



Federal Grant Sought for Kalispell Rail Park Project

City, economic development authority apply for \$8.7 million TIGER grant

BY JUSTIN FRANZ // MAY 25, 2013 // [NEWS & FEATURES](#)



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The Flathead County Economic Development Authority and the City of Kalispell are applying for an \$8.7 million federal grant to start construction of a new 90-acre rail park between Whitefish Stage Road and U.S. Highway 2. Officials say the park would attract new business to the valley and clear the way to redevelop Kalispell's industrial core.

According to Kim Morisaki of Montana West Economic Development and Flathead County Economic Development Authority, construction of the new rail park could begin in early 2014. The \$8.7 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant from the U.S. Department of

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Transportation would cover 60 percent of the \$14.5 million project. The grant application must be in by June 3.

“We’re working fast and furious with the City of Kalispell to get everything ready,” Morisaki said. “We feel like we have a good story to tell and that we’ll be competitive (for this grant).”

Last year, FCEDA purchased 40 acres of land adjacent to Whitefish Stage Road, Highway 2 and another industrial park owned by BNSF Railway. The BNSF and FCEDA land sits alongside the rail line connecting Columbia Falls and Kalispell owned by BNSF and leased to the Mission Mountain Railroad.

The new rail park would include a trans-load facility to move cargo from rail cars to trucks so that it can be delivered locally. Brad Koon of KLJ Engineering is designing the park and said a facility like that could bring transportation costs down for local industries. One rail car can fit the same amount of cargo as four truck trailers.

“(An industry) wouldn’t have to be based in the park to still be able to use the park,” he said.

A new industrial park could clear the way to redevelop the roughly 360 acres of land along the railroad tracks through Kalispell. Currently, CHS Kalispell and Northwest Drywall use the rails into town, but Morisaki hopes they could be relocated once the rail park is built. Mayor Tammi Fisher said the move and subsequent redevelopment would not happen overnight, but she sees it happening in her lifetime.

“It would affect all of Kalispell. It would lead to the revitalization of the entire community,” Fisher said. “It’s a great project and a great opportunity that has never been available before.”

Morisaki said FCEDA could find out early this fall if they would receive TIGER grant funds. If money is secured for the project, construction would begin in the spring of

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2014. The entire rail park could be completed within three years. Even though FCEDA has not started advertising the rail and industrial park, Morisaki said they are already getting inquiries about moving industries there, including some from out of state.

Morisaki emphasized that the rail park project was a team effort between many different entities.

“We’ve been working hand and glove with CHS Kalispell, Northwest Drywall, BNSF Railway, the Mission Mountain Railroad and the engineers,” she said. “If we can find a solution that makes everyone happy, then that’s the goal.”

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