

January 12, 2010

Sweetgrass Development Meeting – Cut Bank, Montana

In attendance: Tony Sitzmann, Jerilee Wilkerson, Cheryl Curry, Deb Brandon, John Shevlin, Doug Embody, Jim Hodgkiss, Janice Coburn, Larry Bonderud and Brett Doney. Recording the minutes –Lorette Carter.

Minutes: John moved to accept the minutes as presented. Doug seconded to approve the minutes and the motion carried.

Treasury: Larry reported on the financial statement. He reviewed some of the line items with board members with corrections suggested. Brett requested Sweetgrass Development put together a service contract with Cut Bank Development for the 10 hours weekly services in the Cut Bank Development Office. A motion was made by Larry to accept the financial statement, subject to the review of the line items in question and to draft a service agreement between Sweetgrass Development and Cut Bank Development Corporation. Brett seconded with the motion carrying.

Old Business:

Gage Accounting Audit: Tony has contacted Gage Accounting. Mr. Gage felt it was a conflict of interest to do the audit as they prepare the monthly financials. Tony has since spoken with Sharon Isenberg, CPA in Conrad. She suggested we do not conduct an audit, but rather have a review of the books and then seek direction for maintenance of the books. Larry suggested we approach Agnes Fowler, of Conrad to do this review on her own time. Larry made the motion to have Mayor Shevlin ask Agnes do this review on a per hour basis with a cap of \$2500.00 within 60 days. Doug seconded. Motion carried.

Website Maintenance: Deb has had some response to the partner page, but each entity needs to review the page. Deb will submit the corrections when she has responses from all the communities.

Strategy Planning Date: Brett has spoken with Andy Poole and John Rogers and everything is on track. John Rogers, Andy Poole and possibly Tony Preite would like to meet to discuss Sweetgrass Development contracts. The Sweetgrass Development board will meet with them on February 9th at 4:00 pm in Great Falls with the board meeting to follow. February 12th would be the date for a 3-4 hour visioning session with Maria Valandra from 10-2 pm in Conrad and a second session on setting strategic priorities on March 19th in Shelby from 10 to 2:00 pm. Maria would also like to do a conference call on January 29th at 11:00 with the executive committee. Brett will make sure it is coordinated with Sweetgrass Development. The entire board will be notified if they would like to join in on this conference call.

Policies: Brett has handed out a draft of a portion of the policies for board review. They are the same policies that High Plains Financial and Great Falls Development Authority use. We will put this on the agenda for the February meeting for review and approval.

Diversification Implementation Priorities: Brett reported OEA has had budget cutbacks and therefore the transportation component of the OEA grant application has been put on hold. Great Falls is sending a community team to Washington D.C. in March to push for additional funding for the transportation strategy. They will also ask OEA to partially fund a regional agricultural development specialist.

CDBG Fund Management: A new agreement was drafted with Great Falls Development Authority excluding themselves and High Plains becoming the administrators of the fund. A Sweetgrass Development account has been set up with Stockman Bank. High Plains Financial has eliminated the application fee to allow for additional lending opportunities. High Plains Financial will also be hiring a development specialist to travel the Sweetgrass Region visiting with bankers, realtors, and city/county leadership informing them of the available programs. Cheryl will work with the High Plains Financial office in reporting and coordinating the loan program.

North West Pro Region Grant: A letter from High Plains Financial was receiving thanking Sweetgrass Partners and the North West Pro Region for directing fund into the IRP fund. The check was given to Brett Doney for inclusion in the IRP Fund.

New Business:

Economic Development Entities Reports:

Teton County: Teton County Commissioner, Jim Hodgkiss reported that oil and gas activity has picked up. Jim said they are currently letting the bids for the Teton Canyon road and a bridge project in Teton County. The Chateau Pavilion is also undergoing some restoration as well.

Glacier County: Cut Bank Mayor, Doug Embody reported on their Main Street “concrete park” and the development plans for trails and walkways. The city will work with Glacier County on this project. They are also working on water issues at the airport. Glacier County has taken two properties for back taxes and is hoping to convert into museums. Glacier County Commissioner, Tony Sitzmann also reported increased oil and gas activity within the county. Glacier County Transit will start February 1 within 2 day per week runs within Cut Bank and two day per week runs connecting to the regional transit going to Kalispell and Great Falls.

Browning: Janice Coburn of Browning Community Development Corporation reported they are currently searching for volunteers within the community to assist with tax preparation for citizens. Montana Making Sense Americorp headed by County Commissioners Services for the State of Montana eliminated the funded program for this assistance. Browning Community Development Corporation will be requested a reversal on this decision. Browning will also be inducting a new mayor this week with Willie Morris remaining as City Manager. Browning is also working in partnership with local groups to request CTEP funds for walkways between the new high school and city. Larry moved and Brett seconded to draft a letter of support to the CDC to restoring the Montana Making Sense Americorp volunteer program which assists with tax preparation. Motion carried.

Pondera County: Mayor John Shevlin reported on the overpass as it's moving forward. They are also working on assisting Brady with their water issues.

Cascade County: Cascade County approved its first Brownfield clean up loan. Their downtown loan fund also has three applicants. Great Falls is moving ahead with heavy industrial park plans. A branding workshop is planned for February 3 at Hilton Garden Inn and February 10th a fundraising expert will be visiting the Great Falls Development Board at 8:00 at Chamber of Commerce offices. January 29 will be the unveiling of the Great Falls Prospector website through GIS Planning.

Toole County: Larry reported on the upcoming water sewer outflow project. The city has also received word of federal appropriation requests for the Energy Park, Downtown Revitalization RLF, and water project. The City of Shelby is also working on an EECBG for Historic Shelby High in joint cooperation with Toole County. The FBI building will be completed in April. The City of Shelby will package these GSA contracts and sell them to the private sector. Toole County is working on purchase of the transit building from the City of Shelby. Larry also reported on a recent meeting with oil/gas representatives and wind farm representatives regarding boundaries and line placement.

Economic Development/Strategy Meeting: Cheryl reported on things happening in the region including the cardboard recycling program in the region; management ideas for the North Central Montana Water Authority; and including Jerilee on the Strategy Committee. Jerilee reported on the refuse district. The group met with Dusty Johnson, specialist from the State. She stated there is a market for cardboard with many companies providing pick up of the baled materials. They also continued talk about the cost of purchasing equipment to convert cardboard into pellets.

Other Business:

Mayor Shevlin discussed the difficulty in the bid letting process for Montana contractors. He made a motion to draft a letter to the congressional delegation on the issues affecting the construction bid letting process on behalf of Sweetgrass Development. Tony agreed to draft the letter. Cheryl Curry seconded and the motion carried.

Deb Brandon also asked if Sweetgrass Development would draft a letter of support for the Northern Transit Interlocal to Opportunities Inc. and Opportunities Link for financial support. Larry made the motion with John seconding. Motion carried.

Jerilee reported that the hard drive went down on the office computer. Shannon was to make back up discs but Jerilee is unable to locate them. The 2009 billing statements are also gone. Brett will follow up with Shannon on these issues.

In regard to chamber dues...Browning dues are higher than the \$100 donation and so Janice will work on this. We will also send Valier Economic Development a \$20.00 donation and Jerilee will take care of the remaining Sweetgrass Development Region chambers.

Brett reported that everything has been taken care of regarding the Easter Seals grant. The Big Sky Trust Fund is on hold pending OEA. The EMS building is on hold as Big Sky Trust is reviewing the initial billing.

Cheryl reported that the Conrad Industrial Park planning grant is getting ready to submit for reimbursement. Pondera Port Authority will include admin fees.

Larry asked for board approval for Sweetgrass Development to solicit funding from the Big Sky Trust Fund to pursue a management firm for the North West Pork Cooperative. Brett seconded. Motion carried.

Next meeting: February 9th in Great Falls.

Cheryl made the motion to adjourn with a second from Jim. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned.