

**Beartooth RC&D Board of Directors Meeting**  
**May 15, 2025**  
**Sibanye-Stillwater Conference Room**

**Present:**

Joel Bertolino, Executive / Food & Ag Director  
Nan Knight, Finance Director/Brownfields Coordinator  
Gaurav Thakur, Economic Development Director  
Myrna Lastusky, Project Manager/Exec. Asst.  
Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Dept. of Labor & Industry/Job Service  
Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County  
Lawrence Killsback, Big Horn County Economic & Housing Director  
Mike Boyett, Billings City Council Member  
Tina Toyne, City of Hardin Economic Development Director  
Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin  
Kevin Mitchum, Sibanye-Stillwater Mine  
Martin DeWitt, Small Business Administration  
Lorene Hintz, Big Sky EDA/SBDC  
Kayla Vokral, Small Business Development Center  
Zoey Stroop, Congressman Downing's Office  
Dan Lowe, Big Horn County Conservation District

**Via Zoom:**

Danny Choriki, Billings Area Family Violence Task Force/Ubet Post  
Wesley DeGiulio, Sen. Sheehy's Office

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

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

**Review March Board Minutes**

**Congressional Updates**

- **Zoey Stroop/Quinton Winsted (Congressman Downing)**
  - Congressman hosted 2 Town Halls.
  - Energy is a focus this cycle – have met with every mine in his district.
  - He returns every month to visit entities and has met with all county commissioners and field staff are attending meetings as well.
  - Introduced 2 new acts: SCC Modernization Act and Safeguarding American Property Act.
  - Co-sponsored bill with Senators Daines and Sheehy to stop minerals like palladium being imported by Russia.
  - Ryan asked for funding support that is helping DOL help people who are laid off.
  - Joel mentioned the EDA Partnership Planning Grant and the need Beartooth has for that to be funded for economic development.
  - Their office is always open to assist us.

- **Wesley DeGiulio (Sen. Sheehy)**
  - Senator Sheehy's aerial firefighting enhancement act passed Senate and will allow for a quicker and easier process to fight wildfires.
  - He and others introduced the Fix our Forest Act – to centralize and simplify wildland fire response. Too many different groups currently handle the firefighting, states arguing over fires crossing borders, etc.
  - All congressional spending projects are in, about 30 total. Each will be submitted into the Appropriations Committee in the next couple weeks and voted on probably in mid-fall.
  - Email or call Wes with anything to pass on to the Senator.

### **Treasurer/Financial Reports**

- P. 14: where Beartooth books are sitting right now.
  - A couple programs have funds defunded or exhausted
    - DEQ EJ Grant
    - Hardin RCDI is closed
    - Specialty Crop is exhausted – set to expire in September
- P. 15: RLF Funds
  - 22 loans right now
  - \$2M is loan balances right now
  - \$1M available to loan out
  - Closed 2 loans last month – one in Yellowstone County, one in Carbon County
- LOT of projects with Kayla and Lorene and helping each other out.
- Ryan said there are a lot of older business owners are ready to sell their businesses, and there are opportunities there.
- **ACTION: Melanie Roe motioned to approved the Beartooth Books and RLF as presented; Dan Lowe seconded. Motion carried.**

### **Personnel Handbook Review**

- Ryan and Joel have been working on the handbook. Take a look and let Joel know if you have any suggestions or you want to help with the updates.
- Adding new issues like the use of AI, security, etc. Mostly cleanup of what is already in there.

### **Approval of Fiscal Sponsorship Fee**

- We had a request from a community who was going to raise up to \$1 million and we decided we would need a fiscal sponsorship fee. Myrna and Nan developed an agreement and a policy. The group decided to go with RLACF instead, but we want to be prepared for future requests.
- Federal vs. State or local requests make a difference in the work load.
- We are already over the audit threshold.
- Mike mentioned concern of Beartooth being liable in these circumstances. Perhaps add that language to the policy.

**ACTION: Lawrence Killsback motioned to approve the policy with the modification of each request being sent to the Executive Committee, who is authorized to designate the fee or percentage to be charged on a case-by-case basis. Melanie Roe seconded the motion. Motion carried.**

## **Staff Reports**

### **Food & Ag Program (Joel Bertolino) – p .17ff**

- Discussions with FADC and Dept of Ag on renewing our contract. We received an additional \$6,000 per year in new contract.
  - Renewal was fairly simple.
- Gaurav and Joel attended Lean Manufacturing training yesterday, along with many of Joel's clients. Great training put on by Lane Gobbs of MMEC at Rock31.
- Trying to put together some more trainings coming up.
- Rodi Farm – applied for VAPG to help them in transporting cut flowers to Bozeman, etc.
- Samurai Sue's – was granted a total of \$26,000 for marketing and equipment.
- Greycliff Mill – were not awarded their grant.
- Farm Box – BEP grant for food safety training.
- Yellowstone Valley Farms – still moving forward on expansion.
- Keeping list of businesses for GTA applications in fall.
- Becky's Berries – she tweaked her mustard recipe a bit to increase sales.
- Rebel Head Kombucha – was at training yesterday.
- Toew's Family Farm – assisted on VAPG application.
- Grindy's Cheeseballs – received a BEP grant for training.

### **Brownfields Program (Nan Knight)**

- We were awarded \$460,000 a couple years back.
- 2 Phase 1s and 2 Phase 2s completed.
- Ready to start 2 new projects in Big Horn County.
  - Tank pull at old gas station
  - Old carpet mill off the interstate
    - Crow Tribe has received funding to turn carpet mill into recycling center.
  - Still getting approval process started with Helping Hands Food Bank.
- Have expended \$300K with \$160K left.
- Red Lodge Urban Renewal District: We have arranged for KSU-Technical Assistance to Brownfields Team is coming on May 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> to do a visioning exercise on the Urban Renewal District.

### **Economic Development/CRDC (Gaurav Thakur)**

- Enjoying visiting clients with Joel a couple times a month to better understand clients' needs and the support they need. Rebel Head Kombucha.
- Joel and GT attended Rotunda Day at State Capitol on March 31<sup>st</sup>.
- Reconstructed loan application form – can now be submitted online or printed.
- Created some infographics to visually show Beartooth's impact to communities.
- Also working on CEDS. Attended EDA Conference and federal government would like more from the CEDS to better help communities.
- MAP EJ Grants (Mountains and Plains Environmental Justice Grant) – we submitted an application on behalf of Sweet Grass County and it was accepted, but then we got word that the program was terminated.
- LURA (Laurel Urban Renewal Agency) Board: GT is on it in an advisory capacity.
  - They are not currently a member of MT Main Street Community. GT is working with them to show them the benefits of this and start thinking about. Application takes about 1-2 years.

- NADO Conference in April
  - Discussed PPG funding that has been delayed.
  - After conference went to India on family emergency. Thankful to staff for all their help.
- Ryan thanked Mike Boyett for his insight into approaching a City Council with a lot of new members and how to educate them and tell our story.
- Danny said that the City has a block during Strawberry Fest and can have a booth for free – definitely for Beartooth and probably for other local government entities.

### **Operations/Project Manager Support (Myrna Lastusky)**

USDA Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) with Red Lodge Area Community Foundation (RLACF/Angela Getchell, Workforce Housing Manager)

- Visioning Activity with the Red Lodge Urban Renewal Agency and Kansas State University-Technical Assistance Brownfields team is scheduled for May 28 & 29.
- Signed MOU with Trust Montana, Roberts School District, and RLACF for First Right of Refusal (FROR) housing model.
  - \$300/month maintains FROR. Fair Market Rent is \$923/month.
  - Working with Architect, Construction Supervisor, Roberts Water & Sewer Board, etc. and going before County Planning Board soon to begin construction on first triplex.
- \$131,000 Grant ends on Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>, but we plan to request an extension from USDA

USDA RCDI (Rural Community Development Initiative) with City of Hardin (Tina Toyne, EDD)

- Grant ended on March 31st. Final Qtr Report & Summary Reports submitted in April.
- 3 ½ years working with Big Horn County & City of Hardin
- \$120,000 grant provided training, support, and 50% reimbursement for EDD position
- End result = 2 Economic Development Directors are now doing great work in Hardin and BHC!

RCAC (Rural Community Assistance Corporation) Grant in Columbus

- Monthly small group meetings continue as we work to make goals a reality for 2+ years.
- Stillwater County Chamber of Commerce support
  - RCAC/Beartooth conducted a 3-hour Chamber board training on May 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Attended Governor's Conference on Tourism April 27-29
  - MT Heritage Center – opening in November
  - Need a grant writer? Try [www.dottedifundraising.com](http://www.dottedifundraising.com)
  - Help setting up a nonprofit? [www.mtnonprofit.org](http://www.mtnonprofit.org)

### **Regional Roundup**

#### **Martin DeWitt, SBA**

- No lender relation specialists in the State, so that has been on Martin's plate, also.
- No travel budget right now. Can't be quite as responsive right now. If you want SBA to attend, they do need to have a speaking role.
- National Small Business Week last week. 3 award winners in eastern MT
  - Young Entrepreneur = Swanky Roots
  - Women-owned Small Business = Billings Aesthetics and Dermatology
  - Small Business Champion of the Year = Steve Arveschoug

- Made in America Manufacturing is a major component moving forward. Some grant funds to become a Manufacturing TA Center.

#### **Mike Boyett, Billings City Council**

- House value went up, taxes went up. State said our property taxes will go down, but to get there, they are reducing the value of a mill. Other cities can float their own mills, but Billings is capped.
  - Billings will lose \$8-\$9 million from this. Rather than laying off 100 people, State said they can raise it up and violate their charter to the next year. Still short \$2.3 million, so will need to lay off people. Next year will be short \$1.9 million. Vicious cycle.
  - Need to go back to residents and change the Charter (so there is no cap) or the number of mills they can charge.
  - We are short about 18 policemen and may not be able to hire more. Feels like we are moving backwards as a City.
  - Might be a tough sell for Beartooth RC&D to ask them to continue their support with all this going on.
- \$1 million grant for trees went away, AmeriCorps Vistas went away.
- Groundbreaking for new ice skating rinks in public/private partnership.
- Broke ground for a rec center that has 4 gyms together – Southside TIF funds.
- 196 soccer teams came to Billings last weekend - huge economic driver.
- Amend Park and new City Hall building are great.
- Thanks to Beartooth for presenting at the City Council about all the loans we have in Billings.

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

- Aquatic Check Station is open. Rest area will hopefully be open again soon.

#### **Holly Higgins, FIB-Hardin**

- Kaala's Village in Lodge Grass has opened. There is a huge need on the reservation to help kids whose parents who are in drug rehab, incarcerated, etc. Mountain Shadow Association has created Kaala's Village to help these families – will include helping families build houses, have a community garden, and more. Watch this 3-minute video to learn more: [Going to Grandma's House - The Story of Kaala's Village](#)

#### **Ryan VanBallegooyen, Dept. of Labor/Job Service**

- Have remote reach to Columbus and Laurel to help impacted miners.
- Remember – the grant to help the miners is for secondary and tertiary impact as well.
- Can help pay for a welding certificate or different needs, work on resumes, help them hold it together until they get called back, etc.
- Hoping for some support in federal funding to continue the work they are doing.

#### **Kevin Mitchum, Sibanye-Stillwater Mine**

- Impacts to communities due to mine layoffs are far-reaching. Columbus McDonalds just closed.
- Workforce: mostly replacing positions, and hourly positions are being called back. Some have the opportunity to go to East Boulder, some haven't accepted those positions.
- Budgeted manpower is what they need to stick to this year.

- 1<sup>st</sup> quarter we exceeded budgeted production, which is great. Trying to minimize costs and maximize efficiency.
- Metal prices are stable around \$950/oz. Need them to get above \$1,000.
- Hard Rock Mining Impact Dollars – impacts from employees, contractors, schools, etc. to communities.

### **Kayla Vokral, SBDC**

- April was the Hive Pitch Competition – HS students to pitch their business and earn money. Did pre-pitch training at Skyview. Last 4 years, every time we've done a pre-pitch, our kids win.
  - Daniel Light won \$8,000. His business made \$21,000 the first year. Pays his friends \$20/hour to clean windows.
- Laurel Small Business Alliance Meeting – economic overview of Laurel and how to better sell their Main Street. Provided some marketing plans to them.
- Veronnaka with Swanky Roots is a client, and she won an SBA award. Visit her!
- MSUB – Entrepreneur group was half MSUB and half from Portugal. Have continued that partnership in working with those students. Very hard to start businesses in Portugal. Hoping to bring one of the businesses to Lockwood.
- QuickBooks Training at library in Big Timber on June 4<sup>th</sup> 10-12 is coming up. Lorene and Kayla are getting their QB certification, too, in order to do more classes.
- Partnering with Nan and Joel on many projects. Great partnership!
- Partnering a lot with Tyson and Brandi of Dept. of Labor on trainings.
- Expert Week: moving it to June 17-18. Opportunity for clients to have free one-on-one sessions with experts. Great resource for clients!
- Super busy. Usually help 100-130 clients each year. Have served 103 already in 1<sup>st</sup> quarter!!

### **Lorene Hintz, Big Sky Economic Development**

- Chamber had a Native American Conference at MSUB. Kayla and Lorene did Start Smart training there.
- Steve's retirement was a big deal. He was at BSED for 16 years, so it's a transition.
- Better off in Billings does a Space2Place each year – grants to make spaces more beautiful throughout Yellowstone County. 22 apps, gave out 7 grants this year.
- World Trade Center Day – partnered with people from WTC and had trainings and 140 people and the governor.
- R&D Tax Credit Incentive – Paul is looking into ways to generate more revenue and still do a good job and serve their people.

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

- Pilot Tourism Grant – making progress.
- PAR on Hotel Becker is moving forward.
- EcDev Strategy and Infill Refill and Redevelopment for Housing – 2 studies they are awaiting results on.
- Submitting requests to MT Business Attraction for possible new businesses.
- Visit SE Montana Executive Board – working on new branding.

- Tire Shop reopened. New mechanic shop opened (Dave's Place). Rent 1 Rental Equipment is opened. New business opened called Love Bears All Things (misc. crafts & home décor). Lumberzac's changed hands and reopened as Hardin Building Center. DQ might open in July.
- Grand opening for Speedy & Flo's Greenhouse just happened.

#### **Lawrence Killsback, Big Horn County Economic Development**

- Housing Needs Assessment gave us a playbook to follow, so we are starting on those steps to create a Housing Working Group to develop a Housing Authority for Hardin/BHC.
- Glendive received Pilot Grant, and Lawrence feels some of their ideas will fit the Hardin efforts.
- Plenty Doors CDC and Lawrence put in an ORE application for a Workforce Feasibility Study.
- Hardin has land, infrastructure and workforce for the women's prison, so they are hoping for that.
- County Planning Board is up and going after 3 years. Brought consultants in to move forward on Growth Policy Update. Working on policy and planning.
- Working a lot with the Tribe to break down some cultural barriers.
- New DES Director is Buzz Coversup. Former law enforcement and great resource.

#### **Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County**

- Pilot Tourism Grant: going really well but have 100 things going.
- Housing shortage, and taxes will likely go up.
- West end development is slowly coming in, doing different things.
- Considering doing a historic district in downtown, zoning restrictions, etc.
- Van Haven – group of influencers who travel around in vans is coming for about 10 days.
- Problems with people putting in septic systems and not checking with sanitarians, etc. – trouble with enforcement. E.g. campground went from 30 to 90 sites. Not applying for 310's, etc.
- So busy!

#### **Danny Choriki, Ubet Post**

- Strawberry Festival is July 12<sup>th</sup> in downtown Billings. Beartooth and other government entities can have a free booth there.

Meeting adjourned at 2:52 pm.