RESOURCE TEAM ASSESSMENT REPORT

For

SANDERS COUNTY
MONTANA

NOVEMBER 3 – 5, 2015

INTRODUCTION

It was a privilege for the Sanders County Resource Team to spend time in your county and experience this unique and beautiful area of Montana. 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 the Sanders County Commissioners who supported the team’s visit as well as countless thanks to Jen Kreiner, of Sanders County Community Development Corporation. Jen served as the champion behind this project and will continue her leadership role with the process through to completion. Jen tapped shoulders of town hosts who gathered community members together so the team could hear as many voices as possible during each visit. Town hosts included Debbie Lyman, Peggy Johnson, Liz Wormwood, Elizabeth Haggerman, Erika Lawyer, Peg Winebrenner and Steve Daggar.

In addition, the Sanders County Resource Team Assessment could not have happened without the support of Gypsy Ray and Lake County Community Development Corporation which serves as the Certified Regional Development Corporation for the area.

The Sanders County Resource Team Assessment had sponsors that contributed to the success to date including Sanders County, Falls Motel, Sanders County Transportation, and Lakeside Motel and Resort.

Finally, I applaud each and every team member who dedicated hours of work and volunteered their expertise in order to participate on the team: Dan Johnson, MT USDA/RD; Jeri Duran, MT Dept. of Commerce; Robie Culver, Stahly Engineering and Associates, Billie Lee, Billie Lee Project Consulting; Roger Hopkins, SBA Montana District Office, and Kellie Danielson, Montana West Economic Development.

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 Sanders 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—what 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

Sanders County Resource Team Assessment   November 3 – 5, 2015; Full Report
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 Sanders County is Lake County Community Development Corporation, with Gypsy Ray serving as Executive Director. The local host, Sanders County Community Development Corporation and the County Commissioners of Sanders County initiated the request for a Resource Team to visit. Jen Kreiner served as liaison and coordinator for the team’s visit. Montana Economic Developers Association (MEDA) provided staff support for the coordination of a resource team to assist Sanders 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 Jen Kreiner, 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 Sanders 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 November 3rd – 5th over 150 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:

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 Sanders County?
- What do you think are the major problems and challenges in Sanders County?
- What projects would you like to see completed in two, five, ten and twenty years in Sanders County?

Upon completion of the interviews on November 4th including visits in Heron, Noxon and Trout Creek, the team met in a work session to compare notes and share comments. A Town Hall Meeting was held that evening in Trout Creek to share the main issues that were heard. Upon completion of interviews on November 5th including visits in Plains, Hot Springs, and Dixon, the team again met in a work session to compare notes and identify main issues. A second Town Hall Meeting was held the evening of November 5th in Plains.

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 Sanders County. The report is available on the MEDA website at http://www.medamembers.org under the Resources tab and the Resource Team Assessment tab.

Two Town Hall Meetings are planned in Noxon and Thompson Falls on January 21st. The purpose of the meetings will be to briefly review the report and guide attendees through a three step process to identify projects, set priorities and create working groups for action.

The team is always available for support and follow-up questions or resources. MEDA will check in on progress made by the working groups in six months and return to Sanders County in one year to celebrate successes.
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Sanders County Resource Assessment Agenda

**Tuesday, November 3rd - Day 1:**
- **3:00pm**  Team has most of the day to travel to Thompson Falls and check-in at the Falls Motel; brief tour of the Thompson Falls area.
- **3:30pm**  County Department Head meeting, Courthouse downtown T Falls
- **5:00pm**  Working dinner meeting with County Commissioners and Community/Economic Development leadership, catered by Big Eddys.
- **7:00pm**  Team heads to Falls Motel.

**Wednesday, November 4th - Day 2:**
- **7:30am**  Team meets for breakfast in Thompson Falls and reviews the day’s agenda and listening session protocol, as well as facilitator guide sheet. (Minnies Café)
- **8:30 - 9:45am**  Drive to Heron and brief tour (Pick-up Minnie’s Café)
- **9:45 - 10:00am**  Team sets up for Heron Listening Session  
  ![LOCATION](Heron Community Center)  
  ![COORDINATOR](Debbie Lyman)
- **10:50 - 11:00am**  Prepare to travel to Noxon
- **11:00 - 11:30am**  Drive to Noxon; brief tour
- **11:30am - Noon**  Team sets up for Noxon
  - **Noon - 1:00pm**  Working Lunch - Noxon Listening Session  
    ![LOCATION](Sawtooth Grill)  
    ![COORDINATOR](Peggy Johnson)
- **1:00 - 1:15pm**  Team prepares to travel to Trout Creek
- **1:15 - 2:15pm**  Travel to Trout Creek; brief tour
- **2:15 - 2:30pm**  Team sets up for Trout Creek/Thompson Falls Listening Session
- **2:30 - 3:30pm**  Trout Creek Listening Session  
  ![LOCATION](Lakeside Resort)  
  ![COORDINATOR](Liz Wormwood/TCCIA and Elizabeth Haggerman)
- **3:30 - 6pm**  Team Work Session and Working Dinner to summarize west end listening sessions and prepare for Town Hall Meeting.
- **6:30 - 7:30pm**  Western Sanders County Town Hall Meeting  
  ![LOCATION](Lakeside Resort)  
  ![COORDINATORS](Liz Wormwood, Elizabeth Haggerman)
- **7:30 - 8:00pm**  Team travels to Thompson Falls for lodging

**Thursday, November 5th - Day 3:**
- **7:30 - 8:15am**  Team meets for breakfast; reviews agenda for the day.
- **8:15 - 8:45am**  Team travels to Plains; brief tour
- **8:45 - 9:00am**  Team sets up for Plains Listening Session
- **9:00 - 10:00am**  Plains/Paradise Listening Session  
  ![LOCATION](Clark Fork Valley Hospital)  
  ![COORDINATOR](Erika Lawyer)
- **10:00 - 10:15am**  Team prepares to travel to Hot Springs
- **10:30 - 11:15am**  Travel to Hot Springs; brief tour
- **11:15 - 11:30am**  Team sets up for Hot Springs Listening Session
- **11:30 - 12:30pm**  Hot Springs/Lone Pine Working Lunch and Listening Session  
  ![LOCATION](Second Home Restaurant)  
  ![COORDINATOR](Peg Winebrenner)
- **12:30 - 1:15pm**  Team travels to Dixon; brief tour
- **1:15 - 1:30pm**  Team sets up for Dixon Listening Session
- **1:30 - 2:30pm**  Dixon Listening Session  
  ![LOCATION](Dixon Senior Center)  
  ![COORDINATOR](Steve Daggar)
- **2:30 - 3:30pm**  Team travels back to Plains
- **3:30 - 6:00pm**  Team Work Session to prepare for Town Meeting in Plains; working dinner at Dog Hill Bistro
- **6:30 - 7:30pm**  Eastern Sanders County Town Hall Meeting  
  ![LOCATION](Paradise School)  
  ![COORDINATOR](John Thorson)
  - **7:30 - 8:00pm**  Team travels back to Thompson Falls for lodging.
**MEDA SANDERS COUNTY RESOURCE TEAM ASSESSMENT**

**MAIN TOPICS AND ISSUES**

The team’s report covering the main topics and issues listed below is available online at [http://www.medamembers.org](http://www.medamembers.org) under Resources and the Resource Team Assessment tab. As many team members as possible will return to facilitate a town meeting to help residents prioritize projects and ideas on January 19, 2016.

The charts below are a summary compilation from the Listening Sessions held in Thompson Falls, Heron, Noxon, Trout Creek, Plains, Hot Springs, and Dixon November 3rd – 5th, 2015. Over 150 people either submitted comments or were interviewed and responded to three questions: What are the strengths and assets of your community/Sanders County; What are the problems and challenges of your community/Sanders County; What projects would you like to see or what vision do you have for your community/Sanders County in the next 2, 5, 10, 20 years?

### COUNTY-WIDE ISSUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN TOPIC: LAW ENFORCEMENT &amp; SAFETY</th>
<th>MAIN TOPIC: COMMUNICATIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Resident deputies</td>
<td>o Between communities all across the county</td>
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<td>o Improved equipment and training</td>
<td>o Emergency notifications</td>
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<td>o Staff to oversee all fire departments</td>
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<td>o Fire and EMS volunteer burnout and funding</td>
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<td>o Drug and alcohol abuse resulting in increased crime</td>
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<tr>
<th>MAIN TOPIC: EDUCATION</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Access to workforce training</td>
<td>o Generational poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>o College and vocational options in high school (like robotics and code class in Plains)</td>
<td>o Apathy and hopelessness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Identify who we are as a community</td>
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<tr>
<th>MAIN TOPIC: HEALTHCARE</th>
<th>MAIN TOPIC: DEVELOPMENT</th>
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<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
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<td>o Aging services – age in place</td>
<td>o Small Business – expand and/or recruit</td>
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<td>o Responsible Natural Resource Development</td>
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<td>o Engage retirees to share skills</td>
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<th>MAIN TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE</th>
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<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
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<td>o Water</td>
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<td>o Sewer</td>
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<td>o Roads</td>
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<td>o Cell phone and internet</td>
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<th>MAIN TOPIC: NATURAL RESOURCES</th>
<th>MAIN TOPIC: HOUSING NEEDS</th>
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<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
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<td>o Effective and responsible extraction; consider the market first</td>
<td>o Family</td>
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<td>o Balance development and preservation</td>
<td>o Affordable</td>
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<td>o Access and management of public lands</td>
<td>o Low Income</td>
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<td>o Support of adequate water for agriculture</td>
<td>o For Seniors/Aging</td>
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<td>o Fire Wise Education</td>
<td>o Workforce</td>
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<td>o Scotchman Peaks Wilderness</td>
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<th>MAIN TOPIC: TOURISM</th>
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<td><strong>ISSUE:</strong></td>
<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Incentivize work over welfare</td>
<td>o Clean up and Beautification</td>
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<td>o Coordination of tourism marketing</td>
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<td>o Identify unique cultural assets of each area</td>
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<th>MAIN TOPIC: INCREASE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES – COUNTY WIDE</th>
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<td><strong>ISSUES:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Planning Board</td>
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<td>o Growth Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Contradiction: want visitors to spend $$$ vs. sustainable jobs</td>
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<tr>
<th>OTHER ISSUES HEARD:</th>
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<tr>
<td>o Planning Board</td>
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<td>o Growth Policy</td>
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<td>o Contradiction: want visitors to spend $$$ vs. sustainable jobs</td>
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### SPECIFIC ISSUES BY COMMUNITY

#### HERON

**ISSUES:**
- Law Enforcement Presence
- Aging Services
  - Clinic open five days per week
  - Life flight access
- Basic services
  - Grocery store
  - Fuel
  - Café
  - Daily gathering place
- Infrastructure
  - Water and Wastewater
  - Cell service and internet access
  - Cat Tail Bog – Railroad Crossing
  - Weed control
- Misc.
  - Culture of helplessness
  - Community Garden

#### NOXON

**ISSUES:**
- Tourism
  - Signage off of Highway 200
  - Trails and Connectivity
  - Development of actual recreational opportunities that people can access
- Law Enforcement Presence
- Aging Services
  - Senior Housing
  - Age in place; assisted living
- Planning Board
- Train Depot – Passenger Service
- Diversified Economy
- Infrastructure
  - Water & Sewer
  - Roads
  - Cell & Internet Service
- Education
  - Vocational training and distance learning
  - Workforce development

#### TROUT CREEK/THOMPSON FALLS

**ISSUES:**
- Law Enforcement & Safety
  - Improved presence
  - Domestic violence services
- Recreation
  - Indoor swimming pool
  - Larger work out facility
  - Trail (and bike) expansion
  - City/County Park District
- Infrastructure
  - Both state and county road projects
  - Water and sewer
  - Housing
  - Cell phone & Internet
  - Communication Infrastructure and public TV utilization
- Economic Development
  - Incentivize small business creation
  - Anti-business sentiment in the area
  - Old Mill site development
  - Downtown beautification
- Education
  - Opportunities for youth outside of school
  - Alternative programs/enriched education
  - Stable funding for rural schools
  - Drug and Alcohol Issues
- Misc.
  - Maintaining freedom

#### PLAINS/PARADISE

**ISSUES:**
- Youth
  - Mentorship – for youth and business start ups to reduce cycle of poverty
  - Boys and Girls Club
- Education
  - Basic Life Skills
    - Balance Check book
  - Soft Skills for youth and adults
  - Utilize Job Service
  - Train under skilled for business development
- Polarity of Thought
- Loss of Doctors
- Retirement of Skilled Workforce
  - Apprenticeships
### HOT SPRINGS

ISSUES:
- **Infrastructure**
  - Trail to highway
  - Bath house re-developed
  - A plan for street repair
- **Communication**
  - Continue to improve tribal relationship with community
  - Address the disconnect within Sanders County
  - New signage designating the reservation
- **Development**
  - Revitalize Homesteader Days
  - Develop elegant hot springs area
  - Availability of larger lots for larger homes
  - Be a center for integrated medicine; develop education program

### DIXON

ISSUES:
- **Safety and Health**
  - Clean the streets of trash vehicles, garbage
  - Blighted areas - concerns of health issues
  - Law enforcement needed – drop off site
- **Drugs and Alcohol abuse**
- **Community**
  - Community resurgence
  - Vision to create continuity throughout the generations
  - Access to transportation for the aging
  - Mercantile re-open
  - Extended after school programming

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SUMMARY OF ASSETS AND VISION

REPORT BY
Jen Kreiner, Sanders County Resource Team - Local Team Leader

Jen Kreiner, Executive Director
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County-wide View of Assets
A major outcome for the Sanders County Resource Assessment Team was they understood why people live here. Although the communities within Sanders County are diverse in geography, industry, and lifestyle there were many comments that had a unified theme—the main one being the people. Our small rural towns breed a close-knit community with passionate, hard-working, and engaged people. This is an asset that is valued from Heron to Hot Springs to Dixon. It is because of that visitors see the true Montana experience where every interaction on Main Street is welcoming and friendly. Residents pull-together in times of need whether it is a community project or a family in need. This sense of community and support for your neighbor is not something found in metropolitan areas. It is a luxury that we afford here. These values make it a great place to raise a family or retire to Sanders County.

Natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and valuable natural resources were cited as strengths consistently in every listening session. Northwestern Montana is the best kept secret; with over 70% public lands this area boasts incredible fisheries, abundant wildlife and access to trails, and internationally renowned geothermal features. There are productive forests due to the climate in western Sanders County, as well as, rich mineral deposits.

It is no wonder that many retired people continue to relocate to the area. The cost-of-living is comparatively low to urban centers around Montana and outside the state. There is access to quality healthcare, great public schools, basic needs, and emergency services. Sanders County is a place where we put stock in family values, peaceful lifestyle, and commitment to our community. We choose Sanders County for the pace, serenity, and quality of life that it provides.

County-wide View of Vision
Overall, communities within Sanders County want to be stable and sustainable. A strong and diverse industry base would support the overall business community. Sustainable development of natural resources, growth of light-manufacturing, as well as tourism and technology-based businesses would reform the economic situation in Sanders County. This is the vision that includes living wage jobs for working families and affordable housing for them to live. Creation of workforce training both for adults and within our 9-12th grade public learning institutions would increase the skills available to employers. There would be consistent and available telecommunication services throughout the county in every community.

This is a vision of community resurgence; where we look local for goods and services, our public agencies meet the emergency and infrastructure needs in every community, where youth are supported socially and academically and they have the opportunity to stay where they were raised. Blighted
properties would be cleaned-up, the wide-spread drug and alcohol abuse and crime that occurs, in turn would be addressed through a comprehensive and collective campaign by the cities/county which includes youth education. A mentorship program for the youth of our county would utilize skilled volunteers, possibly retirees who want to give back can circumvent the generational poverty found in our small, rural towns.

Infrastructure would be addressed from roads to housing as prioritized by the residents of Sanders County. Roads to bridges to water/sewer upgrades and maintenance, emergency services would have the available funding to meet resident needs, housing for our aging population would be addressed as a county-wide strategy so that our residents can age in place. Communications among the towns in Sanders County would exist. An informational platform to keep interested groups and individuals apprised of happenings (social, cultural, emergency) would emerge. Cooperation to achieve a balanced and productive outlook would be adopted so productivity can be efficient and possible. This is a vision where the polarity of thought would find value in the middle.
Overview of Opportunities for Economic Growth and Key Steps for Boosting Rural Economies

The U.S. economy is driven by consumers. Cash spent for goods and services essential to personal and community health, safety and happiness, is the fuel that fires businesses. Without consumers and a reliable source of cash from wages, savings and credit, a community's potential to grow and thrive is limited.

Sanders County has very few indigenous consumers. The entire county population is barely that of many rural small towns - just over 11,000. Furthermore, the population is spread throughout the 2,700 square miles of the county - a land area nearly twice that of Delaware, a state with 80 times the population of Sanders County.

U.S. Census data captures Sanders County as compared to Montana, Delaware, and the United States.
The data show what everyone knows: Sanders County lacks the resources - human and capital - to stoke the fire of a local economy in the way larger communities can. Residents have to fulfill many of their basic needs by travelling to, and shopping in, larger communities with more diverse marketplaces.

Nevertheless basic health and safety needs of Sander County citizens are no less than those in larger communities: safe, clean water; reliable public safety response for fire and law enforcement protection; adequate and accessible health care; good roads and schools; sewage treatment systems to allow for business growth and housing while protecting ground and surface water.

The resource team heard of these needs at every listening session throughout the county. In addition to supporting these keystones of community development from the 19th and 20th centuries, Sanders County residents voiced frustration with spotty, if any, access and availability to the new infrastructure of the 21st Century - wireless phone service and broadband Internet connectivity.

This is the quandary the citizens of Sanders County find themselves: a small, widespread population of consumers, unable to provide a large enough market and a tax base to create or expand businesses and pay for needed infrastructure. It is the crux of the problem facing all rural communities where a small population, spread out over a large and diverse landscape, struggles to find the means to survive, let alone grow and thrive.

**Location, location, location.**

Sanders County residents can find some solace for the lack of economic strength when they look out the windows of their homes and cars. By the very nature of its low population and locale, they have what consumers in other areas simply can't buy: wide open spaces of unblemished beauty, solitude, and backdoor recreation.

This is countered, however, by the often heard expression throughout Western Montana: "You can't eat the scenery," and it's corollary, "You can't tax the scenery." The tax base, primarily
from property taxes, is insufficient to pay for expansion of needed infrastructure and basic services, especially as the population of the county shrinks as noted in the Census data.

But the scenery can be capitalized upon in at least two specific ways: tourism and retirees. Both of these exist in Sanders County and are important sources of imported income. Census data reveal Sanders County has a higher percentage of residents over the age of 65 than either the population of Montana or the U.S.

Criticism or contempt toward either was not heard at any forum. What was expressed, and appropriately so, was discouragement of any attempt to focus economic development upon these resources and assets, specifically tourism, to the exclusion of other industries.

Unfortunately some of the assets that draw tourists can, and do, create problems, specifically with the large number of acres held in public trust by the U.S. Forest Service. Development of these lands is limited, and the natural resources of the forests - wood products primarily, once a vibrant source of income for the local economy - are locked up in litigation and regulation. Access to the mineral assets beneath the forests is also problematic. Mining is a highly regulated and market dependent industry.

Regulatory reform and market improvements are not going to be influenced by the citizens of Sanders County on their own. Neither will intervention by citizens to ameliorate the litigiousness of timber sales. Political action can be a means toward unlocking these resources and creating new jobs with resource extraction. But politics, by its very nature, is divisive without community consensus, and is a tediously slow, evolutionary process, even when consensus exists.

Divisiveness does not appear to be a concern in Sanders County. The listening sessions revealed a sense of pride in the community. Participation and engagement was significant. Thoughtful and valuable insights were offered and shared by participants, highlighting another, more intangible community asset: citizens and a citizenry who care about their community and individual community members.

The Thompson Falls City Council and Thompson Falls Downtown Committee are also to be credited for investing in a master plan for the county seat, arguably the center of the county's business and retail community. This plan, the Thompson Falls Downtown Master Plan (TFDMP) completed in October 2015, offers suggestions and an action plan for improving this core retail area. At the same time, the TFDMP offers insights and information about economic and community development opportunities that can be applied throughout the county to its diverse and vibrant communities: from Heron to Hot Springs; Noxon to Dixon.

**You're not alone.**

If the expression "misery loves company" has any truth, Sanders County residents can also find solace knowing the problems they face are not significantly different from those in other rural communities across the nation. Federal and non-profit entities routinely study rural economies and economics. The conclusions from the Harvard Business School's Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness offers one the most succinct and actionable analyses.

1. Rural economic development should focus on the unique strengths of each area, rather than concentrating on ameliorating generic weaknesses
2. The appropriate economic unit for strategy purposes must include not only rural areas but also adjacent urban centers
3. Rural economic development should address and harness the efficient spatial distribution of economic activity rather than attempt to replicate urban economies
4. A single national rural policy is unlikely to be meaningful and successful
5. Each community should bear responsibility for its economic success, not the federal government
6. Federal and state governments need to provide rural regions with the necessary tools and financing mechanisms to develop and execute an effective strategy

Of these six findings, the fourth is less directive and more instructive. However the other five can be applied to Sanders County as follows.

1. Rural economic development should focus on the unique strengths of each area, rather than concentrating on ameliorating generic weaknesses.

The "strengths" acknowledged by Sanders County citizens during the listening sessions are robust. They include those previously mentioned: scenery, recreation, wide-open spaces, "freedom," strong pride in, and sense of, community. In addition, citizens are proud of their schools and churches, and people step up to help each other.

By focusing on these strengths and assets, and building the means to capitalize on them, the community can make slow, steady progress toward "ameliorating" the weaknesses and growing an economy that can support and sustain necessary infrastructure improvements. Doing so will require finding alternative funding resources, specifically grant and credit resources, to help offset the costs associated with this development. A thorough list of these sources appears in TFDMP, (pdf found at www.downtownfalls.com) pages 7-10. Each option should be evaluated and debated as to their merits, not just for Thompson Falls, but for each community in the county and the county at large.

a) major infrastructure improvements, such as sewage systems, even roads and bridges, will require a willingness for the community to support receipt of grant funds and to engage in debt financing
b) tourism, well managed and strategically planned with the assistance of Montana State resources, can bring in more out-of-county and out-of-state revenue to help small businesses in the community
c) neighborhood advisory councils can create a forum to help unincorporated areas of the county meet, discuss strategies, and prioritize community needs for the county commission and city councils (a change of government to a county charter would provide this flexibility for more direct citizen and community engagement)
d) The TFDMP identified numerous opportunities for enhancement of public and private spaces in the downtown corridor of the county seat and largest community in the county;
adopting and moving forward with recommendations therein will have a spillover effect for the entire county and unincorporated areas
e) The hydrothermal geology of Hot Springs is an asset unique in Sanders County, as is the Paradise School; an investment in both is an investment in Sanders county at large

2. The appropriate economic unit for strategy purposes must include not only rural areas but also adjacent urban centers (combined with)

3. Rural economic development should address and harness the efficient spatial distribution of economic activity rather than attempt to replicate urban economies

Thompson Falls is equidistant from Missoula and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, the two largest market areas within an hour and a half of the county. This proximity is both a positive and a negative: it is a positive in that there is a large, essentially "urban" population close to the county that is within an afternoon's drive. Given the right marketing campaign for Sanders County amenities and attractions, tourists will come to take in the scenery, buying gas, shopping at unique stores and eating at local restaurants.

Several independent efforts to engage tourism in Sanders County seek to capture visitors and travelers from out of the county. "Tour 200," and The Road to the Buffalo all play to the tourist; camping, hiking, fishing and hunting are also natural amenities in the summer, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing in the winter. These activities draw visitors to the area for longer than an afternoon day trip. The TFDMP identifies these assets and offers suggestions for "sprucing up" the retail corridor, enticing visitors to shop and dine at food establishments.

But the proximity is a negative as these larger retail markets, including Spokane just over two hours away, draw Sanders County residents to fulfill some of their shopping needs. The authors of the TFDMP analyzed this "leakage" of retail spending from Sanders County at nearly $12 million for general merchandise and another $4.5 million for health care and related services, $2.2 million for clothing, and $1.6 million for electronics and appliances.

This analysis is based upon the retail trade area identified on the next page. While residents of the communities of Dixon and Hot Springs may feel left out of this analysis, the TFDMP was designed, and funded, to study opportunities in Thompson Falls. References to this report are not to exclude other communities in Sanders County, but are to highlight the assets of this well-travelled corridor and how improvements to the core of Thompson Falls can accrue to the entire county.

Likewise, the county commissioners are well aware of the needs expressed by citizens of Dixon and Hot Springs, which will require improving communication with another county asset and important member of the community: the Salish-Kootenai tribe.

Not all of the retail leakage identified in the TFDPM can be recaptured. The authors are careful to caution readers to reach that conclusion. Any opportunities for small, and even mid-size retail outlets to locate in the county to capture some of this market while creating jobs should be further evaluated, either by public or private entities, including private investors.
4. **A single national rural policy is unlikely to be meaningful and successful**

Just as a single national policy will be ineffective for rural economic development, so, too, will a single statewide, or even countywide policy be the cure-all for Sanders County. While each of the listening sessions offered commonalities of assets and concerns, assets and issues unique to each community were also identified. This is where neighborhood councils, referenced in 1c above, could be helpful: what's at the top-of-the list for Dixon may not register for Noxon. Nevertheless, the concerns of both communities should be addressed, not at the expense of one or the other, but out of respect for both.

5. **Each community should bear responsibility for its economic success, not the federal government**

At each listening session, citizens expressed values of self-sufficiency, reliance upon the citizens of their community through churches and non-profit organizations, and lastly, upon government. The order of preference for government assistance puts local government first, state government second, and the federal government last.
Sanders County residents clearly accept their personal responsibilities, including individual efforts, to achieve economic success. That said, there are numerous tools available from federal and state agencies that can be used to enhance these individual and local community efforts.

6. Federal and state governments need to provide rural regions with the necessary tools and financing mechanisms to develop and execute an effective strategy

As much as some residents may eschew government assistance, if economic growth is to occur, it must be at least partially subsidized. The necessary resources are not otherwise available from the small population, stretched across two Delawares.

That's not to say private investment shouldn't be encouraged. But even private investors will need to see some of the missing infrastructure put in place, or the costs for participating in infrastructure improvements estimated, before significant investment is made in a business enterprise. This infrastructure includes:

a) improved broadband service, capable of handling data transmission suitable for: marketing small businesses and selling goods and services; providing a means for distance workers - teleworkers - to work remotely for employers in other regions; and for manufacturers to share data and designs across the internet.
b) improved/well maintained roads for tourists and for the cost-effective flow of goods and services into and out of Sanders County.
c) reliable and resilient fire protection and law enforcement response.
d) sewage treatment systems that will allow for industrial and retail growth and housing expansion, assuring that the water, a vital asset in Sanders County, is also protected.
e) engaging social service networks to target what is perceived by young and old, in every community, to be a drug problem.
f) engaging social and community service providers to break reliance upon public assistance as opposed to work; work is available, as noted in the front page picture of this report and down the road at another vibrant area business, Lawyer Nursery.

As heard during the listening sessions and supported by Census data, there is a need to provide services to the aging population of the county. Not only does the county have more residents age 65 and older than is typical in Montana or the rest of the country, the number will grow. These services not only include health care, but everything from handyman assistance, to assisted living housing.

Business development and expansion for services in Sanders County would be consistent with entrepreneurial business growth across the nation. All things being equal - such as internet and
cell phone accessibility and basic public infrastructure (roads, sewer, public safety, schools, etc.) - emerging entrepreneurs and new businesses account for nearly all net job growth in the country and 20 percent of all new jobs created by new and existing business. In reporting this finding, Ernst & Young created this infographic, demonstrating that the majority of these new jobs are in the service and technology industries.


Simultaneous with the improvement of county infrastructure to expand business services, federal and state resources can also help local business owners, and prospective business owners, with the tools to grow and expand. The Kaufmann Foundation has named Montana the most entrepreneurial state in the nation for the third year in a row. Why this is is a matter of speculation: a spirit of self-sufficiency; the need for an income source when traditional manufacturing, retail, and service employment is spread out among small rural communities; a culturally engrained history of small business development that settled the west.

Whatever the reason, nurturing this entrepreneurial spirit can help increase the number of these enterprises while helping others expand and grow to hire employees, all of which will help local communities serve residents and visitors to Sanders County.

a) Credit opportunities can be enhanced with government guaranteed loans through U.S.D.A. Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant programs, and the U.S. Small Business Administration loan programs

b) Local gap financing is available when traditional business loans are not

c) The SBA, through the Small Business Development Centers, SCORE, and the Montana Women's Business Centers, offer free and confidential one-on-counseling for business development and expansion

d) Business mentoring and assessment is available through the Montana Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) program

e) Opportunities for businesses to expanded their markets overseas can be explored with the help of the SBA, Montana Department of Commerce, and U.S. Department of Commerce
As stewards of the county, every citizen - through community organizations, churches, public institutions and businesses - has an opportunity to create or enhance the basic community assets of Sanders County in a manner that protects the wide open, scenic splendor, of the county and honors its cultural, historical and geographic diversity.
MAIN TOPIC: INFRASTRUCTURE

Issue: Water and Wastewater Systems
Water and wastewater infrastructure was a topic in several communities in Sanders County. Aging or inadequate systems or extension of service to promote growth was mentioned as an issue in the communities of Heron, Noxon, Trout Creek, Paradise, Camas, and Thompson Falls. Many of Sanders County’s communities do not have community water or sewer systems. This can be problematic, particularly where there is no room left on small lots to replace septic drain fields.

Repairing and updating existing systems or building new community systems can be extremely costly depending on the extent of upgrade that is required. State and federal regulations for public systems are complicated and can also contribute to the cost of the project.

Recommendations:
Reviewing existing systems and planning for potential upgrades is the first step in each community that has identified a water or wastewater issue. Rate structures should also be part of that review in order to understand how much the community is paying for services and whether or not that is adequate to maintain the existing system and set aside reserves for a potential capital project for upgrade or replacement. In acquiring grants for assistance with upgrades a target rate is often required in order to qualify for those grants. Communities who have not consistently raised rates to keep up with the cost of maintenance and replacement may see very large increases once an upgrade project is completed.

Most major upgrades for water and sewer are too expensive for a community to undertake without the use of grants or loans. Incorporated towns within the County have the ability to apply for state and federal grant and/or low interest loan funding. Unincorporated communities are generally required to form a water and sewer district in order to qualify for such funding. A County may apply on behalf of an unincorporated area and District formation can proceed concurrently with the project development. In some cases, an existing not-for-profit water or sewer company may be eligible for Federal but generally not State assistance.

Once a community identifies a need, the first step is to engage the professional services of an engineer with knowledge and expertise in planning and designing water or wastewater systems. Various state and federal agencies which will be listed in the recommended resources section provide planning grants that provide financial assistance for communities to hire an engineer.
There are at least two Technical Assistance providers serving Montana who can assist with hiring of an engineer as well as with the formation of a District. These providers can assist with the rate-setting process which is a necessary part of project financing. They offer operator training and operational guidance as well. Their contact information is listed below.

The engineer is then tasked with providing a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER). That report and the activities associated with completing the PER include:

1. an analysis of existing system conditions;
2. alternatives for improvements;
3. preliminary details for the chosen alternative;
4. an environmental assessment; and
5. public outreach activities to help the community explain the problem, potential solutions, and costs to the public.

It is important that a grant writer is identified to help in determining the most likely funding strategy for the identified project. The sooner the grant writer can become part of the planning project, the more efficient s/he will be in compiling the information needed for grant or loan applications. The grant writer will use the PER along with public outreach information and information about the communities planning activities to submit grants to various funding agencies depending on the financial need.

Acquisition of funding for infrastructure projects is usually a multi-year process and takes a great deal of coordination, often from a variety of sources. The services of a recognized Bond Counsel are often a necessary part of the funding arrangements.

Once funding is in place, the engineer used for planning may be retained to provide final design and construction management for the project as long as procurement has been properly conducted.

**Recommended Resources:**

**Hiring an Engineer**

Procuring a professional engineer is subject to Montana Statute. Engineers are hired based on their qualifications and then the cost of their services are negotiated after the procurement process has been followed.


**General List of Resources**


**Preliminary Engineering Planning Grants (most used)**

Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP): http://comdev.mt.gov/TSEP/tseppergrants.mcpx

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program:

http://comdev.mt.gov/CDBG/cdbgplanninggrants.mcpx


**Preliminary Engineering Planning Loans**

DEQ State Revolving Fund (SRF) Loan Program: http://deq.mt.gov/wqinfo/srf/default.mcpx
**Construction Grants (most used)**
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program: [http://comdev.mt.gov/CDBG/requiredappforms.mcpx](http://comdev.mt.gov/CDBG/requiredappforms.mcpx)

**Construction Loans**
INTERCAP Loan Program: [http://investmentmt.com/INTERCAP](http://investmentmt.com/INTERCAP)

**Bond Counsel**
Dorsey & Whitney, LLP: [https://www.dorsey.com/locations/missoula](https://www.dorsey.com/locations/missoula)

**Technical Assistance Providers**
Mid-West Assistance Program: [http://www.map-inc.org/montana.html](http://www.map-inc.org/montana.html)

**Issue: County Roads and Bridges**
Sanders County operates three road districts that are responsible for maintenance of County roads and bridges. Many miles of road combined with Montana weather conditions and terrain that is not always conducive to keeping roads in tact make ongoing maintenance and upgrades an expensive necessity. Road and bridge condition is a topic of concern for residents of the County.

**Recommendations:**
Sanders County has GIS mapping available that shows all roads in the County. If the road districts are not using the GIS mapping system to identify and track maintenance needs and plans, that may be a way for the County to prioritize their road projects.

A bridge inventory should also be compiled. The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) provides bridge inspection of all MDT and County maintained bridges over 20’ in length in Sanders County. The County is responsible for inspection of bridges under 20’. If bridges are not inspected by MDT it is recommended that they be inspected by a certified National Bridge Inspector (NBI). NBI certification is required if using TSEP fund for the bridge inventory/inspection.

Once inventories are compiled, road and bridge capital improvements plans (CIP) should be written in order to prioritize upgrade and replacement projects. That CIP should be updated on a regular basis to reflect additional needs or completed projects. The county has a CIP which was published in 2013.

Most funding for county roads comes from county budgets and is generated from property taxes or designated funds like Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) which is an alternative form of...
payment from government sources that otherwise do not pay county taxes. Rural Improvement Districts (RID) can be formed to contribute to ongoing maintenance or major upgrades of transportation networks. Additional funding sources for roads may come from Federal Government grants that include the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP), administered through MDT or Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants.

Bridge replacement projects may be part of MDT’s responsibility if placed on the MDT priority list. Otherwise, the County may look for funding through the TSEP program. TSEP Bridge Construction grants, similar to water and wastewater grants, require the development of a PER by a professional engineer.

**Recommended Resources:**

**Road Inventory and Mapping**
The Montana Land Information Advisory Council (MLIAC) assists the State Library to identify, evaluate, and prioritize requests received from state agencies, local governments, and Indian tribal government entities to provide development and maintenance of services relating to the GIS and land information. They establish a granting process based on the Montana Land Information Act intended to develop a standardized, sustainable method to collect, maintain, and disseminate information in digital formats about the natural and artificial land characteristics of Montana. Calls for grant applications are available on a yearly basis and can usually be used for projects such as setting up a road mapping and information system.

http://geoinfo.msl.mt.gov/Home/GIS_Community/GIS_Coordination/MLIA_Grants

**Preliminary Engineering Planning Grants**
Bridge Inventories and Preliminary Engineering Reports can be funded by the Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP). Bridge inventories can only be funded by TSEP planning grants every four years.: http://comdev.mt.gov/TSEP/tseppergrants.mcpx

**Funding for Road and Bridge Construction Projects**
Montana Code Annotated related to creation of an RID: http://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/7/12/7-12-2181.htm
Montana Department of Transportation funding opportunities:
Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP): http://comdev.mt.gov/TSEP/tseppergrants.mcpx

**Road Department Personnel Training**
Montana Association of County Road Supervisors:
http://www.coe.montana.edu/ltapv2/resources/macrs/index.html

**MAIN TOPIC: Housing**

**Issue: Senior Housing**
In each community the citizens of Sanders County identified a desire to have additional resources available for senior housing. The desire is for people to be able to age in place with a range of services from affordable housing to assisted care facilities.

**Recommendations:**
Available, affordable housing is essential for the development of any community. The ability to keep experienced citizens in a community with ties to family and friends is helpful to both the citizens and their community.

In order for housing to be developed there needs to be a sustainable model to support the long term investment needed. This usually begins with a housing needs assessment. There are a few community minded investors willing to commit to this investment. They exist in both the for-profit and not-for-profit realm. Inquiries to existing facilities may provide information and contacts to reach these groups.

Another model that has been demonstrated is the cooperative housing model. The individuals needing the housing pool their resources and form a cooperative. The cooperative business model allows the occupants to own and operate the housing. There are provisions in the organizing documents to allow for both sale and purchase as transitions are necessary. The model provides for self-governance of the enterprise.

In some communities there is a business model which provides for assisted living. This does not constitute an endorsement, merely an example. The BeeHive Homes franchise provides for the establishment of assisted care facilities. There is a support network that goes with this.

Some individuals can extend the time in their existing homes by making modifications or upgrades such as ramps, wider doors, grab rails and bathroom improvements. Low to Very-Low income residents may receive financial assistance to make these upgrades through USDA Rural Development.

**Recommended Resources:**
For additional information and ideas, please visit the following websites:

Homeward: http://www.homeword.org
USDA Rural Development: http://www.rd.usda.gov/mt
Montana Cooperative Development Center: http://www.mcdc.coop/mcdc
BeeHive Homes: http://beehivehomes.com/

**Issue: Single Family Housing**
In each community visited, we heard of the need for additional housing. When asked for clarification about whether the need was for rentals, apartments or homes for purchase, the answer was repeatedly “all of the above.” For a community to develop economically, there needs to be adequate housing, adequate relates to both quality and quantity.

**Recommendations:**
Homeownership can contribute to community stability and economic development. Homeowners tend to have an ownership in their communities and contribute to the tax base. They tend to volunteer more and engage in civic activities.

There are numerous opportunities for assistance with home purchases. Many of the providers require Homebuyer Education Classes and assist with financial fitness training. In some cases
there are opportunities for down payment assistance and some programs offer subsidized interest rates.

A place to start for the County may be to engage with the Home Buyer Education providers to see if they will provide classes in Sanders County. This will enable residents to more easily access the classes and eventually the other programs.

In order to create more housing, it may be helpful to engage with local developers to determine their ability and interest in developing smaller scale developments. It may help to bring realtors and local banks to the table at the same time.

USDA Rural Development can finance homes in rural areas, all of Sanders County is eligible for this program. New construction, new manufactured homes on a foundation, qualifying existing homes and home repairs to provide decent, safe and sanitary housing as well as accessibility improvements are eligible. Interest rates can be subsidized for qualifying buyers. Loans are generally for 33 years and in some cases can be for 38 years. This program can partner or leverage with other providers. Housing Program Staff members can be invited to communities to provide information, meet with interested community members and participate in Homebuyer Education programs.

The Federal Home Loan Bank in Seattle offers the Home$tar and Home$tar Plus programs for downpayment assistance to qualified buyers. This program is accessed through conventional and government lenders.

The NeighborWorks MT Program offers Homebuyer Education and can provide downpayment assistance to qualified buyers.

**Recommended Resources:**
NeighborWorks MT:  http://www.nwmt.org/NWMT%20Network/cap-profile
HomeWord:  http://www.homeword.org/
USDA Rural Development:  http://www.rd.usda.gov/mt
REPORT BY: Robie Culver  
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MAIN TOPIC: COUNTY PLANNING

Issue: Need for County Planning Board, Growth Policy, and other Planning Activities

Recommendations:

*Planning Board Appointment and Development of a Growth Policy*

Sanders County does not currently have a planning board. County Commission appointment of a planning board is a first step in the process of developing a Growth Policy for the County. A Growth Policy is a community’s growth and development plan. It evaluates existing community conditions and sets goals for housing, land use, economic development, local services, public safety, natural resources, transportation, and other unique characteristics and features of the community. A Growth Policy isn’t a regulation or ordinance, but it serves as the legal basis for enacting them.

*Other Planning Activities*

In addition to developing and adopting a Growth Policy, additional planning activities can assist County Government with setting the course for maintaining and improving county facilities and infrastructure. A Comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan (CCIP) is a strategic tool for planning and financing public infrastructure. It is a process used to identify capital needs, establish priorities, and schedule and fund projects to improve existing, or construct new facilities.

Other CIP’s that may be useful for specific pieces of County infrastructure include documents that address the needs of the County-managed airport or County-maintained roads and bridges.

*Advantages of preparing a Growth Policy and other Planning Documents:*

- Community values – preserves cultural and historical values, helps maintain the character of the community
- Safer communities - sets standards and promotes projects that improve infrastructure and services (roads, bridges, water resources, sewer systems, solid waste, fire and emergency services, health facilities)
- Promotes affordable housing
- Saves money - Identifies growth patterns that minimize the cost to provide local services and infrastructure. Helps local government create a long-term financial plan to meet public works needs.
- Builds community - greater understanding of issues
- Attracts business - a more attractive and well – planned community
- Funding opportunities - elevates community management in the eyes of funding agencies
- Helps local governments understand and be more responsive to citizens needs and desires
• Local governments operate more effectively – prevents public works crises, encourages consensus among local officials and staff.
• Can help local government meet statutory requirements – suggests strategy for development

**Recommended Resources:**

**Hiring a Planning Professional or Engineer to assist with planning activities**

Procuring a professional engineer is subject to Montana Statute. Engineers are hired based on their qualifications and then the cost of their services are negotiated after the procurement process has been followed.


The Department of Commerce may have requirements for procuring a planning professional if the community uses grant funding for developing grant funding.

http://comdev.mt.gov

**Funding for Planning**

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program - Growth Policies, CCIP

http://comdev.mt.gov/CDBG/cdbgplanninggrants.mcpx

Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) – CCIP

http://comdev.mt.gov/TSEP/tseppergrants.mcpx

**General List of Resources**

Planning Board Members Handbook
Growth Policy Resource Book
Capital Improvements Planning Manual

http://comdev.mt.gov/cddpublications.mcpx
Suggested optimal business investment targets for Sanders County based upon the assets and liabilities associated with business location factors:

- Agriculture-farming, multi-functional agriculture, value-added wood products, natural/organic products

Natural, native or organic plants, herbs and fungi, are in high demand from consumers. They are used in skin products, cosmetics, food, beverages, and as dietary supplements. Growing and selling the natural plants to Montana based natural product industries creates opportunity for independent entrepreneurs.

**Recommendations:**

- Create a local meetup of citizenry interested in the natural products business enterprise and consider the meetup an unstructured association to share information, learn from and support one another.
- Tap into resources located nearby for education, inspiration and ideas.

**Resources:**

- Maarten Fischer, Kalispell, developed and piloted an entrepreneurial course in the field of multi-agriculture.
- David Amrein, Founder, Dr. Clarks’ Research (Europe) and Mountain Meadow Herbs in Kalispell. Mountain Meadow Herbs is a manufacturer and may have opportunity to procure natural products from Sanders county entrepreneurs.
- Montana Organic Association

- Mobile entrepreneurs/independent self employed

Montana ranks number one in the United States for number of entrepreneurs per capita. Citizens are creative in the way they find a service they can perform or a product they can provide to capture an income.
Recommendation:
Engage retirees who have expertise or have been successful entrepreneurs to mentor and coach citizens interested in starting a business or expanding a business. Montana West Economic development has a mentoring/advising program where currently employed successful business people, especially entrepreneurs, and retired entrepreneurs are vetted by the Montana West staff, and serve as advisors/mentors either individually or in a small group to people with ideas. The mentors/advisors do not charge for their time, nor does Montana West. The desired result to help either launch or accelerate the idea, product or service by having access to expertise.

Resource: Montana West Economic Development, Kalispell
Consider applying for USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant funds to support a local “pop up” program for business growth. The pop up is small or micro funding to assist citizens with a business in their home or garage move to a vacant space in the downtown or shared space. The pop ups could be seasonal or long-term. The new space provides better visibility, space and location to serve their customers. The funding from USDA is utilized to provide for equipment purchases, rent, or marketing, or other items to move the business from the coffee table to a professional location.

Resource: Lake County Community Development Corporation to assist with the grant writing, administration, and deployment

Micro Business Loans-partner with adjoining economic development of finance organizations to market and provide counsel to citizens for micro business loan funding.

Resources: Lake County Community Development Corporation, Montana West Economic Development, Montana Community Development Corporation, local lenders

Internet capacity-Blackfoot Telecommunications-Thompson Falls residents cost for land line and 10mbps of DSL is $95/mo. In Kalispell the cost is $82/mo with CenturyLink. All infrastructure is important, and broadband impacts government deployment of services, residential and business needs. Broadband capitalizes on education and safety factors. Community leadership should meet with the internet service companies leadership and particularly with Bitterroot Economic Development District about internet service capacity improvement ideas.

- Tourism-natural resource silver, and signature event

Recommendations:
Select an on-going successful community event or create a signature event similar to the Red Ants Pants Festival in White Sulphur Springs, Butte’s Folk Festival, or Whitefish’s Octoberfest, to market and bring people both in state and out of state to Sanders County. The visits may attract people to relocate in Sanders County for the lifestyle assets, and increase sales for local community business. Funding is available through the Montana Department of Commerce for tourism asset building. Local funds could be raised through the creation of a local business improvement district in the cities.
Wallace, Idaho is an example of capitalizing on the silver mining asset.

**Resources:** Montana Department of Commerce and Lake County Community Development

Has a resort community governance model been considered for the cities in Sanders County? This mechanism provides funding to the cities captured from the out of state visitors who use local services that all the local citizenry is paying for so the out of state visitors can enjoy.

**Resources:** Whitefish and Red Lodge local units of government would be resources to learn more about the resort city impact; Montana Department of Administration for procedures and regulatory data.

Preserve America Act-established under the Bush Administration, this resource provides assistance to the approved Preserve America communities tools and expertise to preserve historical assets.

**Resources:** Kalispell applied and was awarded the designation in 2009. Contact the city of Kalispell Community Development Director for more information, 758-7738.

**Additional Comments:**
During the listening sessions there were statements about attracting business to Sanders County. While that can happen, the likelihood is minimal, and the resources and effort should be focused on entrepreneurial activity, economic gardening, or simply put, growing business in Sanders County from within. Business location factors vary depending upon the product or service, but universally a business launches to solve a problem or need, and the location factors are to service the customers and market. Manufacturing’s strength in Sanders County is the natural resources, but the weaknesses are government regulatory processes and the cost of inbound and outbound transportation. The professional and technical jobs are paying living wages, and is the typical growing business sector in most Montana communities. Don’t discount the insurance, banking and other professional service providers, and the government employees, these are good paying jobs and have technical applications.

One of the most sensible quotes applicable to property comes from the movie “Gone With the Wind.” Gerald O’Hara, the plantation owner of Tara, comments to his daughter, Scarlett, “land is the only thing worth fighting for, dying for; because it is the only thing that lasts.” The impact of not having a planning board is puzzling; is the lack of planning devaluing the property in Sanders County?

Regarding government borrowing: the statements were made that Sanders County government has never borrowed money. In fact, one elected official stated they personally do not believe in debt. This author has little personal debt as well, but manages a business that has some debt in order to be profitable and serve the need of its customers. There is a difference between over extending in debt and having debt to keep infrastructure, safety and services (such as a community library that is all about education and serves as a community gathering place) from deteriorating and costing more to replace because of lack of maintenance and improvements.
Regarding a grant writer: a grant writer can attract six times their salary and contribute to the public and private sectors budgets, and impact local projects. Or, the organizations can contract with economic development organizations to provide that grant writing and admin service for them. In Flathead County there is vocal opposition occasionally towards accepting grants. However, when those grants are awarded, and when the project is completed, those vocal opposers are clapping their hands over the grant achievement. Don’t let a few vocal opposers hold decision makers from going forward; otherwise, the vision and dreams to accomplish community projects or services will never happen, and those grant resources are being deployed somewhere, but not in your locale.
COMMUNITY PLANNING PROGRAMS

Montana has several programs that can assist with revitalization studies – the Community Development Block Grant and the Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund. Both programs can be used to hire a consultant for this type of plan that would include a list of priorities, cost of implementation, and timelines for completion. Thompson Falls has completed this project through CDBG funding. It would be helpful for all communities to see what these tools provide, as it is similar throughout Sanders County. This plan can set the community apart from others in grant application because there is already buy in at that level. This planning activity can also help establish tourism assets and identify marketing opportunities.

FINANCING IMPROVEMENTS

Individual communities can apply for a transportation grant from the Transportation Alternatives (Montana Department of Transportation) for overall downtown improvements including landscaping, streetscape improvements (lighting, sidewalk paving, benches, planters, façade 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 highways system.
County, city, organizations and individuals can also apply for Tourism Infrastructure Improvement Grants for brick and mortar projects that would enhance a visitor experience. This grant program has recently expanded to include for profit businesses. Additional funding through Indian Country Economic Development Programs for tribally owned businesses particularly in Hot Springs is also available.

**Marketing**

Citizens consistently described the beauty of the area, the art, and recreational opportunities in the area. They also talked about the 2000 plus vehicles per day that drive through the county on Highway 200. In addition, several events were mentioned in each community that could attract visitors from outside of the area to participate throughout the year. Currently, the communities do not have adequate resources to advertise to increase participation and in many cases do not have collaboration among the neighboring communities within the county. Each community should start with a “Moving Sanders County (or individual community) Forward” Workshop offered by the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development. This workshop includes customized navigation of leveraging the State’s Brand and its three brand pillars of 1. Spectacular Unspoiled Nature 2. Vibrant and Charming Small Towns 3. Breathtaking Experiences by and Relaxing Hospitality at Night. Attendees will learn about the Montana Visitor and their buying habits as well as best practices for business when managing your internet reputation and telling your best story. Co-operative opportunities with the State and Regional tourism marketing efforts can be discussed. The workshops are FREE for the communities. We have done over 20 around the state with over 500 attendees.

The Department of Commerce also has grants available for digital development and special event marketing.

**Signage**

Signing regulations with the Department of Transportation can be difficult to navigate. Rob Stapley with DOT has offered to send staff to the community meeting to answer questions from the community about their individual signage issues. Commerce is also partnering with DOT for some reference material on way finding issues. The staff at DOT is willing and able to address questions at any time. His contact information is listed below.

**Resources:**

For additional information please find contact and program information below:

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](http://cdbged.mt.gov)
Annmarie Robinson, Section Manager
Big Sky Trust Fund Program
Montana Department of Commerce
301 South Park
Ave. Helena, MT
59601
PH: 1-406-841-2744
Email: ARobinson3@mt.gov
Website: www.bsf.mt.gov

Carol Crockett, Manager
Tourism Grant Program
Montana Department of Commerce
301 South Park
Ave. Helena, MT
59601
PH: 1-406-841-2796
Email: ccrockett@mt.gov
Website: http://tourism.mt.gov/MarketingDevelopment/GrantProgram

Julie Walker, Industry Outreach Coordinator
Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development
Montana Department of Commerce
301 South Park
Ave. Helena, MT
59601
PH: 1-406-841-2887
Email: jwalker3@mt.gov
Website: http://tourism.mt.gov/MarketingDevelopment

Tash Wisemiller, Main Street Program Manager
Montana Main Street Program
Montana Department of Commerce
301 South Park
Ave. Helena, MT
59601
PH: 1-406-841-2756
Email: TWisemiller@mt.gov
Website: http://mtmainstreet.mt.gov/default.mcpx

Heather Sobrepena-George, Indian Country Program Manager
Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development
Montana Department of Commerce
301 South Park
Ave. Helena, MT
59601
PH: 1-406-841-2775
Email: hsobrepenageorge@mt.gov
Website:http://businessresources.mt.gov/

Michael Wherley, Professional Engineer
Community Transportation Enhancement
Program Montana Department of Transportation
2701 Prospect
Ave. Helena, MT
59601
PH: 1-406-444-4221
Email: mwherley@mt.gov
Website: www.mdt.me.gov/business/ctep/

Michael Rob Stapley, Right of Way, Bureau Chief
Montana Department of Transportation
PH: 1-406-444-6063
Email: rostapley@mt.gov
Website: www.mdt.me.gov
MAIN TOPIC: Law Enforcement & Safety

Issue: Facilities and Equipment
In each community the citizens of Sanders County identified a desire to have an increased presence of trained and equipped law enforcement officers. In addition, Sheriff’s Office Staff identified a need for facility improvements.

Recommendations:
Safety and security are important for the well-being of any community. Adequate training and proper safety equipment are essential for Law Enforcement personnel to do their work. A safe community is more conducive to economic development.

A community must understand that a desire for improved services comes with an obligation to provide funding for those services. There is an initial investment in capital improvements and an ongoing investment in operations and maintenance and debt service. Facilities can be financed from cash reserves on hand, loans and grants.

Since shared services are already a part of the way Sanders County provides court and jail services, it may be worth exploring a partnership to build new jail facilities.

The US Department of Justice has provided grants to hire new officers and pay a portion of their salary for up to three years. It may be worth exploring this while additional sources of funding are developed.

USDA Rural Development through the Community Facilities Program can finance public safety equipment and facilities.

The process begins with identifying current needs whether that is new patrol cars, communication devices or jail facilities. The next step would be to prioritize those needs. Once the priority needs are determined, sources of funding can be sought. Capital improvements such as a new jail would require the assistance of an architect for design and construction oversight. Hiring of an architect requires a competitive selection process based on qualifications.

Recommended Resources:
For additional information and ideas, please visit the following websites:

USDA Rural Development:  http://www.rd.usda.gov/mt
FEMA: http://www.fema.gov/homeland-security-grant-program
MAIN TOPIC: Education

Issue: College and Vocational Options in High School
In many communities the citizens of Sanders County identified a desire to have an opportunity for students to access college level courses through the high schools.

Recommendations:
Extended learning opportunities can benefit students by giving them a leg up on future education as well as enhancing their learning opportunities and engagement in their education.

There are resources available through the Montana State University and Community College network. These entities provide programming and a network to extend learning opportunities.

USDA Rural Development through the Rural Utilities Service provides a grant program assist in setting up distance learning facilities.

Recommended Resources:
For additional information and ideas, please visit the following websites:

Flathead Valley Community College: http://www.fvcc.edu/
Missoula College: http://mc.umt.edu/
REPORT BY: BILLIE LEE, President
BillieLee Project Consulting
405 16th Ave E, Polson, MT 59864
Billie.lee@bleeconsulting.com

MAIN TOPIC AREA: LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SAFETY

Issue: Improved Equipment and Training

- **Recommendations:** The County seems to be tapped in to most of the federal and state resources available for both training grants and equipment; however, as availability of resources – especially federally funded grants – becomes more sporadic, it is critical that someone actually be assigned to a quarterly search for such grants (federal, state, foundation) and upcoming due dates. With increased emphasis on issues of homeland security, it is possible that more dollars may become available to assist rural communities in assuring well-trained and prepared professionals.

- **Resources:**
  - [https://ric.nal.usda.gov/rural-fire-department-resources](https://ric.nal.usda.gov/rural-fire-department-resources);
  - [http://investmentmt.com/INTERCAP](http://investmentmt.com/INTERCAP);

Issue: Staff to oversee all fire departments

- **Recommendations:** Sanders County may be an ideal setting to establish (and fund) a pilot project (that could subsequently be a model for other large, rural counties with similar issues) for regional jurisdiction under the Assistance to Fire Fighters Grant program (due annually usually in November). This could fund a coordinated approach to a central office that works on behalf of local fire/ambulance departments for staffing, training, equipment – helping maintain communication systems etc. Per the grant application, “Regional” - Any eligible entity may act as a “host” applicant and apply for large-scale projects on behalf of itself and any number of other local AFG eligible organizations that will be participating partners in the award. Joint/Regional projects should achieve greater cost effectiveness and regional efficiency and resilience. If an applicant wishes to submit a Joint/Regional application, they should select the “Regional” radio button when filling out the application. For the purpose of this document and the AFG Application, the term “Regional” will serve the same meaning as “Joint/Regional.” Because the grant application is not due until next year, the intervening months could be used to form a steering committee from the various departments to outline what such a “regional” approach might look like and what funding would be needed.


Issue: Fire and EMS Volunteer Burnout and Funding

- **Recommendations:** With a declining and aging population, unless there is greater success in expanding or developing businesses that will draw younger people to communities, there will be an increasing problem in finding volunteers to provide this necessary work.
  - Begin a recruiting program by posting the need for volunteers and citing training opportunities. List physical qualifications required to pass training and stress any
benefits, including things like being prepared for natural disasters, strengthening community from within, etc.

- Establish a partnership with high schools – including private schools - where there is a monthly or bi-monthly introduction to fire and EMS needs and training. These are not lectures necessarily on being fire-wise, but actual participatory demonstrations on use of equipment; physical aptitude; types of fires and use of water/chemicals, etc. Offer occasional after-school mini-trainings for volunteers - or invite older youth to some of the established training programs.

- Some funding for recruitment could potentially be wrapped into the regional pilot program grant – or, because of its potential as additional workforce training, but fundable through certain foundations as a pilot program of its own.


**Issue: Citizen Security and Safety - Dixon**

Seniors in the Dixon area voiced concerns for their personal security and safety, as well as the safety of school children, considering the build-up junk cars and trash both on the streets and in alley’s and private property. The County reported that periodically they require the streets to be cleared of sitting vehicles, and while they get a positive response to their request as made, the build-up soon returns. The safety issues is that all the junk cars can harbor disease, animals and attract homeless or criminal elements to take shelter, as well as being dangerously enticing to children to try to play in and turning the town to blight.

- **Recommendations:**
  - Upon completion of Tribal elections, the County Commission structure a community meeting specifically related to this issue with the Dixon area Tribal Councilman and other parties as may be appropriate to listen to citizen concerns and to work toward some resolution.
  - **Resources:** Develop a list of citizen leaders in the community (both Tribal and non-Tribal); Tribal resources that may include their health and human services and law enforcement personnel in addition to Council members;

**MAIN TOPIC AREA: COMMUNICATIONS**

**Issue: Communications:** The pure geographic dimensions of the county make common communication difficult and the emergency management teams rely primarily on phone trees to communicate urgent messages. The problem is further exasperated by limited cell phone services in many areas; no internet messaging system that can be easily deployed; weekly newspapers serving the county and radio/TV services being generated from a variety of places from outside the county’s borders. The County’s only TV station is community-owned, but is not funded well and does not have either the human or technical capacity to serve as a centralized communication hub.

- **Recommendations:**
  - Assure that all citizens have access to or know where to access emergency management plans – including school students. The plans should be required reading in some high school class.
Investigate the possibility of the community TV station being partnered with TF High school; build a class, entrepreneurship and/or training program around operating such a station; involve HS student in designing a more effective county-wide communication plan, including investigating how such a plan could be funded and implement, including utilizing the TV station.

- Provide on-line instructions in the Emergency Management Department for setting cell-phones to receive emergency notifications including Amber Alerts.
- Assure there is a list of radio and TV stations (with phone and e-mail numbers) to be called when emergency notifications are to be issued; obtain correct information to assure such notifications are promptly broadcast upon receipt.

**Resources:** SC Emergency Operations Plan; SC Wildfires - Air Quality Info; SC Wildfires - Evacuation Info; 2013 Community Fire Protection Plan:
[http://www.co.sanders.mt.us/Department_Emergency_Management.aspx](http://www.co.sanders.mt.us/Department_Emergency_Management.aspx)

**Issue: Communication with CSKT on Community Issues (Hot Springs and Dixon)**
In areas with multiple jurisdictions including Local and County governments as well as Tribal governments, it is often difficult for non-Tribal members and businesses to know what is planned for their communities by the Tribe or activities that may impact their lives or businesses. There is a desire to increase communication between the parties.

**Recommendations:** In Polson and Ronan, the Chambers of Commerce host an annual update from the Tribe on its activities, accomplishments and plans, usually delivered by the Tribe’s Communication Director, Rob McDonald.

- Form committees in Hot Springs and Dixon to meet on some type of regular basis with the Tribal Council member(s) who represent their community (currently Leonard Gray, Hot Springs and Terry Pitts, Dixon). Include at least one Tribal member on the committee who is willing to attend Tribal district meetings and give feedback relative to any specific actions or items that may affect the broader community.
- The Hot Springs and Plains Chambers of Commerce might make a formal request to Tribal Council to schedule similar updates from Mr. McDonald as are given in Polson and Ronan, but specifically addressing any projects or plans affecting Sanders County.
- Utilize the Tribal website to access various departments for direct information related to roads, trails/land use, regulations on Tribal property, etc.

**Resources:** [http://www.cskt.org/](http://www.cskt.org/); Phone: (406) 676-2700; Email: csktcouncil@cskt.org; Mailing Address: PO Box 278, Pablo, Montana 59855

**MAIN TOPIC AREA: CULTURE**

**Issue: Generational Poverty**
Generational poverty was mentioned in all communities as being something that holds people back from reaching their potential related to education and employment and contributes to a perceived over-reliance on welfare or other social programs. It is critical that both social
workers and educators understand issues related to generational poverty as it impacts students and families in the community.

- **Recommendations:** It is recommended that at least 2 people involved in education and/or social programs read related materials and commit to attending the workshop being put on by CSKT on January 12, 2015 (see information below). Follow-up should be done to incorporate ideas into both adult education and training opportunities to encourage people to enroll in programs that will lead them into more sustainable lives (see ideas and discussion under the education and workforce training topic areas).


**Issue: Apathy and Hopelessness – Especially Among the Poor and Young People**

A major key to changing apathy and hopelessness is re-igniting a fire and lighting the way to something better – appealing to the naturally creative instincts and curiosity that exists in most people – no matter their current condition in life. There is a need to become more creative in forming coalitions, partnerships and developing what might be considered the unusual as a way attracting these individuals and inviting them to do something different.

- **Recommendations:** Related both to the generational poverty and potential for education, it is recommended that local businesses, including NW Energy, mining operations, manufacturers, contractors, etc. be enlisted in programs where they open their doors once a month, or quarterly or on some schedule to invite and encourage young people and socially disadvantaged adults to come in and learn about a business; to get some hands-on type training; to hear successful people talk about what they attribute their successes to; skills needed to work in their industry, etc. Often these types of sessions or done through a chamber of commerce or other venue where it is businesses talking to other businesses. Is there a way in which attendance could be encouraged through partnering with high schools; job service; surveys to unemployed people related to areas of interest and types of jobs they might be interested in. etc.
  - Open computer labs or access to public on a regular basis; find some “young” success stories or entrepreneurs who would be willing to come in an give a workshop on a specific application that could lead to piquing someone’s interest and set them on a path not previously thought possible
  - Grow the robotics project in Plains – engage kids in regional and state competitions. Appeal to someone like the Gates Foundation to provide tools, training and scholarships
  - Start entrepreneurship classes as options in schools – or after school within a “club” environment. Start a student-owned business of some type that is mentored by local business people. Bring in successful young entrepreneurs as speakers.
  - As recommended elsewhere, bring the community TV station into a partnership with the high school to use as a learning tool and to provide general operations
MAIN TOPIC AREA: EDUCATION

Issue: College and Vocational Options In High School (Like Robotics and Code Class In Plains)

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 need for advanced training opportunities and classroom work for high school students to better prepare them for future jobs was an essential need voiced throughout all communities as well as county-staff members participating in the sessions. With declining (an aging) populations throughout the county, less money to support schools, and lack of a diversified economy promoting jobs at a reasonably wage, it is perceived that an environment of apathy and hopelessness is setting amongst both young people and the working poor who may have lost jobs in the timber industry and related natural resource jobs. In this regard, both the need for advanced classes and workforce training are interrelated and could potentially be structured to meet both the needs of students throughout the county and unemployed and under-employed others.

Recommendations:

• Both Flathead Valley Community College and Missoula College have strong community ties and outreach programs that work both with high schools and businesses to structure classes and training programs fitting the needs of the community. I highly recommend that a working group be established to more fully explore these options. To facilitate making classes available via the internet, to both students and adults, each of the high schools could possibly establish a computer lab that is open at certain hours in order for people to attend classes. Set up partnerships with businesses similar to the Bitterroot College Fab Lab.

• Explore partnerships with FVCC and Missoula College to offer curriculum locally – partner with local TV station to host group interactive TV courses
  o FVCC Online courses have been designed to fill the needs of busy people who desire to continue their education. There are three types of online learning:
    • Online courses—these courses are fully online.
    • Interactive Television course (ITV)—these are courses presented over an interactive television network between FVCC and partners at other locations.
      ➢ Possibility – establish this curriculum as the basis for training students to operate the community TV station; make the TV – and its use for emergency communications and programming - a school-owned project that is also a teaching studio. Consider setting up a pilot program partnership with SKC TV and MT Public TV and/or Radio for advanced training; partnering on programming, etc.
    • Hybrid Courses—these courses are part face-to-face and part online.
      ➢ Establishing a visiting instructors program once a month where the college instructor comes to a central location in Sanders County to meet with the on-line students
Missoula College offers options to help students prepare for college or to earn college credits while still in high school. Those options include Big Sky Pathways and Dual Enrollment coursework.

**Benefits of Dual Enrollment:**
- Save $ on your college degree, with 50% off or free tuition and fees for high school students!
- Get a head start on earning a college degree!
- Earn credits that show college admission departments that you are prepared for college-level study!
- G Programs for High School Students
- Missoula College offers options to help students prepare for college or to earn college credits while still in high school. Those options include Big Sky Pathways and Dual Enrollment coursework.

- Identify an exploratory group to meet with parties in Hamilton that spearheaded the establishment of the Bitterroot College now less than 5 years old – replicate for Sanders County. Victoria Clark is now the Director of the Bitterroot College Program and was one of the leaders behind efforts to establish the college in Hamilton (contact information listed below). It took 2 years of planning to get it up and running. One of the single most influential moves was when 30 local supporters of the idea traveled to meeting of the Board of Regents in Butte to address the issue and ask their support.

- Revisit the Technology Center planning and Research project completed by SCCDC and see if there is an approach that incorporates both the ideas of a community college branch or partnership and the technology center into a single location.

- Makers Spaces can often be completed at reasonable costs with donated materials if you can find the space. Some excellent articles have been written on the subject with great results – again – partnerships with local business lead to great results.

- Use the school kitchen to invite local chefs and county extension personnel to host and teach some cooking classes – invite the parents to eat as well as potential funders. Have county extension put on a safe food handling class for kids and adults using local products.

- Develop a list of existing businesses in the area that would consider opening their doors to periodic “open houses” for students and interested “others” to acquaint them with the work they do and the skills needed to perform that work. Similarly, identify business owners willing to run workshops either in their places of business or at the school (perhaps in a “makers space?”) on some aspect of the skills they use in their business and/or willing to take interested people in on an intern basis for several weeks. Appeal to businesses on the basis of helping serve their community and offering their expertise, as well as preparing a future workforce. Start by making appeals through the newspaper for
volunteers – get businesses on a workforce training committee to help strategize how to get and retain business owners in the efforts.

o Interview –now- the mine owners (assume either that mine or another may open) and get a list of what skills they would like a future workforce to have in hand before they even apply for work. Implement a plan of working to figure out how to offer those required trainings, certificates, etc. within the community. For instance, trucking companies are offering CDL training; unions are offering apprenticeship trainings; there are welding classes as FV and Missoula College.

o Establish a Community Education Foundation that raises money for an endowment for training scholarships and certifications or apprenticeships (not toward 4-year degrees, for the most part) but to help raise the level of technical skills in the community toward the types of jobs that are available.

o A survey of manufacturers could be used within the schools to help both guide students into skill-based training, technical schools or other “matching” programs help students see the possibility of a future in Sanders County; 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 local 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

**Resources:**

http://www.edutopia.org/blog/designing-a-school-makerspace-jennifer-cooper;
MAIN TOPIC AREA: HEALTHCARE

Issue: Aging Services and Assisted Living

The subject of Aging-in-Place is more fully discussed under the topic area of housing, where there are recommendations specific to independent living options for seniors within their communities. This does not address the issue of Assisted Living or Nursing Home services for senior no longer able to live independently without on-site services related to medical care, food and regular personal care. While housing for maintaining independent living for seniors in rural communities is a creditable option to develop, assisted living and nursing homes are very difficult to develop and cash flow in very rural areas.

- **Recommendations:**
  - Determine “who” in the County is most knowledgeable (or who can be assigned to become knowledgeable) about rules and regulations related to operating assisted care facilities in private homes, including developing a checklist of what the physical requirements would be to convert and existing home for that purpose and what/how the need for assisting with medications, personal care, etc. could be met (i.e. are visiting nurses available or home health care that could be accessed by a private facility?). Solicit inquiries from interested persons in each community who may be interested in providing the required services in their home. See if small, low-interest loan fund could be developed to help owners make necessary conversions. Could a partnership be established with the existing community clinics and/or home health care for routine visitations to residential clients – or using the senior bussing program to pick up residents for regular appointments.
  - Meet with Clark-Valley Hospital to determine what barriers they see in re-establishing the recently defunct Assisted Care facility adjacent to the hospital for its original purpose. What is the potential for inserting geriatric care into the Hospital’s residential rotation program to help with costs? Could part of the facility serve as a nursing home? What is the potential for the hospital to operate such a facility in Thompson Falls?
  - Encourage small private facilities to form a supportive network for information and to offer training possibilities or collaborate on services.

- **Resources:** [https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/rural-monitor/assisted-living-facilities-offer-home/](https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/rural-monitor/assisted-living-facilities-offer-home/); National Center for Assisted Living [http://www.ahcanal.org/ncal/Pages/index.aspx](http://www.ahcanal.org/ncal/Pages/index.aspx);

Issue: Transportation between Communities and to Urban Areas

Several communities mentioned the issue of having no transportation between communities as being a growing problem as the population ages and there is difficulty in getting to services in the larger communities. The bus programs managed and operated by the Senior Centers seem to be effective for limited services; and the Montana Department of Transportation Transit System manages routes through their Hot Springs Office between Hot Springs and Plains and Thompson
Falls; and those locations and Missoula, Sandpoint and Kalispell on varying schedules twice a month.

- **Recommendations:**
  - Form a transportation committee (if not already existing) to survey people throughout the County to determine the real need for additional service.
  - Work with MDOT to obtain funds to complete a Sanders County Transportation Plan that will better detail both the needs and establish possible solutions.
  - Incorporate findings from the potential opening of the Rock Creek mine where employee transportation could possibly incorporated as part of the plan or solutions.


**MAIN TOPIC AREA: DEVELOPMENT**

**Issue:** Small Business Expansion and Recruitment

**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 the communities of Thompson Falls, Plains, Hot Springs and Noxon, 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 group of private business owners that assists the established Sanders County Community and Economic Development Corporation (SCCDC) in its outreach to other businesses throughout the County. In areas like Sanders County, where there is some degree of suspicion of non-profit organizations viewed as representatives of government, it is incumbent upon the private sector to work visibly with such organizations to assure all sectors are heard and that all sectors and businesses are invited to participate in seeking out opportunities for economic expansion.

- Form business councils of community and business leaders, along with Sanders County Community Development, who could develop both a survey for each sector and a team of people (business-to-business) 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. These visits could also be used to encourage or engage business owners in sharing their skills toward educating youth and others about their industry (see topic areas in education and workforce training); taking work interns; helping define needed skills that schools could focus on, etc). Survey residents (or have stores survey their customers) relative to how often they go to Missoula or Sand Point, etc. to shop; what would they prefer to buy locally that would save them a trip; would they shop locally for some percent of the time if goods and services were available.
• 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).

• Revisit the Technology Center Study, and the surveys that were taken of residents relative to the need for such a center (completed by Sanders County Community Development in 2014) to strategize how such a center could be actually implemented. Consider partnering with the high schools and/or businesses (look at the “fab-lab” model at the Bitterroot College). Do a search for existing telecommuters to see if they might either use or help attract users to such a facility – and be available to offer expertise to students.

• Survey tourists at various venues during the summer relative to where they are from; what made them stop; are they passing through or what would make them stop for an additional day; how could the “town” be more appealing to them? (Good project for students?)

• Form a business outreach team that looks at other communities of a comparable size and see what “mini” chain-type stores or restaurants serve them and see if there is a fit for their community that might increase the competitive opportunities to offer alternatives in shopping to fill gaps of what is missing.

• Get ag-producers, loggers etc. 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.

**Recommended Resources:**
http://www.co.sanders.mt.us/Department_Community_Development.aspx;
www.lakecountycdc.org; http://businessresources.mt.gov/BEAR/default.mcpx;
http://mtmainstreet.mt.gov/default.mcpx;
http://comdev.mt.gov/content/CDBG/.../NeedsAssessment/CNAguide.pdf;
http://www.downtowndevelopment.com/revitalizing_main_street.php;

**Issue:** Resource Development (Timber, Mining and Agriculture)
**COVERED BY BILLIE UNDER NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Issue:** Unemployment and Underemployment
**COVERED BY BILLIE UNDER EDUCATION AND WF TRAINING**

**MAIN TOPIC AREA: HOUSING**

**Issue:** For Seniors and Aging Population (Age in Place)
Common to each community in Sanders County are both the unavailability of suitable housing options for aging seniors within the community and limited funding for such housing that is both affordable and that can be supported by the local economy and incomes of those seniors needing the housing. Also common, to these communities and across the nation, is a desire by seniors to “age-in-place” within their familiar communities and not be shuttled off to somewhere away from family and friends. The question raised was how to fund such housing and what services are essential for seniors within that housing.
**Recommendations:** The following information is extracted from several articles cited below, which the readers are encouraged to access and read for themselves.

A significant concern as people grow older is that they may have to leave their home. This would mean leaving behind a comfortable setting familiar community and many memories. In addition a certain amount of control is lost when one leaves home. This "control" provides the underpinning to our feelings of dignity, quality of life and independence. One's home is a strong element in that sense of security.

Most American seniors desire to stay in their homes for the rest of their lives. In fact an AARP survey found this number to be greater than 80% of seniors. This "stay at home" approach is also known as "Aging in Place" Several reasons are cited for this strong Aging in Place preference. These include: comfortable environs, feelings of independence, convenience to services, familiarity, safety and security, proximity to family

"Aging in place" successfully requires planning. To accommodate physical, mental, and psychological changes that may accompany aging, physical changes should be made in your home.

Contrary to popular belief, most American seniors live independently while maintaining strong relationships with family and friends. Their personalities remain relatively stable throughout their lives. Depression occurs less in uninstitutionalized seniors than among young adults, although normal age related changes do occur, such as hearing impairment, failing vision, osteoporosis, increased likelihood of arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension, as well as changes in mental processes. These changes may lead to difficulties in interacting with one's living environment.

However some functions tend to remain the same with advancing age and changes differ between people. While seniors tend to process new information slower, daily social and occupational functioning ability remains stable. Most language related skills also tend to remain stable with age. Most notably, creativity and wisdom continue at strong levels. In addition to physical changes, seniors experience social changes that may be disruptive. These include: isolation from family and friends, loss of peers children living far away and a changing neighborhoods.

The aging process is blamed for many problems seniors may encounter with daily activities. However quite often it is the home creates the difficulties. Most residential housing is geared to young healthy adults. Builders do not take into account age-related conditions such as reduced mobility or limited range of reach. Hence, dwellings do not support the physical and sensory changes that older adults encounter as they age. What appear to be insignificant home features can have a significant effect for a person with even minor aging issues.

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) states that falls are the number one cause of home injury and studies suggest that a significant proportion of all falls are due to environmental factors. The three leading causes of home injuries, according to the NCIPC, are: falls, burns and poisoning. Seniors are especially susceptible to these types of injuries. Most falls are caused by environmental factors such as a home not truly suited for a person with elderly issues. Burns are caused primarily from fires. Older adults are killed in home fires at twice the
rate of society as a whole (National Association of Home Builders [NAHB], 1990) Poisoning is mostly caused by medicine non-compliance: older adults are six times more likely than other age groups to suffer adverse medical reactions (Alliance for Aging Research, 1998).

One of the bigger challenges is to identify safety issues that may be unique to an individual based on their particular aging status and conditions. While research via books and the internet can help focus on such issues the use of a good checklist in assessing the home environment is helpful. Possibilities:

- Working with Sanders County Community Housing Organization (SCCHO) to establish a checklist that families could use to assess their current living environment to identify barriers to aging seniors living in the home.
- Identify someone within SCCHO or other organization that could walk through a home with a senior to help identify potential issues.
- Develop a list of contractors (bonded and insured) that could be accessed to help cure deficiencies (install ramps, add grab bars to bathrooms, install higher toilets, widen doorways to accommodate walkers, etc).
- Identify sources of funds that could be used either as grants or loans to assist seniors in paying for such modifications.

The next biggest need identified, by all communities we visited, was single-level housing, within the community, to safely allow seniors, still capable of living independently, to “age-in-place” while having access to community services, church, family, etc. In rural communities of the size visited in Sanders County, it is difficult to find existing housing that meets the need or to fund new housing specifically meeting the need for seniors – despite an increasingly aging population throughout the county. Two models come to mind, either of which could be considered for Heron, Noxon, Dixon, Hot Springs, Trout Creek – or Thompson Falls. It should be stressed that such developments are for those living independently and do not provide services such as might be found in an assisted living facility or nursing home.

- Once both need and planning is established, SCCHO (either on its own or in partnership with local or County government) has the capacity to plan for and develop smaller (4-6 unit) complexes that are then rented to community seniors. These are usually funded by a combination of grants and low-interest loans and may or may not have rental subsidies available for those occupying the units. Such a unit is currently being planned for Noxon.

- In communities where grant-based funding may be either more difficult to obtain – or simply not a funding mechanism embraced by the community, there are 2 options to explore:
  - Low interest loans through conventional banks, federal or state lending programs specifically set aside for such purposes
  - Establishing a senior housing cooperative, where the initial owners form a cooperative to build and occupy the units; determine best source of funding (usually a loan) and what services they want to have available and fund (maintenance, reserves, lawn care and snow removal, etc.); and the costs are split among the member-residents. Since no-one (like a developer) owns the building – it is owned by the cooperative members – there is no profit to be added to the costs and therefore monthly assessments are set by the residents at a level no more than what is needed to cover actual costs. When a resident chooses to leave, they sell the unit back to the cooperative who then sells it to another senior (there are various models to this). There are several models of this that could be considered. Perhaps, working through...
SCCHO and the Lake County Community Development’s Cooperative Development Program, a pilot project could be established in one of the communities that could lead the way for similar programs throughout rural communities in Montana.


**Issue: Workforce Housing**

It is not clear that this issue is different from “affordable” housing in general in Sanders County combined with the issue of housing the “working poor”, who do not earn enough to rent or purchase safe, decent housing that meets the needs of themselves and their families. Workforce housing is usually identified as having safe, decent and affordable housing available to support a community in its efforts to expand an existing business or attract a new business that cannot rely on having an available workforce that meets their needs or which will attract new residents to the community to occupy jobs that become available.

- **Recommendations:** If indeed there is a concern for workforce housing that meets the needs of something like the mine, if developed, it is recommended that the following actions be taken in preparation for such an event.
  - A task force of both concerned citizens and the SCCHO be formed to begin the work of planning for such an eventuality
  - A meeting with the mine owners well in advance to discuss the number of jobs, types of jobs and having a frank discussion relative to what numbers of employees would need to either have housing at the mine site or within a reasonable radius of the mine. This could be done in tandem with the recommended discussion to be had with the mine owners related to types of workers to be employed and skills that might be needed. Would housing at the site be primarily temporary housing to be occupied for a series of shifts or full-time housing for families. What do the owners propose to build or own. What is available within the communities that are within the “reasonable radius”.
  - Study and take lessons from communities in the Balkan recently faced with extreme needs for providing workforce house at a variety of levels (although that is an extreme, there are perhaps lessons to be learned)
  - Based on data gathered, it is suggested that some preliminary planning be embarked upon (perhaps obtaining a planning grant of some kind from USDA-RD or MT. Department of Commerce) to identify where such housing may be needed; what type of developments could be encouraged (especially within the private sector) and how local and county governments could be supportive in such development.

- **Resources:** Sanders County Community Housing Organization, Jim Jacobson, Executive Director, 406.546.7183, scchotf@gmail.com;
MAIN TOPIC AREA: NATURAL RESOURCES

**Issue: Mining – Development of Mine**

Whether citizens of Sanders County are in favor of, or against development of the mine, there is no question that the potential development will have a significant impact of the County, impacting taxes, jobs, populations, communities, housing, transportation, etc. What is obvious is that many consider its opening as being able to generate large incomes to the County and provide substantial jobs for the currently unemployed or unemployed in the County. What is known is that permits have not been issued, though in process for a long time. What was not obvious from the input of citizens at the listening sessions was the position of the mine owners themselves as to whether or not they are in a position to proceed if the permits were issued today, how and at what pace would they proceed, what do they perceive to be the hold-up in the process, and is it realistically a cost effective venture considering today’s markets and prices. The merger between Hecla and Revett earlier this year and the subsequent closing of the Troy mine has undoubtedly impacted the completion of permitting and opening of the Rock Creek mine – but how is still a question. According to the Hecla website, the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement is due out for review in 2016, although there is no mention of when.

**Recommendations:** While there may be ongoing conversations with the mining company by Commissioners, it seems critical that the community at large have the same information about what is real; and that can only come from the mine owners themselves.

- Host a public meeting with the company where they clarify their current position regarding: the permitting process, timelines once the permits are issued, what are the impacts on the timeline based on market prices of silver and copper, and are there really elements in the permitting process that the owners consider unachievable or onerous that could potentially totally derail the project.
- Ask the Sanders County Ledger to conduct an interview with the mine.
- Ask the company to write an editorial or letter to the editor to update the people.


**Issue: Access to Forests and Multiple-Use**

Obviously, residents of Sanders County love and care about the forests and wildlands in the County, often siting them as both an asset for the beauty and recreation they afford and for their economic potential relative to sustainable harvesting. The issue of access to federal – and state – lands for purposes of harvesting the trees for various purposes is complex and barriers, primarily stemming from environmental activism and lawsuits stopping proposed harvests, have shuttered mills across western Montana. Additional issues include mills that are fighting increased costs and dropping prices due, in part, to large imports of timber from Canadian mills. These are among many issues resulting in large losses in jobs for loggers, mill workers and others in the associated economic stream that formerly comprised western Montana’s one-thriving wood products industry. There are many who wish to see a return – or a partial return - to the industry, redeveloping many of the good-paying jobs that were lost. They perceive that this can be partially attained by reopening the forests to harvest and reducing the barriers caused by over-zealous Environmental Impact Statements that prevent common-sense forest maintenance.

**Recommendations:**
Identify “who” is the major stakeholder that provides leadership to efforts in this area
Assure that the coalition formed several years ago between the Forest Service, mill-owners, environmental groups and forest workers remains active and meets regularly to review changes in Forest Plans in both the Kootenai and Lolo Forests and discuss and disseminate information on related federal and state legislation; re-engage with Craig Rawlings, formerly of the forest Service and now a consultant in the wood products industry in Missoula, to lead a public input meeting on the future potential for the industry in Sanders County – perhaps by exploring alternative manufacturing.
Have the coalition host a meeting with both federal and local legislators. Work to develop a common understanding of what is possible, including a recognition that the industry will be unlikely to return to its previous “glory”, but also recognizing that the industry has potential to remain as a viable economic driver in Western Montana under conditions that also assure sound forest management and long-term environmental sustainability.
Meet with stakeholders in Mineral, Lincoln, Flathead and Missoula Counties to find out how they are addressing the issues, how “sustainability” is being defined, what common political fronts can be formed, market issues for mills.

- **Resources:** Craig Rawlings, President & CEO at Forest Business Network LLC, craig@forestbusinessnetwork.com

**Issue: Preserve and Support Agriculture**
While not a major topic of discussion in the listening sessions, there are several ways in which communities, local governments and schools can support their local agriculture and efforts to develop value-added products from local agriculture. As the State’s lead food innovation center, Lake County Community Development, the regional development corporation serving Sanders County, is in prime position to work with local producers and the Sanders County Extension Service to provide additional support for farmers and ranchers.

- **Recommendations:**
  - Encourage local producers of small crops, organics, specialty beef, etc. to contact the Western Montana Growers Cooperative to see how their farms might join the cooperative to participate in marketing crops, value-adding to their crops, selling to schools and institutions, etc.
  - Encourage farms wanting to add value to their crops or livestock/poultry to contact the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center at Lake County Community Development for assistance in regulatory requirements, product development, marketing, packaging, labeling, etc.
  - Encourage schools to contact the Montana Food Corp program to determine if a Food Corp Volunteer could be placed in the county to develop programs that place local foods in school lunch/breakfast programs or start school gardens. Contact either the Polson or Ronan schools to see how they did it, or the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center’s food-to-institution coordinator.
- Investigate starting a Sanders County food-marketing cooperative or a cooperative based on the “growing” wine grape production through the Lake County Community Development Cooperative Development program.

- **Resources:** [https://foodcorps.org/where-we-work/montana](https://foodcorps.org/where-we-work/montana); Western Montana Growers Coop: [http://wmgcoop.com/#/id/i9480067;](http://wmgcoop.com/#/id/i9480067;) shay.farmer@lakecountycdc.org; jan.tusick@lakecountycdc.org; [http://www.lakecountycdc.org/MMFEC%20Landing](http://www.lakecountycdc.org/MMFEC%20Landing); [http://www.msuextension.org/sanders/](http://www.msuextension.org/sanders/);

**MAIN TOPIC AREA: PLANNING**

**Issue: To Plan or Not to Plan/Growth Policy**

Sanders County residents remain in disagreement on whether or not a County Planning Board should be established by the County Commission and/or a Growth Policy written that serves as a guide for future development of the County.

- **Recommendations:**
  It is recommended that residents familiarize themselves with the contents of Title 76, Chapters 1 – 3 of the 2015 Montana Code Annotated and clarify for themselves what the actual role of the Planning Board is and what authorities they have and do not have. Likewise, the contents of a Growth Policy are enumerated, including that which “must” be included and what “may” be included. Further, that the Growth Policy in and of itself is not a regulatory document; and with the exception of assuring compliance with state subdivision laws (which the County now is required to meet), any zoning or further codification of planning included within such a Growth Policy is provided through separate documents as may or may not be adopted.

- **76-1-102, Purpose.** (1) It is the object of this chapter to encourage local units of government to improve the present health, safety, convenience, and welfare of their citizens and to plan for the future development of their communities to the end that highway systems be carefully planned; that new community centers grow only with adequate highway, utility, health, educational, and recreational facilities; that the needs of agriculture, industry, and business be recognized in future growth; that residential areas provide healthy surroundings for family life; and that the growth of the community be commensurate with and promotive of the efficient and economical use of public funds.
  (2) In accomplishing this objective, it is the intent of this chapter that the planning board shall serve in an advisory capacity to presently established boards and officials.

- **76-1-106, Role of Planning Board** (1) To ensure the promotion of public health, safety, morals, convenience, or order or the general welfare and for the sake of efficiency and economy in the process of community development, if requested by the governing body, the planning board shall prepare a growth policy and shall serve in an advisory capacity to the local governing bodies establishing the planning board.
  (2) The planning board may propose policies for:
    (a) subdivision plats;
    (b) the development of public ways, public places, public structures, and public and private utilities;
    (c) the issuance of improvement location permits on platted and unplatted lands; or
(d) the laying out and development of public ways and services to platted and unplatted lands.

Sanders County has now held a MEDA Resource Team Assessment, heard from its people, recognized its strengths, and reviewed its challenges. The people of Sanders County now have this report in hand and can use it to explore new options, ideas, and resources.

The next step is for several members from the MEDA Sanders County Resource Team to return and hold a town meeting. The tentative date for this return visit and meeting is January 21st. The team will walk attendees through a three step process with the result being a prioritized list of issues the residents of Sanders County wish to address and identify volunteers who will work on those issues.

Following this, the MEDA Resource Team has several suggestions for moving Sanders County forward:

1. Equip those who are in volunteer or leadership positions with training to sharpen facilitation and leadership skills.

2. Consider using the ABCD model for Community Development as a guide for how to move forward. Your MSU Extension Agent will know of this process and may be trained to facilitate it. Here are some helpful links to get you started:

   Overview:
   http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/What%20isAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment(1)(3).pdf

   Link to the ToolKit: http://www.abcdinstitute.org/toolkit/index.html

3. Consider inviting an organization such as One Montana or Blackfoot Challenge to visit with the leadership of Sanders County to find “common ground” on divisive issues such as government, planning, natural resource protection, and mining.

4. Finally, consider “Community Questions: Engaging Citizens to Address Community Concerns,” by Joe Sumners and Linda Hoke, Kettering Foundation “Citizens at Work” project.

Key Insights in Design of Efforts

1. **Citizens must be engaged if communities are to solve some of their most difficult problems.** Such problems have multiple causes and cannot be solved with a technical fix (unlike repairing streets and bridges). Effectively addressing these problems requires citizens to act – and keep on acting. So . . . **engage citizens to address community problems.**

2. **Citizens often think about problems differently than institutions or professionals.** Not only do people feel more empowered when they are encouraged to identify and frame the issues related to a problem or opportunity, but they often uncover different solutions than institutions or professionals who are looking at the problem from the lens of their own particular expertise. So … **recognize the limits of professional expertise.**

3. **People become engaged only around issues or problems that are of particular interest or concern to them.** It’s not realistic to assume that all citizens will be...
engaged in all issues. The definition of “community” is therefore dynamic and ever changing, with groups of people – who may or may not be connected by geographic borders – coming together to solve a problem or take advantage of an opportunity. So . . . start with what people care about.

4. Citizen engagement – and governance – is a skill learned by practice. It’s important to create mechanisms that allow for sustained citizen engagement rather than just one-time events. As citizens gain experience and see that they can make a difference, they may be drawn into issues beyond their initial areas of interest – particularly as they begin to see how many community issues are interrelated. So . . . establish structures that sustain engagement.

5. It’s often most effective to engage citizens within the organizations and networks they are already a part of; we don’t have to start from scratch. It’s likely that they are already talking about a particular issue in these networks and may have the capacity and connections to implement solutions. So . . . engage existing networks.

6. Networks and connections between organizations can multiply the power of civic initiatives and make them truly community-wide, or “public.” Yet, these connections typically don’t happen by themselves – active intervention is often needed to connect groups that might, at first glance, seem to have very different interests. Even groups working on similar issues often have weak connections. Conveners can help communities re-define their relations, re-shape their networks, and restructure their capacity to act. So . . . connect existing networks and stakeholders.

7. When a group of people comes together for a community conversation, there will be tensions between goals, ideas, and values. What may at first seem to be tensions between groups may, with further examination, be seen as common values that everyone shares – such as a desire for freedom or for security—but which pull against each other. Tensions and conflicts do not have to be resolved as long as everyone shows respect for diverse positions. We can agree to disagree. It’s important to recognize tensions from the beginning of a community conversation. So . . . recognize and value tensions.

Please contact Gloria O’Rourke, MEDA, in moving forward with any of these ideas, or others, if MEDA can be of assistance: gloria@medamembers.org or 406.563.5259.
HERON Listening Session

1. What are the strengths and assets of Heron/Sanders County?
   - World class silver deposit
   - The spirit of the people – independent and hard working.
   - People look out for themselves but also look out for their neighbors.
   - Beauty of the area
   - Remote
   - Fast growing forest climate – natural resources are our richness
   - Abundant wildlife
   - Heron Noxon Cemetery District - County is very supportive
   - Heron Community Center
   - Laurie Hill Library
   - Grandview Museum
   - Fire Department
   - Churches
   - New rail road crossing
   - New bridge
   - Heron Player’s Drama Club
   - Senior Dinners
   - Within the National Forest system
   - Proximity to the Idaho border and Sandpoint
   - Adult Ed.
   - We are on the reservoir
   - We have several Heron Parks, though they need a great deal of attention
   - Post Office
   - Affordable real estate
   - Small population density
   - Availability of natural resources

2. What are the problems and challenges of Heron/Sanders County?
   - There is a tradeoff – we want to live in the country, so cannot expect city services. Yet – how much are you willing to pay for as an individual?
   - High unemployment rate – many people have left to find work.
- Many single parent families as spouse is working elsewhere.
- Very little tax base.
- We have no planning and no zoning.
- No store
- No building supply
- No ‘open daily’ community gathering place
- Climate change
- Lost our grocery store and miss it.
- Many restrictions due to public lands regulations – lack of access.
- No place in Sanders County to even get your saw sharpened – and we are a timber area.
- Find the middle ground between those that have extreme ideas and realism with what we can afford.
- Culture of hopelessness, helplessness of the aging when their family leaves and cannot find work here.
- Thievery – need law enforcement in the area.
- A place for old people to live for Heron and Noxon.
- Heron needs a cell tower!

- LAW ENFORCEMENT:
  - Heron needs better police protection in reference to crimes of many sorts. Robberies, vandalism, poaching etc.
  - We need improved sheriff/law enforcement presence to address citizen safety concerns.
  - Sanders County needs to be tougher on crime, prosecuting criminals to the full extent of the law.
  - We need to re-open the office space at the Heron Community Center that was used in the past for the deputies to write their reports.
  - The sheriff needs to update the needed equipment for the deputies so the office space in the Heron Community Center can be utilized.

- WATER:
  - Heron needs a NEW municipal water system
  - There needs to be a public open review on the current system and pipe layout
  - Current water system is outdated and insufficient to meet the fire departments needs

- HEALTH CARE:
  - Have an ambulance barn in Heron
  - More options for helicopter landings not affected by noxious weeds
- How our changing demographics make it harder to recruit volunteer EMS people
- Have a 5 day Medical Clinic instead of a 3 day one
- No affordable senior housing...goes directly to having no Planning and Zoning which makes receiving grants impossible
- Worry about inadequate healthcare here, especially as we age.

- ROADS
  - Some improvements needed in over/under water on some roads

3. What projects would you like to see accomplished in the next two, five, ten, or twenty years?

- A cell tower in Heron.
- The need for THREE PHASE POWER in all of Heron. It is in a few places, but not in enough critical areas. It is required in the location the fire department is trying to develop for a well and pump on land that Rail Link is allowing us to use.
- New bridge finished
- Larger water storage tank for Heron Municipal Water System
- Initial GPS and survey of existing water system underway
- An office for a sheriff’s deputy established
- Wilderness designation for Scotchman’s Wilderness designation.
- Planning and Zoning is in place
- Increased ‘responsible’ tourism
- Bull River Clinic opened five days per week.
- Reduce concerns about an aging demographic
- Reduced concerns about an influx of people relocating to Heron in reaction to the effects of climate change in the areas they came from
- Heron learns how to be a stable and sustainable community in 20-50 years
- Development of community gardens...important, but water and aging issues are involved
- Explore Senior’s using the HCC - do they need their own building or is it fine as is?
- Telecommunication infrastructure upgrades
- Become ‘incorporated’
- Have a permanent grant writer for the county
- Improved fire safety (eg. defensible space, usable turn-arounds) education for current and new residents
- Hire two professional people to oversee the needs of all the small Fire Departments within the county.....They would be in charge of training and paperwork and it would relieve much of the burden on the individual departments
• Have a useful community webpage
• Have a regularly running scheduled bus system throughout the county
• A farmer’s market
• New municipal water system
• Duplex for seniors in Heron
• Strong community center
• Thriving community garden
• Park lands more user friendly
• Roads are in good working order and repaired.
• Younger generation has left – and that is okay because we are not meant to be a thriving metropolis. We just need some conveniences. Let the children leave, they will come back to visit and may one day stay here.
• Better access to forest land.
• Must have more businesses to increase the tax base.
• Mitigation management must be a priority to protect air, water, and wildlife.
• Community Center strong and well supported
• Coffee shop filled with young people
• County commissioners need to exert their jurisdiction authority to protect health, safety and welfare; allow access to rich natural resources in Sanders County. Wilderness areas do not generate a tax base.
• Open the forests and create jobs once again.

NOXON Listening Session

1. What are the strengths and assets of Noxon/Sanders County?
• Rich natural resources: silver deposit, productive forest, fish and wildlife opportunities.
• Rural small sound character, beauty, scenery, ditto, ditto, ditto
• Beautiful and all trying to make a living here.
• Foodbank
• Good neighbors willing to work together.
• There is no place better.
• Hiking and kayaking
• Recreational opportunities
• Great place to raise a family
• Close knit community with passionate people; they don’t always agree but it is still positive.
• Low stress life-style
• Sell a low stress life style – and we want similar people to be here, who also want a quiet lifestyle. ditto
• Little business competition when you have the right business.
• Use the infrastructure we have to its best advantage.
- Sense of community in Noxon is incredible; look at the schedule of events.
- County Commissioners have a great working relationship.
- Trail system
- Retired people who live here have a wealth of knowledge that could be contributed here.

2. **What are the problems and challenges of Noxon/Sanders County?**
   - Horrible internet so can’t have home business.
   - Lack of work, lack of jobs
   - Medical – have considerable retirement population with health needs.
   - Balance between jobs and our environment
   - Trail system is costly to maintain
   - School populations declining.
   - Aging people have to move away from their home as there is no place for them to get care. Ditto.
   - Roads are getting dangerous.
   - Law enforcement – lack thereof.
   - Senior housing and affordable housing
   - Resident deputy in this end of the county
   - Bring people across the bridge to our businesses.
   - Need housing and transportation – can’t grow without it
   - Basic infrastructure is needed for Water and sewage systems – in Heron and Noxon
   - Internet is awful and expensive.
   - Noxon is dying – between Sanders Point and Thompson Falls.
   - Too many spouses are not together because one has to live in another area or another state.

3. **What projects would you like to see accomplished in the next two, five, ten, or twenty years?**
   - Commissioners show backbone and adopt a Planning Board and draft a Growth Policy.
   - Utilize value added wood products
   - Remove trees on county right of way which are too close to the road.
   - Extend Thompson Falls water system to Harvest Foods
   - Consider paid EMTs; paid Fire Dept.
   - Crosswalk in Trout Creek leading to the boat launch/swimming area for the safety of the kids.
   - Remove junk cars throughout the county.
   - Each community in the county should have a webpage.
   - County needs a park system/recreation/sports – at least one school with a modern football field and track.
   - Need a library in every community, not a book mobile. Create a county library system.
   - Need a county vocational school; high school level.
• Retirement living center of some sort – provides for people who want to age gracefully. ditto
• Utilize our resources in a sustainable way without changing the character of the area. Ditto
• People continue to spend their money here – and leave. Boaters, cross country skiers, etc.
• Scotchman’s be designated wilderness area.
• Consider hiring a grant writer
• Better senior housing
• Engage with a college so that we can begin networking and addressing our youth’s education needs.
• Growth Policy must be in place in order to receive many grants; no need to get a grant writer if can’t qualify without a Growth Policy. Ditto
• Create broadband so that people could work here who enjoy wildlife.
• Same rural community with better utilization of the resources we have in a sustainable way.
• Good jobs; if the mine goes in that it is the best mine possible.
• Better jobs for young people so they can stay here or return here. ditto
• Recruit light industry here; find the balance to improve our tax base and keep our character.
• Balanced approach so that we don’t tear down one thing to build another; balance is found so that we have a structure to support all.
• Planning Board in place.
• Tourism – and a train depot – between Noxon and Thompson Falls passenger line.
• Advertise to aging Americans to come here and bring their retirement money.
• Housing – families can find decent affordable places to live.
• Diversify for a healthier economy; no one industry. Infrastructure in place to provide for diversification.
• Growth Plan! Educate the public regarding a Planning Board – does not have to include zoning.

TROUT CREEK/Thompson Falls Listening Session

1. What are the strengths and assets of Trout Creek/Thompson Falls/Sanders County?
• We are a small rural community in an incredibly beautiful region of Montana. There are thousands of acres of wilderness to play in whether you hike, mountain bike, trail run, hunt, camp, horse back ride or OHV ride.
• Search and Rescue
• Senior dinners
• Avista – great neighbor
• Northern lights
• Without saying it is a beautiful place to live. The access to the waterways and wilderness are prime draws for this community. The small towns and community feel of the area make people want to stay.
• Welcoming and friendly
• Great fishing
• Our people – hard working and independent. Ditto, ditto
• Unity – don’t have classes – we are all neighbors and treat each other equally.
• Small town businesses – we know who we are buying from and owners know who we are
• Forest, water, parks, youth areas, spirit of volunteerism
• Great school system
• Climate –
• Great medical services
• Volunteerism – dedication to our schools
• Public lands and wildlife, ditto
• Senior Citizens Center – important to our community
• Diversity – like that we have different communities in our county
• Bookmobile
• Ditto all of the above
• Unity of the community
• TV station in Thompson Falls
• Freedom – reason for some people to come here. ditto
• It is quiet.
• Commissioners have good relationship with the Forest Service
• School system for the money it gets doing a great job.
• Shakespeare in the Park
• Gene Morrison’s Rope Program
• Blues Festival in Noxon
• Proximity to the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness areas and potential wilderness areas such as Scotchman Peaks. I am only an infrequent visitor to the Cabinets, but it seems there are many visitors who come to Trout Creek specifically to hike in the Cabinets. An important aspect of the Cabinets is that it is one of very few high mountain wilderness areas that is accessible to the elderly and people with limited ability to hike long distances, especially uphill, thanks to the area around Chicago Peak having a USFS road that ends within 100 or so yards of the wilderness boundary. The trail from the road to the wilderness boundary and beyond is level and spectacular.
• No open daily community gathering place – especially during bad weather. The park is a great place in the summer.

2. What are the problems and challenges of Trout Creek/Thompson Falls/Sanders County?
• We are a small rural community in NW Montana -- often people in the rest of the state don’t even recognize we exist.
• Employment is one of the major challenges for our community. Younger people need to have a place to make a livable wage year round.
• It is also a challenge to get the word out as to events, projects, and opportunities.
• Drug and alcohol use, ditto
• Cost of living seems high in Thompson Falls
• Living wage jobs
• Hope for the youth – that they can come back and have a place to live and work, ditto
• Wildlife – does create damage
• Drug and alcohol abuse – we are losing people because of the abuse. Ditto
• Teens without parents – due to divorce, drugs, etc.
• We do have a workout facility in Thompson Falls but need to have a bigger place.
• Mind set – people want things to happen but we don’t have planning.
• Great people working hard – but pushing a boulder up hill. Chronic unemployment.
• Higher costs per students to transport them which drains the school budget.
• Emergency medical system – EMT’s and Ambulance Drivers worn out and receive nothing in compensation. Burnout.
• Bridges are falling apart. Can see through the Trout Creek bridge floor.
• Transportation is also a hardship for employees – i.e., substitute teach and drive to the school, it takes ½ days pay for those costs.
• Affordable housing – not much available. Ditto, ditto
• Opportunities lacking for youth outside of school….orchestra, etc.
• Jobs for young people
• Need a Master Plan. Ditto
• Planning Board – ditto, ditto
• Distances to overcome in transportation – hard for emergency services, medical,
• Communication – two newspapers – a phone tree is the only way to go.
• Infrastructure – ditto
• Animal shelter needs help
• Shooting ordinance needs to be enforced.
• Some people do not want any change.
• No support for entrepreneurs and small business creativity.
• Maintain current infrastructure – challenging to pay for repairs let alone maintenance
• Assisted living
• A challenge that faces Sanders County is the often controversial and radical anti-government nature of local politics. This has been an issue since 1988 with the announcement that the Aryan nations would be moving from Hayden Lake, Idaho, to Sanders County. The move was thwarted by community opposition. This phenomenon has waxed and waned since that time but is still an important aspect to keep in mind. Stable, mature governance is an important aspect to community growth.
• Employment opportunities in a variety of industries
• Attracting businesses to the area that offer good paying jobs
• Attracting tourism and travel related visits
• Everyone likes events - but there are not a ton of people to volunteer to make the happen.
• Lack of support from our regional tourism office - even though we pay into the lodging tax, very little of the funds return to our region to help promote our area. When we do
our part and serve on the boards, we are still unable to get the attention and support we need.

- I strongly believe that the leaders of Sanders County need to negotiate a way to tap into the fiber optic lines that go through our county. Offering excellent and secure internet in a rural region would help attract cottage industries and individuals who can work anywhere in the world but need good internet capability (most of whom make great money). Furthermore, these businesses and individuals seek quality of life and services that enhance that life. These quality of life items include great local events, further development of trails, restaurants and shopping.
- More people knowing about and coming to our region would help the businesses that already exist do even better, would give reasons for more businesses to open, and would help improve the quality of life for all the residents of Sanders County.
- I also think that the state should have a sales tax so everyone pays into the infrastructure of state - not just property owners and businesses.

3. What projects would you like to see accomplished in the next two, five, ten, or twenty years?

- I think that Montana tourism office and the state should look at lodging taxes and how that money is distributed and figure out a way that the small rural communities could retain a % of the money to fund marketing strategies, hire a local marketing and event management person.
- Need a planning board
- Transportation – Veteran’s Van serves narrow population, Senior Van has limited access and direction. Let’s get a county wide service. Open a business!
- More aggressive invasive weeds prevention
- Indoor swimming pool
- Remove animals hit on the highway – unsafe to leave them
- Tear down burned/gutted buildings
- More access to our rivers and lakes
- College courses in the schools, more class options
- More jobs; replace our lost jobs
- More equipment at the hospitals
- Identity crisis – Figure out who we are. What is our brand?
- Drug issues – a mindset change that we do not accept drug abuse
- Be more innovative- learn of new ideas and implement them.
- Work together to address infrastructure needs so that new businesses can continue.
- Growth plan in place
- Stable and funded economic development organization.
- City/County drug enforcement program along with youth education
- New Railroad crossing
- Satellite learning center – to enrich our education.
- Parks and recreation district, ditto
- Resurface Trout Creek Bridge
- Dog licenses – minimal fee if dogs are fixed, charge more for dogs that are not. Funds used to support animal shelter; have a barking ordinance, too.
- Old mill site developed – with water and sewer for small businesses, ditto, ditto
- Trail from the city east, have trails from state park into town
- Cherry Creek Rd widened
- SRO program
- Walkway from elementary school to high school, ditto
- Existing trails maintained; getting overgrown
- Drug free community - Great American Smokeout – join at T.F. Courthouse on November 19th
- Internet speed and cell phone coverage improved, ditto, ditto
- Funding for rural schools that is stable
- Public lands issues – Keep public lands public, maintain federal management, more active management of forest lands, precious wild country that needs to be protected.
- Scotchman’s Wilderness and Cabinet Wilderness – fully protected.
- Planning Board
- Wellness program – include preventative education and reduce drug use
- Safety measures – more deputies
- Increase program to prevent domestic violence
- Eradication of invasive species – Furasian Water Milfoil
- Bike friendly highways
- Eco-Tourism
- Maintain current beauty
- More opportunities for young people to find jobs.
- Nice playground at the park.
- Improve Main Street - Beautify this area even if unincorporated
- Be more accepting of change and new ideas
- Taking care of our people should be a priority - More aging services in place for our elderly; be thoughtful of our neighbors
- Training so that younger people can start obtaining experience – mentor our youth, not with a program, but with individuals caring to share their time and expertise
- A foundation created
- Trails completed
- Water and sewer completed in Thompson Falls
- Old gas station in Thompson Falls cleaned up for new business
- Diversify Sanders County economy – so when one sector goes down, the county will remain stable.
- Growth Plan in place. Once you know what you have you will know what you need, i.e., water, sewer, housing, etc.
- Water and sewer increased so that Harvest Foods can expand.
- Housing – for all
- Cell service and internet improved.
• Drug testing for sports in high school.
• Bringing in some kind of industry, school, or other training facility would bring in jobs to the community. This would be a long range plan.
• Setting up some type of Visitors Center that would be a central location for event organization and announcements; local and visitors information as to recreational opportunities for the area; possibly selling of fishing and hunting licenses; presentation of some of the history of the area; those types of things would be a great benefit to all of the area. This could be a two year goal.
• Wayfinding signage that is consistent throughout the County would be wonderful and a short term project. This would help both travelers and residents of the community.
• Sanders County has a wonderful array of people who want to make a difference in the community. These people have groups spread out throughout the County. We need a way, a central clearing house as it were, to make sure that all group projects mesh and that work is not duplicated among the groups. How that is accomplished is something that needs to be a priority goal for all of the community.
• Keep Thompson Falls the same – don’t change it.
• The highway easement along the main drag of Trout Creek would be more useful if it had hard scape paths – would keep people from walking on the highway. Cross walks in a couple of places would be nice as well.
• Eco-Tourism to draw people to the positive aspects of our wildlife and scenery
• Community webpage – ride sharing, events about things that get poste don local bulletin boards
• Improved fire safety, eg. Defensible space, usable turn arounds, education for current and new residents.

PLAINS/PARADISE Listening Session

1. What are the strengths and assets of Plains/Paradise/Sanders County?
   • Large workforce
   • Natural resources, ditto – not just logging and mining but scenery, tourism, hunting, fishing, hiking, etc.
   • Location – beautiful; rural peaceful lifestyle
   • Our hospital is wonderful that serves the area
   • Beautiful fair grounds
   • Major corridor
   • Our people are extremely resilient and hardworking.
   • Low cost of living
   • Access to the outdoors (we used to live in a concrete jungle) ditto
   • People – warm feeling that is across the county; very helpful in times of need. Feels like a family – and sometimes families disagree, but in general, people are good.
   • Astonishing amount of talent – artistic, technological, business, etc.
   • Generous population – selfless leadership
- Fire services
- Plains School – High school ranked among the top in the state.
- Geographic center between major hubs – capitalize on it.
- Easy to grow my business here – if you work and work hard you can achieve success.
- Love that I can call a plumber and he comes.
- Plains Chamber is trying to re-organize.
- Schools offer robotics and coding.

2. What are the problems and challenges of Plains/Paradise/Sanders County?
- Hospital is losing doctors
- Natural Resources are locked up – Commissioners need to work to get access.
- Payment in lieu of taxes
- EPA closing our jobs – none of my children can live and work here; open the woods and the mine.
- Some groups shut down any progress if we try to open a mine or begin logging. Local opposition to the use of the natural resources.
- People say we need more services, but they are opposed to the use of our natural resources.
- Connectivity – need higher internet; ditto, ditto
- Training opportunities when someone needs another job, training is not available. Ditto
- Lack of industry.
- Affordable daycare – prevents people from going to work.
- Roads in Plains area are not good – especially near schools, hospital, ambulance, and businesses. Ditto
- Railroad – loud and dirty
- Under employment – which results in other problems for the county.
- Poverty – and the mindset that it has always been this way.
- Lack of vision of who we are; recognize our history
- Sustainable light industry that leaves a light footprint on our lands.
- Must know there is a market before investing in mining, timber, etc.
- Huge county that does not communicate throughout.
- Plains might be great within the state school system but the state ranks amongst lowest in the nation.
- Instead of bike path – use that money for maintenance of our roads.
- Timber – forests are overgrown and unhealthy; clean them up
- People who fall through the crack – no job, support, so end up with criminal record and/or do drugs.
- High welfare numbers
- Some people do not want to work; five out of ten applicants really do not want to work, just doing the paper formality.
- Jobs are available – teach people to not be dependent on the system.
- Vo-tech for high school students to train to be plumbers, electricians, etc.
- Adults need to be better educated; you can survive here if you have the gumption.
• Generations of poverty – children don’t see any way out.
• Majority of people are 50+; what kind of workforce do we have to offer?
• Many in the county feel utter hopelessness.
• Polarity of thought is a stumbling block for the entire county.
• Insufficient public investment – like in the streets of Plains, pedestrian bridge and Paradise sewer system.
• The valley of Cogene – reservoir is a muddy mess.
• I see this process acting like a planning board; I do not want a planning board.

3. What projects would you like to see accomplished in the next two, five, ten, or twenty years?
• Paradise School repurposing – state and federal support of visitor’s center; historical and geological signs and exhibits.
• River restoration, especially threats to Plains waste water treatment.
• Pedestrian lane for Plains bridge.
• Clark Fork corridor public transit.
• Add an equestrian center – was tried in the past but could be successful now.
• Rock Creek Mine to get underway.
• Put history, civics, math back in school and take out sex.
• Increase access to the internet to attract high-speed workforce.
• Schools place more emphasis on plumbers, electricians, etc., for apprenticeship. ditto.
• Huge county very spread out – we don’t have the connectivity between our communities that would give us more momentum. Find a way to cooperate!
• Distance learning.
• More comprehensive approach to embracing the new economy, ditto.
• Clean up our forests; put people to work and reduce fire hazard. Ditto.
• Teach people not to be dependent on the system because jobs are available. Instill pride, ambition, sense of achievement. Ditto.
• Mentorship program for students (and adults) caught in the cycle of poverty. Ditto – basic life skills, entrepreneurship, business. Ditto, ditto, ditto, ditto.
• Road improvement. ditto.
• Focus on mineral wealth – extraction; the future will depend on minerals.
• More law enforcement – reduce our drug use and activity.
• Library supported more – longer hours.
• Places to get shoes, washer, dryer, - attract those businesses and reduce people shopping out of town.
• Innovative thinking to address the resources that are available to us – explore them, find them, and identify the obstacles to getting programs in place.
• Strategic planning and training that would allow someone to work for Google here.
• Get tourists to STOP; countywide effort on tourism.
• Culture – bring some events here so that people don’t travel to Kalispell and Missoula.
• Design and implement infrastructure plan – human and physical – include voc-ed, resource management, waste water treatment system in Paradise.
• Increased law enforcement presence, more protection.
- Rural health care
- Organized Boys and Girls Club to achieve the mentoring needs.

**HOT SPRINGS/LONEPINE Listening Session**

1. **What are the strengths and assets of Hot Springs/Lonepine/Sanders County?**
   - Use of the mineral (and healing) waters; internationally rated mineral waters
   - This is a healing place; people come from all walks of life.
   - The healing waters being on the reservation is a strength.
   - Natural beauty
   - Uncrowded
   - Main Street in Thompson Falls
   - Nonprofits
   - Business Owners – and diversity of business owners from organics, to essential oils
   - Glacier Country
   - Incorporated town – has Mayor and City Council, Fire Dept., City Works – with great committed employees
   - Full service town – do not need to leave for any reason.
   - Musical events and workshops.
   - Ditto all of the above
   - Hot Springs Art Society
   - Have a cell tower
   - Existing committee that is working with the tribe.

2. **What are the problems and challenges of Hot Springs/Lonepine/Sanders County?**
   - Very tax poor town – economy needs to be more diverse.
   - Jobs – how do we create them? How do we let people know what we have?
   - Need to have jobs so our younger people can stay in town. Ditto
   - Shared services – Flathead or Lake County – so Sanders County sometimes does not get services.
   - Feel like they are not as important as a client when go to a shared service office with other counties.
   - More development – a bath house
   - Crime – people read it in the paper and don’t want to come.
   - Ditto all of the above.
   - Housing and jobs are a huge issue.
   - You have to bring your job with you.
   - Heavy rental area but if you have a big family there is little available.
   - We are lucky to be alive and well in the middle of nowhere since the economy sank in 2008.
   - Need street repair.
   - Walking trail needed from community to highway.
   - Housing for the elderly; housing overall.
• The lot size for average home in the town is very small; have to buy two to build a home.
• Drugs are a major problem; vandalism, crime.
• We have given up on more cell service.

3. What projects would you like to see accomplished in the next two, five, ten, or twenty years?
• Bring in green businesses.
• Re-create, redevelop the tribal bath house. Ditto
• Increase internet speed - to grow home jobs
• Lot sized increased for the town of Hot Springs.
• Great working relationship with the tribe for increased coordination.
• Consider a gas tax to fund our roads.
• If we get the ball rolling a lot of our problems would take care of themselves.
• Housing for the aging and the elderly; ditto.
• Educate on Chinese medicine; integrate it into our healthcare.
• Jobs created through the development of a natural health care center that incorporates all of the talent in the area. Includes training our young people on how to work with this industry.
• Walking trail in place. Ditto, Ditto.
• Make people aware of Sanders County and then when they get here we are appealing and attractive.
• Create a Sanders County Community Foundation.
• Make Main Street in Hot Springs attractive; make people want to be here and draw them in. Ditto. Ditto.
• Help us get our Homesteader Day’s growing.
• Streets repaired.
• Good licensed day care and pre-school.
• Develop all tribal geo-thermal assets.
• Hold more large conferences at Symes; could use a larger conference space.
• Refresh/repaint Hot Springs Reservation sign – ditto.
• Clean up and beautification.

DIXON Listening Session

1. What are the strengths and assets of Dixon/Sanders County?
• Agricultural area, ditto
• Rural area
• Great people
• Senior Center ditto
• My family lives here; great community.
• I don’t like change – I don’t even like to change my clothes.
• My family has been here 102 years.
• Area farms and ranches
• Ditto all of the above
• The climate and Senior Center.
• Gentleman that cleans Hwy 200 and mows it three times per year, does it to thank the community for its support when his family was in need.

2. What are the problems and challenges of Dixon/Sanders County?
• Sometimes feel isolated but the Senior Center helps.
• I don’t know what is going on – hard to know – word of mouth is best because can’t find cell phone numbers.
• Junk vehicles on the street are blocking access.
• Couldn’t grow if we wanted too – good the size we are.
• Excessive drug problem here; awesome people and then people with problems.
• Junk in the streets – offers a hazard to the children walking to school, as well as the public.
• Dirty – the whole county is dirty. Clean up your mess; don’t have to look at other people’s trash.
• Dixon was a logging boom town – agriculture is what is left. Need water; legislature passed an agreement and it is now in court. Our farms and ranches will not survive without that irrigation water.
• Bonneville Power buys up ranches and then sells the land to the tribe so that is lost revenue to Sanders County.
• Drugs and lawlessness both are big deal.
• Confrontation with people trespassing on private property.
• Continuity – to sustain what we have is going to be a challenge.
• Law enforcement is lacking; simply not available.
• No one answered my 911 call regarding a burglar trying to get in my house while I was in bed - not the tribe nor the county 911 answered. When I had a bear in my garage, however, someone came within the same day.
• People wonder why can’t things be done. My father took pictures of what the living situation is and there are no answers as to why it is allowed to continue...i.e., junk vehicles.
• When we had a murder here several years ago, there was a response in 8 minutes. At that time there was a good presence; and now there is very little coverage here.
• Lockdown alarm was pulled at school yesterday; not possible to wait for law enforcement to come.
• Garbage and filth keep building up – no one will come here.
• No intervention for kids experiencing the lack of parenting, guidance, will end up like their parents.
• Dixon has fallen through the cracks; needs help.

3. What projects would you like to see accomplished in the next two, five, ten, or twenty years?
• Clean up the trash, junk vehicles, the town. Ditto, ditto, ditto.
• More for kids to do to instill pride and appreciation for where they live; perhaps a program for helping the elderly.
• Drastically improve law enforcement presence so we are safe and not in fear.
• Provide opportunity for kids who do not have parental supervision or guidance to have an after school location to receive help in reading, writing, etc., instead of being home alone.
• Community resurgence: rejuvenate our community by shopping local, get people reconnected with neighbors, the natural environment, etc. But these obstacles mentioned above must be overcome.
• Mercantile sells and new business comes in.
• With clean up and more law enforcement, people would come here to retire. We have a great climate for Montana.
• More sidewalks put in town – may create a boundary so people wouldn’t park in the street.
• Transportation access improved.
• More playground equipment for the school; also would help address diabetes in children.
• We do have a 21st Century after school program but cannot go late enough in the evening, only until 5:00pm or 5:30pm. Trying to introduce our students to the students in Charlo.
• Acknowledge and accentuate the natural beauty of this area.
• Scrap wood structure.

**SANDERS COUNTY DEPT. HEADS AND COMMISSIONERS** Listening Session

1. **What are the strengths and assets of Sanders County?**
   • Successful employment hiring process – provides equity of opportunity for applicants.
   • Effective turnover management – use best practices when recruiting and behavior based interviewing strategies.
   • Support high safety standards
   • Teamwork in the office.
   • Good addresses and data.
   • County Fair – raises funds;
   • People come together in our communities.
   • Doors are open and welcoming.
   • Outdoor activities, recreation, natural resources, ditto
   • MSU Extension – long reaching network
   • Human resources are terrific – able to network with local resources.
   • Create income through housing state inmates.
   • 911 dispatchers work very hard to keep the public and officers safe
   • Love being in a small community; allows you to step up and be a leader for your community
   • Commissioners are supportive of the departments
   • Weed Control – have dedicated weed board and staff; generate revenue as well
   • County Treasurer is also Superintendent of Schools
• Broad range of skills in sheriff’s office
• Road Dept. – crew strives hard to keep roads safe
• The great relationship between emergency services and surrounding counties is important!
• Long term crew that is well trained and skilled; strive to please the public.
• New hires – bring a great skill set
• Growing segment of younger retirees, also untapped resources.
• Schools are a great asset – excellent schools.
• Environmental Health – strive to go the extra mile to serve the county and increase our competencies.
• Reverse 911, emergency sirens, phone trees
• Hospital is expanding
• Unfunded mandates
• Mines – great potential for tax income
• Timber industry
• Agriculture industry
• TRL Mill
• The Environmental Health Department is intent on increasing competencies and enhancing services available to customers, both internal and external. For the past two years we have increased certifications and skills that have allowed growth as well as the ability to conduct activities at the county level rather than the state level.

2. What are the problems and challenges of Sanders County?
• Communication – both within department and outside of the department.
• Two newspapers only publish once per week.
• Many requests for GIS - how do we balance the need to provide this information?
• Ideas to generate revenue; challenged to get new technology i.e., GIS
• No Mexican restaurant
• Unanticipated technological changes
• Succession planning for retiring workers
• Little outside training experience to make outside workforce eligible for county jobs
• Stigma – have to know someone to get hired by the county
• Outdated courthouse – high security risk, too small to adequately operate and provide services. “Five people in a closet.”
• More law enforcement – the county is the size of Delaware and there are not enough uniforms
• More staff in detention area
• Sharing district judges – have a judge once per week; communications, rules, filing, can be challenged.
• Youth do not want to leave, but there are not jobs available for higher waged positions.
• Ditto
• Very poor county – not much tax base; how will things be paid for?

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• One person planning department – would like mentor or colleague to discuss items with
• Planning Enforcement – hard to be proactive so end up doing violations instead of permitting.
• Consistent services all across the county, i.e. MSU Extension Ditto
• When people move in, hard for newcomers to know how to participate; hard to find sources.
• Finances – makes hard to update programs, buildings, workspace, etc. Ditto
• Juggling budget with trying to keep the public happy. Ditto
• Staff needs for 911 dispatchers – challenge to find the right person
• Staff and space for staff – jail is very old, kitchen is inadequate and needs to prep three meals per day.
• No time to look for grants.
• Weed control – salary level does not allow for staff retention
• School buildings are very old
• Lack of jobs creates secondary problems such as drug use, crime, etc.
• Aging community – deputy coroners are paid only when called upon.
• Have ten fire departments, three EMS, three schools and high schools – big challenge to plan for emergencies
• Volunteers are decreasing for fire, ems services.
• My children have all had to move away – jobs not here.
• Tools, Talent, Technology!!!
• Economy changes so rapidly it is hard to ramp up services and pay for staff.
• Very poor cell phone capacity.
• Farther you get from I90 – higher freight costs.
• Continued growth requires a revenue source. With an unstable county economy, providing new services jeopardizes sustainability of existing services. This is a difficult balance especially when program growth teeters on the need for additional staffing and there is risk of overextending existing staff.
• Community infrastructure – communities face a crossroads with sanitation infrastructure, and particularly wastewater. Thompson Falls, Paradise, Trout Creek, Heron, Noxon, and Camas are examples of communities without public wastewater treatment systems; they rely on individual, on-site systems. Due to lot size, City lots have a finite ability to support on-site systems. Options to replace failed individual drainfields can be cost prohibitive, may pollute water resources, or may not be available. Each of the communities listed above has encountered this situation. Long term planning, including financial planning, is required to address the issue as community growth is highly dependent upon utility infrastructure.
• Impact of illicit drugs – Sanders County is a known hotbed of methamphetamine and heroin use. The impact on personal and property safety is substantial. The violence and theft, symptoms of a county mired in dangerous illegal drug use, are accepted as the “norm” and very little is done to control these activities. I had planned to retire here. However, I have begun rethinking my ability to stay and, when asked, I openly tell potential residents that Sanders County is currently a marginal area to raise a family.
The growth of Sanders County whether from new business, new residents, or past residents who want to come home, is very likely impacted by the lack of serious attention to the drug problem and the criminal activities it precipitates.

- Management training – teaching/coaching elected officials and administrative leaders to understand their roles and responsibilities. Understanding that difficult conversations now will lead to a more positive work environment in the future.
- Need to document quarterly management/employee performance discussions

3. **What projects would you like to see accomplished in the next two, five, ten, or twenty years?**
   - Contact growing segment of younger retirees as untapped resources; seem to be on the west end of the county – encourage to shop in MT instead of Idaho.
   - Vo-Tech in sync with the high school/
   - More technology – more education for people so that they know they can do their county business on line.
   - Trainer jobs to allow youth to obtain skills.
   - Keep pace with Tools, Talent, Technology. Ditto
   - Expand the trails system – pedal bikes on the 200 Tour Ditto
   - Digital record keeping; would take legislative action
   - Improved “click on map” so that revenue data is easily available.
   - New or updated courthouse
   - New or updated fair grounds
   - New or updated schools
   - Court of records where all is recorded in Justice Court – huge cost
   - Juvenile services expanded (state level)
   - More security measures – in the courtroom and in the courthouse Ditto, ditto, ditto
   - Form of government changed
   - GIS Mapping and Planning – get more of this data on our website when it comes to roads and easements; assist with land development. Proactive and educating land owners.
   - MSU Extension more visible – all across the county.
   - Indoor facility for people to be active in the winter. Hard for aging community to be active and safe. (Walking mall with nice Mexican restaurant. ) ;-)
   - Improve records management system
   - Bring in industry or some type of employment
   - Sanders County Fair – boost youngsters to get back into 4-H
   - Electronic recordkeeping and processing, need to get away from so much paper – from property to county services, the public is seeking electronic data.
   - McDonalds
   - Plan upgrade of vehicles for the weed department – they are reaching the end of their life expectancy.
   - Upgrade internet capacity so that all of our computers can operate at once.
   - Services for the handicapped to use, i.e., trail
   - Ditto, Ditto, Ditto, ditto – facilities, technology, equipment
• Economic development plan to attract business here – to build our tax base to be able to afford what is needed.
• More space for horse trailers to turn around – hikers park their cars and then horse trailers can’t turn around.
• Redundancy of 911 in place and preparation for catastrophic situations.
• Role of commissioners and HR to integrate into the high school; recognize the value of virtual education
• Do better job marketing Sanders County
• We become the center for something – education, or virtual education or...something we are known for – to create economic development.
• Improve rental market for young families do have a job here. First time home is over $200,000.
• Need jobs – a unique employment for Sanders County is Rock Creek Mine in Noxon.
• Partner with MDLI to get county-wide access to post-high school training. No option to commute and/or still live here.
• Five rock quarries – maximize their potential.
• Organic Farmers – explore potential for expanding their markets
• Spotlight the arts community and promote it
• Expand on the asset of the County Fair
• Provide on-going management training for elected officials in such a way that they are expected and willing to participate
• Address low employee morale; results in better customer service
• Develop relationship with high school to foster curriculum and/or internships to enhance skill sets for working for the County
• Replace the retiring Personnel Director