

Focus Group Meeting Notes

Group: Economic Health

Date/Time: February 25, 2015 at 5:15 PM

Location: MonTec conference room

Notes by: Bob Horne, Applied Communications

Attended by: Ruth Reineking, Eric Gabster, Matt Joseph, Sean McCoy, Suzette Dussalt, Sam Sill, Vladimir Kustanovich. Staff: Laval Means (Staff: Please check sign-in sheet and fill in the blanks for me. BH)

UPDATES

- The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Ruth Reineking at approximately 5:20 PM.
- Ruth then gave a brief summary of the first meeting of the Steering Committee held the previous week. The Committee basically reviewed and discussed goals produced by the six focus groups that were arranged by topic. The Committee did not get through all of the goals, but they did make some suggestions for the Economic Health focus group to consider including adding a separate goal for broadband within the infrastructure topic, addressing ways that goods and freight move through the community, and considering ways that financing (having access to capital) can help boost economic health.
- The group felt objectives regarding goods and freight are addressed in the transportation topic, and financing is addressed with the business development topic. That left interest in developing a goal for broadband with the infrastructure topic.

REVIEW OF DRAFT GOALS & OBJECTIVES

An additional goal was developed for broadband deployment and several changes were made to the University of Montana topic. The group went straight to the Infrastructure topic as the Steering Committee had suggested, then took up some issues about the University raised by Brigitta Freer in an e-mail dated February 20. The following was agreed upon by those present:

Topic 1: Infrastructure

Goal 1: Strategically build and maintain critical infrastructure that will support economic development.

Goal 2: Make Missoula a state leader in broadband deployment.

Objectives:

1. Promote reliable and affordable next generation broadband service city wide.
2. Continue to support, plan for, and fund---through CIP, facility master planning, and other means---the types of infrastructure most critical to economic development, including:
 - Water (treatment and distribution)
 - Wastewater (collection and treatment)
 - Power (including renewable energy sources)

- Natural gas
 - Fiber
3. Recognize that successful economic development requires high quality infrastructure that is planned in harmony with other city support services.
 4. Support compact development and mixed use developments to reduce costly expansion of infrastructure.

Actions:

1. Promote and incentivize green building infrastructure.
2. Assure sufficient water and wastewater capacity with state-of-the-art treatment to serve the existing community and to expand as necessary.

Topic 2 – Labor Pool

Goal 1: Build and maintain a reliable and skilled work force to both serve existing business and industries and to attract new ones.

Goal 2: Work toward a vibrant, diversified, basic sector economy with above median wage job opportunities for the Missoula community.

Objectives:

1. Explore and promote alternatives to traditional higher education in technology fields.
2. Seek more agility and better alignment between business/industry labor needs and training curricula in all educational institutions.
3. Engage youth/millennials in community development.
4. Coordinate with public schools to create a work force with skills for 21st century jobs.
5. Promote associate degree programs in trades and labor.
6. Encourage educational institutions to partner with businesses, industries, and trade unions and associations to establish programs in internships, vocational mentoring, and apprenticeships.
7. Develop relationships between businesses and educational institutions to share information, retain an educated workforce, and support business growth.
8. Assure an adequate supply of affordable housing in order to maintain a quality labor pool.
9. Protect and enhance Missoula’s “quality of life” components (arts & culture, diversity, educational opportunities, clean air and water, outdoor recreation, etc.) that attract and keep a skilled and productive work force in the community.
10. Encourage the creation of jobs that will compensate above the community median wage.

Topic Area 3: Business Development

Goal 1: Support and provide resources for business retention, expansion, and relocations to the Missoula area.

Goal 2: Support strategic economic development efforts that broaden, expand, and/or diversify the base economy.

Objectives

1. Support partnerships with government and business organizations to create a positive environment for starting, operating, and growing a business in Missoula.
2. Encourage our existing economic development funding programs and financial institutions to ensure that their policies and administrative practices are meeting the needs of emerging businesses and new business models.
3. Promote resources for start-ups that include incentives such as incubator space, shared facilities, technical assistance, and state-of-the-art broadband access.
4. Balance business recruiting efforts with the careful nurturing and support of existing businesses.
5. Formulate economic development policies and strategies that can be measured with statistics and benchmarks.
6. Ensure that home-based business remains a viable option in the Missoula area.
7. Encourage R&D investment for renewable energies.
8. Expand the visitation component of the local economy by focusing on heritage, cultural, business, and resource based recreational tourism.
9. Develop programs to provide incentives for desirable and strategic types of growth.

Actions:

1. Add action on rural outsourcing.
2. Assess Missoula's potential to become a regional center for bioscience industries.
3. Coordinate economic development efforts among the various agencies and determine roles and priorities to optimize resources and effectiveness.
4. Inventory community assets and promote them to attract businesses and top notch employees.

Topic Area 4: Transportation/Transit/Multi-Modal

Goal 1: Provide a full range of viable transportation alternatives and modes to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

Objectives:

1. Develop a city-wide greenbelt to enhance open space and to facilitate alternative transportation such as walking and cycling.
2. Formulate land use policy that supports compact development and transit and multi-modal accessibility.
3. Support land use policy based upon transit and multi-modal transportation alternatives, and focus inward concepts.
4. Plan for a modern, efficient thoroughfare system to move people and goods safely about the community.
5. Promote the development of more frequent airline flights to more regional hubs for better business access.
6. Continue working with Montana's rail freight carriers to improve upon Missoula's advantage in rail access and service.
7. Continue to build and maintain the core transportation facilities that contribute to Missoula's overall quality of life and economic advantages, including streets/roads, Interstate highway, and non-motorized trail and pathway system.

Actions:

1. Encourage the state to establish a matching funds and promotional program in support of improved air carrier service.
2. Explore a hierarchy of home-based businesses to be incorporated into the local land development regulations.

Topic Area 5: Local Business

Goal 1: Support and provide the necessary resources that facilitate local business start-ups and business retention in Missoula.

Goal 2: Recognize the unique challenges faced by local businesses and entrepreneurs in competing with national and regional chains and franchises.

1. Encourage local preference purchasing on the part of anchor institutions.
2. Partner with local and regional lending institutions to provide more technical and business plan assistance and better access to capital for local businesses.
3. Explore an incentives program for local “green businesses” that use reused products and renewable energy.
4. Promote energy efficiency as a local business advantage and a job creator.
5. Encourage the state, city, and county to streamline and provide consistent, predictable business regulations.

Topic Area : Economy/Jobs (It was determined that the goals and objectives in this topic were largely duplicative of those in other topics, particularly local business and business development. Objectives from economy/jobs that did not duplicate objectives already identified under local business and business development have been moved to those topics.)

Topic Area 6: Downtown

Goal 1: Continue to create and enhance downtown’s business diversity, and economic vitality, and make the urban core a competitive hub for the region.

Goal 2: Continue to promote downtown Missoula as the community’s center for government, commerce, entertainment, and culture.

Objectives:

1. Maintain vibrancy and diversity, at an appropriate scale, through a combination of housing, small and large businesses, parks and trails, retail, dining and drinking establishments, and events.
2. Maintain downtown as a safe destination for residents and visitors.
3. Ensure that downtown conveys a sense of place and uniqueness.
4. Continue to implement the downtown master plan and to support its objective of a dynamic mixed environment of business, housing, and retail.

Topic Area 7: University of Montana

Goal 1: Strive for educational excellence that produces globally competitive graduates.

Goal 2: Recognize the mutually beneficial relationship between the University and the community, and that the UM faculty, staff, and students are a vital part of the community.

Objectives:

1. Ensure educational efforts at UM meet demands in local and regional markets for technology and work force.
2. Ensure funding for research that will play a role in shaping the innovative industries of tomorrow.
3. Provide opportunities for the community through integrative learning experiences as well as graduating a professional and competitive work force.
4. Explore programs and other opportunities to reduce student debt.

MAPPING EXERCISE

Immediately following the goals and objectives discussion, the group moved on to the community mapping exercise until approximately 7:30 when they adjourned. The group made the following comments during the exercise:

Gateway: Primary gateways considered at the Wye (I90 and Hwy 93 North intersection), the Airport, East Broadway near Van Buren, and at the Hwy 93 South and Blue Mountain Road intersection. The intersection of Orange Street and I90 is also viewed as a key gateway as a main way into the downtown. A future gateway is anticipated at the Bonner/I90 exit associated with the fact that a new state park is taking shape in the vicinity.

Downtown: The group concurred with the downtown master plan focus area but could see the character and connection of downtown extending along Orange Street in the future. Orange Street should continue to support neighborhood commercial needs for the immediate area as well.

Urban Core: The group identified an approximate area between Reserve Street, the University of Montana, I90 and S. 39th Street as being the Urban Core. They focused on areas that already have existing or planned for infrastructure like 15-minute transit service and existing streets and other public facilities. They also considered the core to include the new location of Missoula College.

Important to the new economy is having land available for affordable housing, so there is a need for available and developable land.

Activity Nodes: The group considered activity nodes at a few different scales – large scale mixed use activity nodes that are supported and associated with transit routes and node reinforcement areas that are smaller scale support for neighborhood commercial and mixed use within established or establishing neighborhoods. They felt that most neighborhood could benefit from node reinforcement. The larger scale activity nodes were identified along Brooks Street, supporting conversion of grey-fields to mixed use; Russell Street coinciding with transit service availability and the Bitterroot Spur.

Redeveloping Areas: The new urban renewal districts near North Reserve Street and the Bonner tax economic development district were identified with potential for economic redevelopment.

Urban agriculture: The potential was identified in portions of the Miller Creek neighborhood, along the Bitterroot River corridor in the Miller Creek area; in several areas of Target Range and Orchard Homes, within the River Road Neighborhood, areas of Grant Creek, and areas in the Rattlesnake. It was pointed out the urban farms can be as small as $\frac{1}{4}$ acre and that agriculture, mixed use and housing development are not mutually exclusive, however incentives for encouraging urban farming are likely needed.

Open Space areas: The River was identified as highly valued. It's important to consider how to keep it clean and healthy, while also allowing access.

Concept Map associated with the Mapping Exercise can be viewed with this link: [Economic Health Land Use Exercise Map](#)

NEXT STEPS

The March meeting will be devoted to action items geared to the goals and objectives for each topic. Consultants and staff will attempt to compile the various action statements that have been brought up thus far, and get them out to the focus group members via e-mail.