RESOURCE TEAM ASSESSMENT REPORT

For

BIG TIMBER/ SWEET GRASS COUNTY
MONTANA

OCTOBER 7 – 8, 2014

INTRODUCTION

It was a privilege for the Big Timber/Sweet Grass County Resource Team to spend time in your area. Thank you for your hospitality, your time, and for sharing with the team the vision you have for your home.

Before digging into the report itself, I would like to thank Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC) for its support of the Montana Economic Developers Association (MEDA). It is a partnership between MDOC and MEDA that makes Resource Team projects available across the state.

Special thanks are due to Sweet Grass County, the City of Big Timber, and the Sweet Grass Chamber of Commerce along with Triangle Communications and Beartooth RC&D. Representatives of these entities served as champions behind this project and will continue to be involved with the process through activities detailed in this report. Special recognition is due Luke Walawander, Beartooth RC&D, Page Dringman, City/County Planning; Monte Koch, Opportunity Bank; Anne Boothe, Triangle Communications; Susan Mossness, Sweet Grass County; and Justin Todd, Sweet Grass Chamber of Commerce. In addition, the Big Timber/Sweet Grass County Resource Team Assessment could not have happened without the support of Luke Walawander and Beartooth RC&D which serves as the Certified Regional Development Corporation for the area.

The Big Timber/Sweet Grass County Resource Team Assessment had many sponsors that contributed to the success to date including Opportunity Bank, Citizens Bank, Sonny Todd Real Estate, Triangle Communications, ML Properties, The Land Brokers Real Estate, American Bank, Iron Star Pizza, Super 8 and the Grand Hotel.

Finally, I applaud each and every team member that dedicated hours of work in order to participate on the team: Gloria Hawkins and Michael Dann, MT USDA/RD; Billie Lee, Lake County Community Development Corp.; Stuart Leidner, Prospera Business Network; Tara Mastel, Jefferson County Development Corp.; and Karyl Tobel, MT Dept. of Commerce.

Each team member’s contact information is provided in the following report. Please feel free to call on any of us for additional information or support. It would be our pleasure.

The stage is now set for the future of Big Timber/Sweet Grass County. There are a number of short term and long term accomplishable recommendations that the resource team has provided in this report. Each of you individually must decide what it is that you want to do—that kind of project you want to tackle. It is also important for the entire community and county to be involved in finding ways to accomplish its goals. A few celebrations at the successful conclusion of an activity that has involved a large number of citizens will lead to a feeling of accomplishment that will carry over into other activities. Look through the suggestions, pick out one, and get started. It can be done. It is your choice, your decision; you can do it!

Gloria O’Rourke  
MEDA Team Coordinator  

Big Timber/Sweet Grass County Resource Team Assessment October 7 – 8, 2014
PROCESS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THIS REPORT

According to Montana Department of Commerce program requirements, Resource Team Assessments are to be approved through the community’s Certified Regional Development Corporation (CRDC). The CRDC for Sweet Grass County is Beartooth RC&D, with Luke Walawander serving as Economic Development Director. Three hosts including the City of Big Timber, Sweet Grass County and Sweet Grass Chamber initiated the request for a Resource Team to visit. Luke Walawander, Page Dringman, Monte Koch, Anne Boothe, Justin Todd, and Susan Mossness served as liaisons and coordinators for the team’s visit. Montana Economic Developers Association (MEDA) provided staff support for the coordination of a resource team to assist Big Timber/Sweet Grass County in evaluating its assets and challenges and in developing suggestions for improving the environment, social and economic future of the area.

Under the direction of Luke, Page, Monte, Anne, Justin and Susan an agenda was developed, logistics arranged, as well as budgeting and publicity for the assessment. Resource Team members were selected to visit, interview citizens, businesses and community leaders to develop options for projects for Sweet Grass County. The team members were selected based on their fields of expertise that local officials indicated would likely be needed to respond to the problem or project areas identified.

Throughout the Resource Team on October 7 - 8, over 200 people attended listening sessions and made comments. All notes from all listening sessions as well as those submitted via email or handwritten are included in this report. The team was available for listening to the following groups: McLeod, Agriculture (in Melville), Business and Tourism; Churches, Non-Profits and Service Organizations; Law Enforcement, EMS/Fire, and Governmental Entities; Senior Citizens and Healthcare; Arts, Museums, Entertainment and Other Community Organizations; Mining, Energy, Utilities, Technology, Infrastructure; Student Government Class; and Administrators and Teachers.

Each participant was asked to respond to three questions designed to begin communication and discussion and to serve as a basis for developing recommendations in this report. The three questions were:

- What do you think are the major strengths and assets in Big Timber/Sweet Grass County?
- What do you think are the major problems and challenges in Big Timber/Sweet Grass County?
- What projects would you like to see completed in two, five, ten and twenty years in Big Timber/Sweet Grass County?

Upon completion of the interviews, the team met in a work session to compare notes and share comments. The team then agreed that each team member would carefully analyze the things said, synthesize what they heard with their knowledge of programs and resources, prepare their notes and suggestions, and forward these items to be combined into this final report to the people of Sweet Grass County.

A preliminary oral report and a summary of group recommendations were presented to the people of Big Timber/Sweet Grass County the evening of October 8th.

Following the oral report, this formal written report was prepared and is presented to the people of Big Timber/Sweet Grass County. The report is available on the MEDA website at http://www.medamembers.org under the Resources tab.

A Town Hall Meeting is planned for November 18th at 6:30pm in the library. The purpose of the meeting will be to briefly review the report, identify projects, set priorities and create working groups for action.
BIG TIMBER RESOURCE TEAM
BIG TIMBER, MONTANA

October 7 – 8, 2014

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Big Timber Resource Team Assessment Schedule

**October 7, 2014:**
Tour: start at 1 p.m., travel to a couple Big Timber businesses and loop through town

2:30-travel to entrance of East Boulder Mine-just to see location, then return to McLeod for a listening session

Tour of the area.

Travel to Bill’s Place in Melville for dinner (6 p.m.) and agriculture listening session 6-8 p.m.

Return to Big Timber for the night

**October 8, 2014:**
6:30-8:30: Breakfast and listening session with Business and Tourism

8:35-9:35-listening session with Churches, Non-profits and Service Organizations

9:40-10:40- listening session with Law Enforcement/EMS/Fire/ any governmental entities

10:40-11:10 Break

11:10-12:40: Lunch at the Senior Citizens Center and listening session with Seniors/Healthcare

12:45-1:45: Split into two Listening Sessions:

A. Listening Session with Arts/Museum/Entertainment/Other community orgs.

B. listening session with Mining/Energy/Utilities/Tech/Infrastructure

1:45-2:45 MEDA work session

2:45-3:40-listening session with American Government Class students

3:45-4:45 listening session with Administrators/Teachers with snacks and beverages

5:00 – 7:00 MEDA work session and dinner at Iron star

7:00-Town Hall Meeting
BIG TIMBER RESOURCE TEAM ASSESSMENT – MAIN ISSUES

This list is a summary compilation from the Listening Sessions held in Big Timber, McLeod and Melville, Montana, October 7th and 8th. Over 200 people either submitted comments or were interviewed and responded to three questions: What are the strengths and assets of Big Timber/Sweet Grass County; What are the problems and challenges of Big Timber/Sweet Grass County; What projects would you like to see or what vision do you have for Big Timber/Sweet Grass County in the next 2, 5, 10, 20 years.

MAIN TOPIC: BUSINESS RECRUITMENT AND EXPANSION
ISSUES:
• Downtown business development
• Business diversification
• Business recruitment
• Value Added Ag Opportunities
• Distribution of local products
• Regulatory challenges
• Transfer of Wealth

MAIN TOPIC: WORKFORCE
ISSUES:
• Education
• Workforce training, recruitment, retention
• Youth
• Medical
• Alternative industries
• Housing
• Pay scale

MAIN TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE
ISSUES:
• Sidewalks
• Pedestrian Safety – school drop off and sky bridge
• Bike paths/Walking trails
• Utilities
• Water/Sewer
• Broadband
• Cellular/Mobile Connectivity
• Storm water system

MAIN TOPIC: MARKETING
ISSUES:
• Marketing of Big Timber
• Signage to find McLeod
• Signage off of interstate
• Recreation and tourism
• Increased awareness of the arts community
• Expansion of civic events

MAIN TOPIC: COMMUNITY SERVICES
ISSUES:
- Medical Center expansion
- Emergency equipment upgrade and replacement
- Emergency training funds
- Equipment and evidence storage
- Senior Citizens Center- improvements
- Youth Activities/Center

MAIN TOPIC: NATURAL RESOURCES
ISSUES:
- Mutual respect - there is no one use that is mutually exclusive
- Work together to solve natural resource issues
- Renewable Energy Resources: hydro, wind
- Retention of PILT and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funds

MAIN TOPIC: CATALYST PROJECTS
ISSUES:
- Old High School
- Auditorium/Performance hall
- Indoor Pool
- Jail
- Cowboy Hall of Fame
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Next Generation Group 20’s – 40’s
INTRODUCTION:

The Big Timber community and Sweet Grass County have many assets to be proud of. Situated between the Crazy Mountains and the Gallatin National Forest, the City of Big Timber enjoys pristine countryside and many recreational amenities. With close-proximity to the freeway and future home for the Cowboy Hall of Fame, Big Timber is bound to be a destination for enthusiastic outdoor recreationists and those appreciative of an attractive, friendly small town.

People consistently stated that Big Timber is a safe community with low crime rate, and has many family-owned businesses and numerous good places to eat! I can add that Big Timber has caring citizens, a clean downtown, lively Senior Citizen’s Center, great school system with devoted teachers, busy medical center, active churches, beautiful library, and blessed to have a core of volunteers ready to tackle local projects.

Comments heard:

“People come together to help everyone – there’s lots of love.”
“People show-up for a cause.”
“People like to get things done.”

MAIN TOPIC: BUSINESS RECRUITMENT AND EXPANSION / INFRASTRUCTURE

Issues:
- Downtown Business Development
- Business Diversification

Recommendations:
At nearly every community input meeting, citizens expressed concern over the lack of local shopping loyalty, condition of downtown business district, empty store fronts, and getting store owners to work together to promote local business.

Downtown Revitalization Plan
Through Beartooth RC&D, the community may consider applying for planning grants to hire a consultant to complete a downtown revitalization plan. This plan could include an assessment of existing businesses, potential business opportunities, needed infrastructure improvements (store signage, sidewalks, streetlights, etc.), landscaping, parking, and historic preservation.

This plan could include an outline for revitalization of the downtown core, leverage of public/private investment, non-vehicle modes of transportation (walk and bike paths), removal of blight, and affordable housing for mixed use real estate. It was expressed several times at the community meetings about the need for a place that youth could use for after school entertainment. A youth center or teen center could be considered as part of the revitalization plan.

It is understood that the City has a current Capital Improvements Plan that was completed within the last five years. The downtown revitalization plan should include specific improvements related to water, wastewater, and storm drains for the downtown core, if not already included in the City’s overall plan.

The Montana Department of Commerce has two programs that can assist with downtown revitalization studies – the Community Development Block Grant – Economic Development (CDBG-ED) Program (planning grants), and the Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund (BSTF) Program (Category II grants). Both programs can be used to hire a professional to complete this type of plan that would include a list of priorities, cost of implementation, and timelines for completion.

**Financing Downtown Improvements**

**Downtown Business District Revolving Loan Fund**

Once the plan is in place, the City should consider a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) through Beartooth RC&D specifically for downtown business improvements. RLFS are started with a loan for a specific business improvement. Repayments from that initial loan would be deposited into a Revolving Loan Fund and made available to other downtown businesses for business improvements. Improvements could include new doors, thresholds, windows, sidewalk repairs, signage or other necessary improvements that would enhance local business and increase downtown consumer traffic.

The Community Development Block Grant – Economic Development (CDBG-ED) Program can provide the initial low-interest loan financing to assist a specific business with needed improvements. In turn, that business will need to retain or create jobs during the contract period. Loan repayments would be deposited into an account for relending activities to other businesses. The CDBG-ED program could be used as gap financing ideally with participation from the local banking community, and equity from the business owner.

**Downtown Infrastructure Improvements**

The City could apply for a transportation grant from the Community Transportation Enhancement Program for overall downtown improvements including landscaping, streetscape improvements (period lighting, sidewalk paving, benches, planting containers,
decorative walls and walkways, signs, public art, and historical markers), for historic preservation projects, scenic or historic highway signage, and aesthetic improvements, and other activities related to strengthening the cultural and environmental aspects of the state’s highway system.

Water, wastewater, and storm drain improvements can be financed through the Treasure State Endowment Program or the CDBG Public Facilities Program. Improvements should show community-wide benefit through these programs, and both programs are often used at the same time to finance community infrastructure improvements. The CDBG Program focuses on benefit to low and moderate income persons.

If the City has a business that is not already being served by City infrastructure and the business needs those services in order to expand operations or even maintain operations, the CDBG-ED Program could assist with those hook-up costs, or costs of water or wastewater improvements or extensions. If the infrastructure improvements would be owned by the City or County, the CDBG-ED Program could award a grant for the improvements and the business would only need to document the job retention or creation during the contract period – there would be no loan to the business that would require repayments.

**Assisting Businesses Development**

If businesses are considering modifications in their marketing or business plans and need assistance, there is help available through the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Billings. The SBDC can provide guidance and training to businesses that need to create business plans, need assistance with business accounting, counseling, and other related services.

A business considering an expansion of existing services or expansion into a new market that would result in the creation of new jobs may consider an application for assistance with hiring a consultant to create this type of professional business plan that would in part be financed with a planning grant. If the business needs a grant or low interest loan for needed equipment, working capital, construction costs, or job training – the same programs can assist with those capital expenses.

In addition to local bank options, financing for business expenses can be obtained through the Beartooth RC&D and the Montana Department of Commerce economic development programs.

**Recommended Technical Assistance Resources:**

Certified Regional Development Office:
Luke Walawander, Executive Director
Beartooth RC&D
110 South Main Street
PO Box 180
Joliet, MT 59041-0180
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Small Business Development Center:
Dena Johnson, SBDC Director
Big Sky Economic Development Authority
222 North 32nd Street
Suite 200
Billings, MT 59101
PH: 406-254-6014
Email: Dena@bigskyeda.org
Website: http://www.bigskyeconomicdevelopment.org/

**Funding Opportunities for Planning Grants, Business Loans and Grants:**
Debra Demarais, Section Manager
Community Development Block Grant – Economic Development Program
Montana Department of Commerce
301 South Park Ave.
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Email: mwherley@mt.gov
Website: www mdt me gov/business/ctep/

**Community Infrastructure Improvements:**
Jennifer Olson, Bureau Chief
Treasure State Endowment Program
Community Development Block Grant – Public Facilities Program
Montana Department of Commerce
MAIN TOPIC: MARKETING

Issues: Marketing of Big Timber

Recommendations:
Citizens described local events held at the fairgrounds, parades, concerts, and other promotional events that did not have the level of local support that was needed, or did not have the frequency or advertising to bring in adequate participation from neighboring communities.

Branding and Marketing Plan
To recruit businesses and bring more consumer traffic to Big Timber for vacations, recreational activities, civic events, and museums, the City should consider a city branding and marketing plan. Planning grants could be applied for to hire an experienced consultant to work on a professional branding campaign for Big Timber. This campaign should include community input and meetings to select a brand focus and the development of a community marketing plan. With a brand, the City would have a theme for erecting street banners, developing promotional materials, and advertising to attract people to Big Timber.

Big Timber has an ideal location - with two large metropolitan areas within one hour of Big Timber that offer a consistent supply of potential tourists that only need to travel a short distance, branding would help recruit visitors from these areas to enjoy recreation, events, downtown shopping, and overnight stays. Recruitment efforts should include the newspaper, Internet, Facebook, Twitter, updated community calendar, and the Chamber of Commerce.

The Montana Department of Commerce can assist with planning grants to develop a branding and marketing plan (not printing or development of promotional materials). The BSTF and CDBG-ED have both been accessed for this same activity by other Montana communities. The branding and marketing plan could include website development which would also attract visitors and recreationalists.

Downtown Business Development Group
Downtown businesses should consider forming a downtown business development group and strategize on how the downtown will promote and encourage local shopping and recruit shoppers from outlying areas. Combining efforts and strategies would provide economic benefit to the whole downtown business community. Businesses should look at additional creative ways to draw people to their shops. As other communities have done, the downtown core may use a gift certificate program where purchased gift certificates, gift cards, or tokens are good for any local eatery or store. Gift certificates would be a low cost campaign to garner business support. The Chamber of Commerce could be the portal for the purchasing of certificates.
Shop owners should find other ways to attract more people to the downtown area to shop and eat with extended shop hours, art walks, sidewalk sales, block parties, Christmas strolls, and other promotional efforts. If there’s a parade in town, shops should be open to capitalize on the foot traffic working its way through downtown. Extending shop hours would help attract the after work consumer, and coupling downtown events with other community events would ensure greater participation.

The city could develop a business promotion where people have to visit a selected set of businesses, receive stickers for each visit, and turn in completed sticker books for entries into a downtown gift certificate or other type of reward. The reward could be a coupon for a service or discount which would be a low cost promotional incentive.

Advertising should extend beyond the city and county to bring in more visitors – which would be an opportunity for packaging weekend getaways for hotels, meals, and recreational opportunities. The Chamber of Commerce and members should work with the city and local development staff to plan and implement promotional activities. Big Timber could be promoted as an affordable weekend getaway with great restaurants, lodging, and local events. If Big Timber receives the highest visitor traffic in the summer, it should also work on winter promotional events which could include activities that would bring in locals and outside visitors such as a crafting fair for hunter’s wives, Victorian Valentine making clinics, or other low cost events that would draw people to beautiful downtown, Big Timber.

Issues:

- Signage to find McLeod
- Signage off of Interstate

Recommendations:

Transportation Study

Big Timber should also consider hiring a consultant to complete a transportation study that includes compliance with signage requirements for the business loop, downtown historic business district, best location for bike and walking paths, traffic patterns, crosswalks, and school traffic and safety.

With the community expressing concerns with obtaining signage from the highway to the City, and signage directing people within the City to critical points, it would be helpful to have a professional review all the requirements set by the Montana Department of Transportation and Federal highway regulations to develop a plan so proper signage can be in place to help bring visitors into Big Timber and direct them to downtown.

The transportation study should also address the community’s concern with pedestrian safety related to school traffic, and early morning pedestrian traffic to the mine’s office, street conditions, crosswalks, potential sky bridge, and other traffic related issues. This study could also identify the best locations for walking and bike trails that citizens have expressed a critical need for.
The Montana Department of Commerce offers planning grants to assist with this type of study as it relates to business development, potential for business recruitment, and contribution to downtown revitalization. The BSTF has funding available as does the CDBG-ED Program.

A consultant should work with the Montana Department of Transportation related to any corridor studies that may be applicable to the Big Timber region and for any available financing that could assist with these studies. This is especially important with the development of the Cowboy Hall of Fame and efforts to draw visitors from the museum to the downtown area.

**Issues:**

- **Increased Awareness of the Arts Community**
- **Expansion of Civic Events**

Attendants at the community meetings explained that the local museums have done outreach to recruit an interest in local art and museum attractions. Citizens expressed the need for more emphasis on bringing people to Big Timber to enjoy the museums, buy art from local artists, and enjoy local concerts and events at the fairgrounds.

Big Timber has a neighboring community with a strong arts and entertainment population – Livingston. As the City considers the next steps towards promoting local events, it may consider coordination with adjoining communities such as Livingston so there could be a joint promotion of unique cultural offerings with studio tours, artist lessons, gallery showings, and other special events that would bring in visitors to both communities. One promotion could be a passport for visits with a map of critical points of interest which would enhance awareness of the arts community.

The art and cultural businesses could capitalize on volunteer assistance and consider discussions with the local school arts class to recruit student volunteers to assist with providing direction, registrations, and assistance with children’s art clinics which would draw families to these events. Students at the high school indicated that they do a lot of volunteer work in the community. Some public schools offer credit for volunteer work, or require a certain number of hours of volunteer work as a graduation requirement.

Completing a downtown revitalization study, transportation study, and branding and marketing plan will put the City farther ahead when planning and promoting local civic events.

**Financing Local Events**

There may be grants available through the Montana Arts Council under several programs to help finance and promote local art and performing events. The Montana Arts Council also has a published calendar that could promote events in addition to posters, Facebook, Twitter, the Chamber of Commerce, newspapers, blogs, and other means of social media.

Depending on the event, the City may be eligible for assistance with eligible expenses by the Office of Tourism at the Montana Department of Commerce for promotional and advertisement of local civic events, or other related infrastructure costs associated with historical and cultural
treasures. The tourism office also conducts workshops on promoting Montana tourism in an effort to assist Montana businesses attract and retain visitors. The workshops include training on social media and best practices.

**Recommended Resources:**

**For Technical Assistance:**
Certified Regional Development Office:
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110 South Main Street
PO Box 180
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**Funding Opportunities for Planning Grants for Community Branding and Marketing Plans:**
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301 South Park Ave.
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**Information on Transportation Studies and Possible Funding:**
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Data and Statistics Bureau  
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Also Contact the Following for Transportation Related Studies:  
Montana Department of Transportation/Billings District  
Stefan Streeter, 1-406-657-0268  
Email: ssreeter@mt.gov

For Signage Issues  
Montana Department of Transportation Traffic and Safety  
Ivan Ulberg, 1-406-444-6217  
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Transportation Plan  
Montana Department of Transportation  
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**Information on Assistance with Local Event Costs:**  
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Email: vbjornberg@mt.gov  
Website: [http://travelmontana.mt.gov/forms/](http://travelmontana.mt.gov/forms/)

Montana Arts Council  
Website: [http://art.mt.gov/default.asp](http://art.mt.gov/default.asp)  
Cultural and Aesthetic Project Grants  
Website: [http://art.mt.gov/orgs/orgs_ca.asp](http://art.mt.gov/orgs/orgs_ca.asp)  
Artists in Schools and Communities Grant Program  
Website: [http://art.mt.gov/schools/schools_aisc.asp](http://art.mt.gov/schools/schools_aisc.asp)

**Social Media Training and Promoting Montana Tourism:**  
Pam Gosink, Sales and Constituent Services Bureau Chief  
Tourism Office  
Montana Department of Commerce  
301 South Park Ave.  
Helena, MT 59601
MAIN TOPIC: WORKFORCE

Issues:
- Education
- Workforce Training, Recruitment, Retention
- Pay Scale

Recommendations:
Concerns were expressed by many groups that there needs to be more job opportunities in Big Timber. Citizens stated that people, especially youth, don’t have many job choices with good wages that would keep youth in Big Timber, or have them return to Big Timber after extended education.

Job Training
The Montana Department of Commerce offers assistance to businesses that need workforce development by training existing and new employees. Programs can help with formalized training through colleges and universities, and also provide funding to companies for on-the-job training. Funding applied for is dependent upon the amount of training cost per employee, number of employees needing training, and wages and benefits offered at the end of the training period.

The BSTF and CDBG-ED Programs have grants for job training. Businesses can request up to $5,000 per employee, with a maximum of $400,000 per local government request for the CDBG-ED Program which can help with training expenses for existing and new employees. The BSTF Program only assists with net new jobs and offers up to $5,000 per employee for training expenses, or up to $7,500 per employee in high poverty areas. These job training programs require businesses to pay trained employees a specific wage that includes benefits at the end of the employee’s training period. Both programs can be applied to if there is a need to train existing and new employees and businesses of any size can apply for job training grants.

The Montana Department of Labor also has job training grants through their Incumbent Worker Training Program. This program allows for skill-based training that would reward trained staff with a certificate of completion or accreditation. This program is primarily for smaller businesses that have no more than 20 employees per location.

Training existing employees helps retain local talent, allows for a higher wage compensation for employees completing training programs, and enhances local investment. Job training programs can help industries recruit employees and expand operations.

Business Development
Citizens expressed concern about growing businesses, creating new businesses, or attracting business to Big Timber. One option the City may consider is to coordinate with the university
system and develop a business incubator where start-up businesses can utilize low-cost space while they grow their businesses. An incubator can provide low cost access to business equipment and resources for a specific length of time at which point, the business can “graduate” and operate on its own. The City of Hamilton has a successful incubator in place through the Ravalli County Economic Development Authority and works with the University of Montana.

Another way to grow small business is through a community kitchen. This is an inspected kitchen in a location that can accommodate multiple types of product production and packaging. Successful community kitchens allow businesses to develop their products, learn about state promotional programs such as the Made in Montana Program, develop product labels, and learn marketing tools. Lake County Community Corporation operates the Mission Mountain Cooperative Development Center in Ronan where multiple small businesses can manufacture everything from jam, juice, tea bags, and process meat products. This Center also works through the university system.

Feasibility of starting an incubator, a community kitchen, or other types of business development tools can be financed through the BSTF or CDBG-ED programs with planning grants. Planning grants can look at the feasibility of creating a community kitchen or business incubator, best locations for these initiatives, costs of development, initial design, and other related costs.

**Recommended Resources:**

**For Technical Assistance:**
Certified Regional Development Office:  
Luke Walawander, Executive Director  
Beartooth RC&D  
110 South Main Street  
PO Box 180  
Joliet, MT 59041-0180  
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**Funding Opportunities for Feasibility Studies:**
Debra Demarais, Section Manager  
Community Development Block Grant – Economic Development Program  
Montana Department of Commerce  
301 South Park Ave.  
Helena, MT 59601  
PH: 1-406-841-2736  
Email: ddemarais@mt.gov  
Website: http://cdbged.mt.gov

Nancy Faroni, Section Manager  
Big Sky Trust Fund Program  
Montana Department of Commerce  
301 South Park Ave.,
MAIN TOPIC: COMMUNITY SERVICES

Issues: Medical Center Expansion

Recommendations:
Citizens expressed several times what a great medical center Big Timber has. The Montana Department of Commerce has programs that could support a medical center expansion when the center is ready to move forward with that.

One way the Department could help is with planning grants to hire a consultant to look at any feasibility studies or a preliminary architectural report related to the center’s services, determination of the most desirable location for the expanded center, initial designs for expansion, review of equipment upgrades, workforce availability, and other critical components needed to grow the medical center.

The BSTF and CDBG-ED have funds available for these types of studies. Planning grants could be used to hire professional consultants to help gather needed information and develop plans to enable the medical center to determine the type of expansion best for its facility.

Once the preliminary plans are completed the City could apply for grant funds from the BSTF and CDBG-ED programs to purchase needed equipment, assist with construction costs, or pay for job training costs for employees. If the center would not meet the low and moderate income
job requirements under the CDBG-ED program (51% of the jobs are made available to or held by low and moderate income persons), and the City meets the low and moderate income requirements for area-wide benefit (center’s service area serves 51% low and moderate income persons) under the CDBG Public Facilities Program, it could apply for a grant to help with construction costs, infrastructure improvements, or equipment purchases.

**Issue: Senior Citizens Center – Improvements**

**Recommendations:**
The Resource Team was lucky to have a delicious lunch at the Hospitality House - Senior Citizen’s Center and to have the chance to meet with the seniors and gain their input into community issues. The Hospitality House serves as a shared library, gift shop, game room, meeting room, coffee house, and dining facility.

Seniors expressed the need for some structural improvements to the center including kitchen upgrades, stairs repair, insulation of windows, improvements to upstairs apartments, and other energy efficient upgrades. The Hospitality House not only offers a place for social gatherings, but also focuses on health related services and education for the City’s senior population.

The Montana Department of Commerce can offer assistance through the CDBG Public Facilities – Planning Grant Program if the City demonstrates the low and moderate-income benefit. If the City wants to hire an architect to complete an analysis of the building, compile a list of needed improvements and associated costs, or draw up a preliminary design for the center, it may consider applying for a planning grant through this same program. Demonstrating the need for a public facilities project such as this should have a focus on the service to the seniors including medical services (i.e. flu shots and blood pressure checks), nutritional programs (i.e. Meals on Wheels), and education (i.e. diabetes information, communicative diseases).

The same program could be considered for project funding to make the necessary upgrades to the facility to meet current codes, improve energy efficiency, and expand services under the CDBG Public Facilities category. If the apartments upstairs are rentals, the City should work with Beartooth RC&D to explore options under the CDBG Housing Program category for grant funding to repair and upgrade the living quarters.

**Recommended Resources:**
**For Technical Assistance:**
Certified Regional Development Office:
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**For Funding Opportunities:**

**Funding Opportunities:**
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Jennifer Olson, Bureau Chief
Community Development Block Grant – Public Facilities/Housing Program
Montana Department of Commerce
301 South Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601
PH: 1-406-841-2773
Email: jeolson@mt.gov
Website: [http://comdev.mt.gov/Grantsbureau/grantsbureau.mcpx](http://comdev.mt.gov/Grantsbureau/grantsbureau.mcpx)

**Issue: Youth Activities/Center**

**Recommendations:**
 Keeping youth in Big Timber includes activities and entertainment sources that will satisfy their need for variety, keep them safe, and allow for families to keep track of their where-about. Allowing youth to have a say in what their community offers, keeping them in the decision making process, and enabling them to help facilitate plans will ensure personal, volunteerism, commitment, and help build community roots. Communities have enhanced their local offerings to include skate board parks, after school youth centers, community gardens, community centers, indoor pools, and other types of youth-attracting amenities. Funding for amenities can be raised through local fundraising activities or through public and private foundations. The Grant Service Center through Montana State University/Billings offers information on potential funding sources for state, federal and private grant funding organizations and foundations.

**Recommended Resources:**
Montana State University Billings
MAIN TOPIC: CATALYST PROJECTS

Issue:

- Old High School
- Auditorium/Performance Hall

Recommendations:
At every community meeting citizens expressed concern over the state and future of the old high school building. It is understood that the building is privately owned and that the owner is not interested in selling the building if it will be torn down or damaged in any way. At the same time, the community has indicated that it wants an auditorium or performance hall where it could hold concerts or other events.

One option for consideration is to apply to the BSTF or CDBG-ED Program for planning grants in different calendar years, 1) to complete a feasibility study for a performance hall or auditorium – with the old school house as one potential location, and 2) to do an assessment of the building for repurpose. A comprehensive feasibility report would help the City determine the viability of constructing a performance hall or auditorium and whether it would be sustainable. This study could include the determination of the best location for a hall or if there are potential existing buildings that could be refurbished for this purpose.

If a performance hall or auditorium proves feasible for Big Timber, one potential project for planning money (with the owner’s permission and financial match) could be to hire an architect to do a structural analysis with list of improvements needed and associated costs. This type of analysis may be to focus on using the old high school for a performance hall – as other Montana communities have done, or for another identified purpose which could include senior apartments, mixed use real estate, assisted living, or another use that the City has identified through a public process.

Recommended Resources:
For Technical Assistance:
Certified Regional Development Office:
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For Funding Opportunities:

Funding Opportunities:
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Issue: Volunteer Coordinator

Recommendation:
It’s a common thread among our cities - that there are a handful of energetic and passionate people who volunteer their precious time to help with causes they believe in. Volunteers hold jobs, raise families, and have life obligations, in addition to working long and hard hours to help local and national causes to better our world. They are natural leaders, and are a group that rarely hears “thank you” or receives recognition for all that they do. Finding additional people to help with local objectives can be a challenge.

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development offers training for local development officials and volunteers to learn practical, hands-on learning and networking, on leadership and community development. Heartland offers a couple of reasonably priced courses to help communities capitalize on local assets, learn from other communities how to promote tourism and business development, and how to be competitive for local and outside dollars. The courses are “Helping Small Cities Succeed”, and “Home City Competitiveness”. I would encourage attendance at one or both of these courses as they offer substantive and useful information that would assist the city expand its social capital, and further its economic development efforts. Courses are offered in regions and are well attended.
The city’s youth are a potential source for additional volunteers. Seniors at the Hospitality House also spoke of volunteer efforts and the desire to coordinate more with the City’s youth. Seniors could be a source for mentoring youth to volunteer time, help with career exploration, and provide experience on business development.

**Recommended Resources:**
Heartland Center for Leadership Development  
3110 N. 40th Street, Suite A  
Lincoln, NE 68504  
PH: 1-800-927-1115  
Email: info@heartlandcenter.info  
Website: www.heartlandcenter.info/contact.htm

**Issues:**
- Indoor Pool
- Cowboy Hall of Fame

**Recommendations:**
Raising money for museums and pools will depend on local fund raising efforts, campaigns, and private foundations. It is understood that the City has instigated fund raising efforts for both an indoor pool and the Cowboy Hall of Fame. I would direct the City to contact the Grant Service Center through Montana State University/Billings which offers information on potential funding sources for state, federal and private grant funding organizations and foundations. There are sources of funding for these types of projects and often from local or regional endowments. The Grant Service Center will have information on sources of grants for both community pools and museums.

**Recommended Resource:**
Montana State University Billings  
Grant Service Center  
Grants and Sponsored Programs  
1500 University Drive  
Billings, MT 59101  
PH: 1-406-657-2011  
Email: webmaster@msubillings.edu  
Website: www.msubillings.edu/grants/opportunities.htm

**CONCLUSION:**
The City of Big Timber has many advantages and recreational amenities to entice visitors and entertain the people that live there. With a clean and attractive downtown, good hotels and eating establishments, Big Timber should be a vacation destination that draws from neighboring communities and beyond.
The industrial park has space for manufacturing, and the downtown core space for additional business occupancy. The City is within a Certified Regional Development Corporation’s territory so it can capitalize on the expertise of economic development professionals to help package proposals using the City’s banking community and public financing programs to help Big Timber meet the goals the community has prioritized.

With a strong commitment to volunteerism, close family ties, and active civic groups, the community moves forward to make the changes it wants to happen. An experienced senior community and active youth can help catapult the City’s goals into action.
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Introduction: 

One of the most compelling attributes that community members from Big Timber and the surrounding county was their passion for their community, and their lifestyle. And frankly, that passion is what has driven their successes to date and I am sure those to come. From the ranching community to the senior center participants - - passion ran deep. That passion also translates into a core strength that supports the community and that is volunteerism.

As a neighbor just down the road in Livingston, I learned a lot about the area, and see what the opportunities are going forward and will be watching to see how these reach their fruition.

MAIN TOPIC:  BUSINESS RECRUITMENT AND EXPANSION  
Issues:
- Downtown business development  
- Business diversification  
- Business recruitment  
- Value Added Ag Opportunities  
- Distribution of local products  
- Regulatory challenges  

Observations and Recommendations: 

One of the main issues I heard during the listening sessions was the lack of business diversification to keep people shopping locally more. One of the most challenging aspects for economic development efforts is business recruitment and the perceived need to bring in new businesses. It can be much more cost effective to work with existing businesses to fill gaps potentially to address community needs. One alternative to help identify what those needs are more succinctly is to conduct a retail gap analysis study with your residents. This would help the community better understand residents shopping habits and provide a framework from which to ascertain whether what goods and services would compel residents to remain and shop in the community more frequently. Obviously not a unique challenge to most communities, but one that can be addressed. These types of planning projects could be partially funded through the Montana Department of Commerce, Big Sky Economic Development Trust (BSTF) fund.

Identifying and strengthening opportunities within the value added agricultural sector will be very complimentary for the community. I would recommend working with Growth Through Agriculture program and your local economic development organization to develop some training modules that address the value added producer’s needs. The Montana Manufacturing
Extension Center has also just recently started working with the private sector to establish a food manufacturing network and it may be an opportunity to see how local businesses could benefit from participating. Todd Daniels at MMEC in Bozeman would be the contact person.

Certified Regional Development Corporation’s (CRDC’s) are able to apply for planning funds through the Big Sky Trust Fund category II. These funds could help with planning efforts such as developing a community marketing or branding plan. Beartooth is your community CRDC and should be consulted if interested in developing one of these plans.

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jbertolino@beartooth.org
P: (406) 962-3914; C: (406) 598-3302
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Montana Manufacturing Extension Center
Todd Daniels
Bozeman Area & Billings East
Montana Manufacturing Extension Center
2310 University Way, B2-1
P.O. Box 174255
Bozeman, MT 59715
Phone: (406) 994-6055
Fax: (406) 994-3391

**MAIN TOPIC: WORKFORCE**

**Issues:**
- Education
- Workforce training, recruitment, retention
- Youth
- Medical
- Alternative industries

**Observations and Recommendations:**
Whether we heard it from law enforcement, students, or at the senior center work force challenges and training needs spanned the community. What I heard in the sessions was not just hiring the appropriate staff, but providing additional training. To that end, I would encourage the businesses to work with the Dept. of Labor’s Incumbent Worker Training program and access the local Business Expansion and Retention team for the region. The challenge is bringing the training to the community for easier access. Given that additional technical training is either in Billings or through MSU Gallatin College in Bozeman which may be a barrier to access easily, look to funding programs through the CDBG-ED or BSTF programs to work with businesses that are creating new jobs or possibly training existing staff. These funds may help to help mitigate some of the direct costs to the businesses.

Resources:

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BEAR
South Central Montana

Marissa Hauge, Columbus, 406-322-8050, mhauge@stillwater.mt.gov, Stillwater County

Chad Moore, Billings, Yellowstone County, 406-869-8404, moore@bigskyeda.org, Big Sky Economic Development

MAIN TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE
Issues:
- Sidewalks
- Pedestrian Safety – school drop off and sky bridge
- Bike paths/Walking trails
- Utilities
- Water/Sewer
- Broadband
- Cellular/Mobile Connectivity
- Storm water system

Observations and Recommendations:
One of the primary issues brought up was with regards to an aging infrastructure and primarily I am referring to more of the underground utilities. Without benefit of seeing a comprehensive list of engineering projects that have been completed for the city, I would recommend that if one hasn’t been done to develop a comprehensive engineering report that encompasses the CIP, and
any other ancillary improvements that need to be done for streetscape improvements that may fall outside of the typically underground, curb and gutter types of projects. I recommend this after going through a similar process with a community to ensure a more efficient construction process. I would also recommend that those projects include the installation of the conduit and fiber capacity to address the connectivity challenges of the community. This could be an open access network and there are similar projects being completed in other areas of the state that you may be able to model yours after.

Resources:

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MAIN TOPIC: MARKETING

Issues:
- Marketing of Big Timber
- Signage to find McLeod
- Signage off of interstate
- Recreation and tourism
- Increased awareness of the arts community
- Expansion of civic events

Observations and Recommendations:
My primary recommendation is to develop a comprehensive plan and then implement it in a series of phases that you can accomplish with current staff and/or volunteers. I would recommend an overall strategic marketing plan for the community. This might be part of a large economic development plan for the community, but this piece in particular will provide you guidance for a more effective marketing campaign. Last year the community of Livingston embarked on a branding planning project. The project was funded in part with BSTF planning grant dollars. It has been instrumental for the community and now the community partners are funding the implementation in stages. The key will be to develop a brand image and campaign for the community that can be used by businesses, the Chamber and municipalities to promote the community.

I would recommend going through the local CRDC to seek BSTF planning grant funds for this project. Once that is complete seek grant funds matched by local funds to promote the community and access the Yellowstone Country tourism funds.

Resources:

Beartooth RC&D
MAIN TOPIC: CATALYST PROJECTS

Issues:
- Old High School
- Auditorium/Performance hall
- Indoor Pool
- Jail
- Cowboy Hall of Fame
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Next Generation Group 20’s – 40’s

Observations and Recommendations:

Old High School and the Arts
There appear to be several good opportunities to expand the arts in the community. While many in the community feel the old school should be torn down for parking or other alternative uses, I would encourage finding common ground with the owner and see whether there could be a feasibility study/architectural and engineering study done to recapture the building from decay. Funding could be accessed through the BSTF program for the studies to be done in phases. Examples of these types of projects would be The Shane Center, in Livingston (http://www.theshanecenter.org/) and as far flung as the Curley School in Ajo, Arizona (http://www.curleyschool.com/).

There may also be opportunities to enhance the arts community through an organization called Art Place (http://www.artplaceamerica.org/). While their most recent grant cycle just closed, it may be worthwhile to connect with this organization for additional support for the arts community as one part of the economic fabric of Big Timber.

As the community is exploring how the arts can be an integral part of the “place” of Big Timber, also consider the National Endowment for the Arts grant programs (http://arts.gov/grants/apply-grant/grants-organizations).

Also consider possibly putting together a summer “tour” of the artist’s studios in the area ending with an event in downtown. Utilize the Yellowstone Country tourism grant funds to help support the promotion of the event itself and others connected to the arts.

Jail
One of the catalyst projects that jumped out during the meetings with the law enforcement and emergency services group, was the need for a new jail. Based on the initial conversations we had that day, I would recommend sitting down with Luke from Beartooth RC&D and do an
analysis on how to possibly structure debt service for a new jail based in part on the amount currently set aside in the budget for contractual services all the way over to Bozeman. There was roughly $100K set aside for that contractual arrangement. Based on 30 year low interest notes, or revenue bonds, that would provide a portion of the total debt service needed. In terms of a job creation project, if you estimate that it would require 14 more employees at or around the average median income for the county (which is $54K) that would provide a tremendous boost to the local economy, not inclusive of the expenditures that could be derived to provide other goods and services to the facility by private enterprise. This project could very well be a solid feasibility study with funding support from the BSTF or CDBG-ED planning grants.
Main Topic: Business Recruitment and Expansion

Issue: Value Added Ag Opportunities

Recommendations:
The Agricultural Community of Big Timber on numerous occasions identified the need for producers to increase the ability to process and market value-added products. The agricultural food product would be raised, produced, and distributed in the local region in which the final product is marketed. Local distribution and sales of the raw agricultural food product results in increased value to the commodity, would expand the market, and increase financial returns.

- The community would be able to make decisions based on need by talking to neighbor ranches and assessing which needs have priority.
- Is the foundational goal to construct and maintain a plant packing facility?
- Would a co-op organization benefit the community?

A USDA Rural Development Planning Grant would facilitate economic planning activities to determine the viability of a value-added venture, and may include costs for an independent feasibility study and development of a marketing and business plan. A USDA Rural Development Working Capital Grant would contribute to the operational costs directly related to the processing and/or marketing of the value added product. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis, and are solicited through a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) each year.

Recommended Resources:
USDA Rural Development Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt

Main Topic: Business Recruitment

Issue: Business Recruitment

Recommendation:
Big Timber recognizes the necessity to maintain the small rural community but still have the variety of businesses to allow the townspeople to frequent the local vendors. The community expressed the desire to have a strategic business plan that incorporates the existing businesses
and formulate a plan for future growth. The school age generation would like to see more restaurant chains like McDonalds; the young families wanted a variety of eating establishments that encompassed different cultures and the older generation felt the eating establishments were adequate and praised the various current restaurants.

The community does not have a business plan or a business committee that would create and document the desires and direction of the town.

- The town could organize a committee of various individuals who could participate in the 1-year, 5-year and 10-year plan to give depth to the needs of the community. It would detail the infrastructure including water/waste water and storm water needs; medical competency; performing arts aspirations; vendor variety; education growth, etc.
- Hiring an individual to be the community events coordinator who collaborates with all organizations, businesses, and groups could create a unity amongst all peoples and consolidate efforts. This person could also be responsible for the tourism packets to be distributed; neighborhood information for new families locating in Big Timber; work with neighboring communities to support their events and include them in Big Timbers. This position could also be the volunteer coordinator.
- Consider sending out a community survey to the town with questions that pertain to needs and desires of future businesses.
- Create a business organization where the area businesses form a group to encourage each other and inform the various merchants of the products offered. Networking and sharing information could be used to enhance the Chambers direction in future decisions.

**Recommended Resources:**
USDA Rural Development Business program is utilized to improve, develop, or finance business, industry, and improve the economic and environmental climate in rural communities. The Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) program provides funding to facilitate development of small and emerging rural businesses. The Rural Economic Development Loan (REDL) provides zero interest loans to local utilities which pass through to local businesses for projects that will create and retain employment in rural areas.


**MAIN TOPIC: WORKFORCE**

**Issue: Housing**

**Recommendation:**
Affordable housing is a state wide issue. Big Timber has the inventory of numerous vacant properties but not the variety to meet family size and financial needs. The clean town, excellent recreational resources, and beautiful surroundings of the area will not entice families to move to the area if they can’t find and afford the housing.
Financing for high end properties requires conventional financing. The very low, low and moderate income families can utilize the USDA Rural Development housing programs. The Direct loan does not have a down payment and is facilitated by a possible government subsidy. The Guaranteed loan is processed by a bank utilizing the RD program. Property can be new construction, existing, modular and new manufactured homes. There are income and loan limits to be considered.

Resources:
The repair or rehab of existing properties can also be a burden on the elderly. The 504 Program can assist home owners repair items that are deemed health and safety hazards. This program has a loan and grant option. The home owner has to be 62 or older and living in the home to be eligible for up to a $7,500 grant; loans are available for qualifying applicants. This program can enable the home owner to get needed repairs like a new roof; heating system, windows and deteriorating floor coverings repaired for the safety of the borrower.

www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt

MAIN TOPIC: MARKETING

Issue: Marketing of Big Timber

Recommendations and Resources:
The community of Big Timber needs to decide and define the reason for the marketing of the town. Is it to create a bigger tourism business; or bring in people on a more consistent nature; or to have more attendance at the special events? Is it to bring new businesses into the area that in turn creates more jobs, fills the schools with children and brings growth to Big Timber? Is it as simple as a larger and more concise signage on the highway that bypasses Big Timber?

- Create a logo that is attached to your advertising, your marketing language and signage.
- Coordinate a Big Timber campaign that celebrates a single or series of events.
- Organize a newsletter that is either hard copy or web based and update the news monthly; distributing to surrounding communities and larger cities.
- Produce signage that has an identifiable distinction to Big Timber and advertises local businesses.
- Create a new slogan.
- Do free radio announcements; TV spots to highlight the town.
- Partner with Beartooth RC&D and apply for a strategic plan, a feasibility plan or business plan that incorporates your particular issues.
- Solicit businesses to locate in the Big Timber area.
- Research grants opportunities through the internet that would enhance your mission. Consider hiring a grant writer that can research the grant opportunities that pertain to your needs through www.grants.gov; http://arts.gov/ (National Endowment for the Arts); CHS Foundation Grants (awards for projects and programs related to rural youth.
leadership, and community leadership development); just to name a few.

www.beartooth.org/

**MAIN TOPIC: COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Issue: Medical Center Expansion**

**Recommendation:**
Whether it is expansion or rehab of existing facilities, the town of Big Timber will have to strategize on if they can afford a loan to complete the desired result. Loan funds can be used to construct a new facility, enlarge or improve the existing health care center, or purchase equipment.

The information received during the community assessment was mainly praising of the existing facility but that there was a need for specialized physicians and office space to house them. It would be beneficial to look into a plan to recruiting physicians once the appropriate office space has been designated.

Consider a Community Open House Day at the Hospital. This will give the community an opportunity to tour the facility and meet the staff. Also giving care givers a low stress way to introduce the care that is available and build trust with the residence.

**Recommended Resource:** www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt

**MAIN TOPIC: NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Issue: Renewable Energy Resources, i.e., Hyrdo, Wind, Solar**

**Recommendations and Resources:**
Renewable energy and energy efficient projects can come in many varieties. Talking with a few of the Agricultural individuals the idea of utilizing the programs of many agencies to provide assistance to agricultural producers was not a new concept but not well none of the expanse in eligible technology.

The Rural Development Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) helps eligible applicants install renewable energy systems such as solar panels or anaerobic digesters, make energy efficacy improvements such as installing irrigation pumps or replacing ventilation systems, and conduct energy audits and feasibility studies.

This program has two areas: 1) Renewable Energy Projects that include biomass (bioenergy production or anaerobic digesters), geothermal (electric generation and direct use), hydrogen, solar, wind, hydroelectric, and flexible fuel pumps. 2) Energy Efficiency Improvements Projects include any energy savings measures to businesses or agricultural operations including but not
limited to replacement of inefficient equipment, retrofitting, insulation or any recommend improvement identified in the energy assessment or energy audit.

The minimum Renewable Energy System Grant is $2,500 up to a maximum of 25% of eligible project costs or $500,000 whichever is less.

The minimum Energy Efficiency Improvement Grant request is $1,500 up to a maximum of 25% of eligible project costs or $250,000 whichever is less.

Projects can include converting to solar power to generate a livestock well pumping station; replacing boilers in a business, etc.  www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt

MAIN TOPIC:  CATALYST PROJECTS

Issue:  Jail

Recommendation and Resource:
Conversations with the townspeople of Big Timber conveyed the message that the current jail is inadequate and in need of a larger facility to house the impounded vehicles and other confiscated property. Once the community agrees on the project whether it is an addition to the original facility or construct a new regional facility, options are available with Rural Development. The Community Facilities program can provide financial assistance to help construct, enlarge or otherwise improve essential community facilities in rural areas. Examples of public safety include Communications Center, Fire and Police Stations, Fire Trucks, Jails and Civil Defense Buildings.  www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt

MAIN TOPIC:  CELL AND INTERNET SERVICE

Issue:  Lack of Cell Service and either No Internet Service or Extremely Slow Speeds

Recommendations and Resources:
USDA finances new construction and upgrades to telecommunications infrastructure. Access to high-speed Internet services and other quality telecommunications services increases educational opportunities, improved availability of healthcare, job creation, retention and growth of businesses, and other economic growth.

- Telecommunications Loan Program
  This program provides funding for the improvement and expansion of telecommunications facilities and service in rural areas of 5,000 in population or less. All facilities financed must be broadband capable. Program funds are provided through a variety of direct and guaranteed loans.

- Broadband Loan Program (Farm Bill)
  The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill) established a new
loan and loan guarantee program access to Broadband Telecommunications Services in Rural Areas. This program was modified and reauthorized under the 2008 Farm Bill. This program provides funding for the cost of constructing, improving, and acquiring facilities and equipment for broadband service in rural communities of 20,000 inhabitants or less. Program funds are provided through a variety of direct loans.

- **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Broadband Initiatives Program**
  This program supports the expansion of broadband service in rural areas through loans, grants and loan/grant combinations to projects that provide access to high speed service and facilitate economic development in locations without sufficient access to such service. All funds under this program must be obligated by September 30, 2010.

- **Distance Learning And Telemedicine Grant Program**
  Under this program, RUS provides grant funding for the deployment of distance learning and telemedicine projects serving rural areas of 20,00 or less (based on formula) to entities operating educational and healthcare facilities.

- **Community Connect Broadband Program**
  This program is designed to fund deployment of broadband infrastructure to the neediest areas in rural America. Each application covers only one community, population of 20,000 or less, which is completely unserved with regard to broadband services.

www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt or Kim Jacobs at Kim.Jacobs@wdc.usda.gov 307-254-0910

**MAIN TOPIC: POLICE, FIRE, AND EMERGENCY VEHICLES**

**Issue:** Lack of City Owned Police Vehicles and an Aging Fleet of Ambulances and Emergency Equipment

**Recommendations and Resources:**
Community Facilities Programs provide loans, grant and loan guarantees for essential community facilities in rural areas. Priority is given to health care, education and public safety projects. Typical projects are hospitals, health clinics, schools, fire houses, community centers and many other community based initiatives. They can also be used to fund new equipment such as vehicles, radios, and specialty rescue/law enforcement tools.

- **Community Facilities Direct and Guaranteed Loan Program**
  Community Facilities Programs can make and guarantee loans to develop essential community facilities in rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. Loans and guarantees are available to public entities such as municipalities, counties, parishes, boroughs, and special-purpose districts, as well as to non-profit corporations and tribal governments.

- **Community Facilities Grants**
  Community Facilities Programs provides grants to assist in the development of essential community facilities in rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. Grants are
authorized on a graduated scale. Applicants located in small communities with low populations and low incomes will receive a higher percentage of grants. Grants are available to public entities such as municipalities, counties, parishes, boroughs, and special-purpose districts, as well as non-profit corporations and tribal governments.

www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt

**Issue: Sweet Grass County High School**
The deterioration of the old high school was top of mind for many residents. The dominant opinion seemed to be to remove the building somehow even though it was agreed that the building was beautiful in its day.

**Recommendations:**
To an outside eye, the old High School is a gem, loaded with potential. The school could help Big Timber meet some of its needs and build on its greatest strengths. The old High School is located near Big Timber’s vibrant downtown. Redeveloping the school into a space for arts, small business, and affordable housing and youth activities could further enhance the traffic to downtown. The Emerson building in Bozeman is an excellent example of how an old school was transformed into an economic and cultural engine. The Borden’s building in Whitehall is currently being redeveloped into housing, office and retail using Historic Tax Credits purchased from the local mine. In the short term, some of the space could be leased to the County for much-needed evidence storage which could create a small revenue source to repay debt.

**Recommended Resources:**
Emerson Building in Bozeman: http://www.theemerson.org/
Historic Tax Credits: http://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm
Sonoran Institute study on downtown living preferences in West: http://communitybuilders.net/reset/

**Issue: Bike paths/Walking trails**
Big Timber is surrounded by natural beauty, but local residents have no place to take a quick walk around town for pleasure or fitness. Walking trails are one of the top amenities sought out by people looking for a new place to live.

**Recommendation:**
Seek out assistance on developing walking trails from communities that have successfully developed them. Facilitate a trails working group to make progress on the project.

**Resources:**
Montana Community Transportation Enhancement Program grant.  
http://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/ctep/

Issue: Downtown Business Development

Big Timber’s downtown is vibrant compared to many other small Montana towns. In addition to some of the basic services, Big Timber has some retail and a destination restaurant and hotel. Even so, community members and business owners expressed interest in even more business development in the downtown area. Certainly it is true that the more businesses there are in the downtown area, the more traffic the whole area will draw. Big Timber is well suited to attract additional traffic given its high number of out-of-state land-owners and its proximity to Bozeman and Billings.

Recommendation:

Supporting and enhancing existing businesses so that they are as profitable as they can be is a good first step to attracting more businesses. Resources through the Montana Main Street Program or neighboring towns or businesses could be brought in to teach business owners how to attract more customers and increase sales through merchandising, signage and promotion. The community could develop a façade improvement revolving loan fund using private dollars or Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP) funds.

Existing store owners could mentor potential new business owners by subleasing small spaces in their shops or simply assisting with business planning. Hosting a business planning class in town could give the skills and the incentive to reluctant business owners and could give existing business owners an opportunity to look at their business with fresh perspective. A survey to ask customers what other things they would like to see, do or buy while they are downtown would be helpful to existing or future business owners in pursuing new ideas.

Increasing traffic to the downtown would help existing business owners and could encourage new business owners to move forward on their ideas. Increasing effectiveness of signage directing people to the downtown is essential. Downtown business owners could work together to develop a promotional plan for their downtown and could self-fund it and use social media and other no-cost options similar to Phillipsburg MT.

The Bozeman Downtown Association is very deliberate about encouraging its business owners to cross promote other downtown businesses. They encourage downtown businesses to learn about what each business offers and to refer customers to another downtown business if they don’t have what the customer wants. Along a similar vein, buy local campaigns can remind people of the importance of supporting local businesses. Working together as a downtown association of business owners can be an effective strategy. Making a business working group fun and exciting helps attract business members as well as participation from the community as demonstrated by the Great Falls Downtown Chicks group.
Overall, developing a Master Plan for developing the downtown area could give Big Timber a road map to achieving its goals. Having a strategic plan in place makes a town more competitive in seeking grants to fund projects identified in its master plan.

**Resources:**

Montana Main Street Program. [http://mtmainstreet.mt.gov/default.mcp](http://mtmainstreet.mt.gov/default.mcp)
Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE). [https://bealocalist.org/local-first](https://bealocalist.org/local-first)
Great Falls Downtown Chicks. [https://www.facebook.com/groups/GreatfallsDowntownChicks/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/GreatfallsDowntownChicks/)

**Issue: Recreation and tourism**

Even though second home owners are prevalent in the Big Timber area, the typical infrastructure to support those frequent visitors was minimal. The second homeowners would likely engage with the Big Timber community more if there were more things for them to do.

**Recommendation:**

Find out what amenities tourists and second home owners would use and support entrepreneurs in developing those businesses.

**Resources:**

Montana Tourism Assessment and Planning Program (MTAPP). This was a pilot program but may continue. Contact Victor Bjornberg, Montana Office of Tourism, 406-841-2795 [vbjornberg@mt.gov](mailto:vbjornberg@mt.gov) or Tash Wisemiller, Montana Main Street Coordinator at (406) 841-2756.

**Issue: Housing**

Affordable housing was an issue for many people, particularly because wages tend to be lower in Big Timber. It appears that there is adequate single family housing stock available for purchase, but the offerings do not fit the preferences of the buyers. Downtown housing could be a solution for some of these buyers and it could also meet the needs of snowbirds and others that want a second home in Big Timber. The Sonoran Institute did a study recently showing a strong trend of Baby boomers and millennials preferring compact, downtown residential in the West.

**Recommendation:**
Bring in a speaker from the Sonoran Institute to talk about developing downtown housing in Big Timber. Facilitate a group to identify buildings suitable for downtown housing.

**Resources:**

Sonoran Institute study on downtown living preferences in West: [http://communitybuilders.net/reset/]
REPORT BY: Tara Mastel
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Whitehall, MT 59759
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MAIN TOPIC: CATALYST PROJECT

Issue: Sweet Grass County High School
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Recommendations:
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MAIN TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE

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Recommendation:
Seek out assistance on developing walking trails from communities that have successfully developed them. Facilitate a trails working group to make progress on the project.

**Resources:**

**MAIN TOPIC: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

**Issue: Downtown Business Development**

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Montana Community Transportation Enhancement Program grant.  
http://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/ctep/
Core Four Business Planning. 
Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE).  https://bealocalist.org/local-first
Great Falls Downtown Chicks.  https://www.facebook.com/groups/GreatfallsDowntownChicks/

MAIN TOPIC:  MARKETING BIG TIMBER

Issue:  Recreation and tourism

Even though second home owners are prevalent in the Big Timber area, the typical infrastructure to support those frequent visitors was minimal. The second homeowners would likely engage with the Big Timber community more if there were more things for them to do.

Recommendation:

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MAIN TOPIC: WORKFORCE

Issue: Housing

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Bring in a speaker from the Sonoran Institute to talk about developing downtown housing in Big Timber. Facilitate a group to identify buildings suitable for downtown housing.

Resources:

Sonoran Institute study on downtown living preferences in West: 
http://communitybuilders.net/reset/
MAIN TOPIC: BUSINESS RECRUITMENT & EXPANSION

Issues:
- Downtown business development
- Business diversification
- Business recruitment
- Value Added Ag Opportunities
- Distribution of local products

Recommendations:

Business recruitment, retaining existing businesses and expansion of those existing businesses that have potential to create a thriving work force reflects the very vitality of a rural community. In the case of Big Timber, this crosses all business sectors, from agriculture to retail/down town businesses; from the hotel and grocery store to its manufacturing sector – all critical to its future development. Here are ideas for various sectors that could be instituted with the assistance of a dedicated “business council”.

- Form a business council of community leaders who could develop both a survey for each sector and a team of people to visit 3-4 businesses in each industry sector to determine the status of the business related to how it rates its own potential for growth, what it sees as critical to its future in the community, what its workforce issues are, wage rates and job availability, and what supporting services it sees as needed from the community (include major agricultural entities, both on-farm and ag-processors in the production/shipping chain), and what types of businesses or products would they like to see available within the community that might be compatible with theirs’ or help them save on transportation costs or otherwise increase sales and/or profits.

- Utilize the resources of the regional development organization (Beartooth RC&D) to help form a BEAR team to provide structure to interviews and enter the information into a data base

- Survey residents of Big Timber relative to how often they go to Billings or Bozeman to shop; what do they buy there that they can’t buy in Big Timber; would they shop in Big Timber for some percent of the time it is was available, what makes them stay in Big Timber, or what would make them push to leave.
• Compile the information and be sure it is distributed throughout the town, to all businesses and residents so that everyone sees the issues that emerge (i.e. retailers see what manufacturers need; grocery store sees what residents or schools need; city council sees what manufacturers need in the way of infrastructure; school sees what workforce issues are expressed).
• Survey tourists at various venues during the summer relative to where they are from; what made them stop in Big Timber; are they passing through or what would make them stop for an additional day; how could Big Timber be more appealing to them? (Good project for students?)
• Form a business outreach team that looks at other communities of this size and see what “mini” chain-type stores serve them and see if there is a fit for Big Timber that might increase the competitive opportunities to offer alternatives in shopping to fill gaps of what is missing.
• Get ag-producers and manufacturers together to brainstorm all the value-added products currently being produced and what is possible. Make them the center of a strategic plan that could potentially develop into an incubator or manufacturing center(s) that features value adding to regional raw materials and ag products.


MAIN TOPIC: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Issues:
• Education
• Workforce training, recruitment, retention
• Youth
• Alternative industries

Recommendations:
The expressed concern as to the Community losing its children due to lack of jobs is a chicken and egg issue throughout rural America. The survey of manufacturers (and service industries such as health care) previously noted should be used within the schools to help both guide students into skill-based training, technical schools or other “matching” programs help Big Timber students see the possibility of a future in Big Timber; develop with manufacturers, an OJT program that is more than summer work – but geared to evaluating what a career in such a company or industry might look like and how they would need to prepare themselves for such a path and the potential for upward mobility.
• Work with regional development and the state’s job service representative for your area to understand all possible job training funds that can be used by local businesses
• Work with manufacturing and health care sector to determine if high school students can access training programs within companies at a above minimum wage
• Is there a mentoring program with retired businessmen, both to existing businesses and to the school
• Assess what portions of the Career Track performance program being used in the school in specifically meaningful to Big Timber Businesses
• Start an “entrepreneurism” program as a competition for students every year where the entrants build a small business plan; develop prototypes of their product; are featured at some type of business fair; and winners are awarded and acknowledged.
• Develop relationships with educational foundations; “big” business that serve the area that may be willing to sponsor youth development programs
• When the “holes” are identified, research families, children etc. who have left the area because of the lack of opportunity who may have established businesses elsewhere to see if they are ready to return home and bring that business with them.
• Find out what incentives may exist for bringing a business into the community

Recommended Resources:  http://wtg.mt.gov/default.mcpx;
http://steveblank.com/2014/03/12/beyond-the-lemonade-stand-how-to-teach-high-school-students-lean-startups/;

**MAIN TOPIC AREA: MARKETING**

Issues:
- Marketing of Big Timber
- Signage to find McLeod
- Signage off of interstate
- Recreation and tourism
- Increased awareness of the arts community
- Expansion of civic events

Recommendations: In the heart of the beautiful Sweet Grass Hills, it could be possible to develop a “brand” that could be used to create a marketing campaign that crosses all business sectors from lamb and grass-fed beef to Main Street and equates “quality” and “beauty” with location – capitalizing on state’s “made in Montana” branding by further localizing it. This is a very successful strategy used in other states and Countries, including places like Vermont and Italy, where they use the cooperative marketing model to trademark and brand everything from wine to cheese to sell throughout the EU and the world. Consider a marketing collaborative or
cooperative that helps local businesses and producers sell the “branded” products and/or image of the region itself.

- Form a committee of beef and lamb producers in the valley to determine if a marketing cooperative or collaborative is viable; explore options for building a central storage facility to hold the meat; hire a marketing manager to manage sales, shipments and explore additional collaborative arrangements with other interested parties in the region.
- Assign the Business Council to develop a cohesive “brand” and how it will be used in signage, on the town’s website, by the chamber and as an added value to products, art, businesses, festivals, etc. in their own advertising.
- Create winter festivals to match summer festivals that invite the “urban” centers of Bozeman and Billings to come to Big Timber to re-experience small town wonders. An old-fashioned Christmas Stroll and lighting, with the hotel and restaurants offering winter warming specials might be one such event that highlights what is truly a lovely down town.
- Find who in town has connections to the more “moneyed” summer residents and begin recruiting a board of directors to establish a community endowment/foundation to help provide an ongoing source of funds for youth activities, provide matching dollars for grants that will help address things like trails, the swimming pool, parks, festivals.
- Explore all the opportunities with the Montana Department of Tourism relative to infrastructure and festival grants.
- Be sure that any and all festivals and activities find a place in the regional tourism guides and on websites.
- Invest in “Welcome to Big Timber” signage at both exit ramps that feature the business areas; point the way to hotels and the Chamber of Commerce office. Post visitor guides around town. Find ways to draw attention to your Tesla station – then establish signage at the station that show visitors what else they can experience while they are “charging”.
- Be sure Main Street businesses have a full menu of upcoming events or happenings that they use to invite visitors back to town to experience.
- Ask the mine to develop a story board about its activities, the process of mining and processing the minerals - including its collaboration with environmentalists. It is not only an interesting, intricate process, but could be used as an educational tool and a model of the partnership that could exist. And people really do want to know some of the back stories – not just what they read in the paper.
- Assure the art community is “embedded” with the Montana Arts Council; galleries are featured in its newsletter and featured on its web site; have stories written and submitted on featured artists and events. It lays the foundation for being more competitive for grants and other funding for the arts.
- Feature artists, fishing guides, town characters, history, etc. festivals on a rotating basis on websites (the personal stories, not just the event details).
• Develop a “fun-facts” history of Big Timber – put them up throughout town. (School project in both researching and making the signs?)
• Get Newspaper to feature a weekly “did you know” column on a different business, store, gallery etc. every week – that gives 52 businesses per year the opportunity to talk about themselves, what they have to offer or what they do and what they contribute to the economy of the area – include ag producers
• When advertising an event, collaborate on “experiential” advertising that tags other things to do in Big Timber or the region to the event itself. Explore how places like Vermont and Maine work to integrate food, lifestyle, farms, and events into their tourism planning
• Develop “driving” tours from Bozeman, Billings, Livingston and Yellowstone Park (I love the driving tour we took) through Big Timber. Do a recording of the history and sites – perhaps a mobile phone application – or a downloadable or CD of the tour could be available at the Chamber and other key locations.


**MAIN TOPIC: COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Issues:**
- Medical Center expansion
- Emergency equipment upgrade and replacement
- Emergency training funds
- Equipment and evidence storage
- Senior Citizens Center- improvements
- Youth Activities/Center

**Recommendations:**

The development of a youth activity center, including year-round swimming pool, and a sidewalk and trail system through town could potentially have the largest singular impact on improving relationships with the Town’s youth and engaging town people and visitors alike. Come to some final conclusions on the old high school building – renovation, if still possible, could turn it into the needed auditorium and museum space and community activity center. Demolition and removal could provide space within the school complex for the same activities plus the swimming pool.
- Form an action committee that has youth, seniors and city officials to clearly define what these centers need to have
• Obtain planning funds for feasibility studies, preliminary architectural designs, engineering studies, brownfield assessments, etc.
• Engage the MSU School of Architecture and MSU Extension in providing leadership to the teams
• Engage the Montana Department of Transportation and Fish Wildlife and Parks to determine funds available both for planning and constructing trail systems in the community and surrounding areas.
• Determine the costs of each project and then develop an action plan that includes potential funding sources.

Recommended Resources:
http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/committees/stateTrailsAC.html;
http://www.arch.montana.edu/pages/portfolio/portfolio7_cdc.php;
REPORT BY:  Anne Boothe
Economic Development Specialist
Triangle Communications
P.O. Box 880
Malta, MT   59538
Ph:  406-654-1487
aboothe@itstriangle.net

MAIN TOPIC:    BUSINESS RECRUITMENT AND EXPANSION

Issues:  Downtown (development, diversification, recruitment) – Big Timber is aesthetically beautiful and the city center and main street area is often undiscovered. Concern has been expressed that certain goods and products are not readily available.

Recommendation #1:  Consider a Market or Retail Gap Analysis for the greater Big Timber area. This type of research can enhance the business mix and the position of Big Timber as a destination for both local residents and those outside Sweet Grass County. Results can help to strengthen existing businesses and assist in business recruitment and entrepreneurship.

Establish a local committee of task force to research options, establish priorities and plan of action. Estimated timeframe:  6-18 months.

- **Formal approach** – seek planning grant funds from [Mt. Department of Commerce Community Development Block Grant Economic Development (CDBG ED)](http://www.cdbg.ed.gov) or [Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund Program Category II Planning Projects](http://www.bigsky.org). Both require partnership with local government and/or the Certified Regional Development Group such as Beartooth RC&D and local matching funds to hire and work with a consultant.

- **Informal approach** – work through Chamber of Commerce to prepare and implement a Consumer Survey (you have a wonderful local expert at Survey Solutions) using mixed method (online and printed format.) Working with Chamber, local committee would facilitate process using volunteers.

Recommended Resources:


Becky McCray of [Small Biz Survival](http://www.smallbizsurvival.com) says it best: “If we can see what your local spend on a category, versus how much of that is spent locally, we can spot opportunities. Look at this [example from Waterloo, Illinois](http://www.waterloowarehouse.com). See all those negative numbers? Those are dollars flowing out of the community. Local people are spending in those categories, just not in Waterloo. That means it’s an opportunity. A new business could start in any of
those categories, and know that locals are already spending for them.” The full article What businesses would work in a small town? Filling empty buildings can be viewed at http://smallbizsurvival.com/2013/09/what-businesses-would-work-in-a-small-town-filling-empty-buildings.html


Potential partners – Beartooth RC&D, MSU Extension

Recommendation #2:

Gain a better understanding of local tourism and its economic impacts and improve visibility within and outside of great Big Timber area.

- Investigate interactive data for Big Timber and region per the UofM Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research (ITTR) website. http://www.itrr.umt.edu At minimum, share data with community members in local media, Chamber newsletter and provide a direct site link to the Chamber of Commerce website. This would also be an ideal student government project (research and present a written report to the community.)

- Insure all businesses fully utilize free listings on state tourism www.visitmt.com website – minimum of photos for all entities. This could also be an ideal student or single volunteer effort – aided by the Chamber and businesses involved. Enter your business information via this link http://www.travelmontana.org/OURPROGRAMS/survey_forms
• Understand Montana signage laws and coordinate effort to include all business entities within community.  http://www.montana.interstatelogos.com/state/home.aspx

• Understand Sign Exemptions and work with local and state MDT officials to create uniform directional signs to downtown Big Timber from all highway entrances to community.  http://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/oac/sign_exemptions.shtml

• Optimize local websites - consider addition of virtual business and community tour. Example of this http://www.insidemt.com (a Montana business - photographer located in Helena)

• Encourage partnership of local Artists and Art Organizations to fully take advantage of available grants, programs and services – work to coordinate with local tourism and marketing efforts.  http://www.art.mt.gov/orgs/orgs.asp
Investigate opportunities to showcase and feature the culinary talents of the community at local events and/or develop a local image or brand that is consistently marketed among restaurants, the Chamber and media. This tactic would also be used with locally grown foods such as lamb and beef.

- Paws Up Resort features several events - Montana Master Chef’s, Montana Master Grillers, and Long Table events [http://www.pawsup.com/events/montana-master-chefs.php#VF1Jf8nYeGo](http://www.pawsup.com/events/montana-master-chefs.php#VF1Jf8nYeGo)
- Billings – Guest Chefs events - is a great example of featuring the individuals. Big Timber could copy this on your Chamber website [http://www.winefoodfestival.com/participants/guest-chefs](http://www.winefoodfestival.com/participants/guest-chefs)
- Brand local food products on menus
- Encourage positive comments about great food, places to stay or play onto [www.GetLost.MT.com](http://www.GetLost.MT.com) from your guests and visitors.

**Recommendation #3: Make a direct link between Downtown and Tourism.**

The [Montana Main Street Program](http://www.mainstreetprograms.org) offers technical assistance and expertise to member communities and awards competitive grant funding to communities actively working on downtown revitalization, economic development, and historic preservation. Following the process outlined by the Montana Main Street Tier System, Big Timber should invite program coordinators to make a formal presentation to the community and work toward becoming an Affiliate Community. The application cycle is open from October 1 through December 31st.

Many of the projects and suggestions outline within this assessment could be incorporated into the Main Street Program. NOTE: this program is separate and not to be confused with the Governor Bullock’s Main Street Montana Project.

**Resources:**


**Cooperative Marketing Funds via YELLOWSTONE COUNTRY**
Robin Hoover, Exec. Director, PO Box 3048, Bozeman, MT 59772 robin@yellowstonecountry.net
or Riana Davidson, Consumer Marketing Manager, Montana Office of Tourism 406.841.2948 rdavidson@mt.gov
Montana No and Low Cost Advertising and Marketing Opportunities

The Montana Main Street Program http://mtmainstreet.mt.gov/default.mcpx and the National Main Street Center http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/#.VF1m_8nYeGo

Issue: Value Added Ag Opportunities and/or Distribution of local products

There seemed to be a lack of communication between the various sectors regarding agriculture producers adding value to and distributing local products. It was noted that many producers are actually marketing certified organic and natural beef, lamb and pork products. Many of these products are processed locally within two facilities and sold by private label ranches and in online sales. A variety of processed meats are marketed under the label of Meats of Montana.

Recommendation #1: Make connections. Tie the local culinary experts to agriculture community to promote and market your community. See additional connectors in culinary and tourism recommendations above.

Resources:

- BUY FRESH, BUY LOCAL – CONNECTING FARMERS, CHEFS AND DINERS http://www.reapfoodgroup.org/bfbl
- Montana Farm to Table – Grown in Montana event http://agr.mt.gov/Special/pdf/MTF2T_restaurant_grocery_distributor.pdf
- NCAT http://farmtocafeteria.ncat.org/resources will help you find a local food seller or a local food buyer

MAIN TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE

Issue: Broadband

Recommendations and Resources:

- Investigate interactive broadband reference maps from the Montana Broadband program http://mtbroadband.org/interactive-broadband-map Gain a general understanding of regulatory and funding issues faced by the FCC, state and service providers.
- Inquire with all current broadband providers (wired, fixed wireless, mobile wireless) regarding their current capabilities, short and long range plans for system upgrades.
- Investigate options for open dialog and areas of opportunity between existing or new providers. Consider hosting a “round table discussion” or similar conversation to share concerns and opportunities.
• Apply to Triangle Communications Connected Community Challenge program which promotes Smart Rural Communities throughout their service area. The process follows national priorities that include “Access, Adoption and Use of Broadband” in communities. Using a local committee and local technology assets, existing needs and opportunities are reviewed along with demographics of who’s not online and why. The final aspect of the program is a simple community Broadband Action Plan. See details at Triangle’s website or via this link http://www.itstriangle.com/economic-development/connected-community-challenge The next round of applications is anticipated to be in early 2015.

• In addition to the above, good examples and links to materials include:
  50 ideas to Connect Communities - http://www.connectingcommunities.info
  Connected Nation http://www.connectednation.org/who-we-are
  Building Digital Communities
  http://www.imls.gov/about/building.digital.communities.aspx
BIG TIMBER/SWEET GRASS COUNTY RESOURCE TEAM ASSESSMENT
OCTOBER 7 – 8, 2014

STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

McLeod - Strengths
- The Library in Big Timber
- Education system
- Beauty surrounds us
- Peace and quiet
- Clean Air
- Sense of community
- Natural Resources – fishing
- Stillwater Mine
- Hospital, Assisted Living, Nursing Home; one MD and three mid-level providers
- TeleMed
- Triangle Telephone/USDA/RD grant provided equipment
- Both 90-ish and 30-ish in business; a generational shift

Melville - Strengths
- School
- Location
- The People
- Community Support
- Ag program
- Airport
- Fire Department
- Vet Clinic
- Assisted Living
- State inspected packing plants
- Wind and access to transmission
- Water resources, streams, rivers for irrigation, wildlife, tourism, etc.
- Excellent recreation
- Wildlife – abundant
- Great student/teacher ratio

Business and Tourism - Strengths
- In the middle of the best country in Montana: two rivers, mountains, prairies, and just a little wind.
- Great diversity of people.
- One hour away from two large cities – live a rural life but bigger city access.
- Large core of volunteers.
- The quality of the people of Big Timber.
- When someone needs help the community rallies; more so in Big Timber than your typical small town.
- Defined boundaries – we do not have sprawl here.
- Ag, Mining, Tourism
• Safest County in the U.S. – (must not include wind)
• Don’t have Wal-Mart or Costco – we have family owned businesses.
• Great restaurants.
• Movie Theater, outdoor pool, park system – and I don’t know how we afford it all.
• Clean
• Defined Main Street
• A sophisticated small town – quality.
• Diverse shopping
• Sweet Grass Fest is the pre-rodeo event.
• Farmer’s Market

Churches, Nonprofits, and Service Organizations - Strengths
• We have excellent artists, writers, performers
• The non-profit groups are the ones that truly welcome a newcomer.
• Historic and beautiful churches
• Rally when someone is in need.
• Churches are the mainstay of the community.
• School system – top rated.
• Everything we need is right here – restaurants, clothing, supplies, hardware, etc.
• Location
• Very active nonprofits that provide needed volunteer services.
• The food bank
• Lion’s Park
• Friends of the Library
• Active community garden
• Sweet Grass Health and Wellness
• Raw Deal Run – an example of impact a nonprofit can make. Charity fun run.
• Senior Citizens Center
• FFA and 4H activities
• Active churches and active youth groups
• After school program very active – under Health and Wellness
• Ambulance response teams active; as well as fire department
• Savvy - Group at high school that encourages volunteerism
• Big Timber Buzz facebook page

Law Enforcement, EMS/Fire, any Governmental entities - Strengths
• Volunteerism
• A safe community
• Great ambulance crew, sheriff’s office and fire department and how well they work together.
• Community support
• Mutual aid agreements with surrounding counties
• Agriculture – supports our community
• School system
• Location – on interstate – great for emergency services.
• Outdoor and recreation opportunities.
• It is just a good place to live, right here.
Senior Citizens and Healthcare - Strengths
- Loving, sharing community
- Our Senior Center and the whole town is full of love; we do fund raisers and help each other.
- Medical center here – Pioneer Medical Center
- Beautiful place to live
- Senior Center is fabulous
- Follow up, support, and care of Veterans (Service officers come in)
- Good cooperation from governing boards in the city and county
- Meals on Wheels
- Education system for our kids; we back our kids and would drive 40 miles to watch them for one hour.
- Library – serves people of all ages
- Kitchen Band is active to entertain seniors
- Music program and athletics
- So much to attract people here....mountains, river, wildlife, peace and quiet

Arts, Museums, Entertainment & Other Community Organizations - Strengths
- County Museum is an asset
- Many writers, musicians, sculptors – which is unusual for a community of this side.
- Galleries that people are willing to support.
- Tourism, agriculture, mining, employs people but so do the arts.
- Relationship with Bozeman Symphony
- Special events that feature the arts
- Our library is supportive of the arts – writing classes, etc.
- Galleries showcase various local artists
- Instructors that give art classes
- Sweet Grass Arts Alliance
- Christmas Parade

Mining, Energy, Utilities, Technology, Infrastructure – Strengths
- Fantastic natural environment
- Wide range of natural resources – wind, minerals, etc.
- Quality of life; Quality of people
- Proximity to wilderness
- Renewable natural resources – sustained by agriculture
- Maximum participation by local government
- Volunteers in all sectors – couldn’t operate without them
- Strong community ties – taught through example
- All banks Montana owned
- More miners live in Sweet Grass County than surrounding areas
- Bus that goes to Livingston/Billings

Sweet Grass County High School American Government Class
- FFA Program is super good.
- Clean – not a lot of trash lying around.
- The Fort
- People care about each other – close knit.
• We have a good school – rank higher than many other schools around the state.
• Enjoy shooting, football
• Volunteer group in high school helps with fund raiser projects, pick up litter, paint, flower beds, bird houses, senior citizens, mentor grade schools, etc.

Teachers, School Administrators, and School Board
• Small community
• Good neighbors
• Supportive parents
• No stoplights
• Good schools
• Friendly people
• Beautiful
• Billings and Bozeman – enjoy living in a small community but can travel for needs
• Access to the Boulder River
• Great restaurants
• 24 hour gym
• Businesses support school activities
• A real sense of community – we are close together; Big Timber identity
• Feel safe here
• Strong volunteer base
• Assortment of businesses
• Merchants are customer service oriented
• Job shadowing program

Emailed Strengths Comments:
• I think Big Timber’s strength overall is it’s geography. Given our location east/west on I-90 and the major north-south highway intersection (191), we are conveniently located and accessible from 2 major airports, yet far enough away that we, so far anyway, are not going to just become a bedroom community to Bozeman or Billings. This allows mainstreet businesses to succeed in my opinion. The fact we can offer small-town amenities but the close convenience of two major cities should be an attraction to more businesses. I don’t mean more restaurants or convenience stores, but businesses that provide goods or services or products which are exported outside of this community which in turn brings outside dollars in.

• We are also located on the northern tip of the “Grand Loop” of the Greater Yellowstone. It would seem that getting tours and buses to tour through Yellowstone, the Paradise Valley, down I-90 (stopping here) and then over to Red Lodge and over Beartooth Highway or Cody back into Yellowstone would be an attraction.

• I also think there is a good inventory of residential and commercial buildings and empty-buildable lots to support growth and accommodate other businesses. There are real estate/building resources in this community that are not necessarily listed for sale.

• We have good access to National Forests and a couple of Montana’s most famous rivers not to mention what is probably the best 9-hole golf course in the state.

• Love our schools, firefighters, and EMT’s.
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PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

McLeod - Challenges

- Internet service – typical rural connection problems
- Communications
- Shopping local- people go to Billings or Bozeman
- Shopping out of town has become a form of entertainment
- Difficult state laws for outfitters to continue to do business
- Housing – new homes are out of reach for most wages in Big Timber and mostly available in subdivisions out of town
- Lack of jobs with a competitive wage; not much job diversity
- Celebrities – have assisted with funds such as library and theatre

Melville - Challenges

- Wind – people feel it is too windy here.
- Ranch numbers are declining; how to transfer to children
- Drastic reduction of businesses and number of businesses
- Stores don’t carry what rancher’s need
- Better access to transfer grain – minimum of 100 miles to truck grain
- County roads are not all weather roads – some work has been done but more needs to be done.
  - Utilities and emergency vehicles need better roads, too.
- Change of land ownership from traditional agriculture to reintroduction of predators, problems with wildlife that have diseases that can transmit to humans, plus damage from grazing; Fish and Game can’t keep up. Get sportsmen up-to-date on disease transfer.
- Fish and Game management issues – have met with them and exchanged ideas.
- Too dependent on Stillwater Mine – must diversify
- My internet sucks. Satellite sucks too. Copper wire is maxed; broadband not coming for a while.
- Aging population, aging ranchers – some children returning to ranch, others cannot
- Transferring assets and escaping taxes for ranch families is very difficult. Hard to make enough money to pay the taxes when the asset transfers.
- Absentee owner recreational properties – reflects downtown.
- Roadblocks to general resource development whether wind, timber, water, etc.
- EPA trying to control and permit day-to-day activities.
- Very low starting wage for teachers; struggle to fill with quality applicants. Wages can’t compete with nearby Wyoming or Eastern Montana.
- Hard to find a place to store product until the distribution process can begin.
- Permitting, permitting, and permitting.

Business and Tourism - Challenges

- We don’t appreciate what we have.
• Internet connectivity – lack of selection for phone and internet services.
• Rent is high for entry level workforce; gap for entry level and higher wage earners.
• Shop local challenges
• Internet shopping
• As individuals we strive to improve business but we don’t work together to improve business.
• Better participation by business owners to promote business in Big Timber – must make it a priority.
• Empty storefronts.
• Grocery store better supplied or a second one for more selection.
• Local products are not showcased; don’t know where to purchase them. Easier to find in Billings than here at home.

Churches, Nonprofits, and Service Organizations - Challenges
• Ambulance volunteers
• Selling the idea of what community means; get questioned “why do you want to do that?”
• More of a transient community than we used to have – causes people to not engage
• Lack of good career and well paid jobs.
• People have two jobs – or more! Makes it even harder to get people to meetings or volunteer.
• We are Big Timber and if we want to see it survive we have to take responsibility.
• People live here but work elsewhere.
• Active youth graduate and there are not others to fill those shoes.

Law Enforcement, EMS/Fire, any Governmental entities - Challenges
• Generating volunteers from the next generation
• Time – to volunteer
• Training for volunteers
• Water and sewer system in Big Timber struggling to meet EPA guidelines; problems pending in our future.
• Jail – conditions are so crude we have to transport to Gallatin County – 1 bed at $65 per day whether the bed is used or not. We can hold four but only for 72 hours, no female. To hold anyone is a huge liability.
• Surrounding counties have packed jails; can only put in felonies.
• Need storage for vehicles, paperwork, seized cars
• Did I mention problem with volunteer recruitment?
• Drug and alcohol use has increased greatly among the youth since the 1980’s;
• Adults are using more alcohol; with youth they are using more drugs rather than alcohol.
• By default, law enforcement becomes mental health, transport, domestic violence counselors, etc.
• Bakken energy boom involved Mexican drug cartel which came through Big Timber.

Senior Citizens and Healthcare - Challenges
• Businesses don’t pay high enough wages so people leave and then we have to pay people to travel here which costs even more.
• Snow removal on main street – to plow snow into the gutter makes it dangerous and prevents people from coming downtown. We have to shovel our walks then the equipment dumps snow back on to them.
• Teacher attraction – affordable housing prevents them from coming as rents are too high.
• Our swimming pool is only open in the summer. There was a push for an indoor pool at one time but nothing happened.
• FFA, 4-H, after school program – but some kids are falling through the cracks and are left out.
• Jobs – that pay well so that young people can live here.
• Give youth a vision so that they want to better themselves in the future. Consider healthcare as a profession, etc.
• Need new volunteers – our ambulance volunteers are aging and the youth are not stepping up; time, work, family challenges.

Arts, Museums, Entertainment and Other Community Organizations - Challenges
• Difficult to get the word out regarding Big Timber’s art community
• More recognition as a creative arts home.
• Too many empty storefronts
• Declining government support for the arts.
• Participation from youth and the entire community.
• Need to get the older generation and the younger generation to come together.
• Sometimes more people show up for an event in Billings than if we offered it in Big Timber.
  People would travel; don’t support local activities.
• Sports is a strong focus

Mining, Energy, Utilities, Technology, Infrastructure – Challenges
• How do we sustain volunteers – start now and engage youth
• Limited housing opportunities
• Wages cannot sustain housing rent costs
• Lack of high speed internet
• Lack of cellular service (Mine has own communication system)
• Need basic services such as CPAs, Electricians, Mechanics, RNs
• Threats to environmental resources – we have to be wise as we develop
• Mine is 42% of tax base which is good and bad

Sweet Grass County High School American Government Class - Challenges
• Lack of jobs for everyone – almost easier to find a job in high school than for adults to find a job.
• Stores – prices are higher with the smaller stores.
• Local store didn’t have bread selection for several weeks.
• Don’t have clothes here that kids like to buy – just basic needs.
• People don’t stop here when they are on the interstate.
• Tourists that will fish or camp here stop in Bozeman or Billings before they come here.
• People don’t expect supplies and equipment to be here. Need to change that perception.
• Lack of recreational businesses like bowling alley
• Kids get in trouble because there isn’t enough to do
• Programs exist for grade schoolers to keep them occupied and out of trouble but not for high
schoolers.
• Town doesn’t have follow-through; i.e., ice skating rink.
• I love the town and the people but I need to experience other places and then come back here.
• Slow internet at home is a challenge when doing homework project

Teachers, School Administrators, and School Board - Challenges
• The wind.
• Need a bike and trail system; sidewalks
• Sidewalks end in strange places
• More variety of restaurants such as Thai,
• No car dealership
• Cable is more expense here and slower.
• Can’t give certain homework assignments because at home students don’t have access or it is too slow.
• Cell service is spotty and dangerous with gaps in emergency response situations
• Streets need a lot of work
• Shortsighted – it may cost money up front but in the long term money would be saved.
• Affordable housing is very difficult to find.
• Housing - Inflation due to mine.
• More jobs are needed in the area.
• More things for kids to do on weekends and after school.

Emailed Comments: Challenges
• Where does one work in Big Timber right now and be able to make enough money to afford to buy a house? There are not that many jobs which pay enough or are secure enough. As a result, I think our work force suffers and it is hard to find well-trained, educated or experienced persons to work. I know numerous employers whose biggest complaint is they cannot find competent persons to fill positions.

• Getting the Cowboy Hall of Fame off the ground and into the building west of town. But, the Hall of Fame needs to realize this cannot be done on the backs of Big Timber’s main street businesses. We simply do not have the hundreds of thousands if not millions that this project will take. I do think if they can build it and get it open it becomes and attraction for other businesses and especially fits into the concept of the “Grand Loop of the Greater Yellowstone.” If not the Hall of Fame, then somehow get that building and area west of town utilized by some business that fits that infrastructure.

• Get more of Stillwater Mine’s employees with families to live here. It is not clear to me why they do not. Some say that it is because we as a community discourage it, it may have to do with the bad timing of the housing market crash, etc. All I know is that there are way more by factors of 10 stable employee positions at the mine whose personnel do not live here or even in Sweet Grass County.
• How do we find businesses to locate here? We have our rifle manufacturers, but we need more of that type of “exporting” businesses. The Print-for-Lesses, the Elk River Systems, of the world. I think we have the space and convenience for these types of businesses or services. What businesses may be sick of the Bakken and looking to relocate?

• I also think that we are hurt economically by not having a larger, more variety grocery store. I am not blaming anyone at anything, but it is astounding to me the number of people who shop for groceries out of Big Timber. That’s a lot of fuel dollars that could be saved and put back into our economy another way. One will never stop those who view a trip out of town as a get-a-way, but I think we are leaking a lot of money just on groceries.

• This area needs at least one if not two more local electricians (including commercial) and local plumbers. The persons actively working these jobs are overwhelmed with work and as a result this slows building, building repairs, etc.

• Getting the younger generation to volunteer and be active in community service and development. I think this is a function of demographics not the least of which may be that there are way more families where both parents have to work to make ends meet and more families who are employed by others and not themselves thereby having less flexibility. However, I would worry that the younger generation is not as actively involved in community service and development as my generation and the generation I saw before me.

• I think that two huge problems in our town are the grocery store and the pharmacy. They are either out of something or it is already expired or the fresh fruits and vegetables are on their way to being bad at the store. Then at the Pharmacy, they are also out of something a lot of times. Therefore, people go out of town for groceries and pick up other stuff they need as well. So it starts that the local businesses don’t receive the support they might otherwise get.
VISION AND PROJECTS

McLeod - Projects

- More job opportunities
- Better technology and connectivity
- Keep a vibrant downtown- no more empty buildings
- An economy that allows our children to go to school in McLeod like we did
- More retirees returning to Big Timber
- Old High School – issue resolved in a way that benefits Big Timber
- Post Office and buildings in McLeod continue to remain open.

Melville - Projects

- Expand Stillwater Mine
- Diversify economy
- Improve roads
- More people get involved and have a voice in water rights, rancher issues, etc.
- More businesses – more opportunities for kids to stay in the community; can’t ranch only - need another job, too.
- Explore a gas generation plant
- Timber – use the resources; get around the out-of-state interest groups
- Vibrant and diverse tax base
- Market our resources whether wind, wildlife, oil, gas
- All of us work together to have a vibrant community so that our kids can stay here.
- Raise wages for starting teacher’s salaries. If you stay in the district for 20 years it evens up but - starting wages are very low.
- Added value – add value to more products before they leave town; distribution barriers are removed.
- Address the government regulations that prevent exploration of value added products.
- Figure out how to solve the storage issues for products to enable distribution to make a profit.
- Marketing plan in place for all producers; need to expand our markets.
- Resource development – i.e., logging, water, done economically and with land returned back to the state and under state control.
- Hydro-electric has huge potential here.
- Permitting barriers addressed and applied with common sense.
- Figure out how we can address change at the local level until regulations are changed.
- Organize to appear in Helena during the legislative session when these issues come up. Very difficult to leave the ranch to do this, however. Do: use email and telephone. Explore how other remote areas are influencing legislators.

Business and Tourism - Projects

- Compare pricing before leave town to shop.
• Signage to point people to McLeod Street
• Tourism effort to put together a package: golf, movie, dinner, etc.
• Visitors on Sunday – have few businesses that are open.
• Before Christmas – know what inventory the other businesses in town so that you can refer.
• Walking paths around the town – walking/bike paths
• Summer rentals for bikes, ATVs, boats, paddle boats,
• Beautification of downtown, ie, streetlights,
• Christmas decorations – in the works
• Two or three larger events that bring people in.
• Advertise the events we do already have better.
• Sweet Grass Fest is the pre-rodeo event; have applied for grant to promote.
• Work with neighboring communities and support their events and ultimately bring more people here.
• Instead of gathering together when there is a crisis or someone needs help, let’s get-together now! Use the Chamber to do this. “It’s everybody’s business."
• Shopping/Consumer assessment to learn what people are going out of town to buy.
• Attract new business and grow jobs for young people and professionals.
• Rental business for cars, boats, fishing gear, etc –
• Improved grocery store – or another store.
• Signage!

Churches, NonProfits, and Service Organizations - Projects
• Better connection with the SAVVY group at the high school – set up communication connections so they know what help is needed where.
• Volunteer coordinating point across the community – possibly use the Ministerial Association, or establish a volunteer coordinator point of contact.
• Community calendar so everyone knows what is going on; distribute across facebook, in the local paper, etc.
• Some place so that newcomers learn the rules – i.e., permitting, parking, weeds, snow removal, etc.; distribute these as well, perhaps through realtors.
• New Comers – re-inact – like a Welcome Wagon.
• Expand electronic waste collection to include other recycling
• Something like an Annual Roundtable so that all groups share, including city/county to be informed of all that goes on.
• Create a plan to fill the shoes of volunteers that are over-worked or aging and slowing down.
• Youth Leadership Program – apply the knowledge.

Law Enforcement, EMS/Fire, any Governmental entities - Projects
• Storage for vehicles, seized cars, equipment, paperwork, evidence storage, i.e., DNA
• Explore more options with jail – multi county or build our own
• New asphalt on the streets, add sidewalks and/or replace
• Upgraded water and sewer plus a storm system
• Fill empty stores on main street
• Safe way to drop off children at school; possibly have crossing guards
• Address dangerous crossing for Stillwater workers and students – state allowed reduced speed but did not observe when pedestrian traffic is heaviest. Consider a sky bridge.
• Additional cell towers – so don’t lose signal for emergency services, especially north

Senior Citizens and Healthcare - Projects
• Something done with the old high school.
• Need trails and bike path to keep healthy – we do have a master plan to connect existing trails.
• Hospitality House – County Commissioners have been supportive; working on a long range plan for the Senior Citizen Center. (Stair repair, cement repair, insulation, etc. plus plans to improve windows in the upstairs apartments,
• Quality healthcare must always factor in to Big Timber’s future. Big Timber needs to continue to support medical care.
• More interaction with the youth of the community.

Arts, Museums, Entertainment, and Other Community Organizations - Projects
• An amphitheater behind the museum
• Utilize the fairgrounds more – change the in-and-out access.
• Event center up and running within the Cowboy Hall of Fame at its new location.
• The Arts strong and helping Big Timber grow; pulling people off of the interstate and making Big Timber a destination stop.
• More jobs – that pay well - so that people can afford to purchase art.
• Prepare now to adjust for aging and declining population.
• Studio tour
• Phase 1 off the ground of the Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Mining, Energy, Utilities, Technology, Infrastructure
• Fiber Optic Network
• Youth provided technological opportunities
• Medical expansion to meet growing aging population
• Strong Main Street
• More conservation easements on private land
• Cowboy Hall of Fame

Sweet Grass County High School American Government Class - Projects
• McDonalds
• Better sports programs within the school and recreational
• Indoor swim/rec center – form a swim team.
• More job options – right now only have low paying or to work at the mine.
• Recreational things like skate rink, hockey rink, multi-purpose location
• Boys and Girls Club-like structure for kids of all ages
• A place to do arts and crafts
• Cowboy Hall of Fame would bring tourists in

Teachers, School Administrators, and School Board - Projects
• Sidewalk, bike and trail system – include out-of-town areas
• An auditorium for performances, concerts, etc.
• Affordable housing and a way to find out what is available for rent or sale.
• Indoor pool
• A place for kids to go after a game or event to hang out.
• Public transportation – probably not feasible but if you are 14 and live five miles out of town you cannot participate in activities.
• Diversified restaurants, i.e., Thai, Mexican, and Chinese.
• More real-world courses, i.e., use of credit cards, budgeting, and life skills, etc. Financial Literacy.
• Encourage legislators to support education. We have same resources as Wyoming and to some extent North Dakota but we don’t prioritize education.

Emailed Comments: Projects

• Old Sweet Grass County High School get torn down. The Lions Club has worked hard on trying to solve this but the owner does not cooperate so wondering if there is a way to force a condemnation or something.
• This community could use an outdoor shooting range. The Big Timber Rod and Gun Club lost their lease several years ago to a land sale and I think an outdoor shooting range would be beneficial given the outdoor enthusiasts that live and frequent here.
• Consolidate our county and city governments like Butte-Silver Bow. I remember a speaker from Butte-Silver Bow stating that the hardest task they had in consolidating was combining law enforcement and fire protection and we essentially have that.
• Consolidate our school districts. I’m not sure it makes sense to have two school districts in our small community.
• The restoration of the old high school would cost everyone too much money to restore it, even if government grants paid for it (because we the people pay for those as well, nothing is free). The lot where the old school is would be a great parking lot for people to use for the library, civic center, and the churches because everyone parks along the streets and it is hard to see to get across the streets or find places to park. We have a great bazaar that draws a lot of people to town, but again not good places to park. A grant for fixing up the Civic Center stage (if necessary) would be better than the excessive amounts of money that it would cost to fix up the old high school. I have been to many productions and concerts at the civic center and they were just fine.