**Beartooth RC&D**

**Board Meeting Minutes**

**March 21, 2024 – 1:00 pm**

**Big Horn County Courthouse**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Jacy Head, BRCD

Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service

Mayor Joe Purcell, City of Hardin

Kerri Crowe, Dept of Business and Labor

Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank-Hardin

Lorene Hintz, Big Sky Economic Development

Kayla Vokral, Small Business Development Center

**Present on Zoom:** Thank you, Sibanye-Stillwater Mine, for the grant to help us purchase our Meeting Owls!

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Danny Choriki, Ubet Post

Emily Schneller, Congressman Rosendale

Wesley – intern for Cong. Rosendale

Tory Kolkhorst, Senator Daines

Josiah Porcel, Senator Tester

**Guests on Zoom**:

Phasia Sanchez, Pryor Consulting Services LLC in Bridger. She assists organizations with finding and securing grant funds and other sources of funding for their specific programs.

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

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

**City of Hardin Mayor Joe Purcell:**

* 2 years ago started a police dept from the ground up. Ended contract with Sheriff’s Dept. Part of goal was to improve public safety, school safety, etc.. Just established a School Resource Officer position and now have a drug dog who is starting on Monday.
  + Will be used for school searches, traffic stops, etc.
  + Dog and training is $32,000 and covered by grants – big push for city safety
* Updated street banners, flags on poles
  + Banners represent 3 cultures: Railroad, granary, and teepee
  + Flags represent our government and military
  + Also meant to catch people’s eye and draw them downtown
* Main Street Program for downtown and updating wayfinding
* Infrastructure
  + Upgrades to sewer treatment plant - $11 million project – almost $6 million in grants plus $200K in forgiveness
  + Water plant is in good shape – mild upgrades
  + Upgrading the liners and mixers to water tanks with Flippa money.
  + Street projects get going this spring.
  + Water extension project on Gable Blvd – doesn’t have city services yet and will accommodate 15 homeowners in that area. They have sewer but no water.
* Push with Industrial Park – economic development
  + Dept. of Commerce and Beartooth have been a big help in pushing interest toward Hardin.
  + Met with another group yesterday looking to put in a manufacturing plant.
  + Lot of action with business attraction. Something will click eventually.
* MT League of City and Towns – League Pres.
  + Went to national conference in DC and met with Dept. of Education director, Dept. of Transportation director, guest speaker was Pres. Biden. Was good info and good contacts.
* Lead Service Line – sounds like there will be funding to go to cities and towns to do the improvements.
* Tina’s projects:
  + Preparing for Wayfinding and Planning
  + Flo and Speedy’s Sweet Corn are putting up greenhouse.
  + Big Sky Passenger Rail still going forward – program that brought an initial $500,000 to get it going.
  + SEMT Tourism – Battle of Little Bighorn 150th anniversary is in 2026 so they are starting to work on goals to prepare for that and increased tourism.

**Review January Board Minutes (Action): Holly Higgins motioned to approve; Lorene Hintz seconded. Motion carried.**

**Congressional Updates:**

**Josiah Porcel (Sen. Tester)**

* Public safety – recent roundtable with law enforcement in Kalispell. Wrote letter to DOJ urging them to enhance funding for rural law enforcement. Highlighted challenges like limited resources and fentanyl epidemic in rural areas. Streamline application process. Underscored support for bi-partisan bill.
  + Advocate to secure southern border and combat influx of fentanyl in MT.
  + Legislation targeted at departments under 200 officers. Billings is the biggest in the state with approximately 180 employees.
* Agriculture:
  + Sen Tester and Mike Rounds of SD filed a CRA resolution to overturn Biden Admin’s decision to lift a ban on beef imports from Paraguay. Bi-partisan resolution is supported by many organizations.
* As Chair of Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Sen. Tester is introducing bi-partisan legislation to ensure that national guardsmen and reservists receive full educational benefits for their service. Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act will grant GI Bill benefits to guardsman and reservists for all days spent in federal service since Sept. 11, 2001, including active duty activations, drill weekends, active trainings, etc. Want to recognize and honor their service and provide access to educational benefits.

**Tory Kolkhorst (Sen. Daines)**

* Concerned with EPA rule on tailpipe emissions – will mandate more production of EVs and the cost will be passed on to consumers. In MT, those EVs won’t always hold up.
* Pushing back against open southern border. He introduced 2 bills to protect us from almost 9 million illegal migrant crossings. Laken Riley Act will require ICE to arrest illegal immigrants who commit various crimes. Must be detained and not allowed to enter the U.S.
* Biden’s proposed 1.3 trillion budget continues their reckless spending
* This past week Sen highlighted the increased danger of wildfires and need for forest management at a Senate Energy and Natural Resources meeting. Tory spent the week in DC at these meetings where he represents Montanans
* Ag – joined colleagues in urging US trade rep Katherine Tai and Dept of Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack to increase US ag exports and improve the competitiveness of US products from abroad.

**Emily Schneller (Rep. Rosendale)**

* Budget – couple of mini-bus spending packages. One passed for 6 spending bills for $513 billion – Rosendale didn’t support and voted for separate spending bills. Next one is this week – total package of 1.2 trillion dollars, released at 2 am today. They have 48 hours to review thousands of pages. Congressman will not support this either.
* Biden Admin also released $7.3 trillion budget for 2025 a month past the deadline.
* EPA rule for emission standards to push nationwide adoption of EVs. Mandate is supposed to force EVs by 2030, so automakers will be forced to rapidly curb emissions in passenger cars, light pickups, trucks, vans, beginning with model year 2027. Following it closely, not supporting.
* Congressional Art Challenge – each spring congressional districts accept artwork from HS students. Winners have art displayed for one year at Capitol and go to awards ceremony in DC. Spread the word!

**Treasurer/Financial Reports: Nan Knight**

* Nan is missing today because she’s doing a tour in Big Timber with Commissioner Roe.
* Joel directed everyone to pages 14-15 to review financials. If anyone has questions, we can pass those along.

**RLF Financial and RC&D Financials (ACTION). Kayla Vokral motioned to approve the RLF and RC&D financials as presented. Mayor Joe Purcell seconded. Motion passed.**

**Adding Danny Choriki to Board as Special Appointment / Clarify SBDC (ACTION)**

Ryan said that Danny’s role has changed but we’d still like to have him on the board and he is willing. Joel said that it’s been our practice to include people from different areas as Special Appointments.

Danny: My focus is on community building using technology – websites, portals, virtual meetings. If we can implement at the local level and get people to pay attention to what is going on locally, we’ll all be better off. Ubet Post will be a calendar/portal/newspaper/directory available online. That same model can also be used for social issues and physical issues. I hope to work with Beartooth on housing using this model.

**Holly Higgins motioned to approve Danny as a Special Appointment. Kayla Vokral seconded. Motion passed.**

Joel: Over the years we have changed our Board roster. Originally had Lorene as SBDC rep and then had her as BSED rep and never backfilled the SBDC spot. Kayla has been coming to board meetings and being a part of them, but we want to officially approve Kayla Vokral as the representative of SBDC and Lorene Hintz as BSED rep.

**Holly Higgins motioned to approve. Mayor Joe Purcell seconded. Motion passed.**

**Approval of USDA Signature Authority for Myrna**

Ryan and Joel said since Myrna is handling the RCDI grants, she should have signature authority. Jacy disagreed and explained that it is best to have checks and balances and it wouldn’t be responsible to grant Myrna signature authority since she is handling reports and everything else with the RCDIs.

Myrna explained that USDA said she should get signature authority so Joel doesn’t always have to sign. Jacy reiterated that checks and balances are needed – that she never signed the RCDI reports when she was doing them.

Holly said it might be good practice to have a backup person to sign if Joel isn’t available. Joel said that is why he and Nan thought this would be a good idea. Sometimes there is a quick turnaround time.

Jacy said with federal money it’s important to have oversight and checks and balances.

Danny said there are different requirements, and these days the person whose name you want on the reports are the people who are doing the work. Checks and balances in the computerized world don’t depend on signatures. CitiBank stopped checking signatures back in 1998.

Ryan: Our previous auditors said it’s always good to have checks and balances in place, so perhaps we should hold off on this.

**Holly made a motion to table this after further discussion. Kayla Vokral seconded. Motion carried.**

**Staff Reports – Program/Project Updates**

**Food and Ag Program – Joel Bertolino**

**Beartooth FADC**

* Face-to-face trainings and other stuff planned on April 2nd in Livingston.

**Growth Through Ag and USDA Projects**

* Yellowstone Pasta – been helping since fall. Successful $50K GTA grant for business expansion.
* Speedy and Flo’s Sweet Corn – been helping for awhile and also successful in $50K GTA grant for business expansion.
* Greycliff Mill – assist on and off and provide TA, mostly recently was Rural Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) grant – new to Dept of Ag.
* Yellowstone Valley Farm – also assisted Reuben Stahl on the RFSI grant application.
* Rodi Farm – also applied for RFSI. Also assisted her on a Women’s Prospera grant.
* Grindy’s Cheeseballs – new to us. Talking about financing to expand their business. Nan is working with them.
* Stovall Ranch and Yellowstone Feeders. Been trying to get in touch with Turk Stovall for several months. Large feedlot with many needs. Trying to figure out how to finance corn processing for his feed lots. Gave him info on a USDA Middle Supply Chain Guaranteed Loans that go up to $40 million. Also, REAP for renewable energy and solar. He also raises a lot of cattle and they direct-sell beef, so gave him VAPG grant info as well.
* Georgette’s Galettes – Mark was looking for funding for his Belgian-style treats. Will be applying for GTA Business and Marketing grant.

**Ongoing Projects**

* Oswald Farms – still working through their successful VAPG grant.
* Becky’s Berries – brought them on a tour to King’s Cupboard Chocolates in RL to look at some of their equipment and systems.

**FADC Outreach**

* King’s Cupboard Chocolates – Red Lodge
  + Kayla would like to join if they tour King’s Cupboard again!
* Grindy’s Cheeseballs – Billings

**Initial Contact**

* Stovall Ranch – Yellowstone County
* Marc Leberger / Georgette’s Galettes
* S-Ranch Meats in Hardin – Helped with a VAPG last year and narrowly missed. Applying again this year and provided a LOS.
* Rodi Farm – gave LOS for VAPG.
* Mountain View Colony – Hutterite colony with large egg-producing operation and they sell to Walmart and he is looking at a GTA app this fall.

**Operations Support – Myrna Lastusky**

* AARP Community Challenge Grant: Partnered with RLACF to submit an AARP grant to defray costs of putting in a baseball field in Bridger. Currently Carbon County high school students must travel to Yellowstone County to play, and the goal is to create a Carbon County baseball team who can practice and host games at this field. We should know by late May if we will receive any funding from AARP.
* RCDI grants: Trying my best to continue the great work Jacy began with these grants, so the past few months have been filled with getting up to speed in some of the details.
* RCDI in Hardin/Big Horn County: Working closely with Tina Toyne on several different projects including:
  + City of Hardin’s application to MT Community Reinvestment Program grant – for a Housing Needs Study.
  + City of Hardin’s CDBG application to create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy document.
  + Big Horn County’s application to both CDBG and MT Community Reinvestment Program grant – for a Housing Needs Study. Big Horn received $20,000 from CDBG, and we just submitted the MCRPG app early this morning.
  + Tina also accepted a job at Hardin School District, so she will be leaving us in early July. We’re so sad to see her go, but she will be a blessing in her new position as Gear Up Liaison for the high school. She will be preparing students for their next steps after high school, including trade schools, 2-year degrees, 4-year degrees, and beyond. She will also stay in touch with students after graduation to support them in their efforts.
    - We are figuring out the next steps with the RCDI grant and have been in talks with City of Hardin and the commissioners. I’m meeting with the 3 commissioners on Monday and should know more after that.
* RCDI grant in Red Lodge: Working with Angela Getchell, Workforce Housing Director :
  + Beginning a housing study in Bridger with Cushing Terrell on a couple pieces of land. Local landowner has been very cooperative and excited about helping with affordable housing.
  + Great progress is being made with a developer who is very excited about creating affordable housing. A Brownfields assessment is being done on the Old Hospital property in hopes that it can be one of the sites to be developed.
  + Planning some upcoming trainings for new and not-yet homeowners in Carbon County.
  + Continued construction on the Mutual Self-Help homes and rental units in Red Lodge. Work should be complete by mid-summer.

**Economic Development / CRDC – Jacy Head**

* Next reporting period will include:
  + -USDA RCDI Quarter reports (2)- will be submitted in April 2024
  + -CRDC Quarter report- will be submitted in April 2024
  + -EDA Partnership Planning Grant report- summer 2024
  + -EPA Brownfields ACRES Quarter report- will be submitted in April 2024
* Helping Hands Food Bank in Hardin- the board decided to move forward with Tetra Tech as they move forward with more testing and cleanup through the Petra Fund. With the cleanup work they’ve already done, they’ve already meet the deductible for the Petra Fund Board, so hopefully will be a smooth finish to their community garden.
* Former Rocky Fork Inn site in Red Lodge- awaiting the FEMA buyout to be completed; may require another assessment depending on timing. Has already had structural assessment, phase 1 and 2. Will be a demo and disposal.
* Lodge Grass Lumberyard- utilizing both DEQ and EPA funding for the Phase II assessment and cost estimate draft has been distributed for comment and then we can move into cleanup planning.
* Community-Wide Brownfield Assessment Grant- 3 Qualified Environmental Professionals (QEPs) have been chosen for the program. We chose to have 3 so Beartooth has control of the Brownfields program. We have to develop the Quality Assurance Project Plan, which will take a couple months. Once developed, we can develop the CIP (Community Involvement Plan) and will do more outreach.
* DEQ Brownfields Collaboration- BRCD has been selected to be a sub-recipient to one of DEQ’s new capacity building grants; it offers funding (salary of ½ a position), training, and support to enable them to engage the communities they work in on environmental topics; the grant lasts for three years with initial funds being received in spring 2024. Beartooth staff are strategizing on the best way to utilize this.
* RCAC Building Rural Economies (BRE) Program- recently awarded this three-year grant as a sub-recipient; doing onboarding meetings with RCAC staff
  + Will be doing ROCE (Recharging Our Community’s Economy) Workshops. This may also help Beartooth’s capacity. Does site-specific projects, access to capital, etc. Focused in Columbus starting in April, but will be open to all the other communities as well.
* DOC-Business Attraction – still working on Project Quartz and Black Diamond; new one is Project Sentinel (Nan is there and would enable 150 positions in Sweet Grass County). They like that site because it is directly across the street from a gun manufacturer.
* MEDA Spring Conference in Red Lodge- April 23-25th at the Roosevelt Center.
  + Coordinating with Allison Corbin on best tours to showcase our community.
  + Jacy will be part of a panel discussion for flood disaster.
* Trainings in the upcoming year- work with SBDC on training collaborations
  + First one happening on April 9th at Joliet office – Personal Financial Statement
* Additional Clients that were worked with (Jan. 15-Mar. 13 2024):
  + City of Red Lodge/Mayor Westwood
  + RL Pea Cannery
  + Tom Fischer/ Old Hospital
  + Quincy Dabney/Town of Lodge Grass
  + Ford Hedge property in Edgar
  + Town of Roberts
  + Beau Simone
  + Bill Foisy/BRTA
  + Crazy Mountain Music
  + Monte Koch

**Regional Roundup:**

**We are focusing on our CEDS SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) throughout the region. Be especially thinking about Infrastructure, Economy, Communication, Services, Natural Resources, and Human Capital.**

**Danny Choriki, Ubet Post:**

* Danny is a plaintiff in a lawsuit called Cottonwood vs. the State of MT. Back in 2021, the MT legislature banned local governments from being able to ban or restrict plastics from local establishments. Court issued a summary judgment last week saying that the legislature doesn’t have authority to prevent local governments from having initiatives. It has broader implications, which is why Danny got onto it. He wants to bring back more control to local governments.
* Ubet Post – see above

**Kayla Vokral, SBDC:**

* Huge kudos to entire Beartooth team – I’ve talked to all of them regularly over the last few months, and they have been champions in helping to get funding for some deals.
* We were going to do a workshop with Tina in Hardin but with her leaving, not sure that will happen. But it’s been great working with Myrna and Tina on other regional trainings.
* Part of Downtown Billings Battle of the Plans – TIF funds to use for someone to get a business up and running in downtown Billings. Will award 2 $40,000 to businesses – one existing and one startup. 23 businesses are part of that.
* Boutique hotel has been approved in downtown Billings right next to BSED. 140 rooms. Working quickly on it and hope to open by 2025. Clientele will be more higher end than most locations.
* Yellowstone Summer Jobs program – lot of interns looking for summer jobs this summer but only 9 businesses have signed up.
* Workforce Education Series – for anyone new to management or middle management who need additional training.
* May 3 – The SBA Administrator Guzman is coming to Billings. They have an entire day lined up. Her focus this time around is Ag. Ag roundtable and team exercise.

**Lorene Hintz, BSED:**

* City of Billings wasn’t awarded the grant for the 25th Street bridge, so they are seeking other funding.
* Space to Place applications are under review right now – money for people who want to paint a building or do some fixing up in the area.
* South Billings TIF is considering a recreation center that is scaled down from the initial plan. Kids still need places to go.
* Partnering with economic impact analyst for Zoo Montana. Yellowstone County submitted an application to USDA for funding for infrastructure for the Loft Lake Industrial Park.
* Yellowstone County just received 6 Class B Property Tax statements for manufacturing equipment under the SB-530 newly created program.
* Economic Impact Pulse – Lorene passed out copies.
* Business recruitment – new gal Ashley Cavanaugh has been very active and working with air services and hotel accommodations and retail. She and Steve are working with adding flights to several cities including direct flights to California. There is a grant to help with air services and will help with air service. Spring is when the Delta, United, and Allegiant flights will click in.

**Kerri Crowe, Dept. of Business & Labor, Workforce Services Division, Engagement Strategist**

* Helping industries set up trainings, seeing where we can use positions like carpenters, welding, CNAs, etc. Sometimes you don’t need a whole semester of classes; you can have a 6-7 week class could work very well.
* Working on overcoming barriers for justice-involved workers. The PROWD2 Grant is working with those coming from the federal prison system and working with apprenticeships.
  + **Always** looking for businesses who are willing to set up these apprenticeships.
* Pathways Grant for those in the state system – working to set up one in Billings and Missoula. Kerri went through the Job Jamboree yesterday and talked to every single company who could possibly help. Had many great conversations. All but one said absolutely yes in the right circumstances. Kerri is looking at these questions:
  + What can we do to as Workforce Services Division to make the process go smoothly from DOC to pre-release to job services, parole, education, and so on. Looking at wrap-around care and continuation of services.
* Breaking it up into things that are manageable first. What does the process look like? It’s all about relationships and communication.
* Looking at things don’t take any extra money, for businesses willing to have those conversations.
* Looking at a labor force, public safety, schools (when a parent gets their act together, the child does much better, too).

Joel: We need to stay in touch because we work with businesses who are often looking for more workforce. Some of them have already utilized that population.

Kerri: Meat processing is a big one. Construction, Hotels, even residential care, manufacturing. We need to be very intentional about placing them.

* In Yellowstone County and surrounding area, we are dealing with 8000 a year that are justice-involved. We are working with education to see what training programs could look like. Also working with Unions to see what training in the construction industry, e.g., could look like.

Kayla: Would you be interested in doing a workshop on hiring justice-involved workers? YES! And Ryan would be a better resource.

* Ryan: I would put together a list of organizations and employers that have had success.
* Kayla: My wheels are turning! If we could partner with BillingsWorks on that, it would be great.
* Ryan: Different pockets of people and their particular challenges – justice-involved, disabilities, seniors who aren’t fully retired . . . there are possibilities out there that we can explore some workforce solutions.

Kerri:

* Part of my work has been bringing together Dept. of Corrections pre-release, Job Service, Apprenticeship together and say, “How are we going to get this flow?” It’s been wonderful because we are learning with each other. I want to bring business owners to the table with pre-release, who have frustrations with DOC’s timelines and mandatory tests that don’t always fit great with their work schedules.
* Looking at what adjustments can be made to create a better fit for employers and overcome some of the barriers.
* Ryan: Joe is director of nursing and always has needs. Maybe you need to sit down together and figure out if there are solutions to help Joe get CNAs, etc. It’s a great conversation.
* Kerri: Absolutely. There are many who wouldn’t fit, but there are some that can. I am learning through all these conversations, so please communicate with me if you have questions.

Ryan: Lots of possibilities to incentivize hiring justice-involved. It can also help break down some stereotypes and barriers.

Joe: From a business side, you have to adjust to new generations.

Kerri: But there are other things we can do. Lots of questions but many answers. What does it look like to set up supports? There are some incentives to hiring.

**Holly Higgins, FIB: (Had trouble hearing some of this)**

* Plenty Doors CDC hired a contractor to start building the business incubator building in Crow Agency. There will be offices and other spaces. You can lease a spot, build your business up. Construction starting this spring/summer. Doing 2 buildings, this is phase 1.
* Little Bighorn Days committee decided not to do the PRCA Rodeo this year. But Big Horn County Fair in July will have a rodeo.
* Dairy Queen closed in Hardin
  + Joe: Initial plan is a remodel to take care of water damage/black mold, so they hope to fix that and reopen. Some management issues prior to the reopening.
  + Holly: Go to Farmer’s Daughter in the meantime to get ice cream!

**Mayor Joe Purcell, City of Hardin:**

* Working with the old Sinclair station to get cleaned up.
* Town Pump bought out Flying J’s in state. They found black mold and plan to demolish it and start from scratch. Possibly will be a restaurant.
* Crow Tribe purchased Western Motel during COVID to use for COVID housing. Are going to remodel it and turn it into housing/apartments.
* Lot of empty buildings around town, but also a lot of people looking.
  + Holly: bank building is still being worked on
* Joe: Storage unit behind McDonalds is up and running with indoor and outdoor storage
* Speedy and Flo’s leveled the property to put in a greenhouse.
* Maverick – purchase of property across the highway and Maverick will be going in. Waiting for DOT Highway Traffic Study is being done, approved by City Council. One study is done, they’ll be ready to pull the trigger.
* Love’s – almost done with renovations and addition of RV park. Looks nice.
* Golf course is still owned by folks who run the Carnival. Having management issues but not open right now.

Good News: Kerri shared that she just got a text from her daughter and she re-enlisted Navy for 6 more years. Awesome! Thank you for your service!

Joel: Sent antiquated Business Plan out. Will run through Executive Committee and staff and try to have some updates and a draft by the July meeting. July will be our luncheon and informational stuff and an overview on the organization. If anyone has any input in the meantime, let us know.

* Ryan: We want to be intentional with some of the operations.
  + Where are we at?
  + Where do we want to be?
  + How do we get there?
  + Can we be better employers, employees, board members . . .?
  + Do better onboarding of board members

**Next Beartooth RC&D Area, Inc. Board of Directors Meeting: May 16, 2024 – Big Horn County**

**Meeting adjourned at 2:43 pm.**