

# MONTANA RURAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, INC.



## Rural Resource Team Report

**Baker, Montana**

March 2002

## **MT RDP Mission**

As our Mission, the Montana Rural Development Partners, Inc. is committed to supporting locally conceived strategies to sustain, improve, and develop vital and prosperous rural Montana communities by encouraging communication, coordination, and collaboration among private, public and tribal groups.

## **THE MONTANA RURAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, INC.**

The Montana Rural Development Partners, Inc. is a collaborative public/private partnership that brings together six partner groups: local government, state government, federal government, tribal governments, non-profit organizations and private sector individuals and organizations.

An Executive Committee representing the six partner groups governs MT RDP, INC. The Executive Committee as well as the Partners' membership has established the following goals for the MT RDP, Inc.:

- Assist rural communities in visioning and strategic planning
- Serve as a resource for assisting communities in finding and obtaining grants for rural projects
- Serve and be recognized as a neutral forum for identification and resolution of multi-jurisdictional issues.

The Partnership seeks to assist rural Montana communities with their needs and development efforts by matching the technical and financial resources of federal, state, and local governments and the private sector with locally conceived strategies/efforts.

If you would like more information about the Montana Rural Development Partners, Inc. and how you may benefit as a member, contact:

Gene Vuckovich, Executive Director  
Montana Rural Development Partners, Inc.  
118 East Seventh Street; Suite 2A  
Anaconda, Montana 59711

Ph: 406.563.5259  
Fax: 406.563.5476

[genev@mtrdp.org](mailto:genev@mtrdp.org)  
<http://www.mtrdp.org>

Montana Rural Development Partners'

## Community Resource Assessment Team Report

# Some *Next Steps*

For Getting Baker's Projects Done, Problems Addressed, and Strengths Leveraged

May 8, 2002

Input by approximately 200 Baker/Fallon County residents in March, 2002.

Feedback by:

- ✓ Al Jones, Regional Development Officer for South Central Montana,  
Montana Dept. of Commerce Business Resources Division
- ✓ Paul Tuss, Executive Director,  
Bear Paw Development Corporation for North Central Montana
- ✓ Mike Fladeland, Community Development,  
Montana-Dakota Utilities for Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, and South Dakota
- ✓ James Klessens, Coordinator,  
Beartooth Resource, Conservation & Development Area for South Central Montana
- ✓ Kathie Bailly, Executive Director,  
Snowy Mountain Development Corporation for Central Montana & City Administrator of Colstrip
- ✓ Bill Barr, Cooperative Development Specialist,  
USDA Rural Development/Montana Office

Thank You for the considerable and cheerful hospitality your entire community provided our visiting team.

Thank you even more for your candid and thoughtful observations, ideas, and issues raised throughout the intense 3 days, they obviously bespoke considerable thought rather than shallow, off-the-cuff remarks about the obvious.

Thank you for the intense efforts of the organizing team of **Sharon Gookin, Barb Olind, Roger Schmidt, Chuck Lee**, the others on the local economic development committee, and the listening session captains who did an excellent job of rounding up enough people to make each session worthwhile and effective. You guys did the real work in this and made our jobs so easy and comfortable.

You'll find each of the team members has a different take on what can be done in Baker and rather than eliminate these down to some general statements to achieve a unified and near useless report, we're leaving these as direct, clear options,

The local folks working on these problems and projects can choose among, blend, build on, or ignore entirely at their own discretion.

The longer we work in local economic development the more we realize how many roads there are to take while the destination is the same (a good place to live a good life in.)

Each community's future is determined by the people there, the choices they make, what they invest their time and treasure in, and how they work together while the factors like natural resources, the economy, technological change, globalism, politics, etc. continue to demonstrate how some communities thrive despite their challenges while others mistake them for insuperable barriers to success.

Economic Development is fundamentally the local people and the choices they make, nothing more and nothing less. Baker's future shape and quality of life truly is in your hands.

Please extend your thanks to the local economic development committee as Sharon, Barb, Roger, and Chuck's jumping on the opportunity to do a Community Resource Assessment got Baker the current market's equivalent of a \$54,000 economic development consultants' study (although this has more specifics than those do.) As you see, it's the people, not the money that gets things done.

Al Jones,  
Resource Team Leader

# HABITATION

(HOUSING)

**ISSUE** – At the Community Resource Assessment Team town hall meetings every session identified housing as a problem. The discussion included: inadequate housing; sub-standard housing; vacant housing; lack of available units, rental housing, affordable housing, and/or temporary housing (hotels and motels), need more housing established for retired, elderly and low income families, owners desiring to sell rather than rent out their homes, and structural problems such as foundations make homes ineligible for financing,

## POTENTIAL GOALS

- To provide and maintain safe and sanitary housing.
- To manage housing and its preservation and development in the community.
- To provide safe, satisfactory housing opportunities to all households at affordable costs, without regard to income, race, age, religion, national origin, family structure or disability.
- To stabilize the deterioration of the existing housing stock and promote demolition of unsafe housing.

- To promote housing production to accommodate the current community housing needs.

**SOLUTION** I recommend the following:

**1.) Community Task Force** – As a result of this community town hall meetings, a task force be appointed jointly by Fallon County Commissioners and City of Baker Council Members to monitor, provide direction, and carry out the community housing plan. Members of the Task Force may include representatives from Financial Institution, Realtors, Low-Income Advocates (ie. Office of Public Assistance), Elected Official, Habitat for Humanity, Building Contractor, Sanitarian, and Other Interested individuals. A Task Force of 7 – 12 members is suggested.

**2.) Housing Survey** – A structural condition survey be conducted **identifying the condition of each house as standard or sub-standard**, the number of total units, vacant lots, vacant units, commercial units, rental houses, duplex houses, triplex units, multiplex units, apartment buildings, mobile rental lots, and mobile owning lots. Units considered for demolition should be identified through this process.

- **3.) Rental Survey** – A rental survey should be conducted identifying existing situation, gaps, and significant findings. The survey could include:
  - the types of rental property including houses, apartments,

- mobile homes and lots for mobile homes
- ❑ **-A determination of rent amounts for all existing housing units**
- ❑ Average rent amounts by type of unit
- ❑ Average rent amounts by number of bedrooms
- ❑ Minimum rent amounts by type of unit
- ❑ Minimum rent amounts by number of bedrooms
- ❑ Maximum rent amounts by type of unit
- ❑ Maximum rent amounts by number of bedrooms
- ❑ Security deposit for rental housing units
- ❑ Rental units by number of bedrooms
- ❑ Heat paid by landlord or tenant (*quantifiable numbers*)
- ❑ Electricity paid by landlord or tenant (*quantifiable numbers*)
- ❑ Sewer & water paid by landlord or tenant (*quantifiable numbers*)
- ❑ **Average age in years of rental housing units**
- ❑ **Age in years of newest rental housing units**
- ❑ **Age in years of oldest rental housing units**
- ❑ Age of rental houses
- ❑ Age of rental apartments
- ❑ Age of rental mobile homes
- ❑ Number of mobile homes built **before 1976**
- ❑ Vacancy rates
- ❑ Subsidized housing
- ❑ Age of subsidized units
- ❑ Number of bedrooms in subsidized units
- ❑ Is rental on current market?

**4.) A Realtor Inventory** is another tool that may be considered. The inventory could include such questions as:

- ❑ The number of listings your agency had in 2001?

- ❑ How many of the units listed in 2001 were located outside the city limits?
- ❑ The number of sales resulting from those 2001 listings?
- ❑ How many of the units sold in 2001 were located outside the city limits?
- ❑ The range of sale prices of units sold in 2001?
- ❑ The average sale price of units sold in 2001?
- ❑ The average length on the market for units sold in 2001?
- ❑ The approximate age of units sold in 2001 and their condition?
- ❑ **The number of inquiries from interested buyers that could not find a suitable and/or affordable home in 1995?**
- ❑ How many units were sold to **local** residents? From outside the community but in-state? Out-of-state?
- ❑ How many units were sold to transferees? Retirees? Semi-retirees? Self-employed?
- ❑ Of the units sold, how many were financed by conventional? FHA Financing? Contract for Deed? Cash?
- ❑ Of the units sold, how many were sold to singles? Couples? Families? Investment?

**5.) A motel/hotel survey** would not have to be extensive, but could identify number of units available for rent, **percentage of rented rooms for each week or month of the year**, listing of events not able to host in the community and number of rooms needed to accommodate, other questions which would help you decide if you need or can financially afford more rooms to rent.

**6.) Delineate a scope of work** based on the results of the survey(s) and develop an overall project schedule. The schedule is probably

a 5 year plan of work and should identify priorities for each year.

## RESOURCES

**Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** program for funding a **housing rehabilitation** program.

The CDBG program is a federally funded program designed to help communities with their greatest community development needs. All projects must benefit low and moderate income households (so single oil-field workers won't qualify, while those with families may.)

The State program in Montana is administered by the Montana Department of Commerce and serves communities less than 50,000 populations. This program provides funding for housing, public facilities, and economic development projects.

Contact: Gus Byrom,  
MT Dept. of Commerce  
CDBG Housing Program Manager  
**406-444-4477**

The grant competition for housing is conducted annually in the fall.

### **HOME Investment Partnership**

**Program** – Provides funding for the purpose of developing affordable housing for persons of low and very low incomes. In Montana this program is administered by the Montana Department of Commerce. Eligible activities include **rehabilitation, conversion, new construction, tenant-based rental assistance, acquisition of property (for first-time homebuyers), rental housing or transitional housing), selective eligible activities (such as acquisition of land, site improvements and demolition,** relocation assistance, and other activities related to the development and maintenance of

non-luxury housing. For further information contact: HOME Program, P.O. Box 200545, Helena, MT 59620-0545  
Connie Onstad, Program Manager  
or Leslie Edgecomb  
(406) 444-0092

### **USDA Rural Development (USDA RD)**

**Housing Preservation Grants (HPG),  
504 Rural Housing Loans and Grants,  
515 Rural Rental Housing Loans,  
502 Homeownership Loans**

These programs of USDA RD provides grants and loans to public bodies to repair and rehabilitate rental and owner-occupied housing; construction or purchase of apartments, duplexes and multi-unit dwellings; to purchase, build, improve, repair or rehabilitate existing homes or to construct a new home.

Contact Deborah Chorlton,  
Program Director,  
Rural Housing Services,  
PO Box 850, Bozeman, MT 59771  
(406) 585-2551 for information.

**Montana Board of Housing** – The MBOH is the administrative agency of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program in the state of Montana. The Low Income Housing Tax Credit was established by Congress in the Tax Reform Act of 1986. It is intended to provide for the retention, rehabilitation, and construction of rental housing for low income individuals and families. For further information contact: MBOH, PO Box 200528, Helena, MT 59620-0528 (406) 444-3040.  
Single-Family Home Mgr.  
Robert Morgan 406-444-9568  
Multi-Family Home Mgr.  
Mat Rude 406-444-9566

## **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development –**

For further information contact:  
Larry Gallagher, Community Builder  
Fellow at HUD, Power Block  
Building, 7 West Sixth Avenue,  
Helena, MT 59601  
(406) 447-1480 or on the website at  
[www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov).

## **BEAUTIFICATION**

**ISSUE** – During the Resource Team Listening Sessions, in nearly every session issues rose about the aesthetics of areas of the community.

Some of those comments included: grandstands need to be redone before they fall in, challenge to bring tourism to Baker, take more ownership in the community, appearance of town, appearance of entrances to Baker, downtown and residential areas need to be cleaned up, RV park needs to be cleaned up and made more functional, littering, lake gets murky and dirty and has an odor, vandalism in Plevna is rising, keep pets in their own yard, keeping weeds mowed, type of population tends to cause the clutter – renters are only here for a short period of time and don't care about property appearance, street on north east side need upkeep and drainage, no community pride, too many cats and kittens loose, and need better sidewalks.

## **POTENTIAL GOALS**

- To make entrances to Baker attractive.
- To replace existing grandstand.
- To increase community pride through community clean-up activities.

- To make Baker more attractive for visitors.
- To make Baker a safer and healthier place to live and work.

**SOLUTION** – This resource team member is offering a myriad of suggestions. They are meant to spur your creative minds. I believe the real answer lies in the motivation and enthusiasm that can be created in the community. Things have to happen in your own backyard first. What is keeping you from making your home and property look attractive? What can you do to make your property look better? Here are some suggestions to get the excitement going.

### **1.) Appoint a committee** of 4-7 people to work on this project alone.

Have them prioritize activities to work on and generate the enthusiasm. They need to be upbeat, positive and enthusiastic people and not someone who comes off superior, directing, snooty, or condescending.

Get the media involved as part of this committee.

Appoint someone on the committee who has the ability to request and get support from the City and County.

Appoint someone who has an eye for beauty, understands aesthetics, thinks out of the box, and has a strong sense of community pride.

### **2.) Develop a positive year around program** to encourage cleaning up the town. Keep the message about cleaning up the town always in front of the public. Recognize those that are achieving the image you'd like everyone to maintain. Ask why others are not achieving that image

and than find a way to assist them succeed. Beautification events could include:

**“Make a Difference Day”** – Get the banks or someone to sponsor cash prizes for groups that do an activity for Make a Difference Day.

## Emphasize group work & public service.

**“Baker Earth Day”** – Encourage everyone to pick up litter, haul garbage to the dump, clean up lawns, plant trees and flowers. The day could end with a community picnic at the Baker Lake Recreation area and include cleaning that up for the summer season.

**“Weeds in Baker Identification” contest** – Ask the County Extension Agent or Weed Supervisor to locate weeds within the city and take pictures of them. Sponsor a contest to identify the weed and location of the weed. Let the public know about the contest in advance and advise them when the Extension Agent or Weed Supervisor will be taking pictures. I wouldn't want my property in the contest, would you? I'd also learn a lot more about weeds through the process.

**“Free Garbage Hauling Day”** – The City and/or County could encourage residents to clean up their place by allowing free dumping in the garbage dump. Work with the schools and youth groups such as 4-H'ers to get volunteers to help elderly who find it difficult to haul heavy items such as the broken wash machine in the back yard.

Have the City and/or County volunteer dump trucks and drivers to pick up the garbage. I live in town and don't have a truck to haul things so sometimes things pile up because I need the right kind of vehicle to haul the large stuff away.

**“Paint a Block”** contest – Challenge blocks to fix up their homes, fences, lots or businesses through a contest. Maybe businesses would donate 50% of the paint for projects. Encourage residents to buy the paint and arrange for volunteers to paint the houses, fences, etc. Work with the art department at the high school to design and paint a mural on a wall that looks tacky.

**Recognition Program** – Get the newspaper, radio, or Cable TV involved in recognizing **weekly** those that are doing a good job. Reward the positive while working on the negative.

This could be done throughout the year (i.e. First one to rake the leaves in the fall, homes with attractive Xmas decorations featured, a homeowner caught cleaning up their yard, someone caught making home improvements on their property, a new paint job on a building, workers on the outdoor theatre, a business person shoveling the sidewalks, a youth helping an elderly person, or any other positive reinforcement.

## RESOURCES

**Media** – Get the media involved in making a difference in the appearance of your community. Have them sponsor regular contests. Get them to recognize the positive things that are happening and

encourage more. Have them do educational pieces on lawn care, weed identification and control, rodent and pest control, and general household repairs.

**County Extension Agent** – They work with youth and adult groups

**Tree City, USA** –

**Landfill and Sanitation Officer** – Continue efforts allowing free dumping on special days. Encourage the officer to visit with property owners about sanitation and health issues related with decay, junk, and debris on property. Encourage the sanitation officer to be actively involved in clean-up and beautification projects. Have the officer do educational pieces on Lead Poisoning, Asbestos, and Radon.

**Montana Community Foundation**  
– General grants are available for \$5,000 awarded in the areas of Arts and Culture, Basic Human Needs, Economic Development, Education, Natural Resources and Conservation. Projects must be submitted by a governmental unit, 501 (c) (3) organization or an entity conducting the project for a recognized charitable purpose. The project must enhance community vitality or endowed philanthropy. An application can be secured by writing: Montana Community Foundation, 101 N. Last Chance Gulch, Suite 211, Helena,

that do community service projects. The State 4-H program has grants available to help clubs do community service projects. Extension Agents receive information on the national “Make a Difference Day”, and “Arbor Day”.

**Kathie Bailey, Executive Director**  
**Snowy Mountain Development Corporation**  
613 N. E. Main  
Lewistown, MT 59457  
(406) 538-2591  
[cmrcd@lewistown.net](mailto:cmrcd@lewistown.net)

**PREPARATION – (CAPACITY BUILDING)**

**ISSUE** – While this area was not clearly identified throughout the town meetings, it is an area the resource team felt would help Baker address many of its economic concerns. Communities need to have the capacity to address their own problems in order to change the existing spiraling decline. Preparation includes many things such as strong leadership, capital, management, social capital, etc. You have to work with what you have, but there are also ways to increase the existing capacity. It is easy to determine that Baker is full of dedicated, committed community members by the attendance and responses at the town meetings. But there are areas that we believe could be strengthened or expanded.

**EFFECT** – By enhancing the capacity of Baker, the community will be better prepared to address its economic development needs. Not only will the vision of Baker and the goals become clearer but there will be the leadership and resources to implement these goals and vision.

**SOLUTION/ RESOURCES -**

Throughout the rest of this document are strategies and resources to enhance the capacity such as the Montana Community Foundation which offers Capacity Building Grants. I'm merely offering

additional comments not mentioned elsewhere.

**Revolving Loan Fund** – The City or County can apply for Montana Department of Commerce Community Development Block Grant funding which could establish a revolving loan fund for your area. Many communities have had a business step forward and request a loan and that was how the initial fund was started for that community. The Grant is made to the local government who in turn loans it to the business. The business repays the loan to the local government and that fund is established and available for the next business requesting funds. The initial grant from the state must be more than \$100,000. This fund serves as “gap” financing for projects. Business expansion and retention efforts or the attraction of new businesses and industry often require an available source of low cost financing. This does not replace loans through the bank but rather adds to them and increases the potential that businesses would expand or move to your community. This may boost your community lending by commercial banks, which is especially important in distressed rural areas such as Baker.

Loan funds can come from a variety of sources including the Microbusiness Program or Small Business Administration Program or USDA Rural Development. To contact SBA looking under “US Government” in your telephone directory or use the internet [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov).

**MSU Extension Service** – The Extension Service offers programs such as community visioning, leadership development, etc.

Resources from Montana State University in Bozeman are available to conduct programs in your community that will build capacity. Work with your local Extension Agent about some of these programs.

**Community Foundation** – One of the most successful projects in Central Montana has been the Central Montana Foundation. It has been in existence for probably 20 years but now has assets, which assist projects in the community every year. Vern Petersen, Fergus County Commissioner, at 538-5119 or 712 West Main, Lewistown, MT 59457 has served as chairman of the Foundation and been a long term member. He would be able to provide you with information on membership, how it was formed, and the success currently.

**School alumni** – Graduating classes host reunions periodically. This is a good resource to capture and create a data base of all of the Alumni's of Bakers. The data base could serve as a mailing list for members to contribute to a community project or to solicit donations for a community foundation. These alumni represent a capital resource that a large percentage has left the community. They've inherited estates from the Baker area and are spending them out of state. Montanan's traditionally like to give back to their "home". So tap into this resources.

**Economic Development Coordinator** – *If Baker and Fallon County is serious about making an impact on their economy, a full time employee needs to be designated to work in this area. This means that funding for a position needs to be identified and someone needs to be*

*hired to devote concentrated efforts in this area, coordinate volunteers and community task forces. If you are interested in tapping into resources from US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration then you need to consider involving more than one county. Perhaps you could consider a Fallon/Carter County Economic Development Office. You might even consider forming a non-profit corporation so you could tap into HUD and other funds. Either way, can you identify if you are involved in another regional economic development group. If you aren't currently, consider working with neighboring counties and developing that regional entity.*

**Kathie Bailey, Executive Director**  
**Snowy Mountain Development Corporation**  
613 N. E. Main  
Lewistown, MT 59457  
(406) 538-2591  
[cmrcd@lewistown.net](mailto:cmrcd@lewistown.net)

### **COMMUNICATION/EDUCATION –**

**ISSUE** – At the Resource Team Listening Sessions numerous items came up which related to communication within the community and education of community members. The items listed included a variety of things from the community understanding the issues facing local governments like school funding, or the need for a new grandstand, to general scheduling conflicts of churches and community service organizations with school activities. Youth relayed problems with getting the education and courses they wanted to prepare them for college or work.

### **POTENTIAL GOALS –**

- ❖ To make the entire community aware of activities, events, and meetings
- ❖ To have a central clearinghouse for information
- ❖ To communicate needs, long term planning, and goals clearly.
- ❖ To collectively develop schedules protecting certain days and times for certain activities. To allow dedicated times for school sports, church, youth organizations, etc.

**SOLUTION** – Communication is one area that we must continually work on. It seems like no matter what we

do, we can always do more to clearly communicate. Again, I'm offering a variety of ideas of ways to change how we communicate. Ultimately, it will rest on your shoulders to continually strive to work together and clearly communicate.

**Community Bulletin Board** – A central place could be designated to serve as the community bulletin board. Items such as events, activities, dates of upcoming meetings could be posted on the board. It could be a computer electronic board, or a large billboard. The key would be to have someone who agrees to update the Bulletin Board and serve as the clearinghouse for information. They could also be the contact for everyone to check with when scheduling these activities.

**Annual Coordination Meeting with School** – Because many of the youth and community activities center around the school and sports programs, it is suggested that annually, the churches, youth groups (ie. 4-H) and community leaders meet with the superintendent of schools, school activity director and other school representatives (ie. School board members) to discuss the annual calendar. It is suggested to request this meeting for the early spring as they are already establishing the calendars for the next school year. It is suggested that they request one night a week be reserved for non-school activities such as church or 4-H or Scouts. While this may have been traditionally a Thursday, maybe a Wednesday would work better for the school and other groups. All entities should recognize that youth that are involved in activities outside of the normal school day are more

well-rounded, less likely to be involved in “at risk behaviors” and more likely to become productive young adults.

**Using existing resources for educational opportunities** – One of Baker’s assets is the ITV at the local school. This is a resource that other communities are envious of. In order to meet educational needs within the community expand and explore all of the capabilities of the ITV.

We heard youth request **advanced placement classes to receive college credits, and specialized classes**. While it’s not affordable to provide these in small rural communities such as Baker, it is practical to offer an ITV class when several communities have youth/adults wanting the classes. Check with other schools connected to the ITV.

Does Roundup offer an advanced placement class that could be delivered over ITV and students from Baker and Wibaux could participate?

Does one of the other schools offer a French class that could be brought into Baker?

Could you ask Mid Rivers to host a meeting with all of the schools connected to ITV, just for the purposes of identifying the highest priorities and scheduling these classes to fit ITV.

It takes coordination efforts, but it’s not impossible. And what you can’t get done this year could be included for next year.

Maybe this year you can offer French class but next year you’ll offer the Spanish class.

## RESOURCES

**You** are the primary resources for any communication improvements. Communication happens from within.

**Mid Rivers and their staff** – You have a tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience with technology in the community. Tape into this resource!!

*(note from Al Jones:)*

### **E-Learning**

U.S. News & World Report recently reported over 100 college campuses now offer classes, up through full advanced degrees, via home PC’s and the Internet. By having either guidance counselors, advisors, or librarians pull together a list, the students can find courses of interest and relevance for their college degrees and start as juniors, when many students finish up most of their required high school credits. Schools ranging from MSU Billings and Rocky Mtn. College in Billings to Harvard offer these now. Colorado State University and the University of Maryland are the most advanced in offering degrees over great distances. The University of Phoenix is entirely online!

Both of these areas I'm sure has been covered in detail by our "fearless leader" Al. So I'm not going to comment very much on this.

**DIVERSIFICATION**

**DESTINATION**

**Travel Montana** – Through the Montana Department of Commerce, Travel Montana offers grants from \$20,000 to the maximum amount available for the TIIP grants in any given year. Types of usage that would be allowed include project construction costs associated with building new and/or remodeling or preserving existing tourism and recreation attractions, historical sites and artifacts; costs associated with purchasing new

and/or existing tourism and recreation attractions, historical sites and artifacts; and equipment purchased for specific tourism project operation.

Contact can be made at:  
Victor Bjornberg,  
Tourism Development Coordinator  
Tourism Infrastructure Development  
Travel Montana/ MT Dept. of  
Commerce  
406-444-4366

PO Box 200533, Helena, MT  
59620-0533

Mike Fladeland's

## Recommendations

Mike Fladeland, Community Development Coordinator  
Montana-Dakota Utilities Co.  
Marketing/Community Development  
400 N. 4<sup>th</sup> St.  
Bismarck, ND 58501  
701.222.7879

[fladelam@mdu.mdures.com](mailto:fladelam@mdu.mdures.com)

### Background:

The following comments and recommendations are in response to the Baker listening sessions in March. It may not be necessary to remind the reader to consider them as constructive criticism, but I think it's important to do so.

Each of us lives in a community that has its pros and cons.

Most of us think a lot of our communities, warts and all.

When somebody from the outside comes in to "assess" its weaknesses and strengths and make recommendations to maximize the strengths and minimize or eliminate the weaknesses, we sometimes have the tendency to want to shoot the messenger.

Keep in mind, all of us on the assessment team appreciate the many positive aspects of the greater Baker community, but it also has some problems and warts. We simply want to work with the people of the community in maximizing its potential to be a great community – a quality place for people and businesses.

For that matter, in my case, I work with a company that is already a corporate citizen of Baker, a company that wants to be an active participant in helping our community realize its potential.

Recently, I attended the **Great Plains Population Symposium**, sponsored by a number of entities, including Dickinson State University and Sen. Byron Dorgan of North Dakota. It was billed as a symposium on local and state policies for addressing rural communities and population loss.

One of the speakers, Joel Kotkin, has written a book called *The New Geography*.

Some people say with the new technology and the ability to communicate from almost anywhere that geography is not a significant issue.

Kotkin maintains just the opposite, now that people can work anywhere, the **quality of place**, the attractiveness of a community, its amenities, those things mean more than they ever have.

One result is that companies will tend to locate their facilities where people tend to live, especially the so-called creative, entrepreneurial, idea people. The creative, entrepreneurial, idea people will live where there is quality of place. As you read this report and those of the others, keep in mind this concept – **Quality of Place**. It should be an over-riding principle for what you will do in the future with the greater Baker community.,

With that in mind, I will cover a number of points, that, based upon my experience as a community and economic development person and a resident of a Great Plains state and community, are meaningful in making for quality of place.

**The points are not necessarily in any order of importance**, just a list of things that the people in Baker should consider for projects.

I've had a chance to observe a number of communities within the service territory of Montana-Dakota Utilities Co. and I've found the communities that are always busy with various constructive, progressive, forward-looking projects are those that are the healthiest. They are the healthiest economically, socially, technologically and culturally, or at least in some combination of 2 or 3 of those areas..

### **Here's a list of work for Baker and the surrounding area:**

1. Counties and communities need to form a coalition.
2. Hire an economic or community development organization and a full time director
3. Keep the livestock sales ring open and operating successfully.
4. Beautify the community.
  - a. Conduct an architectural appraisal of the community
  - b. Develop zoning ordinances and enforce them.
  - c. The city and county need to work together to foreclose on properties that are delinquent on taxes and either renovate or raze.
5. Hire a technology coordinator for Fallon and Carter counties.
6. Develop and promote leadership. That is the key for change.
7. Work to develop a strong community

- a. Prepare a strategic plan and implement the it

## **Implementation Recommendations:**

As they say the say, the devil is in the details, so here's a start.

**Counties and communities need to form a coalition.** *There were a number of people throughout the two days of interviews that mentioned a frustration with state government.*

*They said the people and the needs of the area don't seem to receive enough attention from the legislative assembly or regulatory agencies.*

*Probably the issue mentioned most often was the completion of Highway 323.*

*The more organized the people in southeastern Montana are and the more they speak with one voice though a representative organization, the more effective they will be in the legislature and working with state and federal agencies.*

There is an organization that serves the area, the Southeastern Montana Development Corporation (SEMDC).

But the question that needs to be answered is to what extent are they effective for the Baker area and, if not, what needs to be done to improve their effectiveness.

Because this organization is in place and has a funding mechanism, there is need to replace it or reinvent the wheel.

However, considering Carter and Fallon counties are members, do what it takes to work within the organization and use it for lobbying, grant writing, and accessing resources that will benefit the area.

One way to do that is to have somebody in the Baker area to work with SEMDC whenever and as often as is needed. That person is a full-time director of your economic or community development organization, which is covered in the next recommendation.

However, before we get to that subject, Let's go a little further with cooperation and building coalitions. In addition to the SEMDC, the communities of Plevna, Baker, and Ekalaka, as well as the counties of Fallon and Carter need to work together whenever and wherever possible. One example is the funding and operation of an economic development organization. This could be a joint project of the counties. Another example is the funding of a technology coordinator and a technology/telecommunications center.

**Hire an economic or community development organization and a full time director.** One of the recommendations that pertains to the previous issue, as well as the others that follow, is to hire a person, full time, who will be responsible for community development.

In some communities they are called the executive director of the local economic development organization (EDO).

However, in Baker's case, I think the person, whatever they are called (*perhaps the Raging Inexorable Thunder Lizard of Change*), will have a job description that includes more than simply economic development.

For example, they may spend a lot of time in Helena during a legislative session leading the fight on improvements to Highway 323 or other issues that are significant to

the people of southeastern Montana. In addition, they could be tasked with leading the charge for some of the other issues that follow.

Public and private funding could pay for a Community Development person. In addition, they could be assigned the responsibility of applying for grants which would also help to support the position.

Regardless of how the position or organization is funded, it should remain private sector, so that it is not answerable directly to the city council and the mayor, even though public funding will be a significant source of support. Some people in the community may ask why such a position is needed.

The answer includes three things – time, talent, and resources. Providing for the future of many small towns these days, and leading the efforts of community and economic development is a full time job.

It's tough for the task to be addressed by volunteers. The executive director of an EDO can focus their time on activities which further the interests of the community at large, including assistance to existing businesses, workforce training, providing lobbying services during the legislative sessions, and leading the support for projects like Highway 323.

**Keep the livestock sales ring open and operating successfully**

It is important for any community, but especially a small town to keep all the businesses it can – business retention.

The livestock sales ring serves as a good example for this

concept. We heard that some people were not doing business with the sales rings new owners because they had a bad experience with the previous owners.

If that is the case, then the new owners, with help from other stakeholders, namely those in the community who benefit or profit from an association with the sales ring and those who sell their livestock at the sales ring, **need to somehow convince the non-supporters that they, as well as the community, are better off with a local sales ring.**

If nothing else it is competition for the sales rings in other communities. They will need to remain competitive.

From what I heard the beef producers in southeastern Montana can have their steers picked up by the sales ring in Lemmon and offer them for sale there. I wonder how long the Lemmon sales ring would continue that practice, if the Baker sales ring was to go out of business

The owners/managers of the ring may need to determine if they are being effective at operating and marketing their business. Are they taking good care of their buyers and sellers – doing the best job they can?

There are a number of organizations, including the Extension Service, business and marketing departments at local colleges and universities, the Small Business Administration, Service Corps of Retired Executives that may be able to help. There are also private business consulting groups that can help. The important thing is the assistance is out there, so find it and use it.

Some suggestions to contact for assistance are:

Matt McKamey,  
Livestock Marketing Specialist,  
Growth Thru Ag Program  
Agriculture Marketing and  
Business Development Bureau  
Montana Department Of Agriculture  
phone: (406) 444-2402  
fax: (406) 444-9442  
mmckamey@state.mt.us

Scott Langmann,  
Small Business Development Center  
Director/Billings  
former owner of Billings Livestock  
Commission, partner in a livestock  
sale technology company, past  
owner of feedlots  
406-256-6875  
slangmann@bigskyeda.org

## **Beautify the community.**

This is a case of stating the obvious. It came up over and over again in various groups.

Somebody mentioned that the three entrances into the community from the west, north and east are junky, unkempt, and lead one to believe that the residents don't care about how the community looks.

The entrances to Baker are the "storefront." If the first thing you see is a lousy storefront, you are inclined not to do business at that store, or, as the storeowner, you have to overcome a bad first impression, if you are to do business with the customer who is unimpressed.

Although many people in Baker expressed pride in their community, and that is good, the fact

remains that there needs to be some paint up, clean up, fix up done in many areas.

If you ever have the chance, take a look at some other communities in the region like Powell, Wyoming or Sidney, Montana.

As with most towns, they have areas that could use some improvement, but for the most part the towns are neat, well maintained, and show community pride. Small communities, especially small communities, need to demonstrate “**Quality of Place**” if they are to survive and thrive.

Nowadays, people, primarily young people, are looking for the many amenities that are offered in large communities, a variety of restaurants, a variety of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, and a variety of cultural offerings, such as a symphony or a community theater. In the large cities, people have the variety they’re looking for, but where the small town can’t offer the variety, it can offer the quality.

One aspect of that quality is the appearance of the community.

If houses are abandoned or run down, if the highway into town is unattractive due to junkyards and litter, and if the downtown is not maintained, then the quality of the community is diminished.

**Baker and Fallon counties need to develop zoning ordinances that will begin to correct deficiencies in community appearance.**

There are a number of abandoned homes throughout Baker. Where possible, these need to be purchased by a private entity, person or organization, or by the city and remodeled for resale or rental.

Some people mentioned there was not a sufficient supply of

nice, adequate housing in the community. If the house is beyond repair, demolish it and sell the lot. Even if the lot sits vacant for some time, it will still look better than the same lot with a run-down house on it.

Fallon County needs to get the areas around Baker cleaned up and looking better.

Another recommendation is to establish a zoning ordinance to separate mobile or manufactured homes from the homes constructed on-site. I know that is a potentially sensitive and emotionally charged issue, but it is important for the appearance of Baker.

I won’t go into the details on either side, but in many communities there are “Mobile Home Parks” for so-called mobile and manufactured homes. A mobile home, especially a run-down mobile home in a standard residential neighborhood can detract from the overall appearance of the neighborhood.

Alternately, any run down home, manufactured or otherwise, is an eye sore, so community pride needs to be emphasized more strongly and at every opportunity.

Again **Quality of Place** is absolutely essential to rural communities, if they are to attract (and retain) people and businesses.

**Hire a technology coordinator for Fallon and Carter counties.**

Information technology is an important issue for all communities these days. The challenges of time and distance are being minimized by such technology as interactive video-conferencing and broadband internet connectivity.

A term, the Digital Divide, refers to the disparity of technology

and telecommunications accessibility that is available to some communities, large and small, rural and urban, but not others. Baker and the surrounding area need to make sure they are connected via broadband access to the rest of the world and that they utilize every bit of technology available to provide for Quality of Place.

A technology coordinator can assist both public and private organizations with information technology and telecommunications.

Michael Porter of the Harvard Business School says,

*“Today there is no such thing as low tech industries, just low tech companies, companies that fail to use world-class technology and practices to enhance productivity and innovation.”*

It seems to me that we should do what we can to make sure that Baker uses world-class technology and practices to enhance the productivity and innovativeness of its people and businesses. True, some may not want to and you won't force them to do otherwise, but for those that do, information technology and telecommunications, combined with outstanding technical assistance need to be made available. A talented, progressive technology coordinator can help lead Baker/Fallon County in the right direction.

There are a number of counties in North Dakota that have hired technology coordinators, including **McKenzie, Williams, and Bowman**. In fact the North Dakota Association of Counties has people on staff to assist their membership

with IT and telecommunications issues. Further, Montana has a Chief Information Officer that could help to provide some guidance. He came from Basin Electric Power Cooperative helped to organize the Information Technology Council of North Dakota, and is familiar with the Information Technology Department of ND. Contact:

Benjamin Bernard,  
Technology Coordinator or  
Cal Klewin, Executive Director  
Bowman County Development  
Corporation  
13 E. Divide  
Bowman N.D. 58623  
phone 701.523.5880  
fax 701.523.3322  
cell 701.440.1181  
[bowcodev@ndsupernet.com](mailto:bowcodev@ndsupernet.com)

Tina Langhans,  
Technology Coordinator  
McKenzie County Information  
Services  
PO Box 543  
201 5th St NW  
Watford City, ND 58854  
phone 701.444.3401  
fax 701.444.4113  
[langhans@4eyes.net](mailto:langhans@4eyes.net)  
<http://www.4eyes.net>

## Develop and promote Leadership

**This is the single most important issue**, not only in Baker, but also in many other communities. Some have effective leadership and some don't. Those that don't are losing the battle of economic and population growth.

I have suggested that Baker, and the other towns, if we include Ekalaka

and Plevna, or the counties of Fallon and Carter hire some people, a technology coordinator and a community/economic developer. Those can be two important jobs that address day-to-day efforts to make things better.

However, that does not mean the rest of the people in the community can simply sit back and let the paid staff members do the work.

Whenever I have worked with community groups to identify and hire a director for their EDO, I emphasize that the real work of the the board of directors for the EDO **is just beginning.**

They have the responsibility to set the direction and the policy to guide the hired gun, so to speak.

They have the responsibility to serve as the lightning rod for criticism leveled at the EDO.

***They also have the responsibility to help raise funds for the administration and operation of the EDO and the projects, which the community needs and the EDO is promoting.***

It is essential for the board to retain ownership of the organization and let the executive handle the day-to-day operation.

The young people of the community, especially junior high and high school students **need to take more responsibility for what goes on in Baker and making it a Quality of Place community .**

At the same time, if they take on that responsibility, the current leaders and the other active citizens should accept them and not get in their way.

It would be refreshing to visit a community where talented, young

people are pleased with their contributions to the community and are putting their creative, fresh efforts toward productive tasks.

*In too many communities, rural or otherwise, junior high and high school students are saying, "I am bored."*

**They need to accept the responsibility to do more for themselves and the community** and the adult leaders need to aggressively offer them the opportunity to help make the community better.

## **Work to develop a strong community.**

The vitality, the creativity, the entrepreneurship of the community needs to be nourished.

One example of this need for action is the former **movie theater.**

When people first mentioned that the theater had closed, a number of us on the assessment team thought it had been closed within the last few years. We were surprised to discover *that the doors were shut almost 15 years ago.*

The questions were why had a community asset gone out of business and why had it stayed out of business for so long, when people obviously wanted a theater? Even if something has been tried over the years to restart a theater, why wasn't it successful?

A tool that has been used by some communities is **asset mapping.** It is part of a concept referred to as **Asset-based Community Development (ABCD).** Dr. John C. Allen, Professor of Rural Sociology and Director for Applied Rural Innovation ([cari.unl.edu](http://cari.unl.edu)),

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has worked with a number of communities using this program.

Asset-based Community Development has a very different philosophical base from the more “traditional” approach to community development.

The foundation for the “traditional” approach is identifying a community’s needs, deficiencies and problems.

The foundation for ABCD is a journey of discovering a community’s capacities and assets. Assets are the community “treasures”: youth, elderly, artists, churches, schools, businesses, parks, libraries, cultural groups, clubs, hospitals, Farms, ranches, to name a few.

A reference book written by two people from the Asset Based Community Development Institute (<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>) is Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets.

It is directed at cities, neighborhoods, and communities. The guide summarizes lessons learned by studying successful community-building initiatives in hundreds of places across the United States. It outlines in simple terms what local communities can do to start their own journey down the path of asset-based development.

Another resource for building community and leadership is the

Heartland Center  
for Leadership Development  
941 O Street, Suite 920  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508  
402.474.7667/1.800.927.1115  
Email [heartcld@aol.com](mailto:heartcld@aol.com)

<http://www.heartlandcenter.info>

In 1987, the Center published, “*Clues to Rural Community Survival.*” It came on the heels of a project called “*Visions from the Heartland*” which sponsored a series of seminars across Nebraska.

The workshops were designed to help small town leaders view the future in more positive terms. As the series concluded, an idea for a follow-up project emerged: *Why not study small towns that were thriving, even in tough economic times, rather than towns whose future seemed dim?*

Founders of the Heartland Center translated this query into a key question to focus research: “*Why are some rural communities coping with fundamental restructuring when others seem to have surrendered to crisis?*”

The initial step was to identify communities with relatively stable populations and diverse economies, *although in every instance* the towns were significantly dependent on agriculture.

In 1985-86 the Center’s staff visited five communities in Nebraska with populations between 450 to 6,000. Eventually, 18 communities in 14 states were profiled, from Ohio to California and North Dakota to Texas.

They talked to positional leaders, reputational leaders and average citizens in county offices and coffee shops.

A series of questions covered four topics: ***economic trends, quality of life, planning for the future, and leadership.***

After interviews and site visits were complete, a case study was written for each community. The Heartland Center looked for patterns

of characteristics that appeared to contribute to a community's success. These characteristics formulate the "20 Clues to Rural Community Survival."

According to the Center the most telling lesson that they learned from the 20 Clues was that success is dependent on characteristics that community leaders and active citizens can control. And what they discovered 15 years ago holds true today. **Leadership**—not location—is the key to community success.

Certainly other factors play a role – proximity to natural or historic resources, scenery, climate, the siting of government facilities – these can all be advantages or disadvantages. It is local leadership, however, and its ability to meet the challenges of change, that ultimately determines our future.

I won't list all of the 20 Clues here, but they include evidence of community pride, willingness to invest in the future, deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders, strong belief in and support for education, acceptance of women in leadership roles, and, # 20, strong conviction that in the long run, you have to do it yourself. The full report is available from the Heartland Center

**Prepare a strategic plan and implement the plan** This is the process used by many organizations to establish the vision, the mission, the goals and objectives for their organizations, whether they're for-profit or not for profit, private or public. The organizations that provide the leadership for the community need to focus on a number of projects, think about how they are going to accomplish their *tasks, and then*

prioritize. Decisions need to be made on short and long-range goals, what can we do this year with the resources we have and what will need many years of organized effort to accomplish.

Here, as with other recommendations, it may be helpful to seek technical assistance from public or private organizations. Montana-Dakota Utilities Co., through its marketing department/community development staff can provide a strategic plan workshop to guide a community organization in preparing a plan.

It does not need to be a complicated, time-consuming process.

The important thing is to go through a simple process of organizing for action, analyzing the environment, formulating the plan and implementing the actions.

That final part, implementation, is the most important aspect of planning. There are so many things to be done in Baker and the surrounding area, but you simply need to decide what you want to do, how it will be done, and then DO IT.

If the EDO or other organizations in Baker are interested, in preparing and implementing a strategic plan, contact:

Mike Fladeland,  
Community Development  
Coordinator  
Montana-Dakota Utilities Co.  
Marketing/Community Development  
400 N. 4<sup>th</sup> St.  
Bismarck, ND 58501  
701.222.7879  
[fladelam@mdu.mdures.com](mailto:fladelam@mdu.mdures.com)

An important thing to keep in mind is this, *“If you always do what you’ve always done, then you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”*

If you start doing things in Baker like you’re part of the so-called New Economy, there will be a greater opportunity for success.

Some people maintain the New Economy is built on ideas – *coming up with new, innovative ways of doing a job better or doing a job that has never been done before.*

### **What does that mean to Baker?**

It means if you see something you want to change, start doing something about it. Apply the collective creativity of the people and businesses in the community to make a change. Don’t quit until the change is made or the problem is solved.

### **To conclude:**

Well, that’s it. Once again, Baker has a lot of resources and a lot of positive things going for it, but there is also a great deal of work that needs to be done.

**Baker is no different than a business, if you’re not moving forward, you’re falling behind.**

Baker, by agreeing to endure this community assessment activity is apparently interested in moving forward, in making progress.

But desire is not enough to get the job done.

The community needs to identify its resources, young and old, financial and in-kind, male and female, white, brown, black, those with strong minds or with strong backs, or both, and make Baker a better place for its people and its businesses.

There are some communities that GET IT, they understand they need to be better than they are now, if they are to survive and thrive.

None of us on the assessment team can guarantee your community will be successful if you follow our advice.

None of us can say that if you work to develop your community and provide Quality of Place you will be successful.

**However, I can guarantee** if you don’t work hard to improve and if you choose to do nothing, you will continue to decline both economically and demographically and at some point in the very near future, you will cease to exist as the City of Baker.

It is obvious that the leaders and other active citizens of Baker don’t want to slide into extinction; otherwise they wouldn’t have gone through this process.

I wish you success with your work and I am ready to help however I can.

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he challenges for rural communities in Montana are tremendous. While so often our communities of today are seemingly much less economically vibrant than how we remember them from yesteryear, we have no less pride in the place we call home than we ever had. In fact, in many instances, our hometown spirit is only enhanced by the modern-day challenges we face in trying to re-create neighborhoods and communities that are vibrant, exciting and safe places to live, work and raise a family.

Baker, Montana is a wonderful community with great people, solid values and abundant resources.

There are challenges however, that must be overcome in order for Baker to take the next step toward developing a truly sustainable community for both its residents and businesses.

What is needed will not come easy and will not happen overnight, but in a community familiar with adversity and difficult times, I know that Baker residents are tenacious and patient enough to get the job done and create a solid future for themselves and the next generation.

## PREPARATION

The foundation upon which Baker must build its future lies in creating the necessary local capacity within the community to effectively and efficiently deal with the multitude of issues and concerns that are present today and those which will

present themselves in the future. There are several strategies that exist which I believe can assist in building this capacity. They include the following:

### CREATE A SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In order to assure that “all bases are covered” in terms of economic and community development, it is necessary for Baker and Fallon County to create a single point of contact, or clearinghouse, through which all development activities are processed. This organization is the group that will handle relocation requests, grant opportunities, business expansion strategies, community planning and general community development functions.

This organization must be staffed with a full-time individual. ***Not part-time, not half-time, not volunteers.***

Communities that are successful, even the smallest ones, operate their development activities through the auspices of an organization that employs a full-time staff member.

While experience would be nice, the more important item is to get an enthusiastic, energetic individual who cares passionately about the future of Baker and Fallon County and who has the capacity to work effectively in a one-person office with little supervision.

One important key to creating this organization is committing the necessary and long-term financing required to staff and operate such a group.

Understand that in making a commitment to take this step that **you must commit local funds**. No state, federal or philanthropic source is available to finance this organization.

If Baker is truly committed to local economic and community development, your community must commit to an appropriate level of funding necessary to sustain such an organization.

**Such financial commitments must be multi-year and not one-time.** A general, base-level for funding such an entity on an annual basis is \$50,000-60,000+. Sources of local funding which should be explored include local government (both city and county), financial institutions, utilities, and private businesses.

A primary example of a small town economic development group that has seen impressive results and has built a funding strategy that has sustained it for over ten years is Glacier Action and Involvement Now (GAIN), located in Cut Bank. Their contact information is as follows:

Glacier Action and Involvement Now (GAIN)  
Joni Stewart, Executive Director  
P.O. Box 1329  
Cut Bank, MT 59427  
406-873-2337  
[gain@northerntel.net](mailto:gain@northerntel.net)

## **PARTICIPATE IN THE MONTANA CERTIFIED COMMUNITIES PROGRAM**

One source of funding available for local economic development efforts is the Montana Certified Communities Program, which is administered jointly by the

Montana Department of Commerce, Montana Rural Development Partners and the Montana Economic Developers Association.

The Certified Communities Program is designed to assist with funding local economic development priorities and capacity building activities identified through local development organizations.

Had Baker or Fallon County been prepared to participate in the recently completed round of funding from Certified Communities, your identified local development organization would have received \$4,285.00 this year. This is a future opportunity for your community that should be explored.

Contact information for the Montana Certified Communities Program is as follows:

Montana Rural Development Partners  
Gloria O'Rourke, Deputy Director  
118 East Seventh Street, Suite 2A  
Anaconda, MT 59711  
406-563-5259  
[gloria@mtrdp.org](mailto:gloria@mtrdp.org)  
<http://www.mtrdp.org/certifiedcommunities/> (the website is very informative about the program)

and through Tod Kasten, Regional Development Officer, MT Dept. of Commerce

## **BECOME AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF MEDA**

Arguably, the best, most cost-effective and productive way to get a handle on how to create an effective local development organization is to become a member of the statewide association devoted

to assisting local development organizations increase their effectiveness and capacity. **The Montana Economic Developers Association** (MEDA) is “a private non-profit organization created to increase the effectiveness of local economic development efforts by acting as a statewide resource for its membership.”

Presently, there are over 170 members of MEDA scattered throughout Montana. Of the approximately 70 local economic development groups in the state, most, if not all, have personnel, board members or volunteers who are members of the association.

MEDA members are a wonderful resource for all economic developers, regardless of the size of community in which they serve.

**There is hardly a problem or difficulty imaginable that someone in the MEDA network has not previously experienced and has advice about how to approach.** Typically, assistance is literally a phone call or e-mail away.

Additionally, MEDA provides its members with two training opportunities per year, at the spring and fall conferences.

In addition to the hands-on training you will receive, there exists wonderful opportunities for networking with economic development practitioners from throughout Montana. Often times, this networking in itself is worth the effort and expense of joining MEDA and attending their conferences.

MEDA also sponsors scholarships for its members to attend professional training opportunities (*most of which are out-of-state*) to further hone your skills as an economic developer.

MEDA members have always exhibited a high degree of interest in helping one another to be successful at developing local economies that are vibrant and sustainable. This is an association and network worth investing in and utilizing to assist in Baker's economic development efforts. Annual dues for MEDA is presently \$50 per person.

*Note from AI, MEDA members you've already met include Paul (Prez.), Jim, Bill, Kathie, Mike, & AI of the team, Randy Hanson, Tod Kasten, Mike Carlson, Tom McKerlick, Erin Lutts, etc.)*

Montana Economic Developers Association  
c/o Montana Rural Development Partners  
Gloria O'Rourke, Deputy Director  
118 East Seventh Street, Suite 2A  
Anaconda, MT 59711  
406-563-5259  
[gloria@mtrdp.org](mailto:gloria@mtrdp.org)  
<http://www.mtrdp.org/meda/>

## **PROJECT PRIORITIZATION**

Baker and Fallon County, like all areas, have a number of projects that, if implemented, will allow you to have a healthier, more attractive community.

However, it is imperative that your development projects are appropriately prioritized to assure the most efficient use of finite resources.

Once the community has established a list of projects that have an appropriate level of citizen buy-in, it is important for your local development organization to **prioritize these projects into**

### **short, medium, and long-term goals.**

This will allow everyone to know what your priorities are and when you expect to meet them.

You should also take the added step of *assigning tasks related to the attainment of your goals to interested individuals in the community*, as that provides even more buy-in from the community and does not over-burden one or two people with the responsibility to see that all goals are met.

Periodic “check-ups” are also important to document your progress and to see where any slippage has occurred in your timeline.

## **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTICIPATION**

Montana’s healthiest communities are those whose economic and community development efforts have an appropriate mix of involvement by both the public and private sectors.

Both have much to contribute to the economic health of your community and, because of their individual strengths, the right mix is important in achieving your goals.

If possible, work to recruit a healthy combination from both sectors to serve as board members for your economic development organization and for general involvement in your revitalization efforts.

## **HAVE FUN!**

There is nothing worse than a community that has a great plan to achieve economic sustainability *but lacks the necessary camaraderie amongst its key players* to make

your efforts enjoyable and genuinely fun.

**While the work you are engaged in is very serious, you need not be.**

The best, most appropriate recent example of this is the Resource Team that visited Baker.

While the six economic development professionals that visited your community are very serious about their individual and collective resolve to make a difference for their communities, the state of Montana and, through this assessment process, Baker and Fallon County, they went about the process of examining your community and developing recommendations in a way that seemed effortless.

While our work is important and serious, being able to approach it in a way that allows us to laugh, enjoy each other’s company and be comfortable will result in a better final product.

*Note from AI: If you have pizza, beer, donuts, cookies, pig roast, whatever at your work parties, along with a boombox blaring, it’s amazing how drudgery work by yourself becomes a party with new friends getting something worthwhile done. Do not expect precision carpentry if you have beer there as I learned in my college days. Often a restaurant or grocery store will donate some of this for a particular project (or people will bake instead lay bricks) so it’s easier than you’d think.*

## **BEAUTIFICATION**

Nearly everyone in Montana wishes their community were more attractive, particularly near the entrances, which are often littered with the remains of present or former

industrial plants, body shops, rendering plants and wrecking yards.

These are concerns regardless of the size of the community. Community beautification was a consistent theme during the Resource Team Assessment of Baker. The following are a few recommendations that will hopefully assist Baker with your beautification efforts:

## **COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM**

The Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP) is a federally-funded, state-run program that has been used effectively by a number of Montana communities to fund projects to beautify their downtowns, construct walking/bike trails, **rehabilitate historic structures** and generally enhance the livability of their area.

CTEP funds are allocated annually to city and county governments by the Montana Department of Transportation, but access to these funds are regulated by an application process that local governments must initiate that includes public participation.

By working together, Fallon County and the City of Baker can pool their allocated CTEP funds to tackle projects larger than what they could individually.

One key component that will assist tremendously in working with this program is to have both local government entities designate a Local Program Administrator (LPA) to be the *single point of contact* for the Department of Transportation and the person responsible for

accessing the CTEP dollars allocated to your community.

To obtain additional information on the CTEP Program, contact the following:

Thomas Martin  
[tmartin@state.mt.us](mailto:tmartin@state.mt.us)  
CTEP Bureau Chief  
Montana Dept. of Transportation  
P.O. Box 2010011  
Helena, MT 59620-0011  
406-444-0809

Craig Erickson\*  
[cerickson@bearpaw.org](mailto:cerickson@bearpaw.org)  
Bear Paw Development Corp.  
P.O. Box 170  
Havre, MT 59501  
406-265-9226

*\* Craig serves as the LPA for four counties and several incorporated cities in the Bear Paw Economic Development District with an overall CTEP portfolio of approximately \$1 million.*

## **COMMUNITY VISIONING**

A handful of Montana communities have participated in a visioning process that is administered by the **Extension Service** headquartered at MSU-Bozeman.

This process is designed to partner MSU-Bozeman Architecture students with communities to “vision” what their communities can look like in the future.

Some of the communities that have taken advantage of this opportunity include **Fort Benton, Browning and Anaconda.**

The process itself is highly dependent upon residents looking critically at their community as it presently exists and openly

discussing what physical changes could take place that would make it more attractive to both residents and visitors.

The process is finalized through a document prepared by the architecture students that demonstrates to the community how the community's vision can be realized. Included in the final report are "before" pictures that document present conditions and "after" sketches by the students of how the community would look if the plan is adopted and implemented by the community.

For more information on becoming involved in the Extension Service's Community Visioning Process, contact:

Dave Sharpe, Community  
Development Specialist  
MSU Extension Service  
106 Taylor Hall  
MSU-Bozeman  
Bozeman, MT 59717  
406-994-2962  
[DSHARPE@montana.edu](mailto:DSHARPE@montana.edu)

More detailed information on this process and examples from *communities who have participated in the Community Visioning Process* can be found at:

<http://www.montana.edu/~wwwcom/md/visioning.html>

## MAIN STREET PROGRAM

Understanding the blight and deteriorating conditions that have become more prevalent in many previously vibrant downtowns throughout America, the **National Trust for Historic Preservation** has established the National Main Street Center, which operates the Main

Street Program, whose mission statement is as follows:

*The National Main Street Center's mission is to empower people, organizations and communities*

*to achieve ongoing downtown and neighborhood district revitalization*

*based upon the principles of*

*self-determination,*

*resource conservation*

*and incremental transformation represented through the comprehensive Main Street approach.*

Utilizing the Main Street approach to community revitalization is not quick. It will take time and a significant investment by the residents of Baker to make it successful, but there are several communities throughout North America, including in Montana, that have reinvigorated their centers of commerce through this program. Butte is one example. For information about the Butte Main Street Program, contact:

Leslie Klusmire, Director  
Mainstreet Uptown Butte, Inc.  
201 West Granite  
Butte, MT 59701  
406-782-8443  
[info@mainstreetbutte.org](mailto:info@mainstreetbutte.org)

For information about the National Trust for Historic Preservation and their Main Street Program, contact:

National Main Street Center  
of the  
National Trust for  
Historic Preservation  
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-588-6219  
[david\\_tully@nthp.org](mailto:david_tully@nthp.org)  
<http://www.mainst.org/index.htm>

## **NEED A COMMUNITY CONSENSUS ON BAKER'S ABANDONED BUILDINGS**

In every listening session, the issue of abandoned buildings was “front and center” as a problem that seemed to have a near-unanimous level of concern.

The concern seemed to be two-fold, one in dealing with abandoned households and the second dealing with empty storefronts.

Prior to taking action on these items, Baker needs to truly come to grips with the scope of this problem and have a high-degree of buy-in about the direction these efforts will take. I would recommend ***creating a task force to deal exclusively with abandoned buildings*** (both commercial and residential) and enlist community residents in developing an action plan that is consistent with the needs and values of Baker residents.

Once this takes place, there exist several options to raze abandoned buildings, particularly households.

1. Combine Baker's housing demolition needs with housing rehabilitation needs and apply through the State of Montana's Community Development Block Grant Program for funds to accomplish this goal. Contacts for the CDBG Program and how to specifically use it for housing rehabilitation and demolition are as follows:

Gus Byrom,  
[gbyrom@state.mt.us](mailto:gbyrom@state.mt.us)  
CDBG Housing Program Manager  
Montana Dept. of Commerce

P.O. Box 200501  
Helena, MT 59620-0501  
406-444-4477

Ann Marie Robinson,  
[arobinson@bearpaw.org](mailto:arobinson@bearpaw.org)  
Deputy Director  
Bear Paw Development Corporation  
P.O. Box 170  
Havre, MT 59501  
406-265-9226

The task force must also comprehensively deal with the thorny local issue of how best to deal with the **Baker Hotel**.

While the subject of the future of the Baker Hotel was voiced at nearly every listening session, there was little consensus regarding how best to utilize this property.

Demolition versus rehabilitation is a key, fundamental community debate that, if handled in an appropriate manner, can bring Baker residents together in a way that will build consensus not just around this one building, but rather around the future of downtown Baker and how best to make it a central hub of commercial activity once again.

This and other thorny local issues are often times difficult to deal with through local means.

Often, it is best to utilize the outside, objective services of a neutral third party that can assist the community come to resolution on issues that are divisive and confrontational.

One group organized solely for this purpose is the **Montana Consensus Council**, which is housed within the confines of the Governor's Office.  
Matthew J. McKinney,  
Executive Director  
Montana Consensus Council  
Office of the Governor

Capitol Station  
Helena, MT 59620  
406-444-2075  
[mmckinney@state.mt.us](mailto:mmckinney@state.mt.us)

## DESTINATION

Virtually every community wants to become more of a destination than they presently are. Absolutely every community wants to attract more outside dollars to fuel their local economy.

One obvious way to accomplish this is to place a higher degree of importance on that part of your economy driven by tourism.

While this is easier said than done, there are ways to accomplish this goal, including the following:

## COMMUNITY TOURISM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Prior to delving into uncharted waters regarding how to potentially capitalize on tourism to boost Baker's local economy, it is my strong recommendation that the community look at participating in **Travel Montana's Community Tourism Assessment Program** (CTAP), which is an eight-month, intensive look at existing visitor appeal and tourism infrastructure for a specific location.

The CTAP process also gauges citizen support for an expanded role for tourism in the local economy to determine the level of buy-in that exists amongst residents.

The CTAP program will assist Baker determine what tourism-related projects are worth pursuing and have citizen support. Successfully completing this process also carries with it a financial

***commitment from Travel Montana to assist in funding a tourism-related infrastructure project identified by the community as a top priority.*** There exists a local match requirement as well.

Victor Bjornberg,  
Tourism Development Coordinator  
Travel Montana  
Montana Department of Commerce  
P.O. Box 200533  
Helena, MT 59620-0533  
406-444-4366  
[victor@visitmt.com](mailto:victor@visitmt.com)

To explore additional information about this program, log on to <http://travelmontana.state.mt.us/ourprograms/TrsmDevelop/CTAPOverview01.htm>

## DIVERSIFICATION

The true sign of improving a particular economy rests with doing what is possible to bring about sustainability and to work toward diversifying your present economic base.

**While doing what has always been done is simplest and least painful,** taking calculated risks to move in a different direction, even if it's a slight shift, can often times produce wonderful, fulfilling results.

## TAKE STOCK IN WHAT YOU HAVE

One of the most productive byproducts of the Resource Team Assessment is simply having six additional sets of eyes looking at your community from a perspective that has never existed before.

What's particularly helpful is that those eyes belong to professional economic developers who

have some notion about what is important for community vitality.

What oftentimes local residents take for granted, or even dismiss as unimportant, is actually a critically important piece to the larger puzzle of economic sustainability.

What was uncovered by Baker's Resource Team is a treasure trove of assets that now need to be put to work in a coordinated, focused way to take you a far way down the path to revitalize your community.

Your assets are many. To name only a few: *friendly, supportive people; Baker Lake; airport and Baker Air Service; active oilfield with above-average wages; high speed Internet access; low property taxes; indoor recreation center/swimming facility; low crime rate; local cable channel and radio station; good schools and a quality of life that is second to none.* The list could go on endlessly.

However, my point is that there are wonderful assets in your community that perhaps you take for granted that, quite frankly, do not exist in every community in Montana.

You must do what you can to capitalize on these strengths and build on them, for these very strengths that make Baker an attractive place for you to live and raise a family are precisely the same strengths that will attract others to your community as well, including potential businesses.

Be proud of your community and its wonderful amenities and do not be shy about letting others know what a wonderful community you have built.

## CREATE A 'HOME FOR GOOD' PROGRAM

During our listening sessions, it was mentioned on several occasions that two of the concerns most bothersome about Baker is that there has been an exodus of people from Baker that have left to live in other places, including larger communities out-of-state and that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find specific tradesmen (plumbers, electricians, etc.) to assist with home repair and other needs.

Acknowledging these difficulties, now is the perfect opportunity to begin to implement a *Home For Good Program that will invite former Baker residents back to "live for good."*

Your aim is to both entice people who are already familiar with the area to move their families back to your area, but to also have them bring their job or business with them.

A coordinated strategy between your economic development organization and high school alumni group (*or those who plan class reunions*) is a perfect way to formally begin the process of searching for those individuals who simply might be waiting for a good reason to move back home.

Further information on beginning this program can be found through the following contacts:

Bill Barr, Cooperative Specialist  
USDA Rural Development  
P.O. Box 850  
Bozeman, MT 59771  
406-585-2545  
[Bill.Barr@mt.usda.gov](mailto:Bill.Barr@mt.usda.gov)

Paul Tuss, Executive Director  
Bear Paw Development Corporation  
P.O. Box 170  
Havre, MT 59501

406-265-9226  
[ptuss@bearpaw.org](mailto:ptuss@bearpaw.org)

## PLAN WHERE DEVELOPMENT IS TO OCCUR

Perhaps the only thing in economic development worse than a community having difficulty with its local economy is ***one that is not prepared*** to accommodate development opportunities when they present themselves.

Baker needs to determine a direction it would like to take with its development activities and then begin the methodical process of laying the groundwork that will get you there.

That includes up-to-date **zoning** that is consistent with community values and historical land uses.

It also includes making sure your physical infrastructure is in proper working order and is prepared to accommodate any increase that may be necessary as your community grows.

Through your county planning office and city officials, be sure to take full advantage of the myriad of infrastructure funding programs that are available in Montana to communities. These include the Treasure State Endowment Program, Community Development Block Grant Program and the DNRC's Renewable Resource Program. Access to these programs and additional information can best be located through your Regional Development Officer:

Tod Kasten,  
Regional Development Officer  
Montana Department of Commerce

P.O. Box 520  
Circle, MT 59215  
406-485-3374  
[kranches@midrivers.com](mailto:kranches@midrivers.com)

## HABITATION

There is no community of any size in Montana that is not presently experiencing some significant difficulty when it comes to housing.

In Baker's case, the overwhelming concern seemed to be the need to rehabilitate older homes and demolish vacant homes.

Both goals can be accomplished. Please refer to comments and recommendations made above under "Beautification" for resources that will assist with this significant community need.

## RESTORATION

When discussing restoration, it is important to always keep in mind "the big picture." While individual projects are important and are the only tangible way specific goals are accomplished, always remind yourselves how your current project fits into the overall goal of creating a better, more vibrant Baker.

Restoring your movie theatre was mentioned by many as a goal they would like to see achieved.

However, it is more important to know how the restoration of your movie theatre fits into the broader goal of downtown, commercial revitalization and what will make your movie theatre attractive to future patrons and viable as a business once it's remodeled.

I have addressed restoration ideas in other sections of this report.

However, always understand that your efforts at restoring your local economy will only be as productive as the process you use to accomplish that goal.

*I cannot emphasize enough the high importance of creating a “Can Do” spirit in your community that is pervasive in every sector of your economy and in every person willing to invest their time to make a difference.*

It has been a great honor to be associated with the five other members of this Resource Team as we have “peeked under the rug” of Baker. I have most certainly

received much more from this experience than I know I was able to contribute, but do hope that my presence as a Team member has been productive.

Winston Churchill, following his successful career as Prime Minister of Great Britain, was asked to serve as the commencement speaker at a prestigious university in the United States. Once he was introduced, he approached the microphone and said simply, “Never, ever give up.” These words are as true today for Baker, Montana as they were for those graduates many years ago – **Never, Ever Give Up.**

Submitted by: **Bill Barr**, USDA-Rural Development Cooperative Development Specialist, Bozeman, MT 59771. (406) 585-2545; [Bill.Barr@mt.usda.gov](mailto:Bill.Barr@mt.usda.gov)

## 1. ***Preparation***

**In order to increase Baker's future economic development prospects, three basic elements of economic infrastructure should be in place, all of which are vital to a healthy business community.**

- **Public Capital**: services which government provides and maintains. They include such things as a transportation network, water and sewer, telecommunications infrastructure, and government buildings.
- **Energy**: services such as public utilities, oil and gas companies, and electric power suppliers.
- **Human Capital**: services which relate to the level of workforce skills, education of the people, training programs and private business investment in training and continuing education.

Baker has a solid core of volunteer individuals to assist with economic development planning.

That core would make an excellent board of directors for a full time professional economic developer and, ideally, a staff member. Volunteers burn out, they have day jobs, and when "Baker" gets a call from a business or agency, who gets the call? Where is "Baker Economic Development" located?

Baker would be well served to commit to hiring a full time professional economic developer. There are several ways to fund this

individual, but it requires a long-term commitment from local residents and businesses.

Leslie Messer from Richland Economic Development in Sidney (406) 482-4679 can provide some insight as to how Richland County accomplished a similar task.

Tod Kasten, Montana Department of Commerce (406) 485-3374,

John Rogers of the Economic Development Administration (406) 449-5580, and

Jim Atchison of the Southeastern Montana Economic Development District (406) 748-2990 can help with discussing the advantages of joining and participating in a regional economic development district.

Baker has access to a network of local development organizations and a group of skilled economic development professionals to assist them.

The Montana Economic Developers Association at (406) 563-5259 (ask for Gloria O'Rourke) provides direct training for local development organizations (LDO) and network access to individuals and groups statewide.

The Montana Department of Commerce has a Regional Development Officer, Tod Kasten (406) 485-3374, available to assist LDO's with their development concerns.

The Eastern Plains Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) available to support Baker is led by Mike Carlson, (406) 433-5024.

Bruce Smith, MSU Extension Agent is located in Glendive at (406) 377-4277. Bruce

is also a local technical assistance network provider for cooperative development in support of the Montana Cooperative Development Center at MSU-Northern (406) 265-3771.

Jim Atchison is the Executive Director of the Southeastern Montana Economic Development District based in Colstrip (406) 748-2290.

While economic development is by nature a competitive business, there is a strong federal-state-local partnership which assists existing and emerging LDO's.

**Assistance provided through the Montana Rural Development Partners' Community Resource Assessment Team Report process is a significant first step for Baker.** It has shown that the community can work together. It has identified areas of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities which when addressed as a community, can start Baker on a road to improved, successful economic development.

There are clearly defined steps which can be followed by "Baker Economic Development" if the community chooses to take the next steps along that road. And there are resources available to help with that journey.

It requires a long-term, unified commitment by Baker, complete with follow through, for this process to produce successful results.

**Baker and Fallon County have resources available to it (people, financial, geographic location) that make it the envy of many other counties in Montana, the Dakotas, and Wyoming.**

Economic development experiences, to this point, have prepared Baker and Fallon County for what may come next.

It has resulted in developing strengths and in exposing problems, all of which lead to opportunities which can be exploited.

The financial resources which have been used in the past may not continue to be available in the future.

This puts serious pressure on community leaders to find alternative ways to assure the survival of Baker, to create reasons for people to want to live, work, and stay in Baker. . . and to encourage managed growth.

**The strengths most often mentioned for Baker and Fallon County by most almost all the groups** were the lake, airport, school system, hospital, low taxes and public utility rates, local radio, local cable, recreational facilities, sports, fire and police departments, senior citizens center, small town living environment, good farm and ranch land, an oil and gas production industry, and the library.

There are problems encountered in Baker and Fallon County. The ones most commonly mentioned by the groups included a declining and aging population, **lack of affordable and available housing**, lack of support for local businesses, teamwork is limited to short term projects with lack of follow-through on long term projects, a lack of consensus for unified, defined, prioritized community goals and objectives, limited job opportunities for youth and **no surplus skilled workforce.**

The community needs good paying jobs, but is the work force there for job growth?

In addition, there is spotty support for local retail businesses, a lack of markets for local products, and transportation and accessibility issues,

There is general, across the board concern with the Baker's general appearance, maintenance, and decaying structures, especially at the entrance portals.

Students express "boredom" even with all the recreational opportunities, and the adult population expresses concerns with complacency over the community's future.

In summary, there is concern that the community is not working together, that its economy is too oil/gas focused, that it is not an agricultural community anymore and that distance from markets was too great, that support for retail business is soft, that there is poor planning for creation of jobs to "bring the kids back." While some of the kids interviewed expressed interest in returning to Baker, they were not sure an opportunity would be there should that choice be made.

More kids said they wanted to stay in Montana than in Baker, but even more said they wanted to leave Montana because of boredom and lack of good paying jobs . . .or any job at all.

- **Are these problems unique in Rural Montana? No.**
- **Should Baker and Fallon County "just give up?" No.**
- Do organizational instruments of change need to be found and organized, resources identified (people and financial), a plan developed, consensus reached, and a long-term commitment to

do something to improve economic development be undertaken?

- **How does Baker and Fallon County provide DIRECTION, LEADERSHIP, AND STRUCTURE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT . . . IF . . .the answer to the previous question is "yes?"**

Baker has worked hard; they have prepared to "play" the economic development game. It's a high-risk game, *but the price of not playing is all around you.*

Risk can be mitigated with good planning, good structure, and a unified community.

You have opportunities others do not . . .*and you have yourselves, a resource not to be taken lightly.*

## 2. Beautification

*"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."* This is an old saying, often used by teenagers who don't want to clean their rooms. . . and their friends don't care! But, if you are a business or someone seeking to relocate, what may be "quaint, rural Montana" and therefore "beautiful" may seriously inhibit potential economic development.

*"It's my property, and I can do what I want."* There is value in property, and that value is diminished if neighbors do not work together to retain and increase the value of their property. There is a balance between individual and community rights.

*"You only get one chance to make a first impression."*

What kind of place do you want to move into? To start a

business? To visit on a trip? What if you DON'T know what a special place Baker is? Would you want to shop there? Vacation there? Move there? ***Will your property increase in value or will you be lucky to find someone to sell it to?***

Does your town LOOK like a place with a future? **A place that cares about itself?** If a community doesn't demonstrate that it cares about itself, who should believe that it cares about a business seeking to relocate there? ***Or a person seeking to relocate a family and invest in a home?*** Or a student trying to find a job and return to Baker?

**Tools for resolution of beautification issues** are available to city and county government officials.

- Cleanup tasks are performed more easily and successfully if the community is behind the effort and understands the community benefit.
- Some communities use service clubs to pick up trash (Sidney Montana Kiwanis, Anne Armstrong, 433-4117).
- Sidney, Montana has various ordinances on its books to accomplish this. (Mayor Bret Smelser (800) 423-5219). This includes ordinance requiring the landowner to remove or pay for the removal of diseased trees.
- Henry Johnson, Chairperson, Richland County Commissioners, (406) 433-1706 can provide assistance with **county legislative support**. Both organizations are familiar with Eastern Montana and have some familiarity with Baker.
- Fallon County's County Attorney should be able to advise the County and Baker's attorney the

City regarding codes dealing with safety, health, and community welfare. If the legislative bodies wish to enact beautification policy, they do not need to re-invent the wheel. It's been legally accomplished somewhere already. There are organizations to which your elected county and city leadership belong which provide excellent resources for legislation of this type.

- Zoning codes make excellent tools for managing development areas.
- John Tubbs, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation in Helena (406) 444-6687 might be able to provide guidance and resources **for lake cleanup activities**.
- Mike Carlson, Eastern Plains RC&D, (406) 433-5024 might be able to help with lake clean-up as well.
- Jim Davison, Anaconda Local Development Corporation (406)563-5538 and Chris Cerquone, Project Manager, Maxim Technologies Inc, (406) 543-3045 may be able to provide more expansive assistance for beautification and clean-up where there is abandoned, idled, or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. The EPA Brownfields Program, with which these gentlemen are familiar, offers a variety of tools to address these issues, including grant funding for eligible projects and areas.
- Beautification does take precedence over job creation, but it is a component of successful development strategies.

**Few investors invest in a ship that looks under-maintained and in danger of sinking. The same is true of communities.**

### 3. Destination

Tourism and recreation, according to Outlook 2002 (Bureau of Business and Economic Research, School of Business Administration, University of Montana) took a major downturn in 2001 after September 11.

- It is projected that on a national basis, it may take four years for tourism and travel to reach 2000 levels.
- Air travel took the biggest hit.
- There are indications that domestic travel may not suffer as greatly,
- The Lewis and Clark celebration may encourage domestic travel. Will this be an advantage to Baker and Fallon County?
- Most tourists come to Montana to visit the national parks, ski, battlefields, wildlife refuges, and to fish.
- ***The current economic conditions suggest that tourists may be older, traveling to less physically demanding destinations, and are concerned by fire damage. Many are in motor homes which require certain facilities in order to get them to come.***
- “Exotic” trips of a life time are now competing for the tourist dollar, trips which may include Yellowstone, but will they include the area around Baker?
- Is anyone involved with Custer Country and the tourism promotional activity of the

Montana Department of Commerce? Tod Kasten (406) 485-3374 or Anna Marie Moe (406) 444-2654, Travel Montana, Montana Department of Commerce can help get the connections made.

- Internal state promotion of tourism opportunities in Baker and Fallon County is an important first step to getting folks into town.
- Does Baker and Fallon County have **adequate tourism infrastructure to attract tourists?** Motels? Restaurants? Camp grounds? Part of your follow-on Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy should include an assessment of available and needed tourism infrastructure.
- An honest assessment of tourism and its potential is important: **what do you have to sell in terms of sites that will want someone to spend time getting to Baker**, how do you get folks to come, **and how do you get them to stay?** The Department of Commerce has a **competitive tourism assessment grant** (with matching fund requirements), which can assist Baker and Fallon County in addressing these issues. Anna Marie Moe (406) 444-2654 can assist with this inquiry as well.
- Based on the results of all this information gathering, *a question of value received for value invested must be addressed.* In other words, **will you end up spending money chasing tourist dollars that may never show up? Are you creating sustainable jobs? Is this a priority?**

While becoming a national tourist destination site is not likely, Baker and Fallon County may be able to develop strategies for **attracting day or weekend tourism**. People do like getting away and short trips to something different from what is at “home” does happen . . .

How can you attract this type of business? What will it require in terms of investment, promotion, and likely return?

Again, Anna Marie Moe (406) 444-2654 can assist. Another contact who has significant experience in this area is Sharon Rau, Director of the Sidney Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, (406) 433-1916.

Highway transportation access to Baker and Fallon County is a key element to your becoming a successful “Destination.”

A potentially successful technique is to **invite Bill McChesney, Regional Supervisor for Eastern Montana Department of Transportation**, (406) 233- 3600 base in Miles City to come to Baker and discuss the importance of the Highway 323 Project.

Give him a tour of the area, it prospects and potential. Put on a sustained dog and pony show.

**Invite the State Highway Commission to Baker** and do the same thing. Use your local legislators and your federal legislators (do you know the potential influence on highway funds that Sen. Baucus brings to the table for Montana?) Get your county highway person to “get the project” on the shelf, **ready to go, should funds become available because some other project can’t get ready in time.** Russ Huotari, Richland County

Public Works Director, is a master at this strategy. (406) 488-2106.

**Sell the project by selling the value the state will receive for investing money in this road . . . will it help not only your economy, but Eastern Montana’s?**

**With whom can you “package” tourism experiences?**

Will the Chamber of Commerce or Local Development Organization promote Baker and vicinity in exchange for a promotion of, say Devil’s Tower?

Your local development organization can contact their LDO in WY or you may try a Chamber of Commerce to Chamber of Commerce contact.

The intent is to try to get people into Baker and vicinity and hopefully to spend time and money there.

**Can Baker be enhanced as a retail trade center for the area?**

What would it take for a unified approach to get people to shop in Baker?

This could include tourists visiting or passing through, area or regional residents looking to shop for items not found in their towns, people from across the border looking to save some sales tax, people just looking for a different shopping experience.

The Chamber has access to resources, both statewide and nationally to help with developing programs to improve retail centers. Sharon Rau, Sidney, MT, Director, Chamber of Commerce and

Agriculture (406) 433-1916 can be of real help in assisting with the networking.

It is important to have a supportive community attitude toward your own retail shopping habits, if you want others to shop in Baker. A negative exchange about shopping and “business in Baker” with a customer or in the media can unwind all the good public relations and sales promotion efforts you put together.

Comments were heard that shopping in Baker is expensive and that it is cheaper to drive to Glendive or Miles City.

Driving is not “cheap” and that message can be conveyed to your local residents.

There is a cost of doing business which somehow gets lost in the mix of emotion. The need for a business to make a fair profit is important if a business is to be successful in Baker.

Some businesses have found it useful to form cooperatives or associations in an effort to provide product variety at an affordable price. *(Note from AI, your grocery store is already a member of the Associated Foods cooperative while cooperative buying groups are also common in appliances, consumer electronics, hardware, tires, medical supplies, health insurance, ag supplies, etc.)*

There are marketing, purchasing, and service type cooperatives of an non-agricultural nature that can work. There is a business in Baker doing that now. If more information on this is desired, contact Bill Barr, USDA-RD Cooperative Development Specialist (406) 585-2545 or Bruce Smith, MSU Extension Agent in Glendive at 377-4277.

## 4. Diversification

Traditional Baker economic strengths have been identified as oil/gas, agriculture, local retail, and local recreation and sports. Many comments were received about the health care facilities.

There is an economic development adage that ***suggests success comes best from building on what you do best.***

Making radical changes from traditional strengths or looking for a big “business recruitment” may work for some communities, but most often, it does not.

Diversification does not necessarily mean an entirely new business, but can mean a process by which existing businesses provide new products and services.

***If every existing business added one employee over the next two years, would that have a favorable economic impact on Baker?***

Each business is different and needs to assess whether an expansion of services, products and hours of business would create added business profits to justify the additional employee.

An LDO could help with that assessment and with assisting in promoting markets for those products and services.

An LDO can provide a focal point for conducting a Comprehensive Economic Development Survey (CEDS) to identify what goods and service providers do not currently exist in Baker. In other words, what is currently missing in Baker which area residents or “drive through” tourists would utilize? What would it take to get those kind of business ventures started in Baker? What would it take to make

them successful? Tod Kasten (406) 485-3374 and others on the MTRDP team can network assistance to you. Some have already been identified, such as the truck stop, micro-brewery, coffin manufacturing, farm implement dealership, Piper Cub retrofitting business expansion, and meat packing or processing.

An assessment of community infrastructure to enable successful expansion of a retail business center should be undertaken. What roads need to be resurfaced? Do traffic patterns need to be re-directed? How does Baker get people into the business section of town and get them out of their cars and trucks? Can the parking be enhanced? How can the community be made more inviting to shoppers? What needs need to be addressed on behalf of the business community?

**What can be done to bring the financial community to support an aggressive trade center development for Baker and Fallon County?**

Is water and sewer capacity adequate for present and future growth needs, both for homes and for businesses? For assistance on that, call Mitch Copp, USDA-RD Rural Utilities Service Program Director at (406) 585-2520.

**Care should be taken to identify markets for the products and services which get proposed or recruited.** Tod Kasten can be helpful (MT. Department of Commerce (406)485-3374 and Brent Poppe, MT. Department of Agriculture (406) 444-2402 can assist with answering marketing questions and most of the MT RDP team can help in this marketing networking process. The key is to promote and develop **successful** businesses.

A thoughtful plan, implemented with community participation and consensus, directed by focused local development support, is more likely to attract investors.

There are several avenues of assistance available to individuals or groups seeking to start their own business.

- The SE Economic Development District houses a Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) office and a Micro Business Loan office. Call Jim Atchison at (406) 748-2990.
- Tod Kasten, (406) 485-3374, Regional Development Officer, MT Department of Commerce
- Mike Carlson, Eastern Plains RC&D (406)433-5024
- Members of the MTRDP team can network you to other LDO's and assistance providers.
- The USDA-RD, John Guthmiller, Program Director, Rural Business Cooperative Services, (406) 585-2540 can advise about Business and Industry guaranteed loan program for qualified businesses, Rural Business Enterprise Grant and Rural Business Opportunity Grant, and Value-Added Development Grant Programs.
- Information on SBA programs can be obtained at your local banks.

An important concept to remember is that tax dollars are not going to be given free for someone to start a business. There is technical assistance made available for free, and some grant funds, but mostly loan funds are available to entrepreneurs.

## 5. Habitation

A housing needs assessment is normally included in a Comprehensive Economic Development Survey (CEDs). Tod Kasten (406) 485-3374. Clearly identifying community needs and prioritizing them is a vital first step. Finding resources to develop the needed type of housing comes next. . . and of course, you'd like someone to rent or buy the houses, too.

An adequate supply of decent, affordable housing which a person would like to purchase is preferable to having a supply of overpriced housing of questionable quality or so I'd guess.

Inadequate housing needs to be fixed up or removed. Few people will want to invest in property and a house in a location which will not support the growth of their investment. Resalability of homes is important to a home buyer. With that consideration, they are more likely to take care of the property and at least try to maintain its value.

There are several programs available for assisting first time home-buyers, renovating homes, and even building homes. For specific information about programs and how they fit the needs of Baker and Fallon County, I'd suggest calling the following resources:

- USDA-Rural Development , Rural Housing Service.

The Program Director is Deborah Chorlton, (406) 585-2515

- There is a USDA-RD Community Development Office in Billings, MT

run by Kathy Kaufman, (406) 657-6297, ext 4.

- The 504 Program is a Home Improvement Loan and Grant Program designed to **improve or modernize an existing home.**
- **A 502 Direct Loan Program is designed to assist low and very low income families with little or no down payment, at a low interest rate, with home purchase.**

- **Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loans are used to assist low to moderate income families who cannot obtain conventional financing without assistance. USDA-RD can provide a 90% guarantee to traditional lender loans.**

- The 515 **Multi-Family Housing** Direct Loan Program is designed to address rental housing needs and to provide eligible low and very low income persons with economically designed and constructed rental facilities and rental assistance subsidies.

- The **Multi-Family Housing** Guaranteed Loans 538 Program is designed to serve the housing needs of low and moderate income families. It complements other affordable housing programs and seek to meet the needs of rural America not being served by the Section 515 Direct Rural Rental Housing Program.

- The Rural Housing Service **Housing Preservation Grant 533** Program is designed to aid in the repair and rehabilitation of individual housing, rental properties, or co-ops owned and/or occupied by very low and low income families.

- The Farm Labor Housing 514 and 516 Program objectives are designed to provide safe, sanitary, and affordable housing for U.S. farm workers through loans and grants to finance construction of on and off-site housing.

- The Community Facilities Direct and Guaranteed Loan Program and the CF Grant Program eligible organizations receive help to **construct, enlarge, and improve community facilities which provide essential services** in rural areas and towns. This assistance can include support for hospitals, health clinics, nursing homes, fire and police facilities, community centers, roads and streets, libraries, schools, criminal justice centers, etc. Specific questions should be directed to Sue Gantz, CF Specialist, (406) 585-2555.

- The Self-Help Housing Program provides technical assistance grants to non-profit organizations to help very low and low income families finance and build their own homes.

- Information about U.S. Housing & Urban Development’s extensive and multi-faceted rural housing programs can be obtained from Larry Gallagher, (406) 449-5040.

- The Eastern Plains RC&D, Mike Carlson, (406) 433-5024 also has some housing assistance programs.

Classes for first time home buyers and others are available to assist people with this process. Contact any of the organizations above to schedule them.

## 5. Restoration

Projects involving restoration should be considered within the scope of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Restoration projects can become quite emotional, and that is not all bad. Assessment of value spent for value received needs to be made. Is it cheaper to attain the same result (i.e.: a movie theatre) by restoring or building anew. What is the best use of the land?

- What is the county plan? What is the community consensus as to an historical property it wishes to restore?
- Who will own it?
- Is it a “*nice to restore*” project or a “*have to restore*” project?
- Does it create long term, sustainable jobs?
- Will it actually attract business and tourists?
- How will the project be funded?

Answers to these questions, and others, will come after a list of restoration projects is compiled and a prioritization process by which folks determine what should be preserved.

The movie theatre, the Baker Hotel, and an arts complex were all ideas shared as community interests.

Which ones really contribute to the history and character of Baker?

Will the projects “make” money?

Which ones are a good business investment and which would rely entirely on charity and public funds both to create and to operate?

A good architectural /engineering firm can provide structural information and cost estimates for designing and restoring the proposed project to a current use.

Economic development resources, both in terms of money and in terms of human resources are limited.

Make wise use of them.

## **Education**

A few comments may be in order regarding the role of the educational system and economic development. In general, the community expressed pride in their school system and faculty.

As a component of a unified community problem solving process, the school system has an opportunity to be an integrated player in the economic development picture.

**The lack of age diversity (“old” population vs. “young” kids) may contribute to a perceived isolation of the school from the community.** The school population is dwindling and there was concern expressed over lack of respect for authority.

Favoritism towards certain students over others was also expressed as a concern.

The school administration was described as “traditional” and “non-proactive” and the school board as “along for the ride.”

The faculty and staff were described as “reluctant” to take on new jobs and assignments and feedback communications were “for show.”

Teachers and coaches were described as “good” but more were needed.

The newly hired activities director was given strong accolades.

**Concern was frequently voiced over the lack of job opportunities for youth and that there is no surplus, trained work force should job opportunities arise.**

- There are school-to-work programs utilized by other school districts that assist local businesses and students make the transition from student to employee while providing students with work place skills and a business with an employee.

Carl Stevens, Office of Public Instruction in Helena (406)444-3000 is a resource person.

The high school in Rapelje runs an excellent school-to-work program and a program which provides college credit for certain high school courses.

- Other resources which could be incorporated into job development picture reside in the Department of Labor and Industry.
- Bob Simoneau is the Director, State Workforce Investment Board (406) 444-2607,

Wendy Keating (406) 444-2648 is the Commissioner of Labor &

Industry which includes the Montana Job Service Division. Program information assistance linking education and jobs is available through them. Ingrid Childress heads the workforce training efforts of Job Service which are extensive and complex.

- Job Training Partnership and School to Work information can be obtained from the Office of Public Instruction at (406) 444-4437.
- Bill Linder at the Job Service Center located in Sidney (406) 482-1204 can provide insight into the Job Service Employers Council (JSEC) and how that links local businesses to the local schools.

Disappointment was evident in the limited or **lack of Adult Education opportunities.**

Sidney has an adult education program and information on how it works can be obtained by calling Doug Sullivan, Superintendent of Schools, (406) 433-4080.

Montana has one of the highest levels of two-job holders in one family in the nation.

As the job market and skills required change, it has made sense to some communities to enable training opportunities to broaden and enhance potential and existing employees skills.

Students expressed disappointment over ***the lack of advanced placement classes,***

There is “modern” distance learning technology available at the high school, but there seems to be some issues on how to use it effectively. Students said it’s only being used for Spanish-language lessons currently.

Contacts with the Community Colleges, in MT and ND and WY might prove fruitful, as well as with the Technical Colleges in those states and with the traditional four year schools.

Students expressed disappointment over the **lack of service projects and clubs.**

Are there active service clubs in town? Should there be?

Would students volunteer for projects if there were some clubs?

There are active clubs and school programs in Sidney: if there is interest, call Anne Armstrong, (406) 433-4117.

Some thoughts by **James Klessens**, Coordinator, Beartooth RC&D Area, Inc.  
P.O. Box 180, Joliet, MT 59041 (406) 962-3914 [jklessens@mt.usda.gov](mailto:jklessens@mt.usda.gov)

The motto of the Beartooth RC&D Program is “**Citizens Building Stronger Communities**”.

It occurred to me a number of times during the Resource Assessment Team visit that Baker was indeed a town filled with people with that same vision.

I truly enjoyed the hospitality, the attentiveness to the task and the candidness of the comments.

As much as the week represented a fun and even exhilarating time, it really won't have amounted to much if we can offer you some level of tangible assistance. In many ways, the week was a strange vacation for the team in that we can spit out all sorts of ideas and solutions ... and then go home, as we're all used to being the ones doing the implementation too.

The results are up to you.

That's why I was so struck by the participation in numbers and in spirit, because you are truly a group of citizens can build a stronger and better community.

The workhorses of the community, the Roger's, Sharon's, Barb's and Chuck's and many others have a daunting task in front of them ... a task I'll speak to momentarily.

The six of us can give you basketloads of program names, phone numbers web sites and the sort, but none of it will occur unless the community has it in its vision.

It was once said, ***if you can't agree on the problem, you'll never agree on the solution.***

Think about past community activities that have created divisiveness.

Chances are, buy-in to the project was never obtained before the walls were started, or the hole dug of the concrete ordered.

From a community standpoint, it's not a good place to be as it's kind of like pushing a rope. You never get quite lined out. Which brings me to my first topic.

## Preparation

You'll get to read a lot about community preparation from the six of us. You might even begin to believe that we all choose to speak to it because it's the easiest. Well, you are probably right about easiest to write, but by and large it's the most difficult part to carry out.

And if you can't carry this one out, it makes the rest of the community's hopes and dreams much more difficult.

I saw this pressing need **in the first two hours in town** as we toured by a multitude of started, but yet to be finished projects ... the amphitheatre, the skate park and the concrete trail. Each of these is testimony to a very forward thinking group of community minded people. Great concepts, good designs and planning and then ... half-way through you run out of gas. Why??

I call it **the Shasta Phenomenon (Shasta pop, not Mount Shasta in California.)** As an active community member, your role is to create things to make better neighborhoods, downtowns and

improve the overall community. You essentially get together with like-minded folks to shake things up.

***Well, much like a can of pop ... you build a bunch of momentum (excitement and enthusiasm) on your ideas ... and usually ... POW ... you let it all out at once.***

All of your collective energy and enthusiasm bubbles over to turn the whole town around!

And much like that agitated can of pop, ***you end up with little puddles of pop fizzing away furiously trying to make a difference.***

The result?

Pretty soon the fizz wears out and the little puddle dries up. **The project dies for lack of funds, volunteers and energy.** *How many times did I hear that in Baker?*  
**Bunches.**

The message is pretty basic. Keep your pop in the can, keep it shook up ... but don't open it quite as fast. Simply stated:

1. Take a look at everything that remains to be finished in the community.
2. Build a list of all community projects
3. Convene a community forum to discuss each project and what remains to be done (time, money etc.)
4. All participants must agree that the wishes of the community as a whole are senior to individual wishes. In other words, you work on a "majority rules" basis.

5. Vote for the prioritized order to finish these projects. Use sticker dots of different colors indicating a blue (3 points for favorite), red (2 points) or yellow (1 point).

**6. Let each person have three stickers and see what happens.**

The magic to this activity is this. People in the community have to **trust** that those that are helped first, will help the next project and so on.

Folks that are first to be helped need to understand that they are obligated by **reciprocity** to help those in later activities.

In small communities, it is the only way you can create the critical mass needed to really get things done. Otherwise you see continual burn out (fizz out) and constantly gaze at the skeletons of good ideas. **Keep the pop in the can till you are really ready to deal with the energy you created.**

In the first day of listening sessions, it also struck me **how much was happening that no one really knew about.** Even with the paper, the Cable TV and the various other media sources, I was struck by how little one group knew about the other.

This was not just my perception, it was the voiced concern of many, many people.

It occurred to me that perhaps you should consider a clearinghouse for activities.

One way I have seen this addressed is a forum called **Talk about Town.** I watched this work effectively in Roundup. It's pretty simple.

A local facilitator (like Roger, Sharon or Larry Brence) essentially arranges for a place for people to meet for lunch. You have a lot of

great places to do this in Baker. No host the meal. The facilitator would pick two or three groups from the area to spend 15 minutes telling the rest of the people what they are doing.

It isn't a decision making group, a debate session or a place to hold political rallies. **Rather, it is a forum for people to hear what other people are doing ... in an informal, somewhat social environment.**

As long as you keep it informative, non-controversial and fun, people will come ... just to stem natural curiosity. Kind of like the biggest coffee klatsch in town. (In fact, it doesn't hurt to make sure they show up.)

Others from the team will talk about the delivery vehicle for community development. I will say simply this ... make certain the group you create or endorse has **representation from all sectors of the community.** Perhaps a rep from each of the groups, we met with would be a start. If you have access to the listening session notes, look them over. **There are blatant similarities between all groups and stark differences also.** It is that diversity which helps you keep the pop in the can!!! In addition, that diversity is necessary to rally the energy, the brainpower and the money to get things done. Most of us extremely fortunate if we get two of the three. I think you can see where that diversity kicks in.

Nuff said.

## Beautification

I drew the short straw for the closing meeting and got to talk about

the appearance of Baker. I intentionally was **very** blunt about it as I felt then and do now, that it is the **single biggest negative** you have in your community. Look back at the notes from the sessions.

**Every** single group identified the North, West and East Entrances as being unsightly. Again, at point blank. People are very influenced by first impressions. The first impression I got was not positive. You have a façade in your community ... your beauty, your uniqueness, as a community is hidden behind the ugly, yes, I said ugly, appearance that greets a person as they come to town.

Add to that 28 or so abandoned houses that are not suitable for rehab and you have a serious concern. That concern will affect your ability to attract new business, tourists, teachers or other employees for local businesses.

This is not a simple problem, but it is one that bears a serious effort ... and soon.

At another time I can tell you of several communities that have made a concerted effort to clean up their towns. **Each will show you a whole new attitude and vision for the future than they had previously.** *Decay and blight are nagging problems that effect everyone in the community.*

So what do you do? Fortunately, I have recently had occasion to research the state codes for counties and municipalities on this very topic. You may have observed that Yellowstone County passed a decay ordinance to deal with ramshackle properties. They did this under **Montana Code MCA 7-5-1105 where community decay**

**is defined and a subsequent section empowering county governments to enact an ordinance against such decay.**

That's fine for the county, now what about the town?

The codes aren't quite as specific for municipalities, but fortunately, the State Fire Marshall, Terry Phillips (444-2053) has experience with this problem from his former position as Fire Chief in Lewistown.

I'd refer to code section 50-62-102 – Structures or Conditions creating a Fire Hazard. Now junk in general doesn't fit the bill here, but this is a code section with some teeth.

The State Fire Marshall or their regional counterpart has the authority to declare a building a public nuisance *"for want of repair, by reason of age, dilapidated condition, defective or poorly installed wiring and equipment, defective chimneys, defective gas connections, etc."*

**Essentially if it looks like a fire trap, it probably is.**

The Fire Marshall can issue an order to remedy the condition. Unfortunately, most of us would assume that fixing it would mean tearing it down. It's not quite that easy.

Fixing it might mean taking out the electric or gas service, removing all flammable materials from the interior and boarding it up.

That's probably the selected route as it's likely easier than a demolition project.

If nothing occurs, the code outlines a court-mandated process for rectifying the situation. Legally, it can be pretty messy. In these cases, it is very critical that the ordinance or imposition of a fire

hazard maneuver is **equally implemented.**

If it is perceived that you are picking on a particular landowner or neighborhood, you may not be able to win the case. Prepare yourself for that.

I am not sure where your closest Fire Marshall is, but you should be able to find out through the state office (444-2053)

An interesting angle might be to pursue the decay problem from another statute. Again, this is a method suggested by the State Fire Marshall. MCA 45-8-111 defines a public nuisance as "a condition which endangers the safety or health, is offensive to the senses, or obstructs the free use of property so as to interfere with the comfortable enjoyment of life or property by an entire community, or neighborhood or by any considerable number of neighbors."

What it says is this. If a junk pile, old building shack or shed is a serious detraction to the community as felt by a large number of citizens in the community or neighborhood, **a petition drive could be established to declare said property (or the subject of concern) as a public nuisance.** If it is a building which could harbor skunks, mice, stray cats that could pose a rabies threat, the county sanitarian can do the same thing. And as before, the Fire Marshall can declare it a nuisance.

**The beauty here is that the same code section (2) makes it a criminal offense to maintain a public nuisance.** In short, the person who owns the property could be subject to fines and imprisonment if they do not correct the situation. This may prove to be a less tedious legal route to fix the problem. **(FYI- You can not declare other people**

**a public nuisance!!! No matter how obnoxious they are!!!)**

You will definitely want to have your town attorney ensure that the community is geared up to take these kinds of actions, **before** you take action.

Your worst case may be that people will abandon the properties to public ownership ... essentially forfeiting them for tax deeds. But that is more of an opportunity than a problem.

It is incumbent upon every community member, every civic club and every youth organization to make "Beautify Baker" part of their yearly plan. The collective efforts of each of these groups can really make a significant impact on the look of the community. Remember the energy, time and money deal. It applies extraordinarily well in this regard.

The donations and organizational efforts of older folks, coupled with the motor power of those with time and equipment plus the obvious athletic talents (speed, strength) of your area students are a real opportunity.

We are doing a project in Fromberg where they are hosting a clean up day. BFI ( the Garbage Guys) donated two 35 yard dumpsters to pick up extra large items. A local lumber yard donated brightly colored flags to residents who are unable to haul in junk. The 4-H and FFA Kids, the Student Council and the Athletic Club are going to each flagged house to pick up stuff. It really involves and benefits a lot of people. You would be surprised at the way picking up and cleaning up catches on!!

Junk vehicles have their own set of codes. Your junk vehicle guy (Roger) knows these codes. Get behind him and use them!!!

Naturally being from the mountains, I am really biased toward mountains and trees. I guess I can only stand so much scenery at once and need something to block the view.

Since bringing mountains in seems somewhat unrealistic, **how about an aggressive program to reforest the area?**

I actually am involved in an effort to plant trees to sequester carbon emissions from industry, but that's another 20 pages. You have a great resource for community forestry right down the road.

**Jeff Roe** works for the Department of State Lands as a Community Forester in Miles City. Jeff is a certified arborist and can help your community in a number of ways including:

- 1) Conduct a community tree inventory to see what works, what doesn't and to insure you have good species diversity.
- 2) Assist and perhaps design a community forestry program which would identify species, planting guidelines and maintenance techniques to increase the probability of success.
- 3) Assist in developing park plans for trees and shrubs on the trail system,.
- 4) Assist in the development of species recommendations in the tougher sites such as the in highly salinized areas.
- 5) Can point you in the right direction for potential funding opportunities, Arbor Day programs, Tree City USA designations and others.

The nuts and bolts of it is ... Jeff loves trees and helping communities, especially kids, get trees established and cared for. Call him at 232-3807. Don't be afraid to tell him I recommended him, I am always promoting his good work all the time.

## Destination

Yes, Baker is out of the way, but in the short time I was there, I saw many opportunities which would bring me back.

It's interesting that sometimes we think everyone's out to see the big draws as it seems that's where the most people go.

I might be the exception, but for my kids, a vacation is anyplace they sleep in a different bed or a place they have a warm swimming pool. Fast foods are a plus. For kids that place might only be a mile away from home.

You have a wonderful array of activities in Baker, the Medicine Rocks, the lake, the rec complex, great restaurants and the most important thing for most people ... you are not at work or reachable by phone. I actually found the three days there pretty relaxing considering we were on the go from 7 a.m. to 8 or 9 p.m.

I am of the belief that many two job **families** are really looking for a place where the kids can run free (and safe) , someone else cooks and cleans up, and that they can kick back a bit.

The operative word here is **families**. The amenities you will be focusing on finishing ... the amphitheatre, the skate park, the lake path ... all present a draw to the

area for **families** who don't want the stress of the Disney experience (and I stress **stress**. **Been there, done that, got the T-shirt.**) I know that Baker would never evoke the same emotions for me. Unless, of course, the kids got gobbled up by Al's Baker Lake Monster.

**In our visit, we heard repeatedly about the number of annual events you hold ... you have a great number of activities that could or perhaps do draw folks ... perhaps you should revisit your promotion of those activities.**

**Are you getting the most bang for your buck out of current advertising?**

**Could a billboard on I-94 pull a few more people your way?**

**How can the annual events draw more the *just locals*?**

**This is key because the local dollar is already there.**

**You build the local economy by bringing in dollars from outside.**

In case you missed all of the subtle hints in the previous paragraphs, you should strongly consider your location as a get away for **families**.

One thing I have learned about the tourism industry in the last decade is that you should **be way more interested in the quality of the tourist than the numbers**.

Hotel folks understand this in that the fewer times you rotate a room, the better their margins become. Keeping people in town longer will be of benefit to all of you. That's where the **family** thing really fits. I could realistically see people spending 2 or 3 days in your community, taking in Medicine Rocks, your demolition derby or just

using that fantastic sports complex. Look to bring these kinds of folks around and you'll see new money and a new face of your local economy.

In recent months I have had occasion to work with the Downtown Billings Partnership. You may be surprised that one of their greatest interests at this point is to bring folks from the rural areas into Billings.

Not for the Big Box, empty the wallet experience, but to have them enjoy the many cultural marvel Billings actually has. Places such as Moss Mansion, the Western Heritage Center or the Yellowstone Art Center. Their concept is to package get away for people ... two or three days to come stay in the downtown and see Billings in a new way. This actually represents an interesting angle for Baker in that **in a very real sense, we all want to just get away a bit.** I would venture that gas, grocery or hardware prices and/or selection is **probably not the main reason people go to Miles City.** I'd guess it's primarily to get out of town.

Remember the road runs both ways, perhaps the downtown businesses could come up with a one day get away for Miles City folks to come to Baker.

You do have some great shops (ie: Cedar Rose), great restaurants (too many to list) and a very welcoming (it's the people) feeling to the main street. A movie theatre would be a big plus. Just a thought.

Why all this warm fuzzy family stuff. It could be that it's just the way I am. Or possibly that your community, past it's initial façade, really is a neat place. All six of us were shaking our heads after the

initial tour because we were astounded at the resources that you have available and the opportunities which you could capitalize on. This isn't window dressing ... *we often get ourselves caught up in a "woe is me" mentality and lose sight of what we really have going which is good.* I think 9/11 woke a lot (265 million and change) of people up to how great we really have it. Perhaps a little introspection would be valuable for you. It's really interesting how one can we take our good attributes for granted. Again, you have a great set of notes from the listening sessions .... Use them!

## Diversification

Although it was suggested tongue in cheek several times, moving the town of Baker to the mountains or building your own mountain shouldn't rank high on your priority list for projects.

**In my tenure in the economic development arena, I have often observed the tendency of people to look at what others have and try to emulate them.**

Heck, if it worked for them it should for us, right?

If you'd like, I can show you the skeletons of many a building, mill or plant which emerged from that kind of thinking and just didn't quite live up to the expectations.

Not that watching other people isn't valuable, but what is important is that you learn from what other successful people have done.

**I think you will find in short order that there is no magic fix, no single business recruitment scheme that will solve your economic development woes.**

There is a recipe ... but it's one you will have to concoct yourselves.

And remember, a recipe doesn't always turn out great the first time.

**Hence, don't put everything you have (energy, time and money) into one angle.** You may end up with another strawboard plant.

A key component to any community economic development plan is to identify gaps in the services available and look to fill them. Another key component is to look at services you **can** provide and how you could expand the distribution of those services over a broader area.

I'll confine my comments to a few project areas, accompanied by ideas on how you could get them done. Since your tax base and much of the income generated in the county is from oil, I'll start there.

One individual stated that 87% of the tax revenue of the county came from oil and the development of the Cedar Creek Anticline. Since I'm a guy who like to go with the bricks, how about a focused effort to incubate or expand business ventures that support the oil and gas industry.

Several people mentioned the lack of electricians, plumbers and other skilled tradesman. It would appear an excellent opportunity to do one of two things. First, contact anyone you know who is one of these skilled workers, and find out what it would take to get them back.

You will rarely find people who given an opportunity for steady work will reject such an opportunity.

And since they know you and the area, you'll at least find the reason people won't come. (Then work on that.)

If individual tradesmen won't see the opportunity, try the larger companies in nearby cities. Could they or would they consider an outgrowth of their company? Could an Ace Electric of Laurel find an electrician or two who would consider Baker as a career move. Recognize that an already successful company would really risk little by outposting an employee or two. Yes, the profits would migrate out, but the wages paid, ancillary jobs (reception, books etc.) would stay in the community. Plus you would have services available for local commercial and residential work also.

I'd reckon that some major companies such as Halliburton or Schlumberger might have an interest in the area from an oilfield service standpoint. Asking oilfield companies about their suppliers may open some doors to recruiting or incubating a new business.

Now it would stand to reason that if you are going to recruit a business, you should have potential sites available. **Contrary to popular belief, a piece of raw land out by the highway is not a business or industrial park.**

I noticed almost immediately on the tour, that the town and the county have considerable holdings in and around Baker.

Perhaps some of these areas should be planned as business parks.

I'd pay particular attention to the area north of the tracks. Here is an area that largely has no water or sewer services, yet has expressed

an interest in obtaining these public utilities. Perhaps a planned business park, coupled with adding service to residential areas on this side would be worthwhile to look at.

The design and layout of the Business Park could be put together and financed a couple of ways. The Economic Development Administration has planning grants which can cover 50% of project costs up to \$25,000. We are currently working on one just exactly for this purpose. CDBG and DNRC also have a small planning grants to help communities put projects together.

These are due generally in April ... the cycle changes a bit each year. If the business park is an idea you like, perhaps you should look at applying for these funds to set the stage.

The next step is to get the infrastructure (sewer and water) in place.

To fund this type of activity, the Department of Commerce's Community Development Block Grant program is a good starting point.

These federal funds are made available to benefit low and moderate income (LMI) households primarily seeking to serve these populations. A community wide application would require 51% LMI. **The LMI percentage for the Town of Baker is 26% and for Fallon County 34%.** Obviously, in order to garner this support you would need to serve a specific section of town.

This information can be determined by conducting an income survey, essentially dividing the community into sections.

Areas that meet the income criteria could be project eligible. I would assume that the area north of the tracks would qualify.

Parallel programs for a **sewer and water extension** would be:

the Treasure State Endowment Program, Jim Edgcomb 444-5284,

the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's Renewable Resource Grant Program, Bob Fischer 444-6688

and /or the State Revolving Fund (was Todd Teegarden) 444-6697 out of the Department of Environmental Quality.

The combination of the benefit to LMI households plus the addition of jobs ( business park) would make this a somewhat compelling proposal. The CDBG Contact is Gus Byrom at 444-4482.

These programs work on a similar cycle, with applications due in about a month. You won't make this cycle. The upside is it gives you about two years to really adequately plan your project. As I am sure you realize, these are not something you just slap together ... it's going to take some time and some money to construct the applications.

EDA may also have an interest in the infrastructure for the Business Park. Montana's EDA guy (one and only) is John Rogers. He's based in Helena at 444-5380. You will find him a tremendous resource.

With sites available and infrastructure available, you now have a bargaining chip for recruitment. The State Department of Commerce is constantly working on tweaking their programs to aid job creation and recruitment activity. One in particular the may interest you is the Public Infrastructure Loan Program.

In this program, a loan from the Board of Investments could be made to the Town or the County. The local government would then loan it to a recruited or significantly expanding local business (only certain businesses qualify) to construct the infrastructure needed to serve their facilities. The repayments of that loan will receive a tax credit. Essentially it is a grant to a business that is providing good jobs. You are limited to \$16,666 per job created and there's a 15 jobs created (jobs paying \$23,600/yr.) minimum.

Commerce also has a number of other tax incentives for business development. Check these out at [www.mtfinanceonline.com](http://www.mtfinanceonline.com) for additional details.

Another thing to very seriously consider is using the CDBG Economic Development Program as a finance tool to build businesses in the park. This program provides grants to local governments of up to \$500,000. The local government, in turn would lend those funds to the business at a reduced interest rate (now about 6%). The repayments of those loans would come back to a local revolving loan fund. These funds could then be used to assist other businesses in the community (as loans).

Although there is a lot to learn about public sector lending, you will find that it is perhaps the best tool you can create to stimulate economic development activity. I know this for a fact as we have a small RLF of about \$500,000. From that we've created over 50 jobs and leveraged well over \$2,000,000 in private investment.

You may consider a regional approach to this type of activity. The CDBG is a great program with some

very competent and helpful people operating it. The contact for CDBG-ED projects is Nick Rich at 444-4485. Commerce just published the guidelines for this year's program. You may want to look at the details of this one.

An opportunity was discussed at one listening session which should be fully is that of using the natural gas that is available. The suggestion was to put together a plant combining Natural Gas and Water make this great stuff called Anhydrous Ammonia, a very common fertilizer in eastern Montana. I would seriously check out this option. You could attract USDA Rural Development funding, Montana Board of Investments (Value Added) or even EDA funding on this one.

A lot of discussion at many sessions centered on **truck parking and fuel prices.**

Since this is reportedly a short cut from Bismarck to Billings, perhaps adjacent to your new business park, you should think about building a truck stop. It may generate more downtown trade, if it could be located within easy walking assistance of the downtown.

I don't recall how many times I heard people state gas prices were too high. It's funny that in the same sessions, the same people talked about the need for an additional grocery and hardware store as the competition would lower prices. Well, it's a funny thing that you have three gas stations and high prices. Go figure. I can't answer this one.

If you have sufficient traffic volume, major brand fuel companies will carry out feasibility studies for this kind of development. It certainly would bear checking out.

**All of were extremely impressed with your landfill capability.** I'm sure most people in the community haven't even had the pleasure of taking this tour. While I am no expert when it comes to judging landfills, I certainly saw a tremendous opportunity when I saw yours.

Now I am fully aware of the past discussions of the regional and multi-state concept and the controversy surrounding that development opportunity, but I couldn't help but think of a basic Economic Development 101 lesson: **If you have a service that somebody needs, and in this case needs badly, you have an economic development opportunity.**

I have no doubt there are lots of arguments against such an action but quite frankly, after the site tour, description and a look at the location, I believe you should really reconsider your position. It's kind of like having a bunch of Montana Power or Enron stock and deciding to hold it ... sure that it's going to rebound.

Solid waste disposal is an ongoing concern throughout the country. Roger told us tipping fees for your landfill are \$14 per ton (my recollection). **Did you know that communities like Chicago pay in excess of \$75 per ton?** The potential you have is staggering. So what's the downside? It may not be the cleanest industry, but if you'd look at how Roger's crew manages the landfill now ... any fears of piles of blowing trash etc. will soon go away. Besides at that rate you could hire an army to make sure it stays on site. Hazardous waste got you worried? How about holding a bond from the community you

contract with holding them responsible for all remediation necessary in the event this did happen?

There is something about a site with no groundwater in thousands of feet, heavy clay soils and the remote location that just make too much sense.

And hey, are you worried about power costs? How about tapping the methane off of the decomposing wastes to burn in a gas turbine to generate electricity. This is a proven technology ... not some Buck Roger's idea. Communities are doing this across the country. Check out the EPA's Landfill Gas website at [www.epa.gov/lmop/](http://www.epa.gov/lmop/). The Region 8 contact is Meg Victor in Denver. The phone number should be on the website.

*Note from Al: Capstone's microturbines reportedly will take straight methane from a landfill or sewage lagoon and convert it to electricity (other models require the gas be "scrubbed" through filters before entering the generator, [www.capstone.com](http://www.capstone.com)*

Another article or publication of interest is: [www.epa.gov/ORD/WebPubs/projsu/m/600sr95089.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/ORD/WebPubs/projsu/m/600sr95089.pdf). This is a 1998 recap of the commercially available products and technologies. Believe me there is a ton of info on this floating around the web. EPA has a whole division working on it. You'll see that on their site. Other than the legal gymnastics related to the interstate trafficking of solid waste/ your set up/ siting and going in to business should not be a huge undertaking (small pun there). I'd certainly go for it.

Speaking of undertaking. An individual came to the meeting to bring up the idea of making caskets. This is not a new idea, it's one I've heard numerous times.

Funny though, no one seems to follow it through. It certainly strikes me as something you should check into. As with any business idea. Start by developing the concept. Essentially answer the question, do we have the capacity to do this (labor pool, facility, know how) Then think about the market ... who will I sell these to. If these are positive, you should then move towards capitalizing the program. Al mentioned in his warm-up report that you've got a great resource in Todd Kasten ... He was right ... use him.

Another recurring theme in the listening sessions was **the Sale Barn**. Without any specifics on the operation, it is hard to step with bold answers.

It is somewhat odd, but not a big surprise that many people choose to use facilities far away. It also didn't surprise me that several people cited instances where people actually got a lower price at the Belle Fouche or Miles City market.

That's all part of the rugged individualism of the Montana ranch community.

If what we heard is correct, that is past owners took advantage of local ranchers, (I think you used the term screwed) that is unfortunate.

What it tells me is the new ownership needs to mend fences on more than just the corrals out back.

***My take is that a few key customers providing testimonials, a lot of honest, frank discussion with those who choose to go elsewhere and a very transparent operation*** (one where everything is on the table) is needed.

The nuts and bolts seems to be this. If a rancher can get the same price for his cattle at the home market, why put in the additional time and transportation cost?

At the same time, the market needs to be seen as a conveyor of service, not a competitive speculator who takes advantage of the remoteness of the market. It will take a team effort to make this work. Again talk to Tod Kasten who also raises cattle!!!

You can't speak about economic diversification without dealing with the place that most of the communities money revolves ... the downtown. It appeared to us that you have a good mix of stores, offering good variety on at least the essentials. I'm always surprised when people expect that the local clothing store is going to carry the same lines and quantities as Nordstrom's.

One of the great values of places like Baker is that you don't have to deal with the quantity of people that a Nordstrom's size town will have. But this also represents part of the price of living there also.

You are just not going to get the same selection and pricing. It's pretty basic economics.

**The thing you do have to be very cognizant of is that if you go somewhere else to buy clothing, you are not compelled to fill your car with groceries, hardware and everything else. Yet we all do it.**

One of the most pleasant surprises of the week came from your high school students. It related to their perception of the local businesses. The paraphrased comment was, *"They (the*

*local businesses) really support us even though we don't always support them."* I was particularly pleased to hear this as there is a widespread belief that the local businesses "don't feel the effect of the Walmart's and such. I mean my few dollars aren't a big deal ... they won't miss them."

As indicated earlier, there are two messages the retail community needs to send ... **one is that Baker is a close getaway for nearby communities with great stores, restaurants and people.** The other is a strong message within the local customer base as to their commitment to serve. Wouldn't it be great to have all Baker residents look at the retail community through the same eyes as that High School group! One remark made in a session was there were no toys for birthdays or Christmas so that individual had to go to Miles City to shop. When Al and I went in to the Drugstore to place a thank you on the Cable TV, we happened to look around the store ... they've got a ton of toys.

Residents of Baker ... before you make statements such as prices are too high, selection is poor or that something is unavailable, **be sure you check it first!!!** We heard repeated **claims** from the various groups that contradicted each other 180 degrees. (Example: poor grocery store versus great grocery store)  
Read the notes from the sessions ... they are there.

**A basic tenet to living in small rural communities is that**

**you must support those around you.**

If you appreciate that the local convenience store is open at 10:00 p.m. for that gallon of milk or other essential item (that you likely forgot on your trip to Miles City), perhaps you should consider buying gas from them (even if it is higher) to keep them open.

Lots of Montana towns are losing that ability to keep even the basic services, simply for the above stated reason.

We look to save a couple of bucks on a few items in by shopping elsewhere. That loss of revenue is critical to businesses that are likely already cash poor.

It works on a larger scale too ... look at Montgomery Wards, Sears and such.

We lost brand allegiance and drifted to the big box retailers. As a result we pay less, get lower quality (in many cases) and have lost the level of follow up service that we came to expect.

Then we sit and wonder why these icons have phased down or quit business all together.

I sometimes wonder if a lot of the problems in rural communities are more a matter of jealousy. Nobody wants anyone else to make a buck. I asked this question in one of the groups and got a resounding **YES.**

Perhaps everyone in town needs to truly look at their motivation for shopping elsewhere. ***If the locals don't have it ... perhaps they can get it. Ask!***

## Habitation

Nearly every group spoke of housing problem. Many spoke to

the abandoned and disheveled ones, and many to the fact that there isn't any housing available.

Both concerns represent major threats to the future of your community from an economic development standpoint.

Obviously, business recruitment will be difficult if the company can not find suitable housing for themselves and their employees.

We heard in several sessions that the new teachers could not find places to live.

One oilfield service company felt lack of housing was a big detraction to their recruitment of a highly sought after employee.

The run down condition of homes is indicative of a community in decline.

It's kind of like a billboard announcing that property owners don't care enough for the homes they own to even keep them habitable.

It might seem like a funny place to start your effort, but actually, the community clean-up and the appearance of residential neighborhoods becomes huge boosts to an economic development program.

I can cite several community situations which testify to the fact that this a critical part of the economic development puzzle.

I'd like to look at the housing problem in three arenas, rentals, rehabs and new construction.

Rental housing is almost always a concern in communities where the labor force is transient. We heard that a number of the renters are the oilfield workers who spend 6-12 months here then move on.

Naturally, with no long term connection to the community, the care and appeal of the unit is of small concern. Wear and tear, plus the hassle of screening new tenants is a big burden on landlords.

In many cases, it may be simpler to not rent at all.

As a landlord myself, I know well the problems associated with short term leases.

Perhaps this is part of the reason for 28 uninhabitable properties in town.

The community of Laurel was experiencing this same concern. A similar problem was cropping up for the employees of Montana Rail Link. Because the entry level employment on the Railroad is pretty transitional, a number of landlords in the community were only allowing multi-year leases on their properties. As a result, *MRL made arrangement with several rental units (and motels) to secure space for employees.*

Oilfield companies may want to consider this as an option. It may increase their ability to draw employees and at the same time keep the properties up.

A lot of discussion was centered on restoring the Baker Hotel for rental housing (among other things). This would represent a place that could work well for short term housing.

Although, we did not physically go in the building, my initial assessment would be that it would be an expensive proposition.

As rental properties must meet basic codes, you would pretty much need to overhaul the facility.

You could perhaps look at developing apartments using something like the old Farmers Home 515 program. This would allow you to rehab the structure to

make low income rental (actually the rents are based on income).

The best place to start is with a discussion with the USDA Rural Development office. Unfortunately, your closest office is in Billings. Your contact there would be Kathy Kaufman at 657-6927 ext. 4. Kathy is a great resource.

The Baker Hotel seems to hold some really strong emotional ties to the community.

I've had experience with a number of similar projects where the *real affordability of a project is never a consideration*. As I know nothing of the attempts made to renovate the hotel, I will not pass judgement other than to say, *if you have not done a estimated cost and attempted to calculate the effective rental income from the property*, you shouldn't even be talking about it.

I think William Buckley once said *"Idealism, as it approaches reality, becomes cost prohibitive."* Yes, there are great old buildings out there that need attention, and indeed, there is a need to preserve some history. *The question is ... at who's expense?* I would hate to see the community tie up a bunch of resources on a project that is not self-sustaining. You have too many other opportunities.

Abandoned or substandard housing was the second concern. I've discussed what to do with the structures deemed a public nuisance. Those that have hope for renovation become another project angle. The State Department of Commerce has programs to assist in the rehab of older structures for low-income housing. So does USDA Rural Development. It would be advisable that the Town seek funding assistance to demolish the structures no longer habitable.

Based on the information provided earlier, you have the tools available to clean these up as public nuisances. You also have the legal basis to seize these properties for delinquent taxes. Cleaning up these sites will do two things, clean up the town and provide building lots. The best route for rehab or clean-up dollars is the HOME program. This funding source is again tied to low income so you will need to work through a needs assessment and attempt to service a specific section of town. The Home program contact is: Connie Onstad at 444-0092.

You might want to check the Montana Dept. of Commerce website also at [www.discoveringmontana.com](http://www.discoveringmontana.com)

Each year, the department travels the state giving program updates and project guidance. Get that schedule and try to attend. I believe the session has already occurred this year. Most housing program grants are due in the fall of the year. As with the rental housing, contact Kathy Kaufman at USDA Rural Development for leads on rehab bucks.

The community of Ekalaka is currently working through a rehab program. Julie Jones of Double-Tree Consulting is administering that project. I would suggest that you call Julie and ask her to stop in and give you an opinion on your project. She can be reached at 662-3438. They are a great resource for this type of project.

I can't help but believe that if the "look" of the town improved that you would start seeing more home improvement activity and also new construction.

One phenomenon that I hear of is called **negative equity**.

Because of the depressed housing market, basically a function of depopulation, your housing supply has drastically lowered prices.

**Essentially, a newly constructed home appraises for less than the cost of building the home.** That makes it very hard for lenders to cut deals, especially for persons who are not certain their tenure in Baker will be 10 years or longer.

There is no easy solution to this concern. Since home purchase is one of the most important decisions in many people's life, advising someone to purchase an asset that will not appreciate in value is bad practice.

Essentially, the new home market is **limited to those who know that they will live there for many, many years, and that appreciation of the value of the property is not a big issue.** That thins out the client pool pretty fast.

This is easily witnessed by the lack of new homes in the development across from the golf course and in several other subdivisions that were pointed out.

If new home construction is really a desirable goal, I'd take a serious look at modular homes on foundations. These will allow you to secure reasonably priced housing relatively easily. One concern I heard expressed often is the lack of plumbers, electricians and similar skilled tradesmen.

If this is the case, new construction (stick built) will be extremely expensive as it appears the opportunity cost (what they are losing by doing these jobs rather than oilfield) is high for these contractors.

There are a few modular home manufacturers that will

package multiple units at great prices. Interested developers should give me a call. I can point these dealers out to you.

**As I indicated before, the clean-up will do a lot to improve the value of existing housing stock.** As it would appear that oil is coming back somewhat from the activity witnessed in the area and recent Arab and Iraqi actions, your housing demand should be on the upswing.

First time homebuyers should pay attention to the **down payment and closing cost assistance available** through the Eastern Plains RC&D.

Eligible borrowers can take out a loan for up to \$5,000 in down payment and closing costs in conjunction with Rural Development and Montana Board of Housing programs.

Persons must be income eligible (under 80% of the median income for the county), be a first time home owner, single parent or handicapped.

Applicants must take a Homebuyer Education Course through the RC&D. Contact Mike Carlson at Eastern Plains RC&D at 433-5024.

### **Closing thoughts:**

I am surprised to be approaching 16 pages of rambling. At the outset, I thought (and you'll probably now agree) that 5 pages would cover it. I'm surprised at the amount yet uncovered. It is my hope that the rest of the team have touched on these topics somewhat.

I have a few brief things I'd really like you to think on that I will try to relay at a later time.

**First, think about joining forces with the counties around you as an economic development district.** I know Mike and Eastern Plains have thought about this and perhaps talked to you about it. You will never know the power of working together with other communities until you really do it. I know this first hand.

Next is don't forget the people who lived there and left. We are working with a business recruitment model called "**Bring E'm Back Home – Families Create Lasting Jobs**". The goal is to look at who left Baker (high school grads, friends etc.) and seek ways to bring them back. At least you don't have to convince them about climate, people etc. It's a great angle and one we rural communities should exploit. Besides about two thirds of our taxes go to educate kids, and they scatter to the wind like seeds. Perhaps its time to harvest a few of those seeds. Al Jones has some great ideas on this. Just for fun, find out who still gets the local paper from out of state. Do you suppose those people have a bit more than a

passing interest in what's going on? Likely so.

Last but not least, a few weeks after I got back, I received a copy of an assessment done for Baker about ten years ago. Many of the items discussed herein and through the week were discussed back then.

**Please don't lose track of the fact you did this.** The notes from the sessions, the enthusiasm you showed and your great hospitality can not be left on a shelf. As I stated in the beginning, prioritize as a community and go for it. If you don't, ten years from now someone will initiate a similar effort.

**I greatly appreciated your hospitality, the receptiveness of your community to this process and finally your patience in waiting for this report. It is my sincere hope that you can glean great things from the process you as a community have initiated. I'm sure my fellow teammates will agree:**

***Baker has a lot more going for it , than against it.***

Thanks Again!!

## Al Jones' points (don't blame the rest of the team for these.)

[Aljonesrdo@attbi.com](mailto:Aljonesrdo@attbi.com) 406-655-1696 (Billings-based, serving the 10 counties of South Central Montana for the Montana Dept. of Commerce Business Resources Division.) The opinions, judgements, and experiences (many) here are my own and do not necessarily reflect official views for my Dept. or the State or the rest of the team.

## I. Preparation

**B**aker has a surprising number and caliber of resources already present and available to it. Your MT Dept. of Commerce Regional Development Officer Tod Kasten 406-485-3374 is the most efficient way to find the specific resource(s) for questions, projects, etc. and he continually discovers new resources on often a daily (or hourly) basis. Mike Carlson at the Eastern Plains RC&D, Erin Lutts at the telephone cooperative (and a child of Baker), another child of Baker, Randy Hanson, a Commerce RDO like Tod and myself, always keeps Baker in mind for resources he runs across and he reads the Fallon County Times weekly to keep up. MSU Extension Service has the largest network of technical assistance providers in the state with 60+ staffers and a \$10 million budget so tap their network of expertise.

Building higher levels of community involvement in the many things that need doing in Baker is obviously important. All of America is struggling with community involvement shortfalls because people are participating and volunteering at levels not seen since the Great Depression and at roughly half the rate they did in the early 1960's!

While most groups have blamed themselves, their methods, their goals, their appeal, etc. and there is

certainly some merit in self-criticism and revitalization, the primary factors that Harvard social capital researcher **Robert Putnam** identified in his very useful book "*Bowling Alone*" © 2000:

- ◆ Commuting distance and time spent driving.
- ◆ Television, particularly cable television and VCR's allowing entertainment without contacting other people like card-playing, chatting with a neighbor, having friends over for dinner, etc.
- ◆ Longer working hours as Americans work more hours per week (5-8 more hours per week which knocks out a lot of meeting time)
- ◆ More women in the workforce which eliminates the traditional pool of underemployed talent that most community efforts rested on
- ◆ More passive lifestyle with participation in all forms of sports and active efforts declining while viewing sports, watching tv, staying home, etc. grew.
- ◆ Rise of impersonal fast-food, chains, and drive-through dining while neighborhood cafes and bars where one might be well known and likely to engage in conversation with other patrons have shrunk by two-thirds.
- ◆ Rise of paid community staff and professional standards often now expected of volunteers has turned concerned people into donors by mail more than hands-on doers and vigorous members.

Puttnam doesn't address it but I'd suspect divorce has been a major impact as well since spouses divorce now rather than just find lots of outside activities to minimize time spent with each other.

Another factor has been the rise of pseudo-professionals in many areas of traditional volunteer activity, particularly education. By delivering strings of jargon in a condescending way and suggesting that anyone but a trained professional creates enormous legal liabilities through any actions, volunteers are demeaned, intimidated, dazed, and quietly retreat away. If many of these professionals had sound wisdom instead of only the veneer, they could make good use of volunteers and train them quickly to effectiveness.

I think the conversion of parents from PTA members driving their schools to improve into endless chauffeuring of their kids to soccer games, athletic lessons and competitions, and the endless profusion of other youth programs means the parents' limited time and energy for improving their community gets drained away to keep their children constantly entertained (since the kids were physically healthier, thinner, and more active BEFORE they had this extensive range of athletic and training options, it doesn't suggest adult-organized/staffed soccer leagues, little leagues, little-guy football, tae-kwon-do, etc. is really the answer.)

Repeatedly the comment came up in Baker about how much time, energy, and treasure the community pours into keeping its children busy, active, entertained, and stimulated while at the same lacks those same inputs for engaging the town's adults and addressing the many areas of

common concern. (Probably a small contributing factor to the kids love it in Baker but move when they're an adult and this intense range of services fades away from meeting their needs/wants/boredom.)

It struck me later that Baker does so much in terms of services, facilities, investment, and energy in taking care of kids and senior citizens that ***it makes a great place for them and a tough place for people age 18-64, or as I like to call them, adults.*** This investment in the beginning and the end of the human lifecycle, all funded and operated by the middle of the life cycle means that many of the needs of local adults aren't being met.

That's probably the underlying reason for: **Outmigration by adults.**

A. In-migration only to take a specific job, i.e. the oilfields, hospital, teaching, etc. rather than moving there and then looking for a job or starting a business.

B. Kids moving away upon graduation as they realize ***being an adult in Baker has a lot of responsibilities and expectations without having the lavish resources attached the kids have become used to receiving from the community.*** In other words, they're spoiled and bored and looking for someplace to continue that comfy, exciting treatment. That's impossible to compete with so the problem lies in setting unrealistic expectations.

Part of the slow solution to retaining youth would be shifting youth investment away from games, sports, recreation, and entertainment and into work experience, skills training, business and consumer education, part-time jobs both paid

and volunteer. **In other words, giving the Vo-Ag and Business Ed. Teachers the same status and resources as the sports coaches and diverting the limited community funds into more investment and less entertainment/recreation.** The sacrifice in weeks worth of instruction that student athletes give up in Baker to make the travel schedules is an unconscionable shortchanging of their last free education. Dropping to a Class C ranking to shorten travel distances and reduce a \$60K+ travel budget would be a prudent first step in the best interest of kids, parents, the school's resources, and the town. The fans that don't want to give up those games simply reveal their own priorities for entertainment, not their school or community "spirit".

When you invest most of your time and energy into diversion instead of building, you get collapse, decay, and endless whining because the appetite for entertainment is never sated. It's a lesson from the collapse of Roman civilization.

C. The shortage of skilled workers, building trades-people, long-term employees, and entrepreneurs are all reflections of the resources available to adults in Baker. The comparatively good wages and long, exhausting hours of the oilfield also depress this other diversification.

This unmet need is reflected in the poor condition of many buildings and **subtly cuts into the economic vitality of the community in many ways** (jobs, external dollars coming in through mortgages and home improvement loans, property values, purchases of hardware/building materials/landscaping, ability of the elderly to live

independently, ability of landlords to keep up rentals, expanding the scale/selection and buying power of local vendors, and diversifying the economy.)

Viewing Baker as a place where you work for awhile and then move on. That's devastating in getting people to invest in homes, improve and remodel homes, volunteer in the community, build long friendships and roots, etc. . This was raised as an issue in many sessions and I think cuts to some of the heart of the matter. **Making new adults feel welcome in town and aggressively getting them involved in a local church, local clubs, and local projects so they start making non-work-related friends, learn the community, and become a part of Baker rather than just an anonymous, temporary consumer of Baker's services.**

D. Baker's medical and housing resources benefit to an outstanding degree its senior citizens. This lure means more seniors will move there making the overall Baker population increasing older which impacts most of the long-term investments in a community (schools, roads, buildings, etc.)

Many seniors don't expect to reap the benefits of such long-term community investments and are trying to conserve what spending power they have. That'll hurt you.

In other words it focuses a community gradually on living on its accumulated capital rather than investing to build more, a recipe for stagnation and deterioration.

One variation on this would be actively recruiting new residents who are between 50-70, the still vigorous and active folks who are just retiring and looking for simpler, less stressful places to live in their own homes.

These folks consume a lot of consumer services, creating typically 1 job for every retiree who moves here. By going after the younger ones, you'll add new ideas, new energy, and new customers to the community.

An interesting and worrisome finding of Robert Puttnam's was that this age group still volunteers at the 1960's levels. This has hidden just how little community involvement is displayed by the succeeding generations of adults with the ones in their 20's participating at half or less of the rate that their grandparents do.

**I**nvesting most of Baker's resources in people who will leave in a few years, either to college or Heaven, seems like a dangerous investment strategy. Balancing this to address more to the problems and opportunities of both adults and businesses is the only way to truly expand Baker's economic and social pie.

In farmer words, feed the mules, the chickens, and the pigs well too, instead of just feeding the young racehorses and the old dogs, since it's the plowing, eggs, and ham that keep you going while you usually lose money at the horse races and you just get love and fleas from an old dog.

## II. Beautification

Like most Montana communities, our desire for independence and general quirkiness makes for some wildly varying ideas about appropriate uses of private property.

Many folks brought up their despair at how junky and abandoned 3 of the 4 entrances to Baker are, setting an image of a slum or budding ghost town. The abandoned houses that have sat decaying for 20 years were another problem brought up by many.

These problems are not unique to Baker and this is what we've been doing elsewhere:

**R**ecognize that at some point these properties pass from a personal choice to a public hazard. By treating them as a public hazard instead of a nuisance, we realize the tools available for doing more than suffering them and hoping the owner will do something about them.

- A. Have the state fire marshal inspect and condemn them as fire hazards. These sorts of buildings are the most common starting points for structure fires and are demonstrably a danger to the surrounding structures and residents (as well as Baker's volunteer firemen.) A deputy fire marshal Sally McKenna is based in Billings. 406-444-2050
- B. Have the buildings **condemned as unsafe for occupancy by the state building codes inspector** based in Billings, Don Agan 406-248-2488 These buildings likely have collapsing roofs/ceilings/floors, broken glass, lead-based paint, asbestos issues, lead water service pipes, faulty wiring, no heating, etc. A problem beyond transients moving into them, renting them to desperate folks like migrant farm workers or teenagers, and such is that children are often attracted to play in these dangerous structures so the more of them you have, the more likely an eventual serious injury or tragedy is.

- C. Have the building **condemned for vermin, occupancy without plumbing, etc. by the County Sanitarian**. These are natural breeding grounds for rats, hantavirus carrying mice, feral cats, rabies-prone small mammals, snakes, black widow spiders, etc. and so do pose a real hazard particularly to children playing in the area, since children are generally interested in abandoned and empty buildings, especially “forbidden” places to play.
- D. **The buildings that haven’t paid property taxes for 10-20 years** should be seized for back taxes by the County rather than hoping someday someone will pay on these wrecks. The County Assessor or Clerk should be able to generate readily a list of long-delinquent, say more than 2 years, properties and the County Attorney could start the process.
- E. Pass county standards as Yellowstone County recently has with it’s **“Community Decay” ordinance**. , call Nicole Cromwell who implements it in the field to find out more (406-247-8662) This has allowed addressing places full of junked cars, full of neglected pets and livestock, stinking problems, etc.
- F. The business at the entrance to town with the scattered rusting vehicles and equipment along the hillside should qualify as a “wrecking or salvage yard” by state statute (it only takes a few dead vehicles on site to qualify) which means they’re required to put up an opaque fence around the site. By enforcing this with a timetable and penalties, this will either get fenced or cleaned up.
- G. Consider a substantial fee for service levy on the abandoned buildings (or other unsafe but occupied structures) to reflect that the cost and risk of providing services like firefighting are

considerably greater than the decrepit property pays in property taxes because the owner has allowed the property’s value to deteriorate so greatly.

**They really get a free or near-free ride for public services while reducing the property values/tax base of surrounding buildings so this ignoring of the problem indirectly subsidizes slumlords, absentee owners, and those grossly inconsiderate of others.**

My point is to use not just one of these, but all of them on the same properties as close to simultaneously as possible. That forces the owner to fix it, sell it, or formally abandon it to the local government. A piecemeal approach to enforcement can be delayed for years by a cagy landowner with *“I can’t get any bids, I don’t have the money now, I can’t get a contractor here for months, I’m waiting for something, You’ll hear from my attorney, I want a lot of meetings about this, etc.”*

You’ll want to develop these strategies with the County Attorney, City Attorney, and perhaps in consultation with the MT Dept. of Commerce in-house counsel (we have housing under us) so you have a clean, solid legal footing throughout the process (otherwise it’s easy for a local government to selectively enforce ordinances and lose badly in subsequent lawsuits.)

Have the county or city attorney call Rich Weddle, the inhouse counsel for the Montana Dept. of Commerce’s Housing Division in Helena. Relevant sections of the Montana Codes Annotated that give legal means to resolve these buildings’ include under the headings **“Community Decay, Urban Renewal, and Public Nuisance”** (these are the

search words to use on MCA's CD which the county attorney will have.)  
MCA 7-1-111-112  
MCA 7-1-114 Title 70:30

These folks have let these buildings go to hell for decades so it will take a considerable pressure of "fix it or lose it with in 180 days" and they will be masters at all sorts of reasons why it's inconvenient, too expensive, and too soon to do anything, even on the many houses vacant for 20 years now. One of the legal remedies in the Montana Codes has a much tighter timeline and both cash and jail-time penalties for not getting the place repaired or removed.

Once some of these structures have legally passed to the city or county government, some might be repairable with a significant investment in labor, trades labor, and materials. The shortage of building trades-people and distance to find a wide selection of building materials and hardware suggests the rehab. may well take forever and being next to a years-long construction project is only slightly more desirable than being next to an abandoned building.

I suspect the most realistic approach would be to have the buildings destroyed and the holes filled with spare good soil from the county landfill.

A. Several of the buildings could be burned down as part of carefully controlled firefighter training exercises. This could be done as a joint exercise with Ekalaka's, Wibaux's, and even Miles City's fire department as everyone needs these realistic trainings and since they involve destroying a building, they are rare opportunities.

B. Involving youth and volunteers to tear down a house is much easier than building one and with good organization and some heavy County road equipment, you could probably remove a whole one on a summer Saturday (sort of a reverse community barn-raising). There may be some value to the salvaged lumber, old bricks, and old fixtures/architectural details, especially with transportation costs to Baker

C. A competition could be held between different groups for fastest "*deestructionatin' of a detestable structure*" with a parade down Main Street of the winning team riding the county garbage trucks as the prize. I think this would prove surprisingly popular and raise spirits as old eyesores disappeared quickly. The county could dump grass seed on the resulting empty lot and a neighbor would have to agree to keep it watered and mowed, so it didn't become a weed-infested patch of litter as in-town empty lots often become.

D. The city would then allow high quality modular homes on the lots and perhaps trade the lots to recruit key service providers to Baker, i.e. new teachers, physicians, policemen, nurses, physical therapists, etc.

### **Other Beautification issues:**

1. **The Lake.** Obviously lakes look better if they're surrounded by trees (since lack of plant life suggests bad water) and it would change the site lines. The water salinity and soils suggest trees can be problematic. My thought would be to research trees that do grow in high saline environments, i.e. seacoasts, islands, beaches, to

find appropriate species from Maine, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Norway, Sweden, Russia, etc. for planting. Ideally these would be coniferous evergreens as they both thrive on poor soils and they'd enhance the view of the lake year'round (i.e. winter skating).

To overcome the soils, I'd look at using the empty backhaul capacity of county garbage trucks to haul it's resulting compost and soil to the lake's rim to build up large berms of good soil 20' or more back from the lake's edge. These berms could then sustain the trees in their early years of growth. Ideally planting halophytes, highly salt-tolerant plants around the berms, like the salt-brush that the Australians have been experimenting with, could remove some of the salt accumulation from the soil and give the trees a chance.

See: *K.K. Tanji's "Agricultural Salinity Assessment & Management" 1990 American Society of Civil Engineers* and *F. Ghassemi "Salinisation of Land & Water Resources" 1995 University of New South Wales (Aus.)* press for far more expert ideas that would also have some fresh approaches to dealing with the prevalent saline water. The salt-brush is a high-yield livestock forage that might be particularly helpful to area ranchers.

Adding mountains to the area as was requested by some would be a nice addition but our suggestions on that one would revolve around either substantial prayer, a wildly more ambitious solid-waste importing plan than discussed, or a real challenge for theatre stage prop builders (since technically it only has to look like mountains, not actually function as mountains.)

Given the relatively high water tables, moderate temperature, decent rainfall, and rolling countryside, an aggressive "plant trees everywhere" focused on species likely to thrive in these soils and salinity would have a tremendous 10-30 year impact on the perceived beauty and allure of the area.

I'd wonder with the amount of quality soil/compost available from the landfill, the climate, and number of senior citizens around if the town might want to put together elaborate, raised bed flower gardens on city/county land scattered around the town with their set-up and maintenance a joint project between City Parks, County Landfill, County Extension, and the Senior Citizens. It would do a surprising amount of good to the look of the community as well as building multi-generational friendships.

### III. Destination

**There are 3 levels of making Baker more of a destination for people to travel here:**

1. A day shopping trip from the surrounding area. Instead of worrying about keeping local shoppers here, draw from a radius yourselves by emphasizing the lake recreation, the golf course, the playgrounds, the excellent restaurants, and the convenient cluster of shopping on Main. Many shopping trips are for the variety and the meal, in other words entertainment instead of bargain-hunting.

This could be done with permanent painted wood signs

placed on private land near highways, particularly near the turn-offs from I-94. You could also do this more creative by building goofy sculptures (incorporating signs) pointing towards Baker, i.e. a dinosaur, a Baker Lake monster, a canoe, a windsurfer, a swimmer, etc.

Part of it is packaging and running joint ads occasionally in nearby communities' papers for special events or simply dinner and golf packages at Baker.

2. **Weekend/short trips by families within a 3-5 hour drive of Baker.** Family vacations are getting shorter and more frequent. Baker has enough stuff to make for a nice full day, two with water recreation or golf or hunting/fishing. Making sure it's easy to find out about a bundled, sample day or two (instead of relying on people to figure out an itinerary themselves and then notice, gosh there's a lot to see in Baker-Ekalaka.

Running small, quarter-page ads to this effect in the Custer Country and Northeastern tourism annual guides (Tod Kasten will know who handles that to the North) and the North Dakota and South Dakota equivalent would be a productive start with highway signage also being key.

You can also put together a bundled package with good explanations and then arrange with a radio station in Bismarck, Billings, Rapid City, Dickinson, Miles City, Gillette, etc. to give that package away as part of an extended promotion. Creating it as a contest prize is one of the ways you get people talking, thinking, and planning about a destination (Hawaii has used this the most successfully since actually there are lots of islands in the Pacific and Caribbean that cater to tourists.)

For several thousand dollars (might be a good use of bed-tax dollars) Baker could arrange for the morning disc jockeys at a strong radio station in Miles City or

Dickenson to come **do a live remote broadcast from lakeside** on a hot summer day (and throw a station-sponsored beach party at Lake Baker with swimsuit contests, frisbee contests, volleyball playoffs, shark imitations, twist contests, windsurfing demos, and show a Frankie & Annette '60's beach movie in the new amphitheater that evening.)

For that matter you could do the same thing during Spring Break with a strong rock station out of Miles City or Dickenson by staging an MTV-Florida-style Spring Break party at Lake Baker for teens and young adults. This ideally could develop into a several day party that drew people from several hundred miles and could be an exciting mix of beach and blankets activities depending on what the weather was doing that day. Bringing out portable propane patio heaters, bonfires, big tents, etc. could make cool weather pretty bearable out there.

**3. National Tourism** is a much bigger hurdle, particularly since Baker's location suggests arrival by personal vehicle rather than any other means. This takes significant build-up in promotion over many years to get it stuck in people's minds as a destination.

#### **Basic Steps:**

1. Work with a freelance travel writer to prepare articles about Baker's attractions to appropriate magazines and newspapers. Travel Montana's and your Bed Tax Tourism Region coordinator can help with that. Examples might be Sunset, Montana, Big Sky Journal, Montana Living, Cowboys & Indians, RV Living, etc.. These can be about the Medicine Rocks, the dinosaurs, the water recreation in the

drought-stricken plains, the fishing, the hunting, etc.. Save the stories on my proposed Baker Lake Monster for the National Enquirer, Weekly World News, The Globe, and area newspapers.

2. Tie to existing tourist flows going past you with the idea of diverting them to your area for a day by advertising on their route and in their publications. An obvious example that comes to mind is Sturges, S.D.'s influx of middle-aged bikers, another is Black Hills visitors, Little Big Horn Battlefield visitors, etc.
3. Create packages that travel agents can sell:
  - ❖ Guided fishing trips & B&B stays.
  - ❖ Guided hunting trips, stay at local ranchhouses.
  - ❖ Dinosaur fossil-hunts on private land
  - ❖ Workshop on plains tribe vision quests at Medicine Rocks along with a trip to the Medicine Wheel, Bear Butte in the Black Hills, Devil's Tower, etc.

## Really, really proactive tourism development strategies for Baker

### Lake Baker Monster or Cryptozoological Tourism

Many deep old lakes around the world have something big and mysterious swimming in them, ranging from freshwater sturgeon to unknown species, i.e. Loch Ness, Lake Champlaigne, Flathead Lake, etc.. Many Indian tales in this region refer to several varieties of large, unknown underwater creatures that made river crossings very

hazardous. There's definitely unexplained events seen by many eyewitnesses many times and at times when media-hoaxes were centuries away.

My thought is to create a media hoax very openly and very, very much as a running joke. By building a decent but not overly convincing floating pleisiosaur that floats, moves, and makes noise in the lake, you make a natural series of press releases, lake parties, and merchandising opportunities. I'm thinking the fellow from the airport who rebuilds Piper Cubs could design the thing and figure out its structure with the help of other area machinists, plumbers, tinkerers and shade tree mechanics (Think Tim Allen in "Home Improvement" rather than Disney animatronics.) By using a jet-ski motor for the propulsion system, a radio-frequency remote control for toy cars/planes, a car stereo speaker & walkman with CD's of local guys' snoring (leading to a "Guess who the monster ate this week" lakeside contest based on guessing the snorer's identity), and perhaps red PAR bulbs inside the eyeholes to give it a baleful, angry look.

Along with providing shaky, home video camera footage of the Lake Baker Monster to regional Television News Crews,

Sample earnest testimony from oil field geologists or county planners:

*"With Lake Baker as much as 14 feet deep, there's just no telling what sorta huge, horrible creature can lurk in it, undetected by man until last week!"*

*"I think the new well we drilled nearby may have unleashed a prehistoric creature trapped in a cavern for eons, you know, kinda like Godzilla!"*

This can firmly establish in the surrounding region's mind that Baker has a lake and dinosaur fossils in the area (and a pretty good sense of tomfoolery.) This would be through press releases with a video clip sent to the TV news stations in Bismarck, Dickinson, Gillette, Billings, Great Falls, Minot, Rapid City, Casper, Sioux Falls, Fargo, and Minneapolis. This would make entertaining filler on the Saturday or Sunday night news or a light final story on a weekday. You could probably have some fun with this story on the Web too. Sending out some grainy black and white photos "snapped by an alert passerby" of the Lake Baker Monster floating in the lake while panicked children run away would make a nice submission to the regional newspapers as filler (possibly front page for the National Enquirer.) that would again very inexpensively promote water recreation and a sense of curiosity about Baker. Folks (especially teens and young adults) are goofy enough that more will want to swim in the lake if they think there just might be a monster in it than if they think it's completely safe and dull.

You could offer Lake Baker Monster search expeditions, (*paddleboat or rubber raft rental along with lifejackets, binoculars, flashlight, disposable camera, and a Popiel pocket fisherman*) or just sell windbreakers and sweatshirts emblazoned with "*Lake Baker Monster Search & Rescue Team*" "*Lake Baker Monster Cryptozoological Expedition #38 Survivor*" "*Lake Baker Monster Ice-Fishing Team Survivor*" etc. which would help pay for upgrading the lake's lavatories and facilities.

This would be the cheapest and funniest way for the town to put itself on the tourism map.

According to this week's *Weekly World News* at supermarket checkout stands everywhere, Donald Trump has apparently purchased the Loch Ness Monster, presumably to house it at one of his Atlantic City casinos. Now I'm curious who sold him the monster, same guy who sells the Brooklyn Bridge? Say, maybe the town could periodically sell or auction off the Baker Lake Monster's offspring (buyer has to catch them himself) as a silly fundraiser.

This leaves the high-profile lake monster tourism niche really wide open for Baker to seize upon.

## Medicine Rocks State Park

This is tricky in that if you emphasize this as a spiritual place (sorta like "Hey wanna tour my old neighbors' cathedral?") you run the very real risk of having various tribes declaring (through litigation and the media) that you're despoiling a sacred site. Since most of the other "sacred sites" in the region are ones made by previous, long-gone tribes for one purpose and then discovered by a later tribe who chalked it up to a sacred mystery and later descendants who decide that since their ancestors have been wondering about the site for several generations, it must be a historic sacred site of theirs. Given that the Sioux only took the Black Hills away from the Cheyenne in the 1800's who had taken it away from the Kiowa/Apache a century or two earlier, or the protestations over the medicine wheel probably built by Ute-Aztecs but now claimed by unrelated, far newer arrivals who didn't leave a trail of medicine wheels from Northern Canada to Mexico like the Ute-Apaches did. It's like a Dutchman moving to

Ireland and then claiming a medieval abbey there is his sacred site because he knows it's important, but never found the brochure explaining it.

To figure out which tribes have left material remains in the area, a quick reference would be Karl H. Schlesier's "Plains Indians A.D. 500-1500" U of Oklahoma Press as he and his contributing authors address the specific region and the many tribes passing in and out.

Realistically all the tribes in the area probably used it occasionally for vision quests, the spiritual transformation/3 day fast for boys becoming adults or occasionally adults seeking additional guidance through hunger/thirst emphasized meditation/dreams/precognition.

As this is in the dangerous border country of historic times between Crow, Cheyenne, Sioux, Arapaho, this site may have been used very little in the past two hundred years due to the risk of being caught there weak and alone. Frequent vision-quest sites are generally in territory firmly controlled by the tribe so its youth and adults are comparatively safe there.

By emphasizing this as a young man's vision quest site, which may or may not be true to any great extent, you could do some inexpensive living history interpretation there with an informative audiocassette tour that included snippets of individual chanting, readings from accounts of the vision-quest experience personally, and a description of the site and the area tribes of the past two thousand plus years. Some useful references would be: *"Mystic Warriors of the Plains"* by Thomas Mails

*"The Crow-Shoshone Sun Dance"*  
by Robert Vogle  
*"Sweet Medicine"* by Peter Powell

So the best course is probably to leave this site relatively alone because of the ensuing mess of bringing it to people's attention through a tourism promotion campaign.

If it was in fact just primarily used for vision quests, very few artifacts (often just a knife, a pouch, a pipe, and a buffalo-bladder canteen) were brought there so archaeological digs would be pretty unproductive, most likely. If however Summer Solstice gatherings (tied to buffalo season, sun dance) were held in that area, the material record could be quite informative. This is a place that would make as much sense for a burials site as many others and has likely been used at least a few times for that as well.

### Old Fossils Hunting Older Fossils Expeditions/ Elderhostel

By tying with the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman and helping arrange dinosaur hunting sites on private lands run by one of Jack Horner's assistants, this could be a very popular 5-10 day working vacation based out of Baker and appealing to both affluent retirees and rich college kids. This would build Baker's reputation for fossils, drawing more serious expeditions, and build a steady tourism flow in packaged, high-end tours.

### Winter and Summer Lake Baker Olympanics

As a tourism builder (and just fun) your recreation director could organize a take-off on the Olympics at Baker, particularly figure skating, speedskating, swimming, etc. but

emphasizing competitors from say 100 mile radius, tongue-in-cheek events, local sponsorships like on Garrison Keillor's Prairie Home Companion, etc. . You'd get some regional media coverage, increased visitation, and really bring out the sheer scale and variety of recreation opportunities in Baker. Just do it with a spirit of fun and broad-based participation so you can draw all ages. I suggest "Olympics" to avoid trademark disputes while also suggesting an entertaining and less serious level of competition. You can probably get a number of entries for America's Funniest Home Videos out of this as well which a win could help fund it. The trick everyone misses on these events is to sell lots of food and beverages as well as t-shirts as that's where the real profits come from and it's easy for service clubs/volunteer organizations to do.

#### "Cost of Driving" Education:

Driving to Walmart in Miles City to save some money is one of those core beliefs that need challenging as it does make it more difficult to sustain local businesses and services.

If you take the American Automobile Association, AAA's annual calculations of the actual total cost per mile to drive a moderate new vehicle, last I heard was 77 cents/mile a few years ago (check AAA's website), 90 miles to MC x 77 cents=**\$69.30 (\$138.60** if you come back too!)

**So to actually save money by shopping in Miles City, you have to save over \$138.60 plus have absolutely no value on your time** (otherwise your time would add at least 3 hrs @ \$8.50/hr. drivetime=\$25.50) so by shopping there **unless you're buying a**

**thousand dollars worth of stuff that trip, you're losing money, not saving money.**

Even for an older vehicle that's completely paid for, there's still wear and tear, tires, insurance, etc. beyond the cost of filling up the tank and too few folks take any of that into account when explaining how they're saving all this money. It also makes even less sense with the higher gasoline prices in Baker and the sales taxes in the adjacent cities.

A permanent sign at each road out of Baker, with AAA's new mileage figures each year, showing the cost of driving to Miles City, Dickinson, Gillette, Billings, and Bismarck would be a good idea.

## IV. Diversification

To pursue an anhydrous ammonia fertilizer plant, using your abundant natural gas, I'd suggest researching it on the Internet first to see what the demand trends nationally were and then talk to:

Helena Chemical  
Jim Gordon,  
Laurel, MT  
406-628-8768

TransBas  
(UAP/ConAgra)  
Dan Lester,  
Lockwood, MT

Cenex/Land O'Lakes  
Probably at their HQ in Minneapolis

All 3 handle ag chemicals and are potential investors, operators, distributors, etc.. To make it competitive from Baker it would probably need to be shipped out by railcar rather than truck. This could be done as an plant

investment by a national ag chemical company or a locally created farmer cooperative but I'm guessing from the scale costs of putting together a small plant, you'll want to pursue the corporate plant route first. Tod Kasten will be a significant resource on that if anyone wants to pursue this idea mentioned several times. It certainly seems worth investigating.

### **Truckstop**

Several folks wrestled with the idea of somehow making Baker's downtown more accessible for hungry truckers to park their rigs and get lunch. As this occasional traffic doesn't merit tearing down existing buildings, the alternative would be to pursue a Flying J, Cenex, or other truck stop to locate on the edge of town. This could be a significant operation employing 10-50 people and offering not only meals, gas, and c-store items but also truck lubes/oil changes, tire service, towing, heavy-duty repair, showers, bunks, etc.. That would bring more trucks through the area which would at least add fresh dollars to local businesses, at least bars and restaraunts, while also possibly reducing freight costs somewhat.

### **Coffin-Manufacturing**

A lot of folks snickered at this but this is the sort of specialty manufacturing that's pretty well independent of location that works for towns. Coffins have high profit mark-ups, relatively few competitors, thousands of independently-owned funeral home clients, predictable demand, lots of opportunity for customization and design enhancements, and very low product liability risk (what's a faulty coffin going to do, kill the user?). Some of the most informative market research on the industry has been

done by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission in its studies of the funeral home industry. Jessica Mitford's book on the funeral home industry, *"The American Way of Death"* would also be helpful for exploring this market. The area's Montana Manufacturing Extension Center Field Engineer, Dale Detrick, 406-256-6875 in Billings, has extensive resources for the woodworking industry and would be the best resource for assessing production, product design, and cost issues.

This is worth exploring and Tod Kasten can be a lot of help on this.

### **Ceramics-Mfg.**

Nobody mentioned this but with the tremendous amount of clay in the area, what about doing something with it? Clay doesn't take much to filter, shape, or bake so. The only inputs are often just water and heat which again your natural gas makes easy.

So you could make: bricks, adobe bricks, bags of clay to sell to schools and hobby potters, commercial quality clay bagged for input in other products, facial masks and cosmetics, roof tiles, paintable ceramic molded items, ceramic floor or wall tiles, porcelain plumbing fixtures, tableware, mixing bowls, amphorae, garden statues, etc.

The web has a lot of good resources and there's a surprising amount written about clays in geology, building materials, and ceramics headings.

Ceramics work takes actually very simple tools and kilns can be bought or built for less than the price of a big screen tv. Some training is probably already provided in high school art classes there.

A master at all sorts of pottery and the builder of several kilns is Dr. Marcia Selsor of the MSU/Billings Art faculty 406-657-2324.

**Baking pretzels, cookies, or other salty stuff** that would benefit from salty water might make sense. By setting up a low-tech stone-milling operation for local wheat and barley, using sugar from Sidney or Billings (or area honey) and safflower oil from Montana Amber in Baker, (the cheap natural gas/electricity and abundant pre-salted water would be other advantages in inputs) it seems like you could make about any baked good there.

As cookies and pretzels travel better than bread and sell for higher profit margins, this would be something local entrepreneurs could do. A company called BME in Roundup (Bakery Machinery Equipment) designs and builds commercial baking/production equipment for companies like Keebler and Ralston-Purina and could easily tell you more about the equipment requirements.

**Brewing “O’Fallon’s Fallin’ Down Lager” the pre-Salted beer** made with real Baker water so no matter how many you drink, you’re still thirsty for more! Baker also has all or most of what’s needed for beer brewing close at hand and perhaps the high salinity of the water could become a sales advantage. Schafer Beer’s most successful ad campaign was “The beer to have when you’re having more than one!” while salty Baker beer would ensure they’d keep drinking, rather than just suggest it.

You do have the fundamentals and more for doing small scale **meat packing** in Baker with a skilled workforce, high quality cattle, local

restaurants that appreciate good beef, etc., but no one seemed particularly interested in meat opportunities.

**Roger Megger’s Piper Cub rebuilding and retrofitting business at the airport** has tremendous potential for Baker given the 50,000 or so Piper Cubs still being flown and badly in need of these updates or rebuilds. This is all fresh dollars into the local economy that will turn over on average 7-9x here (as compared to 2-3x for tourism or ag cash which goes to more finished goods than labor.) James Fallow’s recent book on the emerging potential and recent history of general aviation, “Free Flight” would be of interest on this. Baker could use an Airport Improvement Revenue Bond as a way to fund a larger facility and equipment for Meggers’ to rent and expand in.

**Reviving a farm implement dealership there**, while often mentioned, seems unlikely since the number of customers has shrunk perhaps 80% based on the crop-duster’s experience there under CRP. There have to be enough customers clustered to sustain a business and with dealers in so many surrounding communities, I would expect to see more of those dealers fade away (or be squeezed out by their manufacturers as is often the case) than to see a revival in small implement dealerships.

Finally, as to the **premium prices for gasoline** paid in Baker, we did notice they were about 20 cents higher than Miles City. A service station owner was present at the listening sessions and explained that they pay their bulk distributor in Baker a wholesale purchase price

higher than the retail price in Miles City.

As each of the 3 gas stations in Baker would buy from different bulk distributors, this suggests that one or two bulk distributors are either paying through the nose (perhaps because of cash-flow and interest costs, volume purchase discounts not achieved, excessive transportation costs) or marking it up higher than normal to cover interest costs, high overhead, inefficiencies, higher labor cost, or lifestyle costs.

So the wholesale price is distorted to at least 1 station and the other station's have matched the resulting higher price so at least one of them should be making better than average margins.

Bulk distributors are a quirky lot, mixing sharp and dull business operators almost randomly across the industry (I grew up knowing many of them that were my father's Exxon clients). Business technical assistance from Tod Kasten might solve their inefficiencies or financing issues as it often did. If it's other reasons or ones they refuse to change, the only other way to get fuel prices down is to stimulate a gas-price war which forces stations to become more efficient which is often very inconvenient to them. As this state of affairs puts an unvoted tax or surcharge equal to around \$200,000/yr on Baker residents and especially businesses/farmers (figured on 20 cents a gallon, 90,000 gallons a month between all 3 stations as a rough guess based on other markets.)

A gas price war could most likely be started by pressure from the farmer owners of the Cenex cooperative gas station since customers have the strongest voice there. If they can't start a price war to drop gas prices, then it truly isn't much of an issue of local concern.

## **Business Gaps I noticed**

based on driving around and the listening sessions (so I could well have missed existing businesses doing this:)

1. Home handyman service (handy guy with a pickup and tools who charges \$25-35/hr doing basic home repairs for the elderly, busy people, landlords, and the unhandy.)
2. Basement and foundation repair contractor
3. Small boat, jet ski, windsurf, waterski, snowmobile, dirt bike dealer, preferably lakeside.
4. Small engine repair service
5. Hydraulics repair service
6. Laundromats
7. Pawn shops
8. Coffeehouse (teens love this as do non-drinkers)
9. Video rental store
10. RV Park (for-profit)
11. Mobile home courts
12. Bowling alley
13. Electric motor repair
14. Machine shops
15. Greenhouse/Florist
16. Tire shop (with lots of heavy truck tires)

## **V. Habitation**

My other team members are much more knowledgeable about housing than I am so I'll leave this to them.

Only thoughts I had:

1. Modular housing sounds like the way to get replacement housing here as well as how to expand housing quickly for oil-field service families. Prices range from \$30-150,000. Billings area dealers include Pierce Homes, Big Sky Homes, Centennial Homes, Canadian Homes, and I think a couple more.

Connecting them to area real estate agents would help keep Baker from losing households.

2. Educating oil-field service workers about why they should buy a house in Baker rather than rent or commute could be done in a simple photocopied flyer explaining in examples:

A. The impact of deducting home mortgage interest on personal taxes versus paying rent.

B. The potential equity build up in just a few years on these little mortgages compared to spending it on rent.

C. The cost of commuting each day from the surrounding towns where you know some end up staying.

D. How to talk to their employer about company buy-back programs on houses and list which oil companies already offer these.

It's overwhelmingly in the community's interest to emphasize home ownership rather than rentals as it's the difference between investing in the community's future and just consuming what it offers now.

Homeowners are more active in the community, buy a lot more stuff from local merchants and services instead of the pizza and beer that seem like the extent of

renter expenses (*speaking from my own experience,*) take better care of property than transient renters, and care a lot more about their community as they realize they are paying the taxes and living with the results.

## VI. Restoration

### The Movie Theatre

We toured the theater which was in considerably better condition than many people in the listening sessions thought. It would definitely be considerably cheaper to clean up and repair than to build a new one.

As the projection equipment, seats, walls, ceiling and stage are in good to acceptable condition, repairing a few water damage areas, updating electrical and HVAC systems, repairs to the alley wall, replacement stage curtains, a lot of cleaning and painting, updating the snack counter, some work on the lavatories for ADA and updating, etc. so probably between \$100-200,000 worth of work (depending on what you find and labor costs.)

The ideal approach would seem to be to have the high school rent it on a long term lease-to-own plan (the owner indicated she'd be happy to lease it out and get it going again.) The high school drama instructors would become the theater managers, a common thing at colleges and high schools with their own theaters. Using students, parents, and contractors they could get the place shaped up

It also has enough back stage space and a large enough orchestra pit to accommodate school musicals, school orchestra or band concerts, touring shows, community theater, etc. which would allow it to fill many more roles for the

community than just showing movies.

New things to buy for it: stage curtains, movie screen (that retracts up above the stage), dolby sound system, stage lights and a spotlight, lighting control board for the projectionists booth, popcorn machine, ticket printing system for advance sales, new marquee & exterior signage.

Movies can not only be rented from current first-run distributors like Buena Vista, Fox, Sony/Columbia, etc., but they can also be rented from companies that just handle films 1-80 yrs old like Swank which would allow you to run classics, children's shows, John Wayne festivals, holiday films, etc. at prices where 25-50 tickets covered the rental. (College campuses use this a lot which is where I learned it on the MSU-Billings Student Activities Board Film Committee.)

**Funding the theater project can be done several ways:**

1. Seed money for the rehab. and new equipment can come from:
  - A. Direct contributions from the community and businesses.
  - B. Allocations from city and county budgets as you've shown the ability to fund a lot of recreation already.
  - C. High School budget, especially for the stuff that would allow school performances, music, speech, debate, and drama classes on site, and perhaps graduations. The sports travel budget of \$60K+ seems like a good source as this would benefit more of the community and facilitate student skills for a lifetime.
  - D. An additional mill of property taxes could be voted on to fund this community venture as well as upgrading the lakefront lavatories and recreation facilities. That could

then be dedicated to retiring a small bond issue to cover the construction costs.

**Grants are an unlikely source from either public or private sources as essentially this is a community working to expand its entertainment options. The music teaching and performing arts components might** attract some foundation grant money. The U.S. National Endowment for the Arts might have some funding for performing arts as might the U.S. Dept. of Education as music/drama education facility/services.

The Montana Arts Council in Helena makes some grants that might fit and some of the NEA money passes through it as well:

Cinda Holt  
Montana Arts Council  
Communications Director  
[cholt@montana.com](mailto:cholt@montana.com)  
514 Winters Lane  
Stevensville, MT 59870  
406.777.0090 phone  
406.777.1777 fax

The operation's ticket price, event choices, marketing, etc. all need to be done with the intent of not only covering operating costs, but also growing to cover the theater's replacement and maintenance costs, upgrades, and retire debt.

If the start-up funding all comes externally, it's very tempting to run things underpriced and to too small of audiences as one's just trying to get cash to limp along on and relying on sugar daddies for big expenses like an unrepairable projector.

Examples and resources to contact on theater operations: Harlowton's High School students have revived and been running the

town's movie theater for several years now.

To get costs for theater equipment (new or used) and vendor sources, I'd suggest calling:

- MSU/Billings Communication Arts Dept.-Vicky Tait Coffman or other theater instructors: 657-2178 as well as
- MSU-B Student Activities which brings in live performances Cheryl Grew-Gillen 657-2387
- Billings Studio Theater (local non-profit, local adult actors)
- Alberta Bair Theatre in Billings, a recycled movie theater with 2-3 live performances a week of touring shows. It has a full-time staff and at least 15 years operating experience.

[www.projectorcenter.com/](http://www.projectorcenter.com/) for prices and supplies for 35mm film projectors.

<http://www.16mmfilms.com> has a lot of resources about 16mm & 35mm films and materials

<http://www.reelclassics.com/Buy/films.htm> is a great compilation of contacts for renting the films. Good starting point for figuring out film costs so you can calculate break-even audiences and ticket prices.

<http://www.swank.com/> is the primary one we dealt with in college and has probably the most movies you'd want. I think the theater as run by the school would qualify. This is one where putting together a block of films to rent over a year instead of just onesies and twosies really expands your buying power and would allow you to offer very cheap summer or winter matinee movies, weeknight movies, etc. that were classic comedies, big movies that hold up better in a movie theater

*(Gone With the Wind, Wizard of Oz, Lawrence of Arabia, Red River, Bridge Over the River Kwai, Titanic, Dances With Wolves, Wyatt Earp, Gettysburg, Star Wars, most Spielberg films, most Westerns, Disney animated, etc.)*

### The Baker Hotel

While the ownership of the building remains in limbo, the condition of the building is unknown, and an economic use for it is uncertain, nothing's going to happen there.

An assessment of the building by trade contractors (plumbers, electricians, carpenters, roofers, masonry, sheetrock/ painting, carpentry, etc. will give the most realistic and advanced analysis of what could be done there while Architect & Engineer estimates tend to be considerably more expensive while based on less information and using more obsolete technologies and methods (so exactly opposite of what you'd expect.)

The other half of the question, beyond is this building worth saving and what'll it take, is what can be put in the building that will generate enough positive cash flow to pay for the building, the renovation, ongoing operation, and future repairs. That amount of both up-front and ongoing cash makes directing the building to an external grants-funded basis probably infeasible.

**Possible economic uses for the bldg.** *(if you do it wrong, it's easy to lose money with these options too.)*

1. Convert into a few, 4-6 spacious apartments to rent to either Seniors or oil-field families.
2. Converting it to an assisted living center, privately owned or owned by the hospital, is a popular thing

(popular things scare me because that generally leads to building overcapacity, resulting price wars, and completely ruined business opportunities)

3. Tear out most of the interior walls and make it a large retail store, i.e. furniture & bedding, hardware & parts, Radio Shack, Farm and ranch supplies, family clothing store, Ben Franklin, antique mall, etc. to fill current gaps in retail selection in the region. Your market is too small to draw most chains so the retailer would either be:
  1. A local person
  2. A returning resident
  3. A branch from a store in Miles City, Dickenson, Gillette, etc.
  4. A franchised store like Radio Shack, Ben Franklin, Tru-Value Hardware, etc.

**Arts Complex** is probably more doable than initial thoughts would suggest. Artists are used to pretty run-down and funky space as are art-shoppers so it doesn't require the same standards of renovation that retail or restaurants do. Typically small spaces, i.e. 1-2 rooms are rented to area artists cheaply/monthly as studios and the public can tour the hallways, talk to the artists, buy works they see or commission specific ones. Makes a lively tourist spot as well as a good place for kids to hang out. Might generate the most economic activity as well. Converting the hotel lobby area into an artists' cooperative gallery would be a later step and could feature works from artists who still work at home as well.

**The Montana Arts Council staff would have the best idea of funding sources for this as well.**

Cinda Holt  
Montana Arts Council

Communications Director  
[cholt@montana.com](mailto:cholt@montana.com)  
514 Winters Lane  
Stevensville, MT 59870  
406.777.0090 phone  
406.777.1777 fax

Some quick resources for finding more out about stores is:

[www.chainstoreage.com](http://www.chainstoreage.com)

Entrepreneur magazine's "How-To" kits on many businesses which are stocked at SBA Small Business Information Centers like at the Small Business Development Center in Billings at 222 N.32<sup>nd</sup>. St. downtown about 5 blocks West of the Sheraton Hotel

Entrepreneur magazine's Franchise 500 annual issue (available also through Tod Kasten.)

**"Starting on a Shoestring"** by Arnold Goldstein, a very good book for people thinking about starting a new retail business.

Both Tod Kasten the Commerce Regional Development Officer for the area and the Small Business Development Center Officer based in Colstrip are good resources for this.

**Other Suggested Readings** for those trying to figure out what can be done for this area:  
Go to Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble.com for these  
*"Going Local, building self-reliant local economies"* is full of ideas and resources, I just can't recall the author's name.

*"Cities & the Wealth of Nations"* by Jane Jacobs is a great tool to understanding local and regional economies in a useful fashion.

*“How Buildings Learn”* by Stewart Brand is a great guide to renovation, restoration, reuse, the building process, and just a pleasure to read for anyone who lives in or works in a building.

*“Montana’s Native Plants & Early Peoples”* by Jeff Hart, PhD. is a great little guide to potential products based on local weeds as well as a real enhancement for tourist tours/displays.

*“Agricultural Materials As Renewable Resources, Nonfood and Industrial Applications”* by Glenn Fuller et.al.

*“The Meat We Eat”*  
*“Small Scale Food Processing”*  
*“Any Way You Cut It, meat packing and small town America”*  
*“Fast Food Nation”* by Eric Schlosser will all give you some great insights and tools if you want to do more with your beef or grain. The trick for finding the detailed guides I’ve discovered is go to [www.BarnesandNoble.com](http://www.BarnesandNoble.com) but search under “Textbooks” instead of “books”.

*“The Wealth & Poverty of Nations”* by David Landes  
*“How the West Got Rich”* by Nathan Rosenberg  
*“Guns, Germs, & Steel”* by Jared Diamond  
are all fascinating looks at how economic development has actually worked over the centuries around the world with lots of surprises and relevant insights.

*“Devil’s Bargains”* by Hal Rothman is a history of **how small Western communities made themselves into tourist traps**, i.e. Vail, Aspen, Grand Canyon, Santa Fe, National Parks, etc.. Very useful guide to doing it.