

# Engine of industry sputters along *Industrial development lags in Kittitas County*

By MIKE GALLAGHER

*Editor's note: This is the final article in a three-part series profiling the Kittitas County economy.*

Industrial development in Ellensburg has an undistinguished past and an uncertain future.

There's a little more substance in the Upper County where Shoemaker Manufacturing and Zachlift provide an industrial base in Cle Elum's east end. But even in the Upper County, the tale pretty much starts and stops there.

In Ellensburg, industrial development is limited to Twin City Foods and an assortment of small-scale operations, according to Mike Smith, senior planner for the city of Ellensburg. "Our industrial development is ag-based. It's all we've really known," Smith said. "We've never really made the transition to something else."

The city last revised its industrial zoning in 1995. "At that time we located it to the west," Smith said.

A portion of the west Ellensburg property the city owns borders Dolarway Road and is zoned industrial. Generally, the industrial zone follows the railroad corridor and Industrial Way. There is also some industrial zoning on Dolarway.

Smith said much of the land along the railroad corridor is not really usable. "We're going through the comprehensive plan review process now," Smith said. "We don't really know where we're going to end up with industrial zoning."

City leaders are addressing retail issues first in the comp plan process, and Smith said decisions about commercial development will influence where industrial development is sited.

## **Impact of industrial**

Right now, industrial development has little impact on the Lower Valley. "It's a major part of a tax base and we don't have it," Smith said.

What an industry can mean can be seen in Cle Elum where Shoemaker is one of the largest private employers in the county.

To the question of what generates more revenue for a city, retail or industrial development, Ellensburg City Manager Ted Barkley said there is no clear answer. "Most economic studies lump industrial and retail together," Barkley said. Barkley said industrial development creates wealth in the community, while retail "tends to move it around."

Both retail and industrial financially benefit the city more than residential development. "The tax structure is geared toward putting the burden for services on industrial and commercial development," Barkley said.

## **Promise for the future**

Debbie Strand, executive director of the Economic Development Group of Kittitas County, said light industrial companies have an interest in locating in Ellensburg. "We are attractive to people, and people are considering the area," Strand said. "There's just very little industrial land ready to go."

Smith said the city hopes to address that issue with its land on Dolarway Road. "We're looking to develop it into short plats," Smith said.

Ellensburg's situation is often contrasted with that of Moses Lake, which has a port district that markets its airport with one of the longest runways in the nation (the former Larson Air Force base) and has buildings set up for industrial uses that can be leased.

Craig Baldwin, executive director of the Moses Lake Port District, said he does not see the two cities in competition. "We've got different types of industrial development. A lot of it is aviation related," Baldwin said. "Just getting businesses to move into this region helps everybody."

Port districts have more flexibility than a municipality in offering enticements to businesses. Kittitas County once had port district. Strand said she has been told Kittitas is the only county in the state to ever disband a port district.

Strand said there is a challenge locally to bring in the types of industry that county residents say they'd like to see develop. She said residents express a desire to see smaller companies locate in the area, but that those companies typically need to move into an established building that meets their needs. It's the large companies that can afford to build a million-dollar structure.

Without the ability to put up buildings, it's hard to attract small manufacturers," Strand said. Strand said she doesn't see a conflict with the burgeoning office development on Dolarway and industrial uses. She said many modern industries locate in structures that look like office buildings.

When industrial development comes up before the city Planning Commission, Strand said her organization will be an active participant. She said the first step is to determine what people want and don't want.

We're going to advocate considering all the options," Strand said. "We're going to need to be creative because we don't have all the tools our counterparts have. We need to form public-private partnerships in order to do some aggressive things."

## **Airport option**

One of Ellensburg's more promising industrial development sites is not in the city, but Bowers Field, located in the city's urban growth area. "The airport is the one we're focused on as a valuable industrial site. It's in the county's jurisdiction, but it's in Ellensburg's UGA," said Darryl Piercy, director of Kittitas County Development Services.

Piercy said the county's role in industrial development is limited because industry needs urban services - water and sewer. Piercy said the airport will become more viable with the completion of the Bender Road project next year, providing better access. "It makes access to the site more viable for industrial use than trucks driving through the residential area," Piercy said.

The other prime industrial spot in the county is the former Fulleton-Pacific property on U.S. Highway 97 near Interstate 90's west interchange.

There are other scattered pieces of industrial land in the county, such as the old Ronald veneer plant site and the wrecking yard off Canyon Road.

Jan Sharar, county planner, said the county will update its comprehensive plan in 2006, and part of that process is looking at industrial zoning to determine if there is sufficient industrial land.

### **Cle Elum's Situation**

Much like Ellensburg, Cle Elum has an industrial zone that follows the railroad right-of-way, but that zone is constrained by the Yakima River and Cle Elum's sewage treatment plant and lagoons. "Right now it seems like enough. We haven't had a push for industrial development," said Gregg Hall, Cle Elum's city manager and planner.

Hall said a landowner is trying to develop a 12-acre industrial site. "It's in the process for environmental review for industrial development," Hall said.

Cle Elum also has an 80-acre business park on land owned by Suncadia. Hall said light industry, such as a high-tech company, could locate there.