

2012

Flathead/Glacier Park Region of Montana Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS)

Prepared for the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration

AND Flathead County Montana Leadership Engaged In Economic Development

Montana West Economic Development Corporation & Flathead County Economic Development
Authority
8/1/2012



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FLATHEAD VALLEY / GLACIER PARK REGION

Strategic Partners

Numerous organizations were approached for input and through organized media relations comments were attracted from various community residents and organizations. A regional broadband meeting facilitated by the State of Montana Broadband Program in the fall of 2011 provided this report local business and citizen input for technology enhancement suggestions.

Special appreciation is extended to Susie Burch of Flathead Valley Community College, Joe Unterreiner of the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce, and Mayre Flowers of Citizens for a Better Flathead for their contribution to the report.

The comprehensive economic development strategies (CEDS) are designed to bring together the public and private sectors in the creation of an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen local economies. The CEDS purpose is to serve as a **guide** and a plan of **action** with the identification of priorities and funding sources to be used by local organizations, governments and leaders. The Flathead County strategies are focused on *fostering jobs*.

The Flathead County CEDS is dedicated for a five year period, July 2012 to June 2017. The process included public and private input and was advertised as “Community CEDS Input Sessions” facilitated in each of the five communities from September 2011 to November 2011.

In addition numerous organizations were approached for input and through organized media relations comments were attracted from various community residents and organizations. A regional broadband meeting in the fall of 2011 provided local business and citizen input towards technology enhancement. Special appreciation is extended to Susie Burch of Flathead Valley Community College, Joe Unterreiner of the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce, and Mayre Flowers of Citizens for a Better Flathead for their contribution to the report.

Background of the Flathead County Economic Situation:

- Flathead County experienced unprecedented growth until 2007
- The population of the county approached 90,000 persons and unemployment rates were 4% or less
- The economic fuel was primarily funded by construction, manufacturing, and tourism
- The national economy began to falter and the Flathead soon followed
- Businesses shuttered and jobs were lost
- In 2011 the unemployment rate reached a high of 13% and a loss of population began to occur as residents relocated to other areas for jobs
- Adjacent counties unemployment rates reached 18% in some cases

The real estate and construction sector were plummeting at alarming rates and the gradual loss of businesses, as well as jobs tied to Montana’s natural resources were fading as well. The wood products industry sector which built the Flathead economy a hundred years ago remains the predominant manufacturing employer in the county even though the employment and earnings in the industry have diminished statewide by 49.8 percent since 2001*.

Between 2007 and second quarter 2011 there was no growth in the economy of the county. There was a documented loss of over 5,000 plus jobs. However third quarter 2011, 2.2% growth is on the chart and the forecast projects a conservative 2.8% growth for the remainder of 2012. The Flathead economy mirrors the national economy patterns. The median income for a five county area in 2010 is \$38,999; for Flathead County the median income in 2010 is \$43,585. The U.S. median income from 2006 to 2010 is \$51,914. Montana ranks in the bottom ten of the fifty states in wage income.

*Source: Bureau of Business & Economic Research at the University of Montana

The changes in the national and global economy are shifting once again the industry sectors where job growth is occurring. While the Northwest Montana economy is heavily reliant on consumption related sectors such as real estate sales, construction, tourism, retail trade and gaming there are strengths in the natural resource production which provides some diversification to the local economy.

The rock quarries/mining and wood products industries are collectively large employers in the Northwest Montana landscape. The past few years the firearm component manufacturing has increased in the number of establishments and employees. The growth is a result of the state regulatory environment supporting this industry, the Montana heritage and legacy of hunting, and the craftsmen located in NW Montana. The long-term sustainable results for fostering jobs are best supported by focusing on NW Montana's core industries and business sectors that relate to the area's best assets as well as being energetic about emerging new business sectors such as the clean tech sector.

Tourism has played and will continue to play a very vital role in the Northwest Montana economy. The fact that a national park is at the doorstep of Flathead County is the most unique asset. Tourism has been an employment generator since Glacier National Park was established one hundred years ago. The other unique attractor is the ski resort and ski areas.

In 2011 there were more citizens employed in the arts, entertainment, service, and retail trade sector than the previous ten years. While construction and real estate came to a booming halt in 2007 tourism "saved" what would have been a huge out migration of the population as they sought jobs elsewhere.

Due to the strength of local tourism citizens had opportunities for employment. There are challenges with lack of a critical mass and four-lane transportation access at our front door however there are substantial assets being leveraged. Preserving and enhancing amenities attracts people, whether for the attraction of non-resident visitors or for the attraction of residents. New residents bring with them talent and for some, the capacity to start or expand a business.

The following strengths and liabilities list has been revisited on numerous occasions since 2007.

Analysis of Economic Development Challenges and Opportunities:

What unique strengths can Flathead County build on for economic development and growth?

- Glacier National Park
- Ski Resort nationally recognized in Top 30
- Proximity to Canada
- Expanding regional health center in Whitefish and Kalispell
- Regional trade center in Kalispell
- Expanding Community College – offering unique degree programs, transfer, and Running Start credits
- Competitive energy costs
- International airport service
- Broadband advantage
- Entrepreneurial culture
- Strong natural resources in timber, ore, rock, and water

What weaknesses pose challenges to economic development?

- Limited local investment dollars
- Geographic location-isolated from major markets and a critical mass of people
- Workforce skills need upgrading; businesses lack funds to invest into training employees
- Higher truck transportation cost than competitor cities
- Seasonal economic fluctuations
- Loss of some development with local natural resources
- Infrastructure growth and maintenance paid for by local residents due to lack of sales tax
- Increasing regulatory burden at all levels including state policies such as employment-at-will laws, unemployment and workers compensation
- Personal credit damage at an all-time high
- State policies such as employment-at-will laws, unemployment and workers compensation

To what extent can these weaknesses be mitigated and how?

- Responsible resource development-legislative change
- Engage and support workforce development strategies
- Build upon other transportation means for moving products in and out of the area such as rail
- Build and support the area with year round amenities/cultural tourism to attract year round visitors and talent
- Provide counseling and education on the importance of credit and how to manage finances
- Encourage a business friendly regulatory environment

How do the county's strengths and weaknesses compare to those in others parts of the state or region?

- Transportation-communities with Interstate access, hub origination air travel and larger rail volume is a cost advantage for business compared to competitors
- Population is rural-not a major market, not a critical mass living in the area
- Lack of University is a setback for research & development, technology transfer, and innovative applications
- Canadian market is a strong unique asset due to some U.S. goods are less cost than Canadian goods
- National Park is a strong unique asset and public lands are accessible
- Less government regulation and costs in the Flathead compared to competitor communities in other states
- Broadband capacity and capability is stronger in the Flathead compared to other areas of the state

How are economic conditions changing in the county and region?

- Loss of population due to loss of jobs
- Property and building costs are decreasing and becoming more affordable
- High rate of damaged personal credit increases the rental market
- Wages are not advancing at national rate, still lagging

*How does regional economic activity provide **direct** or **indirect** benefits to the county?*

- Produces non-resident visitors, Canadian trade and investment dollars
- Commute patterns relatively short in distance and time
- Attracts talent in the workforce

- Supports trade
- Increases local and state tax base (although not through sales tax)

What assets contribute to the local economy?

- Education
- Sustainable business employing residents
- Educational employment
- Government employment
- International Airport
- Glacier National Park
- Whitefish Mountain Resort
- Quality roads
- Quality water, wastewater services
- Rail Service
- Workforce
- Housing both year round and seasonal
- Health services
- Amenities (shopping, restaurants, entertainment, lakes, rivers, parks-such as the Fairgrounds and Kidsports)
- Strong creative arts culture

Priority Vision

The priority vision among the organizations engaged or contributing to economic development is to promote economic diversity and job growth while preserving the quality of life. The vision includes striving for investment and sound policy toward the support for fostering an entrepreneurial culture, specifically by **improving education/knowledge, enhancing technology, attracting talent, and maintaining a regulatory environment business can operate within effectively and be successful**. These are essential elements to support for the well being of our citizens.

The board of directors for the Montana West Economic Development Corporation made a decision to dedicate resources to supporting local business and entrepreneurs **first. Local business sustainability** takes precedent over out of state business attraction efforts due to limited resources. Out of state business attraction is recognized as important to replace jobs loss to attrition but with

limited resources emphasis is desired to support local business first. This does not mean out of state business attraction is not supported, it is, but resources are not spent on advertising in airline magazines or trade shows attendance where expenses run high and prospects are slim. When opportunities arise from a connection with the out of state business that has the potential for job creation the connection is pursued.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies Plan of Action

Strategies are a plan of action. This strategic plan is intended to gain or prepare an advantage and build upon strengths. *The end result of any plan is for primary expectations to be achieved.* A plan of action needs to be clearly measurable, assignment of who is responsible for the activity and needs to be stated in realistic terms. The following strategies are projects, programs, and activities to be undertaken to support job creation and the sustainability of jobs.

Montana West and Flathead County Economic Development Authority support the National Governor's Association's Twelve Actions for Growing State Economies. **These basic steps create the framework for supporting policy that AID the private sector to seed, grow, renew and then thrive.**

STRATEGIC & FOUNDATIONAL

1. Create (ensure) a competitive tax and regulatory environment.
It is important to assess whether permits, registration, and other bureaucratic requirements interfere with new business creations. If so take measures to change, simplify and speed up the most burdensome government processes. Business needs easy to understand materials regarding processes, licenses and permits. Hiring and maintaining employees is burdensome with all the reporting, regulation, cost and training; *tax climate and business friendliness matters.*
2. Put entrepreneurial activity at the top of the state, regional and local economic agenda.
The startup company is responsible for more job creation today than established business. The support of the growth and renewal of existing companies is important, the launch of new companies is equally as important. *A new priority needs acceptance for supporting resources for starting and growing companies.*
3. Distinguish among different kinds of entrepreneurs and businesses, and then target policies and resources accordingly.
Some individuals open businesses to employ themselves. Some start businesses to fill a niche such as providing a local service and never grow beyond it. Others launch firms with the intent in significantly growing. It is important to distinguish among these different types of companies. *Because resources are limited choose to target the resources towards the businesses that are most likely to achieve high-growth.*

FOCUS ON STARTUP COMPANIES

1. Cast a wide net to find entrepreneurs.
2. Teach entrepreneurship skills and attitudes at all education levels.
3. Build a startup environment and culture.

FOCUS ON HIGH-GROWTH COMPANIES

1. Find the potential high-growth companies and help them grow.
2. Get your entrepreneurs to give back.

FOCUS ON ALL COMPANIES

1. Help companies open doors to new customers-globally and locally.
2. Reward strong ties among universities, companies and entrepreneurs.
3. Encourage entrepreneurs and companies, small and large, to build innovation clusters.
4. Build ecosystems, not programs.

Educate a Competitive Workforce

Strategy

ELEVATE the training resources for advanced manufacturing as an initial focus to educate and attract a pipeline of current and future workers. (Other industry and occupational sectors can be supported by this model of private, public and educational collaboration when emerging needs are identified).

- **Why:** *The local employers express need to address the skills gap that exists between the local workforce competencies and the skills businesses need in order to succeed.*
- **Who:** Flathead Valley Community College has stepped up to apply resources to three manufacturing sub-sectors: wood products, technology-oriented and entrepreneurial manufacturers which include the growing employment in firearm component manufacturing. Manufacturing tends to “fit” our local workforce education profile, pays average to above average wages, exports new dollars into the region, typically provides health benefits, professional development/skills training and offers career advancement opportunities.
- **How:** A consortium of private, public and educational partners being led by Flathead Valley Community College have collaborated to develop curriculum and program designed to assist readying the workforce for employment. The collaborating businesses have committed to hiring program participants, assisting in providing resources for the education and training, and providing continued

guidance towards the curriculum and instruction. Prepare a campaign to attract and build a pipeline of workers associated with working in manufacturing.

- **Performance measurement:** Collectively, the participating businesses have projected a need to hire 457 employees within the next three years.

PROCURE Tools for Skills Assessment for Job Seekers and Businesses. Support the resources for acquiring the National Career Readiness Credential or other similar tool as an evaluation mechanism for the skills of job seekers.

- **Why:** There is need for tools to assist job seekers to meet employers increasing demand for labor market relevant skills and credentials. Despite record unemployment many employers continue not to fill key positions with persons that don't meet employer specific skills. There is a demand from employers that workers arrive with highly technical skills and industry driven credentials.
- **Who:** Flathead Valley Community College.
- **How:** Resources to fund the tool and resource allocation to manage and maintain the tool.
- **Performance Measurement:** Upon procurement and credible service delivery.

EXPAND opportunities for students to engage in learning with local businesses.

- **Who:** Facilitated by Flathead Valley Community College and the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce.
- **Why:** Meet a current and growing demand for industry-specific or multiple fields of study technical skills by employing the "concept of learning while working."
- **How:** Increase work experience for students and align formal programs with local business employment needs. Expand mutually beneficial experiential workforce learning opportunities and business participation in programs such as apprenticeships, internships, on-the-job training, and roundtables for employer/student exchange.
- **When:** Immediate & on-going.
- **Performance Measurement:** Provision of common engagement between employers, high school and post-secondary students.

SUPPORT and provide necessary resources to increase the rate of attainment of high school and college graduation of our local workforce. (Regional competitiveness increases with a skilled workforce and higher wage jobs follow).

- **Who:** Facilitated by Flathead Valley Community College and the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce.
- **Why:** The importance of education is attributable to the emerging global economy in which knowledge and innovation are highly valued. A better educated workforce appears to offer a buffer against the effects of an economic downturn.

- **How:** Drive degree completion; increase Running Start enrollments, offer more four-year degrees locally, align technical training with high wage jobs, and provide skilled career advisement for students.
- **When:** Immediate and on-going.
- **Performance measurement:** Increased education credentials in the workforce.

Enhance Technology

Strategy

SUPPORT policy and assist business to deploy affordable access to high speed, reliable broadband to enhance the capacity and capability for education, public safety, health care, government services and business to thrive. According to the Brookings Institute for Research "for every 1% increase in state broadband penetration employment increases 2% to 3%."

- Keep broadband access affordable (less than \$50/month is ideal) and speed is an important competitive advantage.
- Support service provider competition because it spurs investment and enhanced services.
- Support public use for broadband services in relevant public venues such as the library, government and education institutions.
- Request free Wi Fi for public safety vehicles, in public venues and meeting places; free Wi Fi in downtowns is an asset to the quality of life.
- Adopt policy for the option of coordinating and installing conduit in right-of-way during road construction or utility projects.
- Private business needs to commit to participate in outreach to middle and high school students to expose the benefits of career opportunities in IT to build a pipeline of workers.
- Support creative opportunities to provide and deliver non-interruptible broadband. The past three years investment by broadband providers have significantly decreased the black outs caused by fiber cuts with the investment of dual service lines.

Ensure a Regulatory Environment that Supports Business Success

High growth businesses are one of the driving forces of the modern global economy. They are a primary source of job creation, prosperity, and economic competitiveness. New fast-growing firms often evolve to become large employers such as Kalispell's Semitool and Columbia Falls' Nomad Global Communication Solutions.

Strategy

DETERMINE which entrepreneurial and business growth activities are missing or are burdensome, and determine how they can be supplied or mitigated.

- **Who:** Led by a consortium of business resource providers in the County facilitated by the Business Expansion and Retention Program (BEAR). The information is distributed to local organizations engaged in supporting the business friendly climate.
- **Why:** To improve the resources, services and policies to stimulate entrepreneurial and business activity that leads to job creation and prosperity.
- **Performance measurement:** When the list is developed and when policy strategies evolve that can help business best take advantage of their strengths.

The Kalispell chamber of Commerce has identified the following issues to support for policy reformation:

- Continued reformation to improve the state's worker compensation program;
- Support an effort for state agencies to assess economic impacts via policy and regulations imposed on small business;
- Tort and medical malpractice reform; and
- Stopping and eliminating onerous employment laws.

Attract Talent by Supporting an Entrepreneurial Culture

Strategy

CONTINUE to procure and provide efficient access to non-traditional capital to partner & supplement lending/investing activity. Access to capital remains a critical component for startup and expanding business. Conventional financing needs a partner to share the risk on some projects to get the deal done.

- **Who:** Montana West and Flathead County Economic Development Authority, Cities of Columbia Falls, Kalispell & Whitefish; Frontier Angel Fund; Montana Community Development Corporation.
- **Why:** These non-traditional pools of funds provide much needed support to partner with lending institutions for credit-worthy businesses that project adequate cash flow, sales, and sound management.

- **How:** Utilize and continue to partner with local banks, the finance programs associated with the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Treasury, the Montana Board of Investments, Community Development Block Grant Loans, and the Montana Department of Commerce loan programs.
- **Performance measurement:** Increase in annual number of loans and number of jobs created and retained; ability to maintain programs through compliance and financial management.

DEVELOP & LEVERAGE existing resources to support new & expanding business. Continue to procure, leverage, facilitate and develop all avenues of resources to allocate to businesses with the most potential for growth, sustainability, and ability to meet various resource eligibility requirements.

- **Who:** Montana West and Flathead County Economic Development Authority, Cities of Columbia Falls, Kalispell & Whitefish; Flathead Valley Community College; the Small Business Development Center; Montana Community Development Corporation; Procurement Technical Assistance Program; Montana Manufacturing Extension; Frontier Angels; Chambers of Commerce; Job Service; SCORE; BEAR (Business Expansion & Retention Program).
- **Why:** Private sector investment is not as strong in rural areas as metropolitan areas. Lack of resources from major private sector business in our area is supplemented by government or educational resources.

PROTECT and invest in our natural amenities because amenities attract talent and capitalize on the lifestyle that sells our region. Maintaining and enhancing our natural unique assets help sustain and grow the population and talent pool.

- **Who:** Local planning agencies and local governments. A report published in the summer of 2012 by the National Parks Conservation Association Glacier Field Office interviewed business owners who relocated to the Flathead/Glacier Park Region due to the appeal of the landscape and recreational opportunities. Regional economic development professionals interviewed noted that our unique strength in today's economy is our natural amenities and small-town character---it is what sets us apart---"...it cannot be bought, built, or duplicated anywhere."
- **Why:** Land-use, transportation and housing planning to achieve environmental and social goals combined with sensible business needs will be more successful if it is grounded in an overarching, regional economic development strategy, which sustains these assets. Talent looking for seasonal or full-time living contribute in many ways to the local economy: by working from Montana and paying Montana tax; purchasing goods and services locally; becoming engaged in the communities or in businesses to share their expertise; and starting a business or becoming part of the local talent pool for employers.
- **How:** Requires attention and continued commitment to invest in our natural infrastructure.

IDENTIFY, CATALOG, and CONNECT serial entrepreneurs and skilled professionals to provide mentoring and business counseling services.

- **Who:** Montana West Economic Development will start and manage the process of establishing a business counseling network for the local agencies and organizations engaged in supporting economic development.
- **Why:** Entrepreneurs need skill building to for their business to prosper.
- **How:** Montana West ED is seeking resources to assist in the development of formalized business counseling network of serial entrepreneurs and skilled professionals that will be created and managed by Montana West and shared with area resource partners. Successful entrepreneurs will be encouraged to give back.
- **Performance measurement:** When the funding is secured for the program and the network becomes established, operational and successes can be counted.

PROVIDE services for quality market analyses for local entrepreneurs and businesses from a qualified university with market research experience.

- **Who:** Montana West Economic Development Corporation is in conversation with a qualified research university to provide the services. Montana West's objective is to provide the service support to any business/entrepreneur in Montana as long as the business has the ability to pay for the cost of the analysis.
- **Why:** An identified gap in resources available locally and statewide is the market analysis component for business and entrepreneurs who are assessing their services, products, or invention's potential.
- **When:** ASAP.
- **How:** Resource dedication to support the service delivery and customers to pay for the analysis.
- **Performance measurement:** When the objective is achieved, preferably before year end 2012.

Support Tourism

Strategy

SUPPORT tourism by creating a public assembly and larger convention space as venues in the county are limited due to size and conditions of the buildings. One of the priorities of the chambers of commerce and convention & visitor bureaus are to increase the year round leisure travel, meeting and convention opportunities.

- **Who:** The Kalispell & Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau's, Glacier Country, Flathead Convention and Visitor Bureau, local chambers of commerce, all have annual or multiple year marketing plans with some funding devoted, but significantly less than competitor cities, for the execution of the plans.

- **Why:** Expand the opportunities for resources for promotional expense to increase destination marketing to attract non-resident visitors, activities, events and meetings.
- **How:** Marketing dollars are seldom provided by resources other than private funding. Sustain the current business improvement districts and bed tax to provide the resources. Due to the nature of the tax jurisdictions unincorporated centers have difficulty accessing the needed funding to promote. Enhancing collaboration to promote the region benefits all.

INCREASE the promotion of the area as a destination for year round leisure travel, meeting and convention opportunities.

- **Who:** local business, chambers, CVB's, downtown associations, tourism business improvement districts, creative arts businesses all have a vested interest in improving infrastructure to sustain the tourism opportunities in shoulder seasons.
- **How:** Identifying appropriate facility venue locations and structures to invest in to meet the urgent need.
- **Why:** The service/tourism/retail sector employs more residents than any other sector based on 2011 data.
- **Performance measurement:** Facilities operational and sustainable by 2015.

ENHANCE the County Fairgrounds as an asset to the county, communities and to business.

- **Who:** The fairground board of directors is addressing the master plan development of the grounds. One of the objectives of the master plan is to develop revenue supporting programs and projects to lessen the dependency on property tax revenue support.
- **Why:** The fairgrounds infrastructure is aged and needs repairs. Some facilities are 50 to 75 years old and have become potential safety threats. The current and future needs of the grounds are being addressed by the grounds board of directors. The past three years the grounds have been utilized more and more as a centralized area to support business training, business and industry showcases/expo's, as an educational resource, as a cultural and community center, and provider to indoor recreational venues.
- **Performance measurement:** The current capacity accommodates 2200. The goal is to accommodate up to 2500, providing upgrades to the current infrastructure and changing the scope of the services of the grounds to meet today's user needs. The ability to generate revenue from the use of the grounds is key to the long term sustainability of the asset.

Develop Transportation Infrastructure

Strategy

SUPPORT Transportation Enhancement for Cost Efficiencies.

- **Air Service**-organize a valley-wide group of interested private and public organizations/businesses to collectively support an initiative to provide funding to partner with Glacier Park International Airport for air service enhancement opportunities such as expansion of direct service markets.
- **Who:** The Whitefish Chamber of Commerce will take the lead role in organizing a 501(C)6 to formalize the entity to manage non-airport funds to support air enhancement opportunities in the future. (Whitefish C of C commitment June 2012).
- **When:** Summer of 2012.
- **How:** A board or advisory committee made up of the contributors will monitor and make decisions regarding the expenditure and priorities of the funds.
- **Performance measurement:** Successful expansion of the current of air service through additional options for direct routes and lower air fare.

Rail transportation: support efforts to develop rail served industrial sites. Rail is another mode of moving materials and products in and out of the area efficiently.

- **How:** Flathead County Economic Development Authority has dedicated resources to support the development of a former gravel pit into an industrial park targeting rail users for job creation purposes.
- **When:** began market analysis and conceptual planning in summer of 2012.
- **Who:** Flathead County Economic Development Authority.
- **Partners:** City of Kalispell for the purpose of planning and redirecting rail service.
- **Performance measurements:** Milestones include conceptual phase completed, design and engineering planning of the infrastructure, funding of the infrastructure construction.

Road transportation: support efforts to complete the Kalispell bypass project North extension and other road projects that enhance efficiencies for a growing population.

- **How:** Prioritize and communicate projects based on need for safety and traffic control.
- **Who:** the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce leads the effort for the area with promotion to the appropriate agencies.

Public Works- consisting of water, wastewater, roads, rail, and storm water- *Leverage resources and partner with government entities to provide basic services to job creating projects.*

- **Why:** When opportunities exist for job creation of several new positions associated with an employer some business projects will require service or expansion of basic services to support the operation.
- **How:** Matching funds from government entities may be available for eligible projects with partnership from a city or county.

Additional strategies to increase the support for business success

Strategy

SEEK creative options for a supply of available larger buildings for manufacturing/warehousing specifications.

- **Why:** Certain businesses, particularly technology & information services firms, warehousing, and industrial, seek larger size facilities. The most common requested size is 50,000 square feet. There is a significant lack of available 50,000 square foot facilities with 20 foot or higher ceiling heights available. *According to Eric Canada of Blane-Canada, Montana West's marketing plan consultant, 15% of the communities with existing buildings have access to 85% of the market (prospects) for expansion candidates because an expanding business' first priority is to find an available building. Communities without available buildings have access to maybe 15% of the market. "Communities can only "hope" to service companies looking to build. This is a significant handicap in the business expansion program when expansion is driven by buildings and land."*
- **Who:** Flathead County Economic Development Authority.
- **How:** Economic development entities invest in a building ready project by having plans and permits in place to quickly construct a building and then once constructed sell to the expanding business.
- **Performance measurement:** This proven process in other communities has decreased the length of time for construction of a facility when current available buildings do not meet the business' criteria.

REDUCE energy costs for residents and business through conservation, efficiency and investing in the local energy supply will lead to cost savings. Continue to support energy companies as they seek avenues to identify, partner and comply with alternative energy source opportunities.

- **Why:** Capacity is becoming restrained for some energy companies and identifying cost efficient alternative sources for supply are important.
- **Who:** A coalition of local businesses and organizations including Flathead Electric, Stoltze Land and Lumber, Airworks, and Citizens for a Better Flathead have taken a leadership role in the promotion and educational outreach on energy efficiency

and conservation. See the report Re-Powering the Flathead at <http://repoweringtheflathead.org/>. The report shares data regarding cost saving opportunities to suggested policy.

- **How:** The main opportunities available in conservation and efficiency are seen as:
 - Improve efficiency in existing buildings and infrastructure;
 - Improve efficiency in new construction projects;
 - Improve efficiency of transportation and
 - Conserve energy that is not needed.
- **Performance measurement:** A stable and increase trend in energy conservation and efficiency in the Flathead over time with projected savings to businesses, local governments, agencies, and residents identified. Flathead Electric is actively monitoring energy conservation and efficiency as a result of their on-going programs and the actions of local businesses and residents.

SUPPORT the workforce with housing opportunities that are affordable and safe.

- **Why:** Housing and property is becoming more affordable as a result of the real estate, construction and mortgage industry decline and readjustment in the U.S. However many, many families and individuals have lost their homes and are recovering or starting over.
- **Who:** Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana, Whitefish Land Trust, and Habitat for Humanity.
- **How:** Beginning in 2009 Community Action Partnership established the Northwest Montana Community Land Trust and in partnership with the City of Kalispell. The land trust has purchased foreclosed and empty homes in Kalispell and rehabilitated the properties. The trusts are seeking first time home buyers in the low to mid income range. Habitat for Humanity expanded to Columbia Falls to build housing for low income families or individuals, and the Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana Mutual Self Help Program has been active the past few years. Homebuyer education is provided by Community Action Partnership and supported by Flathead Valley Community College.
- **Performance measurement:** Sustaining the land trust organizations and investment to supply workforce housing to first time homebuyers.

Agriculture

Strategy

SUPPORT exploration of a new two-year sustainable agriculture Associate of Arts and Applied Science degree program at Flathead Valley Community College as the mechanism most likely to prepare residents to fill jobs in the burgeoning local agriculture economy.

- **Why:** Multiple studies point out that the expansion of local food systems can be a development strategy for rural areas. National and local trends indicate that demand for local food products (smaller scale concentrated agriculture) is an arena demonstrating strong growth and job potential.
- **Who:** Flathead Valley Community College, (FVCC).
- **How:** FVCC has received a two-year USDA grant to conduct a needs assessment to determine the viability of a sustainable agriculture program and identify lands suitable for expansion of small scale farming in the Flathead.
- **Performance measurement:** Program implementation and increased percentage of placement of students in local agriculture industry jobs.

CREATE a “Center” to Centralize the Services Dedicated to Entrepreneurs and Business.

- **Who:** Chambers of commerce, workforce and job service partners, economic development organizations, community development partners.
- **Why:** For efficiencies including sharing and collaborating resources, expertise, communication and service delivery.
- **How:** Identify services and co-locate.
- **When:** At earliest opportunity.
- **Performance measurement:** Co-location accomplished.

Community and Private Sector Participation

This section discusses the relationship between the community in general and the private sector in the development and implementation of the CEDS.

Beginning in 2011 community input sessions were advertised through the media and various organizations represented by private business and government officials. Each community input session was facilitated by an experienced facilitator with a background in planning and economic development. In addition many organizations, including the community college, local governments, chambers of commerce members and business leaders provided detailed input. There were avenues for citizen input through electronic mail, regular mail, phone, and individual conversations to be considered for inclusion into the plan.

Acknowledgements

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