



## Promoting Prosperity Through

- Information on economic and demographic trends
- Building local capacity
- Working with other Montana communities
- Solving common problems

# Summary of the *Missoula on the Move* Forum

May 27, 2004

St. Patrick Hospital – Missoula, Montana

As Missoula enters the twenty first century, it finds itself in the midst of a major national population shift and a corresponding economic restructuring. People are moving to the Rocky Mountain West in record numbers, making it one of the fastest growing regions in the U.S. in population, employment, and income. Missoula's future will depend in large part on its ability to understand and position itself for key demographic and economic forces underlying these changes.

On October 20, 2003, Missoula's community leaders gathered at an economic forum to study these forces. Participants listened to results of an exhaustive analysis of Missoula's emerging economy and discussed its implications. They considered the lessons to be learned; they identified issues needing further examination; and they began a community dialog on how Missoula can position itself for success. A second forum was held on May 27, 2004, to continue the dialog and to develop action plans for enhancing Missoula's prosperity. This report summarizes the results of the second forum.

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*Missoula on the Move* is supported by *Montana on the Move* which is a project to help Montana's communities prosper economically and culturally. Sponsored by the University of Montana's Center for the Rocky Mountain West and Public Policy Research Institute and by the Foundation for Community Vitality, *Montana on the Move* offers professional services and staff support to community and economic development efforts, provides information on demographic and economic trends, and helps Montana's communities develop effective strategies for growth and change and unite to solve common problems and expand opportunities.

### *? Missoula’s Emerging Economy—First Forum Recap*

Mayor Mike Kadas opened the May 27<sup>th</sup> forum with a short recap of the October 20, 2003, economic forum’s discussion of Missoula’s underlying economic and demographic conditions. During the October forum, Dr. Larry Swanson, Associate Director for Regional Economics at the Center for the Rocky Mountain West, presented a detailed examination of the national, regional, state, and local economic trends and discussed implications for Montana and Missoula:

- Montana is part of a national domestic migration pattern in which people are moving to the larger Rocky Mountain region in record numbers. Much of this population shift consists of “pre-retirement baby boomers” who relocate to areas of their choosing and who bring significant non-labor income with them. This trend can be expected to continue for another 10 to 15 years.
- Area economic vitality, diversification and advancement have been stimulated by population growth: offsetting continuing declines in longstanding natural resource industries in many areas.
- These patterns have created three very different “economic regions” within Montana:
  1. People are flocking to the mountains and forests of the *western region*;
  2. People also are moving to the Rocky Mountain front of the *central region* reversing previous out-migration; and
  3. People are continuing to leave the open plains of the eastern region which remains heavily dependent upon agriculture.
- Montana’s largest cities are located in the western and central regions and population growth in these regions is centered in and around these cities; city livability, urban services and infrastructure, culture, and environmental amenities play critical roles in drawing people and creating economic opportunities.
- The changes in Western Montana’s and Missoula’s economies mirror those of the larger Rocky Mountain region: the economic importance of resource commodities (mining, agriculture, and timber) is declining while that of human resource services (healthcare, business services, and finance, for example) is increasing.
- Recent and continuing technological advances in information technology and communications infrastructure enable the U.S. economy to disperse geographically. Economic activity once confined to metropolitan areas is migrating to smaller urban areas of choice that offer business, personal, and educational opportunities, and recreational amenities – small cities like Missoula.

### *? Lessons for Missoula’s Emerging Economy*

Dr. Swanson concluded his presentation with eight lessons for Missoula’s emerging economy:

- **Look Forward** Strategies for economic improvement must reflect where the economy is going, not where it has been.
- **Customize Strategies** Successful strategies for economic improvement must reflect area strengths and weaknesses. Understand our local strengths; confront our local weaknesses. We must customize strategies around goals and unique local conditions.

- **Cities Matter** Growth is focusing in and around “city regions”. More attention needs to be focused on the needs of Montana’s cities, such as Missoula, as the settings of economic growth, diversification, and advancement. We need to assist cities, not deny that we have any.
- **Urban-Rural Relations Matter** Economic development town-by-town or county-by-county is difficult. Missoula’s economy is strongly linked to its surrounding rural neighbors. Influencing local economies sub-region by sub-region with healthy urban-rural partnerships has potential and will serve the interests of both cities and surrounding rural communities.
- **Become “Learning Communities”** Successful businesses are adaptive businesses. Successful communities are adaptive communities. Adaptive communities must be “learning communities,” keeping abreast of change.
- **Think about “Regional Positioning”** Missoula’s economy can’t be remade by local leaders, but they can find ways of better positioning themselves – businesses, schools, work forces, governments, families – for future change. Anticipate future change and position for it.
- **Human-Resource Based Economy** The economy is less and less “natural resource based,” and more and more “human resource based.” Well-designed, well-funded, adaptive systems for education and work force development are essential for Missoula’s economic prosperity.
- **Environment as a “Key Economic Asset”** People create economic opportunities and people are drawn to beautiful natural settings and highly livable communities; making the area’s quality environment one of the region’s key economic assets. Protecting and enhancing Missoula’s environmental qualities is essential for sustained economic prosperity.

### *? Becoming a Learning Community*

Before concluding his opening remarks, Mayor Kadas asked forum participants to be thinking about mechanisms by which the community can come together on a regular basis for “learning discussions” to examine important economic and social issues and enhance Missoula’s ability to successfully adapt to change. He offered the concept of a “city club” along the lines of the City Club of Portland, Oregon (<http://www.pdxcityclub.org/>) as an example of an organization developed specifically to encourage community learning.

### *? Focusing on Four Initiatives*

Forum organizers used the results the October 20, 2003, discussions to identify four key initiatives for further community efforts: 1) *Improving the Quality of Our Community*; 2) *Taking Care of Our Place*; 3) *Advancing Our Workforce*; and 4) *Investing in Our Foundation*. Civic leaders active in each initiative area were invited to spearhead a community discussion of important issues within each area. In order to provide a factual basis for discussion, initiative leaders were also asked to work with colleagues to prepare a short white paper describing the status and relevance of each issue (see **Appendix A: White Papers**). These white papers were distributed prior to the forum. Forum participants were asked to join one of these four group for breakout discussions, to work with the initiative leaders to identify specific actions to advance Missoula, and to volunteer to shepherd suggested actions items through implementation.

## *1. Improving the Quality of Our Community*

This group's very lively discussion centered primarily on the role of the arts in creating a vibrant community and fostering business opportunities. The discussion led to five action items:

- a. **City Club:** Group members agreed with the Mayor that Missoula needed a permanent mechanism for community learning and to create an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual respect among Missoula's many different interests. Russ Fletcher, Sue Talbot, Tom Bensen, Doug Anderson, and Barbara Koostra volunteered to further investigate the city club concept. Since the forum, this group has met several times, gathered information from across the country on similar community organizations, and has developed an action plan for creating a non profit organization to serve as an administrative home for a Missoula city club.
- b. **Branding Missoula:** What distinguishes Missoula from other small cities in the region? The group felt that Missoula needed to develop and market its own *brand* – to inventory its many cultural assets and *brand* that package of amenities that best captures Missoula's unique qualities. Steve Sundheim, Susan Estep, Geoff Sutton, and David Nelson volunteered to work together to articulate Missoula's cultural brand.
- c. **Creative Incubator:** While Missoula is blessed with a wealth of creative citizens, it can be very difficult to bring creative ideas to market. Ellan Buchanan, Colleen Rudio, and Kathryn Roth will investigate the concept of developing a *creative incubator* for Missoula whereby individual entrepreneurs can access resources to initiate and grow new businesses.
- d. **Celebrate Missoula:** Missoula offers a rich array of business and cultural opportunities. It is important for the community to celebrate its strengths and to understand that community confidence and energy is a key ingredient for prosperity. Brad Robinson and Ellen Buchanan offered to work with downtown businesses to build on the First Friday's Gallery Nights in order to expand and celebrate the connection between the arts and business communities.
- e. **Quality Education = Quality Community:** The educational, arts, cultural, and business communities are vital partners in developing a quality K-12 education system that is essential in creating a prosperous, unified community. Colleen Rudio and Kathryn Roth will look for additional opportunities to forge community partnerships with the K-12 educational system.

*I am excited about strengthening the connection between the business and cultural communities. It is my opinion that the cultural and business communities are inextricably tied and wholly dependant upon one another for continued success. Absent our vibrant business community Missoula would not have the pool of resources to sustain our myriad cultural enterprise. Absent our cultural enterprise we would lack the quality of life that keeps high quality consumers returning to support our businesses, particularly Downtown businesses. -- Brad Robinson, Executive Director, Montana Natural History Center*

## *2. Taking Care of Our Place*

This group focused attention on the forests and open spaces surrounding Missoula. These lands were recognized as being important assets in providing both amenities and commodities for economic development. A pressing issue is that of forest planning; the Lolo National Forest is in the process of updating its forest plan, or blueprint, for forest management. Debbie Austin, Donna Gaukler and Greg Lind volunteered to work collectively to undertake three tasks:

- a. **Control Fire Threat and Risk:** As last year's forest fires attest, Missoula's wild land/urban interface can pose considerable fire risks to the community. This group will work collaboratively with the community to develop and implement a plan for controlling forest fire threat and risk.
- b. **Land Management Collaboration:** The Western Regional Planners Association meeting in Missoula in August presents an opportunity to gather city, county, state, school, and federal land managers and planners together to discuss and shape a unified vision for public lands in the greater Missoula area.
- c. **Forest Planning:** Missoula has the opportunity to serve as a collaborative model for national forest planning. This group will work to provide an active forum or sounding board for revising the Lolo National Forest Plan. They will initiate and facilitate a collaborative model for community involvement in the forest planning process.

## *3. Advancing Our Workforce*

This group agreed with the Montana Ambassadors that securing a quality workforce is the top issue for Montana, and Missoula, businesses. This requires anticipating workforce needs and developing the educational and training programs and facilities to meet those needs. Three possible goals emerged from this group's discussion:

- a. **Coordinate Training Services:** Federal, state, and local governments all offer some form of workforce training or education; greater coordination of these efforts would increase efficiency and effectiveness in servicing clients. One place to start is to develop a list of current training contracts, bring together the data bases from individual agencies, and create a healthcare career ladder.
- b. **Market Missoula's Workforce:** Missoula has a well educated workforce and offers substantial quality education and training opportunities. This information needs to be effectively communicated to potential businesses.
- c. **Customize Training:** Missoula can better prepare its workforce and position itself to attract new economic opportunities if it can anticipate emerging industries and create workforce training programs specifically tailored to them.

#### **4. Investing in Our Foundation**

Like other fast growing community, Missoula's community infrastructure is experiencing growing pains. While community infrastructure is vitally important to both economic development and quality of life, it is also very expensive, and can be very divisive. A community wide dialog and effort will be required to overcome differences and garner financial support to develop and implement infrastructure improvements. This group suggested that the city/community club concept might be an appropriate mechanism for taking action in three areas:

- a. **Fund Community Infrastructure:** Pursue legislative change to give local communities the ability to equitably fund the infrastructure necessary for rapid growth.
- b. **Reframe Infill Development:** Missoula's infill policies have created considerable misunderstandings and division. The community could use its urban renewal districts to reframe Missoula's infill and mixed use development policies.
- c. **Community Growth Discussion:** One thing is for certain: Missoula will continue to grow. The community needs to take responsibility for planning where that growth is going to occur and for establishing the mechanisms for implementing their plan.

#### **? Closing Conversation – A City Club is Born**

Forum participants were eager to continue the community dialog and create additional opportunities for learning. They discussed both potential benefits (enhanced communication and networking, greater understanding of events and issues, focusing community energy and action) and costs (competition with existing organizations, duplicating other efforts, ensuring openness to all community members) of forming a Missoula City Club. The suggestion was made to use this forum as the "charter" meeting of the Missoula City Club. The decision was made to support Russ Fletcher, Sue Talbot, Tom Bensen, Doug Anderson, and Barbara Koostra in pursuing the concept, to reconvene in several months to review their progress, and to proceed to the next step in making the city club a reality. Anyone interested in helping form the city club is encouraged to contact Russ Fletcher (542-9395 [russ@MATR.net](mailto:russ@MATR.net)).