

**Yellowstone Business Partnership
Seasonality Project Kick-Off Meeting
Billings, Montana
February 28, 2008**

Location: MSU-Billings Downtown Campus

Attendees: Michelle Hippler, Chris Miller, Beth Hutchinson, Dave Stauffer, Sara Minkoff, Barb Beck (Facilitator) Affiliation and contact information is appended.

Welcome

Barb welcomed the participants, thanked them for coming, and reviewed the agenda. Participants introduced themselves. None had any questions about the project at this point. Outcomes for the meeting were presented as follows:

- Participants are briefed on and understand the project and its background.
- Participants have met each other and opened lines of communication across boundaries.
- The top 3-5 most important issues for this sub-region have been identified.
- Next steps are clear to everyone.
- We have produced a list of names of those who wish to continue on the project and those who need to be invited. We have identified representative(s) for the Transportation Round Table.

Video Conference

Participants learned about the background of this project, the grant received, and the transportation round table from speakers Jan Brown, Larry Swanson, and Basil Barna.

Which cross-boundary challenges are a priority to resolve in this region?

Points of discussion included:

- The chasm is deepening between young and old, wealthy and low income, educated and uneducated, skilled and unskilled.
- Expectations of area residents are not sustainable (workers bees can't make it and we all need them.)
- Generating a cash flow is not an economy.
- Lower income labor is not valued and the people are seen as disposable.
- The current system will not meet everyone's needs given the aging demographic.
- Do we need to provide/subsidize housing? Private and public employers are having a hard time finding seasonal workers.

- We need to make sure that whatever regional transportation initiatives come out of this effort do not facilitate a class system by busing workers in and out when they should be housed in the community.
- People seem to be more interested in personal gratification than building community.
- What is a sustainable way of living in the region, in terms of housing, transportation, and other consumption?
- The heavy regulation of the transportation industry (especially in Montana) creates disincentives for private transportation ventures (e.g. can not price differentially.)
- Housing—one idea would be to develop a model on preserving “space” for housing the essential workforce of a community by acquiring and controlling land.
- We need a full range of housing in communities. How do we do that?
- Housing units should be sustainable (green.)
- The relationship between wages and land/housing is non-existent here (broken.)
- The “motor culture” of our region, both from the recreation standpoint and use of public transportation, is having an adverse effect on our area. The state of Alaska operates both railroad and ferry systems.
- How will the economic downturn and price of gas affect our area’s visitation? Expect more foreign tourists due to exchange rates.
- The high price of gas may change the economics of mass transportation--make it more attractive--to encourage what we would like to see happen.
- Instituting real estate transfer taxes could fund affordable housing.
- Workforce planning for the region.
- Liveable wage/income disparity (related but different)
- What is the effect of dollars brought, but not earned here, into our area by newcomers?
- Future implications of dependence on single vehicle system of transportation.
- Transportation issues: regulation as disincentive, availability within communities and between them, options for foreign and other visitors, getting adequate ridership to make it pay, need to change attitude about using public transportation—make it cool.
- Strategies to overcome seasonality.

Top Issues Selected for Billings Region (not in priority order)

Wealth disparity: this is deepening in our region.

Liveable wage: What is a liveable wage here and how do we provide that?

Housing: How do we achieve a full range of housing to make a community work?

Transportation: What are the implications for the region of our almost-total dependence on individual vehicles for transportation?

What is a sustainable way of living in the Yellowstone-Teton region?

Projects

Barb explained that this group has the opportunity to select a topic for further research or analysis that will be supported by a \$10,000 grant to a local institution of higher education. The four institutions in our area include MSU-Billings, Rocky Mountain College, MSU College of Technology (all in Billings), and Northwestern Community College in Powell.) The decision on who will receive this grant will be up to the group as will the method of making the decision. These topics will be discussed at the March meeting which hopefully will have additional participation. Barb explained that this group will meet several more times over the next approximately 6 months and serve as oversight to the research project once it has been selected and awarded.

Projects selected must meet the following criterion:

- Transcend boundaries
- Be place-based
- Think strategically
- Cooperatively invest in our share regional assets.

Who Needs to Be Invited to the Conversation?

Bureau of Indian Affairs (Crow and Northern Cheyenne)
Candace Beaudry, Yellowstone County Planner
Doug Epperly, Custer National Forest Recreation Planner
Stephanie LeFavre, USBR Recreation Planner
Doug Haberman, FWP Recreation Division, Billings
Beartooth RC&D in Joliet
Celebrate Billings
Billings Partnership
Billings Chamber of Commerce

Cody Chamber of Commerce
Buffalo Bill Museum
Billings Gazette, Cody Enterprise Realtor Associations
Department of Transportation
Ski area/golf courses (Red Lodge Mountain, Sleeping Giant)
Builder's Associations
NPRC
Conservation groups
District Managers of major refineries (Conoco, Cenex)
Merchants, Tavern-owners, Lodging, and Restaurant Associations

Next Steps and Wrap-up

Barb will provide the list of invitees to YBP, prepare meeting notes and secure a location in either Joliet or Laurel for the next meeting. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for mid-day, Thursday, March 20. At that meeting we will bring new participants up to speed on the project. Select our one or two topics for further research, decide on a method for soliciting interest from the schools, and decide on a method to select someone to do the project. The observation was made by one participant that based on the title of the report, her expectation was that we would be working to address the seasonality issue, not such a broad range of issues. All attendees at this meeting will try and make the next meeting. None volunteered to serve on the Transportation Round Table. Participants were thanked for coming.