



# DAWSON COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

## QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ~ SUMMER 2020

### DCEDC invites community to “Reimagining Rural” events



Rural communities across Montana are grappling with ideas and solutions for keeping their local communities great places to live, work and raise a family. The Dawson County Economic Development Council is excited to be participating in a series of virtual statewide gatherings called Reimagining Rural that is designed to bring people together who are passionate about creating vibrant, robust rural places, growing local capacity and who are eager to learn, connect and lead local change.

The series includes three statewide virtual sessions for rural communities across Montana to come together to have a conversation focused on building a positive future for our small towns.

“We are excited to bring these great speakers to Montana” said Tara Mastel, Community Development Program Leader for Montana State University Extension. “Community members will learn some great ideas for making the most of changes that are facing our rural communities today.”

Each session includes a speaker followed with a guided local discussion centered on developing and incorporating fresh ideas in our communities. The featured speaker for the first session is Ben Winchester of the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Winchester will share his “brain gain” research that counters negativity common in current discussions of rural communities. Deb Brown and Becky McCray, co-founders of “Save Your Town,” will kick off the second session with an invigorating interactive discussion on becoming an “idea friendly” community. The McCrays are small town natives and passionate about the future of rural communities. The last session will bring back these presenters for a follow up, Q & A and discussion about ideas for potential projects.

Recognizing the importance of our small towns

across Montana, Reimagining Rural represents a unique collaboration of statewide organizations whose work focuses on rural development. MSU Extension, the Burton K. Wheeler Center, Montana Community Foundation and the Montana Governor’s Rural Partners Main Street Program are joining forces to really focus on building up our rural communities, and this series is one of their efforts.

The first session will be held Tuesday, Sept. 15 from 6-8 p.m. in Room 120 of the Ullman Center on the campus of Dawson Community College. The second session will be held on Sept. 29 at the same time and place, and the final session will be held Oct. 13, also at the same time and place.

“We hope that members of the community will take the opportunity to join us to engage in this important discussion about reimagining what Glendive’s future could be,” said DCEDC Executive Director Jason Stuart. “Even if you can’t make it for the first session, we hope you’ll find the time to attend one or both of the follow-up sessions.”

Stuart noted that this discussion couldn’t come at a more opportune time for Glendive and that it’s a critically important discussion for the community to have.

“Now really is the best possible time for Glendive to have this conversation,” Stuart said. “With the recent loss of the BNSF diesel facility and all the good jobs and people that went with it, we really have to take a good look at ourselves and start the discussion about ways we can pivot from that loss and reposition Glendive towards a better, brighter future.”

For more information contact Stuart at 377-7792. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, space is limited, so please RSVP to [dcedc@midrivers.com](mailto:dcedc@midrivers.com) if you plan to attend any of the sessions.

### DCEDC exploring idea for a major new festival celebrating local heritage

A major, multi-day festival may be in the cards for Glendive next fall as the DCEDC explores the possibility of launching a new Oktoberfest-style event.

DCEDC Executive Director Jason Stuart said that hosting some kind of major festival in Glendive is something he has felt the community needs ever since he moved here seven years ago.

“In the Deep South where I was raised, almost every community, big and small, had a major annual festival celebrating whatever that town was best known for, be it peaches, cotton, watermelons or catfish. So it’s always struck me as a bit odd that so few communities in this part of the country, including Glendive, have major festivals outside their county fairs,” Stuart said. “And it’s something I think Glendive could real-

## NorsktOberfest

ly use. Multi-day festivals like this bring the community together, help build pride in the community, and, most importantly, bring in outside visitors and generate economic activity.”

Of course Glendive did once have more than one major festival event. For decades, the city hosted both an annual Norwegian festival and an Oktoberfest. But those events petered out years ago. Stuart said that rather than trying to reboot one or the other, he had the idea of combining the two.

“A pretty clear majority of the folks around here are of either German ancestry, Scandinavian

ancestry, or both,” Stuart said. “So it just made sense to me to look at creating a festival event that combines those themes and celebrates both heritages.”

The idea is still in the exploratory phase, but Stuart noted a major German brewery has expressed an interest in possibly sponsoring the event and that a Helena-based lobbying firm has offered to help organize it for no charge. A decision on whether to move forward will be made within the next month or two. If you are interested in helping organize the festival, contact Stuart at 377-7792 or by email at [dcedc@midrivers.com](mailto:dcedc@midrivers.com)

### MONTANA PASSENGER RAIL SUMMIT



## Passenger Rail Summit is Sept. 17

The Dawson County Economic Development Council would like to extend an invitation to local residents to join us for the Montana Passenger Rail Summit. The summit will be held online on Thursday, Sept. 17.

Elected officials, business leaders, students, passenger rail experts, environmental organizations and transportation enthusiasts from across not only Montana, but the entire U.S. Northwest will be participating in the summit.

Speakers for the summit include Roger Millar, Secretary of Transportation for Washington state, Elaine Clegg, president of the Boise City Council, Rob Eaton, Director of Government Affairs for Amtrak, Jim Matthews, president and CEO of the Rail Passengers Association, and John Spain, vice-chairman of the Southern Rail Commission. DCEDC Executive Director Jason Stuart will also be delivering remarks.

“We have a really great lineup of speakers for the rail summit,” Stuart said. “To me, the participation of such ‘heavy hitters’ as the Transportation Secretary for Washington and the city council president for Boise shows that there’s a real appetite and will across the region to see passenger rail service restored not just to southern Montana, but throughout the Pacific Northwest. And with that kind of interstate cooperation and influence, I believe we can succeed in our goal.”

Dawson County became the ninth Montana county to join the new Big Sky Passenger Rail Alliance (BSPRA) after the county commissioners voted unanimously on Sept. 1 to join. The commissioners subsequently voted to appoint Stuart as Dawson County’s representative on the BSPRA board. Montana state law grants counties the ability to join together to form regional or statewide passenger rail alliances for the purpose of promoting passenger rail service and restoring passenger rail routes. In addition to Dawson County, to date Sanders, Missoula, Butte-Silver Bow, Broadwater, Gallatin, Park, Prairie and Wibaux counties have officially joined the BSPRA, while Jefferson and Big Horn counties have signaled their intent to join. The goal is to persuade all 25 Montana counties along the old Amtrak North Coast Hiawatha line to join the alliance.

Among the topics of discussion during the summit will be the creation of the BSPRA, the role of multi-state, regional rail commissions in restoring passenger rail service, the economic benefits of expanded passenger rail service, opportunities for public-private partnerships and what a passenger rail system for the 21st century might look like, and how members of the public, elected officials and private sector stakeholders can help restore passenger rail to southern Montana and throughout the West.

“This summit is a great opportunity for our local residents to learn more about the enthusiasm for this project across the region, what it will take to accomplish our goals, and what the economic and social benefits would be of having passenger rail service through Glendive restored,” Stuart said. “It would no doubt be a great boon to our community, bringing many more tourists/visitors to our doorstep and stimulating economic activity, providing new employment opportunities and offering our residents another option for their personal travel.”

The Montana Passenger Rail Summit will be held online from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sept. 17. Anyone is welcome to register and registration is free. To register for the summit, visit [www.montanapassengerailsummit.org/register](http://www.montanapassengerailsummit.org/register). To learn more about the BSPRA and the effort to restore passenger rail service to southern Montana, contact the DCEDC at 377-7792 or by email at [dcedc@midrivers.com](mailto:dcedc@midrivers.com).