**Beartooth Board of Directors Meeting**

**January 16, 2025**

**Big Sky Economic Development**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Gaurav Thakur, BRCD

Nan Knight, BRCD

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Tina Toyne, City of Hardin Economic Development Director

Wes DeGuilio, Constituent Liaison & Veterans’ Representative, Sen. Sheehy’s Office

Jeremy Dewell, Military Liaison, Senator Daines’ Office

Will Boone, District Director for Congressman Troy Downing

Tory Kolkhorst, Senator Daines’ Office

Zoey Stroop, Congressman Troy Downing’s Office

Commissioner John Ostlund, Yellowstone County

Commissioner Mike Waters, Yellowstone County

Kevin Mitchem, Sibanye-Stillwater Mine

Lorene Hintz, SBDC

Kayla Vokral, SBDC

J.B. Farley, AgriOrganics

Jeremy Dewell, Military Liaison, Senator Daines’ Office (in for Tory Kolkhorst)

Danny Choriki, Ubet Post

Bob VanOosten, Stillwater Conservation District

Commissioner Steve Riveland, Stillwater County

Commissioner Scott Miller, Carbon County

Dan Lowe, Big Horn County Conservation District

**Members on Zoom/Phone:**

Ryan VanBallegooyen

Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin

Kurt Markegard, City of Laurel

**Meeting Called to Order:** Ryan Van Ballegooyen called the meeting to order.

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

**Review November Board Minutes (Action): Danny motioned to approve. Kayla seconded. Motion carried.**

**Congressional Updates:**

**Tory Kolkhorst, Sen. Daines’ Office:**

* 119th Congress under way
* Sen. Serving on Senate Committees for Foreign Relations, Finance, Indian Affairs, and Energy & Natural Resources

**Zoey Stroop, Congressman Downing’s Office:**

* Serving on Small Business and Financial Services committees
* Yesterday he was appointed to Digital Assets, Financial Technology, and AI subcommittee, US Capital Markets, and Housing and Insurance Subcommittees
* Co-sponsored several bills already

**Wes DeGiulio, Sen. Sheehy’s Office:**

* Very optimistic for the future, potential to get a lot done
* Sen. Sheehy is working on a lot of wildland fire legislation. He has a lot of experience in this area, of course.

**Treasurer/Financial reports: Nan Knight**

* P. 12 shows where the books are sitting.
* We currently have 20 loans of $1.7 million. Sweet Grass had one paid off in November and consolidated 2 loans into one in Stillwater.
* Page 13 has comparison of 2022-2025 budgets and explained a few of the columns.
* In October Beartooth received $500K from State in grant money to loan out, and then we matched it in an application for $750K IRP loan funds. We have $1.25 million available for lending.
* Oldest loan in Carbon County just paid off; been with us since 2005.
* **Tina motioned to approve; Lorene seconded. Motion carried.**

**Constitutional By-laws (Joel)**

* Joel passed around some copies; no changes since November meeting when they were presented. No one contacted him with suggestions. Only real change is to eliminate the term limits.
* **Kayla motioned to accept the Constitutional By-laws as presented; Danny seconded. Motion carried.**

**Nominations for Executive Committee:**

* No nominations were submitted or received prior to the meeting. All Executive Committee members are willing to stay for another year.
* **John Ostlund moved to keep the Executive Committee as is; Tina seconded. Motion carried.**

**Staff Reports – Program/Project Updates**

**Joel – Food and Ag**

* **5 GTA** are working on second-round applications
  + Derek Eaton – CutCraft – uses AI technology to arrange for animals to go to a processing plant, cut, wrapped to each customer’s specifications
  + Samurai Sue’s – Red Lodge. Uses local flour, grains, etc. for her business and is hoping to expand her processing capabilities.
  + Greycliff Mill – want to develop small smoking and meat processing system; applying for equipment needed. We wrote a Business Enterprise Grant that gives them funding to work with MSU Food Lab on recipes for snack sticks, jerky, etc.
  + Farm Box – Joliet; Justin Dye is a one-man farmers market; he markets local producers’ food around the region and also on Facebook. Looking to increase his ability to do this.
  + Marble Table – assisting SBDC on that one
* Rodi Farm – Laurel; might be assisting on reapplying for a VAPG app
* Montana Outlaw BBQ (Ty Hamilton) – took a tour of his business and hoping to do a GTA app with him next year as well as a possible loan through Beartooth. Lots of great seasonings and sauces.
  + He’s also offering cooking classes and sells locally raised meats like Blue Creek Marbled Meat.

**Nan – Brownfields Program**

* Completed a Phase II on the old Red Lodge Memorial Hospital
* Jan. 23rd will be a housing community outreach meeting and will also update what is happening with Brownfields.
* Completed Phase I on Roberts site for affordable housing
* Will be doing a Phase II with ABCA for Pryor High School
* Hope to do a tank pull in Garryowen at old gas station
* If there are other potential contaminated properties, let us know. Cannot help in City of Billings since BSED has their own Brownfields Program. But we can conduct assessments outside of the city limits.
* Awaiting word on the Brownfields RLF application we submitted in November.

**Gaurav – Economic Development**

* Big Horn County – Housing Needs Assessment Study (support of Tina/County)
  + New EDD at BHC has helped to boost the numbers of surveys up to 400
  + Gaurav and Tina attended Christmas Bazaar at Crow Agency for outreach. They were able to speak with many tribal members to better understand their housing needs.
* City of Hardin – Economic Development Strategy
  + Partnered with Tina Toyne & Ayres on in-depth interview with downtown businesses and stakeholders.
* City of Big Timber – MAP EJ Grant application
  + Submitted MAP EJ application on behalf of the City of Big Timber
  + Grant would be for construction of an ADA-compliant bathroom and commercial kitchen for their existing civic center/emergency shelter
* City of Laurel
  + Invited by Laurel Small Business Alliance to present to the Small Business Community about Beartooth RC&D’s service offerings.
  + We would be happy to present to other groups in communities around our region.
  + Gaurav will represent Beartooth & actively participate in the LURA (Laurel Urban Renewal Agency) monthly meetings.
* RBDG grant application to create a regional online business directory and resource library
  + Gaurav is applying to USDA’s RBDG program due Feb. 28th in hopes of increasing business visibility, continuous engagement and communication and resource accessibility.
  + Want to restructure our website too and create a two-way communication engagement with our small businesses.

**Myrna – Project Manager/Operations Support**

* Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) with City of Hardin: We have loved working with Tina, & she is doing so much great work in Hardin. Gaurav has been a big help in assisting on a couple of her projects over there.
* RCDI with Red Lodge Area Community Foundation (RLACF/Angela Getchell, Workforce Housing Manager) – so many great things happening in Carbon County with housing.
  + We presented at a Roberts School Board meeting last night (and have been in talks with Bridger and Red Lodge Schools, also) regarding a model for teacher housing where the school pays a small monthly amount to maintain “first right of refusal” on one or more units. Units will remain affordable through partnership with Trust Montana & rents will fall under HUD guidelines.
* RCAC (Rural Community Assistance Corporation) Grant in Columbus
  + December: Small group (Value Chain) meetings to discuss plans for each group (Infrastructure, Housing, Youth, Downtown Beautification, and Tourism & Recreation).
  + 4th ROCE (Recharge Our Community’s Economy) Workshop was on Mon, Jan. 13th.
  + Monthly small group meetings will continue as we work to make goals a reality for 2+ years.
* Commissioner Miller asked about the Teacher Housing model and who will own it because the County doesn’t want the government to own houses; they want commerce/the country to work it out.
  + Trust Montana will own and control the property – they are responsible for the rentals, repairs, etc.
* Danny Choriki asked if the school is basically in the middle between Trust Montana and the local real estate market?
  + Not exactly. For example, HUD sets the income limits and eligibility, which most teachers in Carbon County meet. So if the rent is set at $1293/month, the school would pay $300/month for that first right of refusal. That brings the cost for a teacher who lives there to $993/month. The school continues to pay the $300 to maintain control. If there isn’t a teacher who wants to live in it, it would be more of an open market rental with a 6-month contract, so the school can get back in down the road.
  + Brad Caton, RLACF Program Director, came up with this unique model out of the Bridger Housing Study. Bridger residents were clear that they don’t want high-density housing, but they needed housing for teachers and workforce in their town, and they want control over who lives in these homes. Brad took their feedback and developed this model. We’ll see how it all turns out.

**Regional Roundup**

**Commissioner Scott Miller, Carbon County**

* Housing – working with RLACF to support the whole county with housing, and they are
* Cedarwood Villa will be torn down in phases for a new County government offices – sheriff’s dept, possibly a small detention center, offices for treasurer, clerk and recorder, commissioners.

**Commissioner Steve Riveland, Stillwater County**

* Law and Justice Center is on hold
* Just completed $4.2 million elevator in courthouse to be ADA-compliant

**Kayla Vokral, SBDC**

* A LOT of new businesses getting started and very busy lately. Lots of cool new ventures will hopefully be coming to Yellowstone County.
* Partnering with Joel on several projects and Nan on some funding projects.
* 2025 Training Calendar is up on the website. QuickBooks trainings will be presented in multiple counties.
* Profit Mastery, Marketing workshops will also be offered around the region.
* Working on quarterly meetings with different industries to connect different businesses to have conversations with each other.
* Kayla passed around copies of the Economic Pulse publication.
* Lorene celebrated 20 years with SBDC and spent 2 different days celebrating her accomplishments.
  + She has helped businesses receive over $71 million in funding!
  + 10,000 clients served!!
  + Her job creation was also outstanding.
* Steve Arveschoug is retiring in April and are in middle of Executive Director search. Hope to bring 2-3 candidates into the Billings area the first week of February.

**Lorene Hintz, SBDC**

* Kayla is in the *Yellowstone Valley Woman Magazine* January edition for her work on *The Vault* podcast! The podcast is marketing the entire community, not just BSED.
* Equitable Lending Leaders cohort – people doing a study to see how to make funding better for the Native community.
* Had some workshops in Columbus and Laurel that were very well attended. Many of their workshop attendees have been affected by mine layoffs.
* Space2Place grant is open here in Yellowstone County.

**Dan Lowe, Big Horn County Conservation District**

* Dan told one of his great stories with a lesson to it.
* Hardin airport had a couple of hangars they didn’t know what to do with, and the Big Horn Conservation District said they would be able to use them.
* On Conservation District board, weed district board, city planning board, Beartooth board . . . very important to help get our message out through communication from our board members and the community.
* Contracts for 2 check stations – did 90,000 boat checks last year between them.
* Thank you for letting me part of this board!

**Tina Toyne, City of Hardin Economic Development Director**

* County Housing Needs Assessment will wrap up in early March
* Put out RFP for Infill and Redevelopment last fall and didn’t get any proposals, but we have a few coming in by the end of this month.
* Mary Slattery of Becker Hotel agreed to do a PAR of her hotel, so working on that RFQ process and will be selecting a firm shortly.
* Completed Pilot Tourism Grant application again on Dec. 31st. Should hear back in early March. No matter what, we will work on growing our Tourism sector.

**Danny Choriki, Ubet Post**

* Tip Your Hat Tuesdays – friendlier community
* Jan. 30th is standard day for all municipalities to count the number of homeless
* 2nd time in the last 3 years the City asked a professional police and fire department management consultant company to come in. This is a follow-up to a report done a couple years ago.
  + Crime is coming down a bit, but still above national and state average.
  + One of biggest wins is Community Service Officer – someone who does lower level tasks that doesn’t require a sworn officer to do. This has helped greatly to take load off officers.
  + Budget process – right now it goes through 4 levels of approval. So they moved budget authority down to save some paperwork and time.
  + Huge need for better data systems – will likely be a serious Council discussion on this soon.

**Bob Van Oosten, Stillwater Conservation District**

* Received money from federal government at NRCS (EWP – Emergency Watershed Protection) to help Stillwater and Carbon Counties with effects of 2022 Flood.
  + Stillwater is done and signed off on.
  + Carbon is done, but Fromberg’s paperwork is not completed (waiting on info from engineers).
    - Scott Miller said the Fromberg Mayor just resigned. Terry Feller is the new mayor – good guy who has lived there a long time. New clerk, also.
  + There is money available for people in Ag for irrigation headgates, etc.
* Sponsoring a Forest Service grant for East Rosebud area that was flooded so badly. In final stages of releasing the proposals to the public for bids. $5 million grant.
* Danny asked about a Watershed Organization – Bob said it is helpful in obtaining grants. Stillwater has a Watershed organization. Mike Penfold is looking into it in Yellowstone.

**Commissioner John Ostlund, Yellowstone County**

* Jail addition started as $6 million project and will end up at $8 million or more. But it is going well.
* Moving out of Stillwater Building into Miller Building that will be the new County Administration building.
* Building an outdoor arena at the Metra.
* Finishing up Jail Study in the next month.

**Kevin Mitchem, Sibanye-Stillwater Mine**

* Last few months have been very challenging.
* Metal prices have stabilized but are still low.
* Mining is a family business, and the people we work with are our family. Tough to watch 650 family members be let go. Has an impact on the entire team.
  + West side of Stillwater Mine has been put on care and maintenance; mining the east side.
  + East Boulder was hit but not as much
* Reset of the operation – need to get facilities profitable again. Meeting with employees and telling them the direction we are going with the hope of getting back to full operation as soon as possible.
* Many people are doing different duties, but thankful to have a job.
* Tory asked about laid off employees getting jobs back at some point.
  + Have an hourly side (union) and salary side (non-union). If jobs come back, those will go to individuals within the union. Not much hiring is happening right now. Just working to stabilize the company.
  + Focused on our own employees vs. contracted employees.
  + People are retaining vehicles longer than they used to (most palladium is used in catalytic converters). COVID had an impact. Russia providing a lot of the supply right now.

**Kurt Markegard, City of Laurel**

* Planning for Love’s Truck Stop west of Laurel – will be hiring 50-60 employees for that (24-7 hours, 365 days).
* Fiberglass Structures is closing up shop (under different name now) and moving back to Texas. Big loss for the community. Just in solid waste fees will lose $10-15,000 per year. 20-40 employees.
  + Ryan V. will be in touch to talk with Kurt about assisting.

**Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank**

* Not much new has happened – Dollar General just opened
* Hardin Primary Schools – getting books out to K-3 students

Next meeting is in Hardin on March 20, 2025 in the Big Horn County building.

Meeting adjourned at 2:28 pm.