



EDUCATION/YOUTH MEETINGS: SUMMARY

April 2022

INTRODUCTION

County staff and a member of the project team met with high school students from each school district, as well as students from Northwest College, to discuss the Plan Park County process on April 25, 2022.

For each meeting, students were asked to participate in an exercise intended to identify what they view as strengths, weaknesses, and challenges facing Park County. This was done by providing each student with four sticky notes—one green, one red, one yellow, and one blue. Students were asked to write down the thing(s) that they like about Park County or feel make Park County special on the green sticky note. Students wrote down what they didn't like or felt reflected poorly on Park County on the red sticky note. The yellow sticky note was used for students to brainstorm what challenges or barriers could prevent Park County from addressing the challenges they identified on the red sticky note. Finally, the blue sticky note was used to ask students if they planned to remain in Park County after graduation, and if time allowed, the reasons for why they planned to stay or leave and what would make them want to stay. The size of each group, length of allotted meeting times, and student interest in different discussion topics led to some variation in the conversation with each group.

This document provides a brief summary of the overarching themes and key issues that arose from the overall takeaways from the discussions with Park County students. Individual meeting summaries are presented in the order that meetings were held.

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

In summary, some of the overarching themes and key issues to come out of the meetings with students and young adults in Park County include:

- Value the open space, scenery, wildlife, and access to nature in Park County
- Appreciate the agricultural landscape and heritage of Park County
- Cherish the rural lifestyle, small businesses, and community events and amenities that create such tight-knit communities
- Concerned about the impacts of development on open space, scenery, wildlife, nature, and agricultural lands

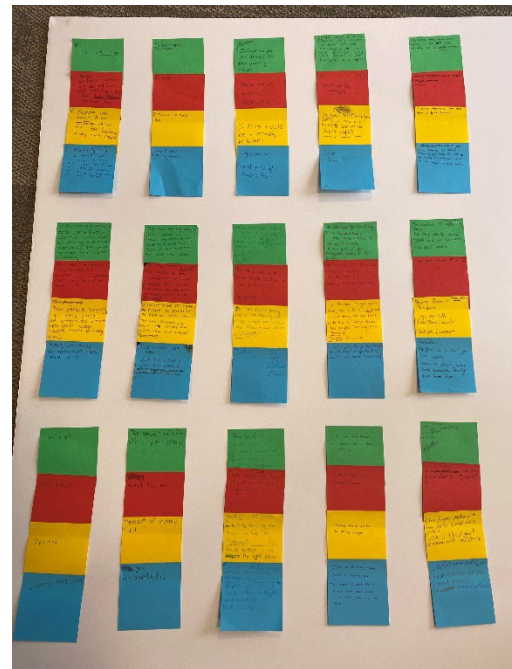
- Would like to see more activities, places to hang out, and educational and career opportunities for young people
- Worried about the cost of living, especially housing, and the impacts on who can make a life in Park County
- Supported economic development of new and existing businesses that 1) provide job and career opportunities, 2) make it easier to shop locally, and 3) balance the needs of residents and visitors
- Would like to see investments in making Park County more livable—including better roads, more reliable internet and cell service, safe places to walk and bike, and improved public spaces and amenities.
- Students recognized that money, the relatively small population, land availability, the economy, resistance to change, the local climate, and getting people on the same page could present barriers to the ideas and issues they identified.
- Most students (as part of these meetings) did not plan to stay in Park County after graduation, but some of those that plan to leave for educational or career opportunities, or to do something different, would consider returning if Park County was affordable and offered enough opportunities.

MEETING SUMMARIES AND NOTES

Meeteetse School

SUMMARY

The project team met with 15 students between grades 7 and 12 at Meeteetse School. During the one-hour meeting, students highlighted the scenery, open spaces, wildlife, recreational opportunities, rural community feel, and culture as positives of life in Park County. Students raised concerns about the rate of population growth (and even more so) development, and the impacts on what makes Park County special. Students also discussed issues with affordable housing, infrastructure, and isolation they felt from not having enough activities or shopping opportunities. They identified property rights, land/housing prices, limited funding, economic trends, the relatively small population of Park County, and resistance to change as potential barriers or limitations to addressing these issues.



LIKES/POSITIVES

- Wild open spaces
- Public lands (BLM, USFS)
- Being rural
- Scenery
- Rodeos/Arenas
- Wildlife
- Hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation
- Mountains
- Lakes
- Not cramped
- Ranches
- Freedom
- The people
- Long drives
- Agriculture
- Lack of windmills/turbines

DISLIKES/WOULD CHANGE/NEEDS/ISSUES

- Decreased recreation space
- Decreased access to public lands due to development
- Public lands being cut up
- People building on or near mountains/hillsides
- Poor waste management; trash blowing from the dump
- View obstructions
- Increased Subdivisions
- Lack of affordable housing
- Better use of ranch land
- Lack of windmills/turbines
- Internet/cell service limitations
- More employee housing needed
- Lack of indoor activities (particularly in cold seasons)
- Lack of stores
- Landlocked by expensive landholders; people from out-of-state pay big prices and drive prices up for locals who can't afford them.
- Water near Beck Lake/Alkali Lake stinks (near highway junction)
- The people
- High gas prices

BARRIERS/LIMITATIONS

- Subdivisions – can't control who buys and can't stop from selling
- Prices – compromising with people; money
- Can't control participation of the public
- More stores = more \$, space, property, employees needed
- Dump: costs money to clean up; wind is uncontrollable; takes time to clean up/maintain; do more than a fence – control waste better to begin with
- Oil field shutdowns, worker shortages
- Finding land for projects
- Resistance of people to new projects
- Wind development is not attractive/visual impacts
- Hard to influence people to change/be nice
- Hard to find employees
- Mother nature
- Don't allow people to buy or build on BLM land
- Need more rec areas – people would want to use those grounds to build
- Centralized services would be better

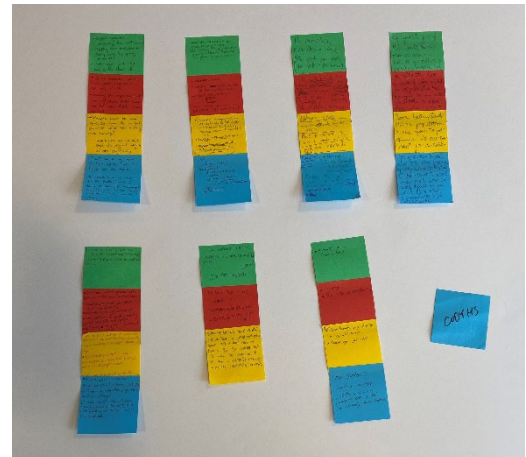
POST-GRADUATION PLANS

- 5/15 planned to stay in the area after graduation (2 plan to come back after leaving)
- Students were interested in the following jobs: agriculture, recreation/tourism, oil, equine, athletics, welding
- What would keep you here:
 - Jobs (welding, athletic training, corporate event planning, medical, veterinary, nursing, and agriculture: ranching, horse training, equine business)
 - Quiet life; hard-working, blue collar
 - Ag business training
 - Bigger-scale college presence (college sports/football)
 - Will visit family

Cody High School

SUMMARY

The project team met with seven 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students at Cody High School for a one-hour meeting. Students like that Park County has a small-town feel, people are friendly and care for each other, there are ample outdoor activities and easy access to nature, there are events and businesses that bring all communities together, Cody has a great rec. center, and the open spaces and scenery are unique. Students thought that Park County could be better with a larger college, more job opportunities, offering more indoor activities (especially in the winter and especially for young people), planting more trees, attracting more diverse people, encouraging development in the right places, investing in safe places for people to walk and bike, and attracting some larger businesses that can bring jobs and shopping. Students identified Park County’s small population, the balance between growth and maintaining our culture and landscape, the seasonality of the tourism economy, housing affordability, lack of cell service, and the cost to provide more activities and services as potential barriers.



LIKES/POSITIVES

- Small-town feel; not big city; connectedness of community; know everyone
- Ability for plethora of outdoor rec opportunities (hiking, mountain biking, climbing, kayaking)
- Proximity to nature (mountains, lakes, ponds, wildlife)
- Grouped businesses
- Outdoorsy; drive and see beautiful things, trails, scenery
- Open spaces; not a lot of people
- Sense of community/ help/supportive
- Events (fairs, car shows)
- Lucky to have an extensive rec center (in the city)

DISLIKES/WOULD CHANGE/NEEDS/ISSUES

- Lack of job opportunities (medical)
- Lack of big college (sports)
- Expansion of development where there used to be ag/open spaces
- Not many winter indoor recreation activities for non-outdoorsy folks
- Development of houses around Cody where there were none before
- Barren wasteland, not much flora; “nuclear wasteland feel”
- Need more foliage/trees
- Need more things to do
- No variety of walking/biking paths/trails; need more bike-friendly paths
- Little pavement on roads; unsafe for riding bike into/away from town; need more trails to connect cities
- Need more education opportunities
- Small size of Cody – would be nice to see some larger businesses/jobs and shopping; bigger city offerings
- Need more diversity (more people would be good)
- Too far away from everything
- City – Walmart is a destination – need more variety of shopping and services.
- City – poor sidewalks, dangerous for pedestrian movement; not walkable/connected, especially as you move away from the downtown.
- City – need more foliage; not a lot of trees
- City – restaurants close too soon

BARRIERS/LIMITATIONS

- Size/population – not enough people to warrant other development
- Not really a need for a larger college because NWC is “enough”
- Where do we put people if we don’t have housing?
- When do we decide integrity and culture outweigh growth?
- City – road to Walmart is on a steep slope – not a good place for sidewalk so close to fast traffic.
- Construction/space limitations; construction takes a long time
- People flooding in for tourism – businesses losing money in the off-season
- Cost of youth activities
- More people would allow more services; diversity of activities

- Large businesses can contrast with small-town feel
- Housing prices limit living opportunities here
- Call service is bad, even in town, which is scary for long drives.

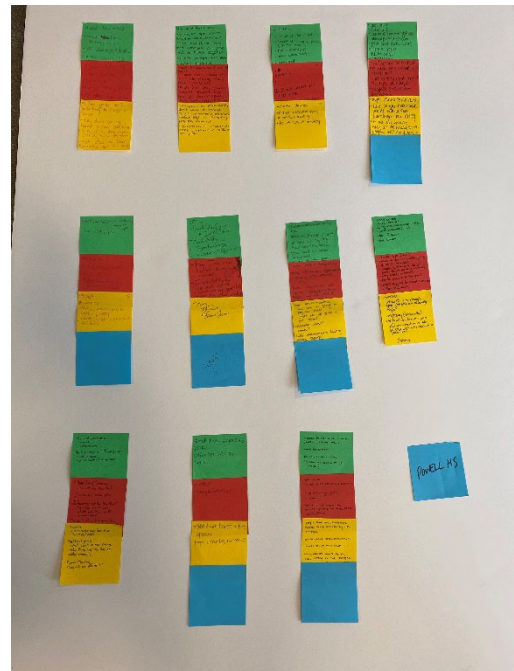
POST-GRADUATION PLANS

- Most students plan to leave Park County for education; also noted the lack of affordability
- What would keep you here:
 - Better education options (medical programs)/bigger college offering (4-year programs)
 - Better online college presence would be inviting; better transferability of college credits
 - Job opportunities (environ. Engineering, doctor/medical)
 - Improve on what is already great – improve walkability/trails so people don't have to drive to access what they need
 - Affordability
 - Housing
 - Town is too small; need diversity
 - Come back later for family; safe place, good schools, kid-friendly
 - More for 17-35 age group to do
 - Entry-level, grad-type jobs

Powell High School

SUMMARY

The project team met with 11 students in 11th and 12th grade at Powell High School. During the one-hour meeting, students discussed the benefits of being small (lots of space, no traffic, not as many chain businesses, lots of great small businesses, community feel, etc.) and shared their approval for the library, access to outdoors/nature/public lands/open space/scenery. Students also highlighted the importance of farms, ranches, and irrigation to life in Park County. Powell HS students also raised concerns about being isolated and far from other towns, the lack of activities and places for youth and young adults to hang out (especially in the winter), the need for some bigger businesses to support community needs, the need to protect farmland and support local agricultural businesses, the need for infrastructure that is well maintained and allows people to walk and bike more places, and an increase in internships, jobs, and educational opportunities. Students recognized that there were barriers and limitations for the County to address all these ideas



and concerns, including limited land capacity (especially if farms are protected), resistance to change, maintaining new infrastructure and amenities, and financial constraints.

LIKES/POSITIVES

- Small businesses, local businesses; coffee huts
- Library
- Less traffic/waiting
- Not overrun by big business/chains
- Community feel
- Easy access to outdoors/nature/public lands
- Lots of parks/trees; nature feel; open space
- Farms and ranches
- Open waterways
- Canal water system
- Protected areas like Heart Mtn.

DISLIKES/WOULD CHANGE/NEEDS/ISSUES

- Not as many big businesses – isolated
- Little access to resources
- Not many safe spaces to hang out/public spaces to congregate
- Cater more towards youth (older youth especially)
- Cody is a far drive; connect Cody and Powell – trail system or more trails
- Everything is spaced out – can make people feel alone or depressed
- Isolation makes us unique – keep it that way
- Keep wind turbines out
- Subdivisions on farmland are bad; already built ones are a waste
- We have open range land that could be used for development
- Need county road maintenance
- Need more support for businesses
- Need afterschool programs – existing ones are sub-par; need more Friday after school activities
- Farmers markets could be more lively – bring more into the city; locally-sourced sales to highlight local farms and food products
- Walkability is not that great (Spearfish, SD has lots of places to walk and eat)
- Not a great place to ride bikes
- Young unmarried couples need experiences; programs; entertainment
- Need more hotels in Powell – hard to host regional events (that could also bring income to the area; Hospitality is low – no hotels, just motels; low quality)
- Need more recreation, in particular indoor rec (roller skating, bowling, indoor track)
- Need large rec facilities to support hosting regional indoor tournaments/multi-purpose spaces
- Lack of indoor facilities leads to seasonal depression; more isolated in winter
- Lack of internships
- Lack of Majors/specializations
- Change perception of local college options – NWC has lots of good programs and training

BARRIERS/LIMITATIONS

- Need more of a buzz

- Growing services means growing people which means taking land
- Where can you put services without getting rid of farmland?
- Services need to be accessible to people
- Older community does not like change
- Keep trees where you can
- Challenge of making paths attractive; correct vegetation
- A lot of people hate tourist culture

- Money money money – need it for everything
- Big plans, but hard to sustain – need people to use the opportunities; small population
- Willwood Dog Ponds – going to waste; spaces for public get destroyed
- Lack of activity – not enough people here to do upkeep
- Old vs. new generational differences
- Local businesses find it hard to succeed, so many don't even try

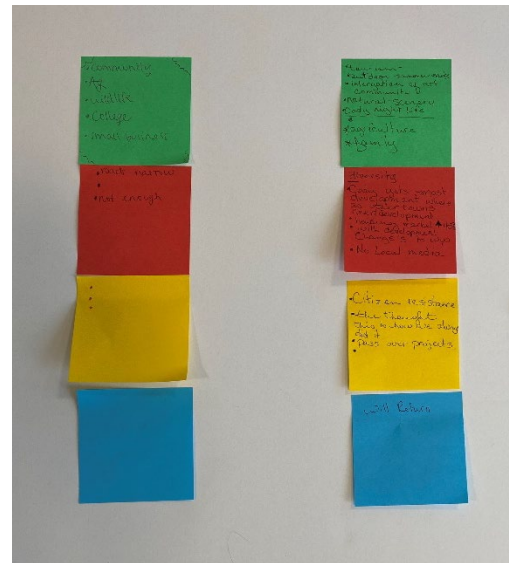
POST-GRADUATION PLANS

- All 11 students said they plan to leave the area after graduation

Northwest College

SUMMARY

The project team met with two Northwest College students for one hour. These students represented one student that was raised in Park County and one that moved here to attend Northwest College. They noted the close-knit, community feel of Park County, agriculture, scenery, wildlife, arts, events, and recreational opportunities as strengths of the county. Students highlighted concerns about lack of activities and attractions (especially during the winter), cost of housing, age and quality of infrastructure, employment opportunities, and underutilization of existing community assets. Students recognized that balancing growth with “small-town” feel, and ensuring people understand the cost/benefits of taxes on infrastructure were barriers or limitations on seeing change. Additional discussion was had on the perceived reasons for the decline in enrollment at NWC.



LIKES/POSITIVES

- Community family; close-knit – keeps people here, neighbors watch out for you
- Ag – FFA – contributes so much to our funding
- Need open spaces to farm and feed us
- Wildlife and scenery
- Northwest college brings people here from all over the world – they get a taste of small-town living
- Small businesses pull the community together
- Tourism – edge of Yellowstone

- Outdoor summer events – need more winter activities to offset
- Integration of art in the communities
- Cody nightlife (supper clubs, rodeos, events)
- College has opportunities for growth/expansion – needs a bookstore

(not just 2x/year and online); sell gear to build pride in the school

- Events to get people into the communities
- Seeing more people – development
- Little piece of heaven
- Park County is “Come Back County” – a lot of students leave, but then they come back

DISLIKES/WOULD CHANGE/NEEDS/ISSUES

- Internment Center is underutilized – partly due to location; could be more of an attraction
- We need more local attractions
- Need more jobs/factories – tourism is only seasonal
- Housing is expensive
- Need to modernize
- Add more indoor recreation options, especially for winter
- More ATV trails – looped, connected/dedicated – to include town
- Roads are too narrow – no room for bike riding
- Hard to keep people here due to lack of jobs and no affordable housing options
- More industry needed

BARRIERS/LIMITATIONS

- Hard to keep the small-town feel while inviting people/growth
- Educate people about taxes and projects that benefit everyone but require money to complete (road projects in particular); there are a lot of dirt roads

REASONS FOR DECLINE IN NWC ENROLLMENT

- Not appealing to outsiders
- People don’t come to high schools to talk about all the NWC offers
- Need grant-writing expertise to bring funding opportunities
- No energy or school spirit on campus
- Need events to draw people
- Citizens are resistant – don’t want change; “this is how we always do it” attitude
- Link to more bigger college degree programs – good schools draw people
- Safety is big
- Convention center needed – draw people, events, concerts

POST-GRADUATION PLANS

- One student will stay in Park County; one will not (but would be open to returning if there were enough career opportunities)
- What would make you stay:
 - Small-town/community feel
 - Good schools
 - "Nothing to do here"