

Focus Group Meeting Notes

Group: Economic Health

Date/Time: Jan. 28, 2015 at 5:15 PM

Location: MonTec conference room

Notes by: Bob Horne, Applied Communications

Attended by: Eric Gabster, Jenny Mish, Marcy Allen, Matt Joseph, Mike Halligan, Nick Kaufman, Noreen Humes, Sam Sill, Sean McCoy, Suzette Dussault, Craig Aasved, Tim Winger, Jessica Allred, Allen Sangster (Facilitator Assistant), Laval Means (Development Services staff)

UPDATES

- Chairman Nick Kaufman called the meeting to order at approximately 5:22. Updated timeline for the Growth Policy was distributed. The Steering Committee will begin meeting in February. The focus groups only have two meetings remaining and we have a LOT of work yet to do.
- Staff distributed a handout summarizing Missoula's accomplishments in the area of environmental quality since adoption of the last Growth Policy in 2005. Staff explained that is easy to forget just how much we have accomplished as a community, and that it really puts those accomplishments in perspective to sit down and make a list like this one. We are now trying to build upon those accomplishments in this Growth Policy update.

REVIEW OF DRAFT GOALS & OBJECTIVES

This set of draft goals and objectives was compiled from the statements developed at the December and January focus group meetings. Statements were sorted by topic area and uploaded to Survey Monkey so that they could be evaluated by the members.

The group once again engaged in a brief discussion about what constitutes a goal versus an objectives, and everyone seemed to have a good grasp of this concept. The facilitator explained that as part of this exercise, we are looking for policy gaps and overlaps----but we are more concerned about gaps.

Topic 1: Infrastructure

Goal 1: Strategically build and maintain critical infrastructure that will support economic development.

Objectives:

1. Promote reliable and affordable next generation broadband service city wide.
2. Continue to support, plan for, and fund---through CIP, facility master planning, and other means---the types of infrastructure most critical to economic development, including:
 - Water (treatment and distribution)
 - Wastewater (collection and treatment)
 - Power (including renewable energy sources)
 - Natural gas
 - Fiber

3. Recognize that successful economic development requires high quality infrastructure that is planned in harmony with other city support services.
4. Support compact development and mixed use developments to reduce costly expansion of infrastructure.

Actions:

1. Promote and incentivize green building infrastructure.
2. Assure sufficient water and wastewater capacity with state of the art treatment to serve the existing community and to expand as necessary.

Topic 2 – Labor Pool

Goal 1: Build and maintain a reliable and skilled work force to both serve existing business and industries and to attract new ones.

Goal 2: Work toward a vibrant, diversified, basic sector economy with above median wage job opportunities for the Missoula community.

Objectives:

1. Explore and promote alternatives to traditional higher education in technology fields.
2. Seek more agility and better alignment between business/industry labor needs and training curricula in all educational institutions.
3. Engage youth/millennials in community development.
4. Coordinate with public schools to create a work force with skills for 21st century jobs.
5. Promote associate degree programs in trades and labor.
6. Encourage educational institutions to partner with businesses, industries, and trade unions and associations to establish programs in internships, vocational mentoring, and apprenticeships.
7. Develop relationships between businesses and educational institutions to share information, retain an educated workforce, and support business growth.
8. Assure an adequate supply of affordable housing in order to maintain a quality labor pool.
9. Protect and enhance Missoula’s “quality of life” components (arts & culture, diversity, educational opportunities, clean air and water, outdoor recreation, etc.) that attract and keep a skilled and productive work force in the community.
10. Encourage the creation of jobs that will compensate above the community median wage.

Topic Area 3: Business Development

Goal 1: Support and provide resources for business retention, expansion, and relocations to the Missoula area.

Goal 2: Support strategic economic development efforts that broaden, expand, and/or diversify the basic sector economy.

Objectives

1. Support partnerships with government and business organizations to create a positive environment for starting, operating, and growing a business in Missoula.
2. Encourage our existing economic development funding programs and financial institutions to ensure that their policies and administrative practices are meeting the needs of emerging businesses and new business models.
3. Promote resources for start-ups that include incentives such as incubator space, shared facilities, technical assistance, and state-of-the-art broadband access.
4. Balance business recruiting efforts with the careful nurturing and support of existing businesses.
5. Formulate economic development policies and strategies that can be measured with statistics and benchmarks.
6. Ensure that home-based business remain a viable option in the Missoula area.
7. Encourage R&D investment for renewable energies and emerging new industries.
8. Expand the visitation component of the local economy by focusing on heritage, cultural, business, and resource based recreational tourism.
9. Develop programs to provide incentives for desirable and strategic types of growth.

Actions:

1. Add action on rural outsourcing.
2. Assess Missoula's potential to become a regional center for bioscience industries.
3. Coordinate economic development efforts among the various agencies and determine roles and priorities to optimize resources and effectiveness.
4. Inventory community assets and promote them to attract businesses and top notch employees.

Topic Area 4: Transportation/Transit/Multi-Modal

Goal 1: Provide a full range of viable transportation alternatives and modes to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

Objectives:

1. Develop a city-wide greenbelt to enhance open space and to facilitate alternative transportation such as walking and cycling.
2. Formulate land use policy that supports compact development and transit and multi-modal accessibility.
3. Support land use policy based upon transit and multi-modal transportation alternatives, and focus inward concepts.
4. Plan for a modern and efficient thoroughfare system to move people and goods safely about the community.
5. Promote the development of more frequent airline flights to more regional hubs for better business access.
6. Continue working with Montana's rail freight carriers to improve upon Missoula's advantage in rail access and service.
7. Continue to build and maintain the core transportation facilities that contribute to Missoula's overall quality of life and economic advantages, including streets/roads, Interstate highway, and non-motorized trail and pathway system.

Actions:

1. Encourage the state to establish a matching funds and promotional program in support of improved air carrier service.
2. Explore a hierarchy of home-based businesses to be incorporated into the local land development regulations.

Topic Area 5: Local Business

Goal 1: Support and provide the necessary resources that facilitate local business start-ups and business retention in Missoula.

Goal 2: Recognize the unique challenges faced by local businesses and entrepreneurs in competing with national and regional chains and franchises.

1. Encourage local preference purchasing on the part of anchor institutions.
2. Partner with local and regional lending institutions to provide more technical and business plan assistance and better access to capital for local businesses.
3. Explore an incentives program for local “green businesses” that use reused products and renewable energy.
4. Promote energy efficiency as a local business advantage and a job creator.
5. Encourage the state, city, and county to streamline and provide consistent, predictable business regulations.

Topic Area: Economy/Jobs (It was determined that the goals and objectives in this topic were largely duplicative of those in other topics, particularly local business and business development. Objectives from economy/jobs that did not duplicate objectives already identified under local biz and biz development have been moved to those topics.)

Topic Area 6: Downtown

Goal 1: Continue to create and enhance downtown’s business diversity, and economic vitality, and make the urban core a competitive hub for the region.

Goal 2: Continue to promote downtown Missoula as the community’s center for government, commerce, entertainment, and culture.

Noreen’s suggested alternative that combines all three previous goals into one: Continue to promote downtown’s economic vitality, ensuring diversity of businesses for residents and visitors, and to serve as the community’s center for government, commerce, entertainment, and culture.

Objectives:

1. Maintain vibrancy and diversity, at an appropriate scale, through a combination of housing, small and large businesses, parks and trails, retail, dining and drinking establishments, and events.
2. Maintain downtown as a safe destination for residents and visitors.
3. Ensure that downtown conveys a sense of place and uniqueness.
4. Continue to implement the downtown master plan and to support its objective of a dynamic mixed environment of business, housing, and retail.

Topic Area 8: University of Montana

Goal 1: Strive for educational excellence that produces globally competitive graduates.

Objectives:

1. Ensure educational efforts at UM invest in research to meet demands in local and regional markets for technology and work force.
2. Provide opportunities for the community through integrative learning experiences as well as graduating a professional and competitive work force.
3. Encourage UM to focus on professors and other educational staff over hiring administrative staff.
4. Continue to grow the University in terms of employment and investment in research.
5. Explore programs and other opportunities to reduce student debt.

NEXT STEPS

Although the Economic Health focus group completed the goals and objectives review task at the Jan. 28 meeting, a significant amount of combining, deleting, and general wordsmithing was left to the facilitator. Therefore, it would be prudent if the group members received this draft well in advance of the February 25 meeting. At that meeting, the group will continue to refine these statements, fill in any policy gaps that become apparent, and work through the land use exercise.