**Board Meeting Minutes**

**January 21, 2021**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD Director

Jillann Knutson, BRCD Finance Director

Steve Simonson, BRCD Economic Director

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD Administrative Assistant

Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service

Marvin Carter, City of Laurel

Jeff McDowell, Two Rivers Authority

Emily Ringer, Town of Joliet

Bill Foisy, City of Red Lodge

Steve Riveland, Stillwater County Commissioner

Scott Miller, Carbon County Commissioner

Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County Commissioner

Lorene Hintz, Big Sky EDA / SBDC

Randy Weimer, Stillwater-Sibanye Mine

Barb Wagner, Yellowstone Conservation District

Tory Kolkhorst, Sen. Daines’ office

Maddie Alpert, Sen. Tester’s office

Stephanie Ray, Stillwater County Economic Development Office

Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin

Patty Sundberg, City of Columbus

Heidi Sparks, Laurel City Area

Dan Lowe, Big Horn Conservation District

Charli Smith, Sweet Grass County Economic Development Director (Guest)

Not present:

Sidney Fitzpatrick, Big Horn County Commissioners

Don Jones, Yellowstone County Commissioners

Clinton Giesick, Carbon Conservation District

Bob VanOosten, Stillwater Conservation District

Chris Mehus, Sweet Grass Conservation District

Page Dringman, City of Big Timber

Frank Ewalt, City of Billings

Clayton Greer, City of Hardin

Marissa Hauge, Montana Family Pharmacies

Gov. Gianforte’s Office (Casey Collins?)

Liz Ching, MT Dept of Labor & Industries

**Meeting Called to Order**

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Introduction of Members and Guests**

**Review of November Board Minutes**

* Jeff McDowell moved to approve minutes. Melanie Roe seconded. Motion carried.

**Congressional Updates**

**Maddie Alpert (Sen. Tester’s Office)**

* PPP Loans opened last week.
* Cheryl Ulmer is available to answer questions about federal assistance for businesses. (Contact info at end of Minutes).
* Contact me at Maddie\_alpert@tester.senate.gov.
* New president puts us in a different position to ask for more things. He’s talking about another relief package coming. Maddie is happy to chat if anyone has questions, too.

**Tory Kolkhorst (Sen. Daines’ Office)**

* Based in Billings office – also helps Carbon and Stillwater.
* First time on call – will listen in and pass anything on to Sen. Daines.
* Ryan explained that we ask a lot of questions, discuss the latest projects happening in our region, etc.
* Feel free to contact Tory if anyone has questions: tory\_kolkhorst@daines.senate.gov or 245-6822.

**Treasurer/Financial Reports**

1. Treasurer Update: Jillann briefly went over her report:
   1. Were able to pay off vehicle at end of year. 77,000 miles on it now. Hoping it will last for several more years.
   2. RLF Client: Commercial building going up. Bank will handle it until building is up, then we will take $200K when bank gets ready to do financing.
   3. Wildflower Gardens gave us a payment in full last week - $178,000 payout on a $120,000 loan – the difference includes about $22,000 in legal fees and the rest is interest.
   4. Bill Foisy: What is the non-budgeted cash flow (pg. 13)? – Jillann said it would be the EDA Cares Grant that Steve received – he will update on where that funding went.
      1. Steve: Admin funds to support Myrna’s position, plus the $400,000 was split between Big Sky EDA’s recovery efforts & Deb Brown/SaveYour.Town, the consultant working with our region.
   5. Ryan: Getting that RLF money back from Wildflower Gardens is a big deal because we can now loan it back out & help other clients.
   6. Jillann: Had Myrna help draft a letter to banks and will be sending it out soon. This time of year Jillann gets bombarded with requests, people wanting to start a business, change businesses, etc. This will be a mass mailing to commercial lenders to remind them that we have money available to help. Jillann is getting a lot of poor requests right now . . .
   7. Ryan: When we can’t help people, we try to refer them and give them other suggestions. Maybe they will come back to us at some point.
   8. Jillann: We can’t give loans to people with very low credit.
   9. Lorene: We help with business planning, also, so feel free to send businesses to us so you can concentrate on loan applications.
2. RC&D Financials
   1. Joel emailed everyone our 2019 Audit. Lot of issues getting it done, mostly due to COVID problems (including the auditors getting COVID!).
   2. Some people have had trouble opening the report, so if you have trouble, let Jillann know. She can mail the physical copy if necessary.
   3. Jillann was pleased with how the audit ended. A few things needed to be changed – the auditors always have a few suggestions. The Wildflower Gardens issue fixed itself. It all turned out pretty well.
   4. Auditors are already asking Jillann for info on 2020 Audit.
   5. If you have questions on it, just call Jillann and she will walk you through it.
3. RLF Financials
   1. Motion to approve RC&D Financials and Audit (included in the motion). Jeff McDowell moved, Bill Foisy seconded. Motion carried.
4. Budget:
   1. No changes from Draft Budget to Final Budget except for one: Stillwater County is giving us some money to help administer the grant program they are doing right now (small biz in Stillwater County). Giving BRCD $1500 to help administer & get checks out. Otherwise, the Budget is the same as in the November meeting. Just need approval on pg. 15.
      1. Jeff McDowell motioned, Scott Miller seconded. Motion carried.

**New Board Members**

1. Scott Miller is new Carbon County Commissioner.
2. Steve Riveland from Stillwater is replacing Tyrel Hamilton
3. Heidi Sparks is taking over the open Laurel Area seat.
   1. Joel and Ryan welcomed our new members.
4. Ryan asked for a motion to approve the three new members. Typically approve the appointed commissioner out of each county. The Laurel Area seat was a special appointment for Ken Gomer, and we need to approve for Heidi Sparks to maintain that position.
   1. All in favor of approving the board members? Motion carried.
5. Ryan: We appreciate you all being Board members. Everyone has different perspectives and different experience and a different way of getting us connected to the different areas we all live in.

**Executive Committee**

1. Executive Committee Activity Report
   1. Ryan said the last meeting centered on what would be on the January Board agenda, whether or not we can have an in-person meeting (hopefully soon), the budget, staff compensation, and election results – new county representatives, etc.
   2. Also heard staff updates. Executive Committee members often have to approve expenditure of funds and other behind-the-scenes issues.
2. Staff Compensation
   1. Included in this year’s budget.
   2. 3% staff raises.
   3. Cell phone stipend went from $25 to $70. Many years since we raised this.
   4. Keeping up with health insurance inflation. Went from $450 to $600/month. Again, many years since we raised this.
   5. As a package, we did pretty well on the budget.
   6. We take a good look at the full picture every 3 years to compare compensation vs. the market.
   7. Action for Full Board – motion to approve?
      1. Jeff McDowell motioned, Randy Weimer & Scott Miller seconded. No other discussion. Motion carried.
3. Executive Committee Nomination
   1. Ryan Van Ballegooyen is willing to stay in Chair position.
   2. Melanie Roe has said she will be Vice-Chair
   3. Marissa Hauge remains as Treasurer.
   4. Jeff McDowell will stay on as Alternate.
   5. Marvin Carter is stepping out of formal Executive Committee member, but will continue as a special advisor to the Council with a great historical perspective. Thank you, Marvin, for all of your service!
   6. Anyone else want to volunteer? We meet every other month with the meeting time subject to change if necessary.
   7. Nominations approved? – Jeff McDowell motioned, Randy Weimer / Scott Miller seconded. Motion carried.
   8. Ryan thanked everyone for the extra time they give. Congrats to Melanie Roe, our new member.

**CEDS – Steve Simonson**

1. CEDS annual update is in your packet. Any additions or corrections? Please let me know by the end of the month.
2. Bill Foisy said he tried to find something to add, but it was extremely well done. He couldn’t find anything to add!
3. Ryan: The CEDS document is our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. When we are going for grants or assisting another organization applying for a grant, we look to that document to support our grant applications (and others’ grant apps). It will support many other organizations to get grants, too. It’s not just BRCD’s document; it’s a good tool for many other organizations to use.
4. Steve Simonson: Yes, good point. Please help us to capture any projects that are on your radar and will help your own planning.
5. Bill Foisy: Red Lodge just updated their Growth Policy. I’ll let you know if there is anything to add in that respect.
6. Jeff McDowell: Hardin City Planning Board is updating its Growth Policy at February meeting.
7. Ryan: Good to make sure we’re all on the same – or similar – page.

**Staff Reports – Program/Project updates**

1. Food/Ag Program – Joel Bertolino
   1. Report starts on pg. 16. General rundown of Food & Ag activities. Monthly calls with Dept of Ag to stay up on their activities.
   2. Last GTA grant application just closed. Ongoing until they do presentations on projects in Feb. Record number of applicants, very competitive cycle, many needs. Hopefully some will be ongoing projects we will help with while others may have just been interested in funding this round. About 14-15 we had contact with, about 5 got the application completed. There were a few who had great projects but just couldn’t get them across the finish line this round. Joel has received another 6 or 7 after the New Year – since doing this report. I wish we had another round of funding to help those clients, but we are looking at other sources of funding for those people, including Rural Developments, Value-added producer grants, etc.
   3. Ongoing projects on pg. 18 – we’ve been involved in some for quite a while.
      1. Pryor Mountain Wind Farm has all towers up, but haven’t completed final phase.
      2. 406 Bovine is going great. Hopefully we can share more at some point if he gets to commercialization.
      3. Stillwater Packing, Emmett’s Meats, Pioneer Meats – got money from MT Meat Processors Grant
      4. Miller Custom Processing in Roberts – his GTA grant was screened out. He is almost finished with his expansion project.
      5. Controlled Environments Construction – in good hands with Big Sky EDA. Looking for a site for their mid-sized meat processing project.
      6. Yellowstone Ag Sustainability Project / RCCP – Coming to a close. Report showed overall impacts of that projects. Money that went to Sugar Beet producers helped them to improve irrigation and accept better management processes. This project is on our website, so others can check it out there. Started in 2016, so it’s been a good project.
      7. Becky’s Berries – Ag Adaptability Grant. Back to work with some new equipment, but she’s waiting on a new air system. We still hope to take a tour of that down the road.
      8. Any questions on anything, just give me a call.
   4. Ryan: For new people, you will realize soon how many businesses who have a positive impact to the economy – BRCD had a hand in so very many. If you wonder what good it is to be on this Board or why your county/city are paying fees, let them know that they get a lot back from our work. Congressional representatives, if they ever want to cut our funding, please fight for us because a lot of good things are happening. Even some negative things on the national side – like meat packer issues – has been a positive in Montana in terms of putting some money back into our state economy and having locally sourced meat.
2. Revolving Loan Fund – Jillann Knutson
   1. See previous notes.
   2. Jillann is very impressed with our current loans and willingness to keep making payments. We’ve only lost one business – not really a loss because they moved out of a building and moved it back home. They may go back to a storefront when things improve. Clients are often high-risk to start with, but they’ve all weathered the storm very well.
3. Economic Development/ CRDC – Steve Simonson
   1. One point on RLF. Steve is on statewide calls every Friday. All the regions are struggling with their RLFs, so kudos to Jillann and RLF committee for keeping our clients going. Keeping people in business this past year is a great success.
   2. Another round of PPP/ EIDL / SBA Funding – we’re happy to help. They should go through a lender of choice.
   3. County projects – thanks to Jeff and Holly Higgins for help on Big Horn County Affordable Housing work. We’ve brought in the medical corridor and developers and others to help Big Horn County build housing and retain workers. This will help Big Horn County to recapture some of the dollars that are leaking out of their economy. There are 22 subcontractors.
      1. Also one of our focus areas for CARES Act funding. Contracted with Cushing Terrell to do a 5-county housing study. We’ll have a “how can we help” plan for each county and what their needs might be.
   4. Targeted Industry Study – taking restaurant, hotel, service piece and finding ways to help market and rebuild those businesses. Have to get through pandemic, get people masked and vaccinated.
   5. Also working with Yellowstone and Carbon Counties on recovery efforts.
   6. Pryor Mountain Wind Farm – let Scott Miller talk about that.
   7. Detention Center – curveball from MDU Resources. Want $4 million to run natural gas pipeline under highway. Involved Dept of Commerce in this discussion. The Detention Center impacts several counties, and it will be full if it gets built. Bond approval pending to go to voters – tentatively in August now. Steve said we’ve found some 1% Board of Investment money that might be a better option. Stay tuned on this project.
   8. Enjoyed the Sibanye-Stillwater Mine presentation, the Good Neighbor Agreement, so much good work going on there. Very impressive, Randy!
   9. Steve asked Charli to discuss work with Deb Brown and SaveYour.Town – but then we forgot to come back to her.
   10. Working with Laurel on west interchange project.
   11. Regional projects – electric vehicle refueling stations in Big Timber, Hardin and Billings. Apps due on Jan. 25, so in the beginning phases.
   12. Bozeman Trail project with Deb Brown and Myrna. This project would touch all 5 counties in our region. Meeting on Feb. 19th with Mike Penfold.
   13. Starlink system we installed at the office is 5x faster than regular internet service. There are great rural opportunities for remote places who don’t have good internet speeds. The pandemic has helped push some of these things forward. For example, telemedicine isn’t helpful if people don’t have broadband to gain access. Precision Agriculture is another area that needs good broadband.
   14. Any questions??
       1. Jeff McD: Monthly fee with Starlink? $99/month with virtually no data cap.
       2. Ryan: For our legislative people, if you’re wondering what to take back to legislators . . . we’d love more GTA money since there are record numbers of applications. Starlink is a great option to get fast, reliable internet to our rural people – a very Montana solution. If there is a federal opportunity to support something like that, please support it.
   15. Jillann: PPP loans are LOANS until you fill out the paperwork, and that paperwork is coming due soon (depending if you did the 12-week or 24-week). If they don’t get it in, they will owe that money.
4. Operations Support- Myrna Lastusky
   1. Mostly helping the directors with their various projects. Doing proofreading and editing, updating website, helping with Bozeman Trail project.

**Regional Roundup** –     *News and updates from regional members on projects and activities in key CEDS categories….*

1. Dan Lowe: Not much to contribute today. I sit in awe with all the comments and activities BRCD is involved in throughout the region. It’s a special experience to be part of it.
2. Heidi Sparks: Growth policies . . . Laurel passed our Growth Management policy recently, so Laurel has an updated policy. Lots of public works projects going on in 2021. Marvin mentioned that the Refinery is bringing in another 500 employees. Heidi said that turn-around starts in April.
3. Bill Foisy: Infrastructure/housing – Habitat is on house number 8 at the Spires. Put up pic of new owner, houses being built, etc.
   1. Economy – resort tax for the quarter ending December (pro-rated since it increased from 3% to 4%) is higher than the same quarter in 2019. Amazing with the pandemic!
   2. Many remodels, no major closures:
      1. Marley’s at the Pollard (restaurant & bar) was remodeled by Tom Kuntz and is open for business.
      2. Cattail Bakery is remodeled and open.
      3. CART (Carbon Area Rural Transit): Anyone in 310/212 corridor in Carbon County can call a day in advance and they will take you to doctor free of charge.
   3. Melanie Roe: Mic wasn’t working, but she wrote this in the Chat: Successful Winter Farmers Market. New enterprise starting in March called Farm to Family or something similar - delivering fresh product and produce to homes. Weekly rodeo is planning on continuing this summer. Pioneer Meats is progressing. Brewery is trying to do some events - music etc. West end Town Pump has been remodeled and is scheduled to open mid-March. Still discussing housing and what the city/county role might look like.
   4. Randy Weimer: Mic not working.
   5. Scott Miller:
      1. Update on the windmill farm from Steve. Turbines at Pryor Wind Farm – some of the landowners are Scott’s relations. About 40 people still working out there getting them up and running (commissioning – not sure what this means yet . . . will get clarity on the exact meaning of what that means – see below for Jillann’s clarification). Getting pushed back with high winds and COVID-19, so not sure of actual completion date. Bob from PacifiCorp is Project Development Director, and he gave Scott the update. 20 years will come quickly, so I want to know what will happen to the turbines in 20 years when they get torn down, etc. This is one of Scott’s goals.
      2. For Detention Center, we are going to Musselshell County to get MOUs for bed rental, as well as from the U.S. Marshalls. That would help us with the bond. Trying to build a facility here that will take our county into the future and help the businesses/economy here. Will bring 25-30 jobs. Hoping to open doors in 2023 if it passes in August (most likely month for vote). Meeting every Wednesday at 6 pm, so anyone is welcome to come to those meetings.
      3. Starlink – hear from a lot of people that we don’t have the internet, so this is on our radar and a big deal for Carbon County and Montana.
      4. Health Board in Carbon County – opened up Carbon County and are at capacity and maxed out. No restrictions or closing times. Only thing we’ve kept is the mask mandate on indoors. If the Governor lifts the mask mandate, Carbon County will immediately do that, also – Board of Health voted on, Dr. George & Board of Health voted on and approved this. Did 200 shots at Civic Center. Hoping to have 150 shots coming weekly. Get more COVID stuff taken care of and it will open a lot more businesses for Carbon County.
      5. Bridger Senior Center – long-standing infrastructure/foundation issues. Coal Board grant of $57,000 with help from Steve Simonson. Talked to engineer and waiting on bids. Hope to have the project done by the spring/summer. The seniors were tickled to be back together for a meeting, so we’re excited to get their Center fixed so they can be back together again. Comm. Blain is working on shots for Bridger District for people who can’t get up to Red Lodge. Thanks to Steve for all his help.
      6. Jillann: Clarification on commissioning of Pryor Wind Farm . . . Knutsons still have 4 Wind Farm workers living at house. They can’t fire up the wind farm until ALL 114 turbines are ready to be fired up. 44 of the 114 are commissioned (ready to fire up). They shut down the site if it goes above 22.5 mph, which is most of the days in winter, so they are shooting for completion around May.
      7. Scott: If the turbines are twisting, it doesn’t mean they’re up and running.
      8. Jillann: They can turn them to test them, but the wind farm can’t work until ALL turbines are ready to go/commissioned.
   6. Jeff McDowell: Hardin is getting a Shipton’s Big R store in the old Shopko Hometown store, but they are losing one of their hardware stores (old Marshall Wells store). Empty buildings downtown. Most of the 300-block of Center Avenue on the east side is going to be vacant or semi-vacant. One business owner died and Jeff has no idea of prospects moving forward. It’s kind of grim in downtown Hardin at the moment.
   7. Patty Sundberg: Keeping busy mostly. City Council is doing their thing, people are working. As far as COVID, people are doing whatever County Health tells us. Ace Hardware sold – new owners and managers are starting to figure it out. Rumor of lumber yard moving and becoming a Lumber yard / hardware / feed store this spring.

Ryan Van Ballegooyen wrapped it up and encouraged new Board members to call if they have any questions. He will reach out to Marissa Hauge and Melanie Roe to schedule the next Executive Committee meeting.

**Meeting adjourned at 2:20 pm.**

**Other Notes from the Chat:**

Lorene Hintz: Any of you have anyone that needs help with a business plan and projections, please feel free to send them to the SBDC: <https://mtsbdc.ecenterdirect.com>

Lorene Hintz: PTAC Trainings [www.montanaptac.org](http://www.montanaptac.org)

Lorene Hintz: SBDC Trainings <https://mtsbdc.ecenterdirect.com/events?reset=1>

Maddie Alpert: Cheryl Ulmer is going to be your best bet to get answers on to questions about federal assistance for businesses and can be reached at Cheryl\_Ulmer@tester.senate.gov but either of us are available to answer questions and hear your concerns.

Holly Higgins: First Interstate Bank has opened their new branch building in Hardin. We are committed to Hardin. The branch lobby is still closed, but drive-up is in full operation.

**Next Beartooth RC&D Area, Inc. Board of Directors Meeting**

***March 18th, 2021  -  Potential Zoom***