**Board of Directors Meeting**

**July 15th, 2021**

**Minutes**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Jillann Knutson, BRCD

Steve Simonson, BRCD

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service

Bill Foisy, City of Red Lodge

Lorene Hintz, Big Sky EDA

Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County

Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin

*Marvin Carter, City of Laurel*

Dan Lowe, Big Horn County Conservation District

Raymond Porter, Sweet Grass County Chamber Director

Josiah Porcel, Senator Tester

Don Jones, Yellowstone County Commissioner

Scott Blain, Carbon County Commissioner

Heidi Sparks, City of Laurel (via conference call)

**Location**: Beartooth RC&D

**12:30: Social Luncheon**

**1:00: Meeting called to order.**

**Pledge of Allegiance, Introduction of Members and Guests**

**Review May Board Minutes**

* Bill Foisy motioned to approve. Melanie Roe seconded.

**Congressional Updates**

Josiah Porcel (Sen. Tester)

* Sen. Tester is working on infrastructure package – member of core group of 5 Republicans/5 Democrats. Significant investment in MT’s roads, bridges, broadband and creating good-paying jobs.
* Energy & Natural Resources Committee:
  + Advanced more than $300 million for Montana-specific water projects.
  + Includes $211M for regional water projects, like the Musselshell-Judith rural waterway project.
* Drought assistance to MT ranchers and farmers – CRP land will be authorized to offer relief to producers.
* Combatting housing shortage for wildfire fighters
  + Press release available
* Housing crisis – Sen. Tester has authored a bi-partisan bill to remove barriers for HUD – especially to help middle-income homebuyers.
* Meat Processing Grants? Joel asked & Josiah will check on it.
* Ryan: Said he heard Tester on the radio this morning & he said he’s making sure we don’t just get population dollars – to allow for our state’s geographic size

**Treasurer/Financial Reports**

* **Treasurer Update**
  + P. 15 – Beartooth Books. In a perfect budget world, it would be 50%, but that never works. Overall, we’re good – we’re in the positive.
  + Bank of Joliet Building Account – replacing the front door and doing better locks, and that will come out of this account.
  + Contractual account – mostly pass-through money for Stillwater County grants.
  + P. 16:
    - We had auditors here this past week. They are short-staffed and behind. Our end of the audit is wrapped up, and they hope to have draft out by middle to end of August.
      * We have to send loan clients a letter and get feedback, so that slows down the process a little.
    - Ryan: Once it’s done, they’ll issue a letter for the entire Board to review.
* **RLF Financials**
  + One loan in Yellowstone County was paid off, and the Wildflower Gardens was paid off, so about $240K paid off recently.
  + A couple semi-decent prospects Jillann is working with right now.
* **RC&D Financials**
  + Melanie moved to approved the Financials as presented. Lorene seconded. Motion carried.

**Staff Reports – Program/Project updates**

* **Food/Ag Program – Joel Bertolino**
  + Steve Simonson moved to a new job with Big Sky EDA. One job application in so far. Please send good applicants our way.
  + Our program got cut this year (5 existing centers cut) by 45%. They added another Food and Ag Center in Lewistown. Joel will do more CRDC this year.
  + Waiting to hear on whether MT Ag Rescue Program gets funded with ARPA funds.
  + Lane Gobbs – new engineer. Took him on tour at Stillwater Packing. He wants to go to the vineyard in Laurel next month.
  + GTA projects – still ongoing
    - JWK Enterprises and Basin Inc. – probably won’t know until October.
    - Carbon County Pryor Mountain wind farm about to stop being reported.
    - 406 Bovine – he’s looking for investors.
    - Stillwater Packing – looking for more money. Joel sent them opportunities through USDA and State funds.
      * Melanie asked how incinerator is working – working well, but DEQ said it wasn’t working quite right. The right size of gas line wasn’t installed, so it was down for a couple months while they worked on that.
      * Jillann said it’s made a huge difference in bad smells – she doesn’t notice the smell anymore.
    - Joel sent USDA funding info to Pioneer Meat, also.
    - Becky’s Berries: Great tour after last meeting. She wants a bigger fridge and a few other things – we’ll see if she’s eligible for ARPA funding.
  + Yohannes Tedessee – biz in Billings marketing
  + Beartooth Fertilizer – Red Lodge
  + Crazy Peak Brewing – Big Timber. Has some needs.
  + Cory Wilson Mushrooms – sent to us by SBDC. Talked about potential for mushrooms and GTA grants.
* **Revolving Loan Fund – Jillann Knutson**
  + De-federalization of federal funds is driving Jillann crazy. But they are getting closer (8th or 9th revision of same report . . .).
* **Economic Development / CRDC –**
  + Working on Quarterly CRDC reporting next week after finishing Food & Ag.
  + 2 BSTF grants still moving forward.
  + Pea Cannery - almost signed. Waiting for High Plains Architects to sign. Not a full PAR, but close. Not sure of the use yet – alternative use analysis. Randy Hafer of HPA is familiar with the building and is excited to be involved. There is some Brownfields in this, too. New owners are paying the match. They gave them credit for assessments already done and some new money for DEQ Brownfields.
  + Sandstone School – moving forward on BSTF. Finished contract on that.
  + West Laurel Interchange – waiting on proof of matching
* **Operations Support – Myrna Lastusky**
  + Myrna is working with Joel & Jillann to complete reporting requirements and maintain communication with Steve’s projects & contacts.
    - This includes the Bozeman Trail group we have been working with for the past 6 months.
    - Deb Brown with SaveYour.Town – Deb & Myrna have weekly/bi-weekly meetings to stay current on projects and deadlines.
    - Social media – please search for BRCD on LinkedIn as we now have a page! Please follow us on Facebook & like/share our posts, as well. And send Myrna any information/events you would like posted from your areas.

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

* Infrastructure
  + - Housing
    - Transportation
    - Broadband
* Economy
  + - Upturns or downturns in industry sectors
    - New business openings (or closures)
* Communication
  + - Marketing and outreach
* Services
  + - Health care
* Natural Resources
  + - Agriculture
    - Energy
* Human Capital
  + - Workforce
    - Education

Heidi Sparks:

* Public Works Director and Treasurer working on first round of ARPA grants. 4 projects identified for those.
* Having conversations about rebuilding south side of Laurel, specifically Railroad and 4th Street that are heavily used & need work.
* Developer talking with City about putting in planned unit development on Tree Street. 60 units, 55+ gated community.
* Early talks about extending water out to the golf course. The club wants to build a new clubhouse. The project is out 3-5 years, but we’ll look at extending services then.
* Might add a 2nd water reservoir for City. The one they have is pretty old and are doing some repairs this summer. In next 3 years want to add the 2nd one and do major repairs on the old reservoir.

Dan Lowe:

* Things are status quo at aquatic check station.
* Shipton’s has been a great addition to community and using the old Shopko building.
* Conservation District has a new office – in a good location.
* New bank & new clinic – the community is growing a bit.
* An honor to be on this Board & hear details of the rest of the region.

Bill Foisy:

* We had a fire . . . 80% contained now, but it’s been disconcerting. Lot of support from firefighters, emergency personnel.
* Girl missing in the Beartooths – had Garmin In-Reach Explorer. It sets waypoints every so often, so others can see where you are.
* Summer weekly events – this weekend is Motorcycle Rally. Car Show coming next month. Shakespeare in the Parks, Fun Run, Arts Festival all coming.
* New Biz: Montana Store, Moo Country, Southern Dish, Kitchen & Home (kitchen store, but everyone comes in looking for food).
* Main Street Program – Dept of Commerce put out new quarterly reporting requirement that is fairly complicated.
* Council is debating an Urban Renewal TIF District – Bill would like to talk to someone else who is dealing with this. You declare a certain section of town as blighted, and it gets everyone’s attention.
* Roosevelt Center – fire suppression system being put in now. The rooms are completely rented out. When fire suppression system is in place, we can open up the 3rd floor.
* Red Lodge has done annual electronic recycling event for past 9 years. Finally transitioned so Red Lodge Recycling Center teamed up with e-Waste out of Billings and is doing this full-time. Personally, a big deal for Bill to hand this off and see it succeed.

Lorene:

* PTAC (Procurement Technical Assistance) – doing annual Gov Match and doing it virtually this year. July 27th – if any companies could potentially do government contracting, they should attend. This is statewide.
* Aug. 24th – Housing Conference from 8:00-1:30
* SBDC & Rock31 working on documentary called Edge of the Plains – interviewed entrepreneurs in our region and had a film crew. Will be showing this around the region in Sept/Oct.
  + Sept 9: Harlowton
  + Sept 16: Big Timber
  + Sept 23: Hardin
  + Sept 30: Red Lodge
  + Oct. 7: Billings
  + Lorene had flyers/posters for everyone to put up in their areas.
* Joel said it was nice to have the SBDC meeting in person last week.

Raymond Porter:

* Infrastructure – new subdivision in Big Timber. Many people renovating, many new people moving to town from other states.
* City/County using ARPA funding for water expansion on west end – vacant space between interstate and downtown. Good to see housing go in there.
* Economy – platinum is steady, so good at mine. Agriculture – not having the best year.
* Crazy Peak Brewing – want to make beer using local ingredients grown on Boulder River. Secret Beer coming this fall – possibly unveiled at an Octoberfest event. Stay tuned . . .
* New Business: Heritage Christian Group opened Greycliff Mill – highly recommend going there. They took a barn from upstate NY and refurbished it. Also have grist mill that they refabricated. Grindstone in mill is from the18th century on east coast. Restaurants, glamping accommodations, horseback rides – putting it on the map.
* Crazy Creek Boutique – Susan Metcalf opened women’s clothing store and boutique.
* Some façade improvements in downtown.
* Pioneer Meats just opened a storefront in downtown. Also have seafood now.
* Chamber is launching a new website.
* City of Big Timber is working on rebranding. Election with people actually running.
* Town Pump tore down old facility and built a new one – nicest in the state! Casino in back.
* Pioneer Medical Center is having a ribbon cutting.
* Municipal Transfer Site doing some expansions.
* Next event is Friday, Aug. 20th: Brewfest.
* PRCA Rodeo every Wednesday and Farmer’s Market every Friday until September.
* 1500 people attended Friday and 2500 on Saturday for rodeo.
* Housing solution – government properties not being used for housing could be released back into the market. E.g. School district had some that used to be used for housing and no longer are. Or something being used for storage – turn it into housing. We need to take on this problem piece by piece, house by house, not just with grandiose development plans.

Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County:

* Same struggles – losing employees because there is no place to live.
* Businesses can’t find any help. Many randomly closed because of this.

Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank in Hardin:

* Housing – not much there and nowhere to build new housing.
* Hired new police chief, but tough to hire deputies, nurses, teachers when there isn’t anywhere to live. What housing we do have is pretty low-end.
* Shipton’s – open since March and doing well.
* Only 10 houses listed last Holly heard.
* New Super 8 will hopefully give competition and get people to stop before heading to Billings.
* 4-H Fair coming week after next. Different this year – more like the Billings one.
  + Beer Garden
  + Rodeo
  + More events going to get people coming in.
* Couple businesses in town closed.
* *Change of Plans* finally reopened.
* Lariat Country Kitchen is listed for sale. Just leaves a couple other restaurants.

Don Jones:

* Same problems as everywhere else.
* Fair share of crime – pretty scary when you look at the number of released convicts who end up in Billings. Way too many shootings.
  + Sober Living places, but no supervision.
  + 14 former inmates living together and most of the shootings happening in these sort of facilities. Working with DOC to find solutions here.
* ARPA money
  + Doing a lot of infrastructure work at Metra. Emergency hospital included there. Need more technology, bigger pipeline, etc. Important for entertainment but also if there would be a natural disaster.
* Laurel Natural Gas Generator will be very nice. Power supply is getting a little shaky, so this will be a good boost. Existing pipeline will be used – it’s been vacant all this time.
  + Melanie asked how many megawatts the plant will be – Don wasn’t sure.
* No plans at this point to expand Yellowstone County Detention Center.
  + Looking to hire more police officers, but the judicial system is bogged down.
  + Police are frustrated because they don’t know where to go with the criminals.
  + Mill for public safety ($1 million) .
    - Kurt Alme was instrumental. Trying to get the different groups to work together.
* City bought the Stillwater building, and commissioners are moving – possibly down to Miller Building, where they can continue to rent out part of it and grow into it as needed.
* Parking downtown is back-in diagonal parking. It’s safer for motorists & cyclists.
* Have a sheriff’s helicopter now – government surplus. They got 3 of them – only allowed to fly one and use the other two for parts. They helped in the Robertson Fire.
  + Gary Blain is the pilot – he is loving this.
  + They’ve captured some really bad criminals this way.

Scott Blain:

* Carbon County Detention Center – ballots went out yesterday for levy and construction bond.
* Caught meth-heads robbing a house and just had to take them to a friend’s house in another town. There is just no place to house them unless the crime is egregious.
* 50-50 chance of bond passing. Good meetings around the county until they came to Joliet. It got pretty ugly.
  + Holly: It was tough to pass in Hardin when they did the Big Horn County – they have the empty one sitting there.
  + Scott: That has hurt us here, too.
  + Lot of support on both sides.
  + Ballots are due on Aug. 3rd. If that passes, groundbreaking would be May 2022 and first prisoner in 2023.
* We own the 13 acres outside of Joliet, and RLACF put in some ARPA money to do a study on affordable housing – maybe they can use that space for some affordable housing.
  + Can’t hire deputies because they have to live in the county within a year and there is no housing.
    - Ryan asked if they can change some of the rules – allow them to live outside the county? Scott said it is something they are looking at.
* Pryor Mountain Wind Farm is complete.
* Roads project will be more expensive than they thought it would be to finish.
* Lots of people coming through Red Lodge – many businesses not open because they can’t find enough workers.
  + Quick Stop closed for the season – no one to work . . .

Ryan:

* Inflation is as high as it’s been since 2008.
  + Raymond asked if Ryan had some statistics – Ryan said to call him at Job Service.
* Employers are having a conversation now about wages and what to do when McDonald’s is paying $15/hour plus tuition assistance.
* We were desperate for employees pre-pandemic and it hasn’t gotten better.
* A high percent of people say they will never go back to an office – many want to work remotely.
  + It is being coined “The Great Resignation” – people are comfortable resigning knowing they can find a job somewhere else.
* Americans work more hours than countries across the world. Countries like Iceland have gone down to 35-hour work weeks with no downturn in productivity.
  + Myrna mentioned schools who went to 4-day school week and the improvement in morale, less costs, better test scores, etc.
  + Ryan talked about restaurants who have looked for a different business model – like *just* a drive-through – and they’ve found that it helps their bottom line.
  + Don: Remote workers are living in Montana, working here, but not paying income taxes to Montana. MT is really missing out on revenue.
    - Ryan said this issue is being looked at with international companies and remote work.
    - Holly: Many people don’t have to file income taxes (like ranching on a reservation). If we had sales tax, we might capture some of that revenue.

**Next BRCD Board meeting is Sept. 16th in Red Lodge**. **Location TBA.**

Meeting adjourned at 2:29 pm with social time to follow.