Big Thompson River near Larimer County Road 3 on the east side of I-25. "That's one of the support facilities for our northern push," he said.

About a quarter mile north is Thompson River Ranch, a 661-acre parcel annexed in 1999 that's primarily residential but also has a commercial component, Franklin said. "The first filing, which is under development, is 237 acres platted with probably 30 to 40 homes right now," he added. The project will eventually have about 489 single-family homes.

2534: activity central

Johnstown's northern boundary along I-25 is at the U.S. Highway 34 interchange, where probably the most development activity is under way. The town just annexed the southeast corner of 2534 West in November, a parcel that's zoned commercial.

"We're not sure specifically what will go in there, but we're hoping for some premier development in there with good I-25 access," Franklin said, noting that could include a hotel or convention center.

Farther east on the south side of U.S. 34 is more annexed land. "We're sliding into 2534," he said. "We've got several new buildings completed and some under construction and residential construction planned on a bluff above the (Big Thompson) river. Those are going to be some fancy shacks."

Franklin is referring to Thompson Crossing, a residential development owned by Hartford Homes in Windsor.

Johnstown's also annexed a 450-acre parcel north of U.S. 34 just east of County Road 3 called The Miracle on 34 annexation, another planned Hartford Homes development that will have about 1,000 sin-

gle-family homes.

Gary Hoover, owner of Hartford Homes Inc., said he didn't have a choice on whether to annex Thompson Crossing into Johnstown but he did with the Miracle on 34 project. And it was not a hard choice to make, he said.

"Johnstown is just an infinitely more pleasant bureaucracy to deal with," he said. "To me, it wasn't even a choice."

Franklin admits Johnstown has acquired a reputation with local developers as a friendly place to do business. "We have received a lot of proposals in the last three to four years," he said. "Are we development-friendly? That's what they tell us and we think we are."

Franklin said the town has adopted aggressive annexation policies and doesn't think twice about crossing the "I-25 line."

"It's just a line," he said. "It's an opportunity for the Johnstown folks and if we don't do it somebody else will."

Franklin said the town has grown quickly in the last decade and now has about 8,200 residents in its eight and a half square miles. "We've been growing about 1,000 people a year, although we did slow down a little bit this year."

Franklin said Johnstown is in the enviable position of being able to grow and add tax revenues by annexing along a nearby interstate and not really affect the residents of the town's core area.

"It's a rare event — we can actually regionally compete with development and get it and people living around the downtown don't even notice it. You don't know that it's actually going crazy."