

State of Missoula 2010

Mayor John Engen

The groundhog, I'm told, saw his shadow today. Six more weeks of winter.

Seems like winter's been a long haul this year. Though it was probably lurking in places we didn't look, the great recession arrived in Missoula in late 2009. An iconic paper mill is shuttered, and an iconic department store on the corner of Higgins and Front is selling the last of its wares at 50 to 70 percent off. Everything must go. An open house to give homeless folks a hand serves nearly 400 in a day. One-hundred-fifty hopeful candidates apply for jobs that attracted 10 applicants two years ago. At the City of Missoula, we're accustomed to planning for how we'll do more and do it better, but today we're planning for how we do the same for less. Folks are nervous and looking for answers and maybe a little magic.

As the saying goes, there's no magic, just hard work. And we're doing it. We've hit some bumps, but the State of Missoula remains strong because of our people: all of you, all of us, pulling together to make sure this remarkable place not only survives, but thrives. We're looking forward.

Let's talk about money. You've seen the headlines. Traditional revenues are in the tank, not just in the state of Montana but in the City of Missoula.

So we've been non-traditional. Our staff's been chasing grants and catching our share.

In our Fire Department, a SAFER Act grant brought us \$257,000 to pay firefighters this year, and next year it will bring \$163,000. A U.S. Department of Transportation grant paid \$38,000 for Hazardous Materials Technician training for firefighters. And \$22,000 in federal CDBG money went toward new fire hydrants in the Franklin-to-the-Fort neighborhood. We will use Title III money coming through the county to improve safety by reducing fuels in our wildlands-urban interface to keep fire danger down and forests healthy. And in the coming year, we'll replace firefighters' self-contained breathing apparatus with an Assistance to Firefighters Grant of \$258,400. Fire Act grants are helping us move toward the replacement of our 20-year-old ladder truck, which we need to continue to keep people safe. Ladies and gentlemen, a ladder truck costs \$1 million.

Our Police Department has been creative in finding outside resources as well. A recovery-act Cops Hiring and Retention Program grant of \$1.2 million is funding five officers for three years. A \$575,000 Internet Crimes Against Children grant helped bring new funding and training to western Montana and helped us establish a full-time Internet crimes investigator to protect our children against these crimes.

Our department moves into the coming year with an increased, creative response to the growing problem of drug abuse. By the end of this fiscal year, we'll have received \$2.2 million in grants and appropriations in the past 18 months to help this work. That will have helped pay for a dedicated full-time investigator of illegitimate use of prescription drugs. Our Police Department originated the state

Drug Recognition Expert Program, and we continue to train officers. That work is closely tied to our DUI work.

During this challenging fiscal year, Police Department leadership had to analyze the department's structure and priorities. The department is committed to its highest priority: doing its part to maintain a safe and healthy community. Leadership has identified the key risks to our community as prescription drug abuse (which killed 19 people in Missoula in 2009); DUI (which leads to significant injury and fatalities year after year); youth violence and gang presence; drug trafficking; traffic enforcement; and quality of life issues.

Outside money is helping us be greener, too. A NorthWestern Energy match of \$39,000 helped us install solar power at our Mount Avenue fire station. After months of work, we have secured our \$680,400 in Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant money -- another federal stimulus program – that will allow us to do another phase of our Green Blocks Pilot Project. That will bring energy conservation measures to 300 Missoula homes, free of charge, and, we hope, to a commercial block downtown – the pilot project treated 93 homes in 2008. This new money will also help set up a revolving loan fund and supply some small grants for energy conservation projects. And it will help fund an Energy Performance Contract to help reduce energy consumption in City buildings. Short version: Energy efficiency saves people and businesses money.

We're working healthier, too. Our employees' efforts to take care of themselves through our wellness programs led by our Human Resources Department allowed us to reduce our health benefit costs by \$487,000 -- a \$100-per-insured-employee reduction in premiums. We'll continue those efforts this year.

In the coming year, federal recovery act money will help us improve our streets; build sidewalk curb ramps that are safe for people with disabilities; and build new curbs, bike lanes and pavement on Brooks Street.

- The North Higgins Avenue Streetscape Project will bring Downtown Master Plan improvements to this core commercial area. The street will have a new business-friendly look from Broadway to Railroad Street. Our vital downtown will keep its strong position as an equal leg in our triumvirate of commercial centers in Missoula.
- The Rattlesnake Gateway Project will bring order to the Greenough Drive entrance to the Rattlesnake Valley. New curbs and sidewalks will better define the street alignment and improve safety and access to Greenough Park and Waterworks Hill.
- We'll build sidewalk curb ramps that meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards on several city streets to improve access to important pedestrian systems that link the community.
- Our Brooks Street Reconstruction will improve the road from Higgins to Mount Avenue with new curbs, bike lanes and pavement.

These projects total more than \$2.5 million in federal money for Missoula, bringing improvements and jobs to our community.

Another major street improvement will be in the Miller Creek area, where we'll build a new roundabout at the intersection of Upper and Lower Miller Creek roads. The road between that Miller Creek Wye and Briggs Street will see new curbs, sidewalks, bike lanes, and a new northbound travel lane.

And we expect to complete the environmental impact statement for Russell Street this spring. This will allow us to start design of the Russell Street bridge and the road system from Broadway to Third Street.

All this means a busy summer for Public Works crews, private contractors, local engineers and materials suppliers.

Our Wastewater Division is planning for the coming year, depending on costs, a reconstruction of our old treatment plant Headworks Building. It will improve hydraulic capacity at the entry to the plant and help reduce odors during the sewage treatment process. We're funding this needed project with sewer use fees that we raised recently for the first time in eight years. Missoula still has some of the lowest sewer fees in the state of Montana.

Our Missoula Redevelopment Agency continues to lead in improving our business districts to secure Missoula's position as a robust and profitable place to do business. It has a major role in the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan and is helping with the North Higgins Streetscape project. The good news in our urban renewal districts is that they're working the way they were designed to work. Reinvestment triggers reinvestment and, in the end, the district and tax base are dramatically improved.

Other MRA innovations in the coming year include:

- The construction of a new parking structure at Front and Pattee streets designed to support both retail and employee parking and position the Macy's building for reuse as a retail center.
- Improvements to West Broadway to encourage investment along that important corridor.
- Positioning the City to take advantage of federal funds for a street-car system and other fixed-route transit opportunities.
- Positioning the City to take advantage of funding, should it become available, for the conversion of Front and Main streets to two-way traffic.

MRA continues to work with the developers of the Old Sawmill District to finalize the cleanup of the property and move toward development of Missoula's newest urban neighborhood. An essential part of MRA's role is the construction of Silver Park and the connection of the riverfront trail system to the California Street Bridge.

More about downtown: Our City Clerk's office staff is hard at work reviewing the Downtown Business Improvement District's petition to renew for another 10 years. The BID has accomplished great things in the past five years, proving valuable in developing the Downtown Master Plan and helping keep

downtown clean and safe with its Clean Team, its Downtown Ambassadors and its work in partnership with us on downtown quality of life issues.

Our Office of Planning and Grants has just embarked on completing the Missoula Active Transportation Plan to better position the community for bicycle/pedestrian funding opportunities. Their fingers are crossed as they await word on our federal TIGER grant application, which will bring a unique approach to active transportation in Missoula.

OPG continues to actively manage the social safety net in these difficult times. The staff continues to strengthen our Crime Victim Advocate program and build closer relationships among the advocates, City and County attorneys, law enforcement and the courts. Project Homeless Connect, held last week, connected 400 people in need with vital services ranging from flu shots to haircuts to pet care to housing.

OPG is working long-term with the County to implement the Urban Fringe Development Area plan, contain sprawl and enhance our healthy, active community.

And one glance in the rear-view mirror: After two years of hard work, the Missoula City Council voted 10-2 in support of Missoula's new zoning ordinance, Title 20. Its decades-old predecessor, Title 19, was the source of considerable community heartburn. The new code is a serious, modern rulebook that will help guide development for years to come. It ain't sexy, but it's really important.

And despite recent news, our economy is still strong, as is our ability to attract and retain business, relative to other cities across the nation. People who live here want to stay, and people who don't live here yet wish they did. That's because while we've grown, we've held on to the values that make us love this home. A big part of those values are our open space lands, our trail system, our close-by recreation opportunities and our parks and green spaces. Our Parks and Recreation staff will continue to be good stewards of all we have to offer.

Now through Feb. 5, we're taking public ideas on plans to replace three deteriorating playgrounds – in Marilyn, Boyd and Sacajawea Parks – and build a new playground in Lafray Park. We're able to do this work because of \$380,000 in reinvestment money we received from the state. Playgrounds are not frills. In the face of rising obesity rates among children, great and safe places for active play, *free of charge*, are more important than ever.

Parks is also working on extending the Milwaukee/Riverfront Trail from Russell to Reserve streets, which will link literally thousands of residents to our university, parks and downtown. They're continuing to work on a new three-acre park off North Scott Street, White Pine Park, where we'll eventually see soccer and other sports, a small playground, a perimeter trail and new trees. Conservation lands and forestry staff has finished an inventory of pine bark beetle activity in our precious Ponderosa pine forests on Mount Jumbo, the Rattlesnake Greenbelt and South Hills, and they're working on thinning

and removing infected trees. Expect to see the draft of our Conservation Lands Management Plan come out for review in February.

Our City-County Health Department, while admirably meeting the challenge of H1N1 during the past year, is working on a Live Well Missoula partnership that will work on policy and environmental changes affecting physical activity and healthy eating. We'll also continue our work to make sure that vulnerable young families have access to basic public health services through our public-health nurses. And because we've done it so well for so long, we tend to take for granted the work our environmental health folks do every day to keep our air and water clean and safe.

The future of Missoula is rooted in the best of our past. When we work together, we accomplish great things.

So this year, we're working with the Missoula Organization of Realtors to understand our housing market better. As you know, my interest in affordable housing is keen. We need more affordable housing to purchase and we need more affordable housing to rent. For the first time, by most accounts, we'll have a survey that tells us where folks want to live based on what they can afford. With that information, we'll work together to figure out how we can build more of what we need in places that make sense. (A quick aside here: When we build a decent, safe place for someone to live, we employ three people. Three good jobs with a remarkable ripple effect in our economy.)

We're working with every City department and the council to make our budget work. We're cutting, saving and reorganizing to meet the challenges of declining revenues. In 2008, we asked for a report card. We asked our citizens their opinions about life in Missoula. They told us they are widely satisfied.

- 81 percent rate the quality of life in Missoula as excellent or good
- 97 percent consider the city a safe place to live, and
- 88 percent are happy with the services provided by the City.

I don't want those numbers to change, except for the better, and as we look at ways our budget can be leaner, I'll be weighing those reductions carefully against the work we must do to maintain our extraordinary quality of life. I, we, have an amazing asset to protect and we need to take that responsibility seriously. Again, there's no magic. Just hard work.

Finally, here's what I hear more than anything from the folks I serve: We live in the best place.

I agree. And that's why I'm launching what I call the Best Place Project.

While Missoula is host to a number of economic-development and business organizations that effectively meet niche needs in the community and region, no single organization effectively drives the effort to recruit business, retain businesses and develop opportunities for businesses in Missoula.

I believe Missoula needs a single, focused organization to guide the recruitment, retention and development effort, much in the way communities large and small around the country have done with success.

Missoula's peerless natural and built environments, its vibrant downtown district, its first-class public teaching and research university, its world-class medical centers and active, intelligent, engaged citizenry combine to create the best place to do business in the western United States. Because we are such an attractive place to live, work, play and raise our families, we must recruit businesses that complement the place and add value. Missoula needs to tell that story to bring new business to Missoula, to help existing business grow and prosper and to create new opportunities for businesses through development and redevelopment. With meaningful resources, The Best Place Project can tell that story over and over.

The goals are simple. Based on a short timeline, The Best Place Project will succeed in the following areas:

- Recruitment: We'll recruit sustainable tech, bio-tech or health-care companies that provide a family wage and benefits, has growth potential and can take advantage of local infrastructure.
- Retention: We'll create a menu of business services (local, state, federal and private programs and funding sources) and make outreach calls with the menu. We'll also facilitate follow-up with those businesses interested in pursuing menu items.
- Development: We'll identify needs for real-estate, infrastructure and facilities for existing or new businesses and make some portion of those needed facilities available.

On Friday, I'm meeting with a small group of Missoula's largest employers, successful businesspeople and creative minds to put this idea into action. My economic-development team will help me work with all of you to create good jobs.

I can't tell you that economic development is someone else's job anymore. It's mine. It's yours. It's ours. I'm going to need your help. This effort complements and enhances the good work of the Missoula Area Economic Development Corporation, Montana Community Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, the Missoula Downtown Association, the Downtown Business Improvement District, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Midtown Association and the entrepreneurs out there who are quietly or loudly making stuff happen. When I knock on your door, please answer. Please work with us.

As I said, it's Groundhog Day, and I'm told the groundhog saw his shadow today. Six more weeks of winter.

Between you and me, I cast a hell of a shadow. But I didn't see it this morning.

I believe that spring is just around the corner in Missoula.

Thank you for the opportunity to spend a little time with you this afternoon. And thanks for all you do.