

# Cortez Heart and Soul receives Colorado APA Merit Award



## ***Cortez Heart and Soul* Receives Colorado APA Merit Award**

Merit Award: Community Engagement

***Tracie Hughes***  
***City of Cortez***



The Colorado Chapter of the American Planning

Association awarded Cortez *Heart & Soul* a Merit Award for Community Engagement in recognition of outstanding professional achievement. The *Heart & Soul* of Cortez project was a community-driven process that identified the shared values of the residents of Cortez and the surrounding area. The project followed the Orton Family Foundation's Community Heart & Soul™ model. The initial intent was to identify values to be integrated in to a values-based land-use code and to compel local decision making to support the values. A team of volunteers from the community, called the Community Advisory Team (CAT) worked alongside city staff to conduct the process. The process promoted inclusive community engagement by seeking to reach a broad range of community members, and employed a variety of activities to gather information, such as personal interviews and storytelling sessions, a photo contest, neighborhood block parties, numerous community conversations, and a survey targeted at youth. A web-based platform gathered additional input from community members. Eight value statements and a community action plan were drafted as a result of the hard work of individual community members, the CAT team, and staff. Results of the project included a land-use code values alignment analysis completed by University of Colorado students, youth seats with voting rights on advisory boards, a citywide beautification plan, and a land-use code update that is underway. In addition, the outcomes and practices used during the project provided valuable feedback for the Orton Family Foundation's Community Heart & Soul method, benefiting other communities conducting similar processes.