

Richland County Goals and Objectives

Vision

Richland County is a healthy community based on agriculture, energy production, outdoor recreation and value added programs for all of these industries.

Richland County is dedicated to maintaining the strong pioneering spirit that helped to settle this area generations ago by continuing to promote a self-reliant and viable residential and business community—supported by a sustainable and diversified economic base. This commitment extends to offer opportunities for new entrepreneurs as well as expansion of existing industry, while also promoting and encouraging families of all ages to put down roots and help make this area grow.

Richland County is dedicated to helping create an environment that is friendly to business; to help create an adequate and reliable tax base, which will help to afford the public services declared essential by the citizens of the county; and to improve the quality of life in the area. A comprehensive and coordinated effort must be made by local citizens to provide decision-makers with the technical information, assistance, and access to resources; to better manage—conserve—protect and utilize the natural resources and human resources of the county.

Goals and Objectives

POPULATION

Item 1: Between 1980 and 2000, county population declined after the end of the last oil boom that began in the late 1970s. Population peaked around 1980 at about 12,243 persons in 1980 and fell to 9,667 in 2000. Although the most recent oil activity has resulted in an increase of out-of-county workers, most of these have their full-time residence elsewhere, so they don't count for census purposes as an increase in Richland County's population. When the development phase is completed, total anticipated net population increase in the county as a direct result of the recent oil boom is expected to be approximately 100 persons.

The percentage of population over age 65 is growing and the percentage of school-age children is declining. With the aging population is increased potential for number of persons on fixed incomes and reduced ability to support local taxes.

Regaining population growth is essential to Richland County's vision of a viable residential and business community—supported by a sustainable and diversified economic base.

GOAL A:	Promote population growth to sustain new businesses and schools at a rate that can be supported with government services and infrastructure.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attract and retain businesses and young families. 2. For planning purposes, set population growth targets based on best available information. 3. Assist unincorporated communities in identifying areas desirable for growth and target capital improvements in these areas. 4. Identify areas for future growth within the city-county planning areas and facilitate extension of municipal capital improvements.

HOUSING

Item 1: Historically, residential development in Richland County has been clustered in communities and as scattered homesteads on farms and ranches. Constructing new homes in existing communities can reduce overall costs for public infrastructure as it is more efficient to provide infrastructure such as roads, water, and sewer in areas of greater density. However, participants at growth policy meetings also specifically referenced one-lot subdivisions, similar to the past historic agricultural homestead sites, as another way to meet some of the housing demand. Many historic homestead sites have been abandoned over the past decades.

Even with declining populations over the past 20 years, the number of households was greater than the supply of housing in fair or better condition in the year 2000, before the most recent housing demand influx from oil activity.

Despite the recent increase in demand, there have been no subdivisions of more than a few lots in the county. Both the private and the public sector have been cautious not to repeat losses resulting from overbuilding in response to the last oil boom.

The last oil boom resulted in a number of RV, trailer parks, and housing subdivisions, many of which failed after the “bust.” Many of these ended up in the county’s possession when taxes were not paid. Most of the lots have now been sold.

GOAL A:	Expand housing stock in good condition to meet needs.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess and quantify demand for housing based on existing and projected future needs. 2. Expand programs to rehabilitate existing housing units. 3. Identify and initiate programs to address decay and assist with demolition.

GOAL B:	Continue historical trend of residential development primarily in existing communities with scattered homesteads in rural areas.*
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage new residential development in the county to locate in existing communities. 2. Assist communities in identifying expansion areas desirable for residential growth and capital improvement needs. 3. Promote in-fill development and historical community housing densities to maximize use of existing and future infrastructure.

* The Growth Policy would not preclude or prohibit residential development in rural areas outside of existing and proposed zoning areas for Sidney and Fairview.

Item 2: The Richland Housing Authority works to provide low income housing, but demand continues to exceed supply.

Affordable housing for those who do not qualify for low income assistance is a continuing problem, especially as market demand has resulted in increased housing prices.

The increasing population over age 65 is resulting in specialized housing needs. Richland Opportunities Inc. has people on a waiting list for special needs housing.

GOAL A:	Improve capabilities of low-moderate income persons to purchase and maintain homes.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand the number of low-moderate persons assisted in purchasing and maintaining homes. 2. Encourage new development to include affordable housing options. 3. Assess need for and develop a housing foundation fund.

GOAL B:	Encourage development to meet housing needs of seniors and those with disabilities.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify options for senior housing needs (e.g., assisted living). 2. Work with Richland Opportunities Inc. and others as appropriate to expand the number of persons assisted as needed in the county.

AGRICULTURE

Item 1: The county has unique assets that are significant at a regional and national scale. The USDA-ARS-Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory is a huge resource to attract agricultural development, unduplicated in Montana outside of Bozeman.

“Water is the true wealth in a dry land.” (Wallace Stegner) There is high potential for cultivation of specialty value-added/high value crops requiring exact water management. This is one of the few areas in the United States that still has unappropriated waters for irrigation development. There is potential to add at least 500,000 acres of new irrigation within 150 miles of Sidney. Other future development (including other infrastructure expansion) could potentially facilitate or impede irrigation expansion, depending on type and location.

A well-developed infrastructure is in place to transport goods into and out of the region (e.g., excellent road, rail, and air transport systems), strong electric power network, and a research triangle of Montana State University – Sidney, North Dakota State University-Williston, and USDA-ARS-Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory-Sidney.

Confined livestock operations and dairies could increase with the development of more industries with by-products that can be fed to livestock (e.g., “distillers grains”), abundant groundwater, abundant land for waste disposal, and distance from large population centers. Odor and flies can be problems.



Elevator near Savage

GOAL A:	Expand the county's production of high value crops and potential for value-added industries.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop the area's agricultural resources and expand irrigation. 2. Develop and expand market for new and existing agricultural businesses. 3. Coordinate with land use policies and infrastructure development to maximize potential for new irrigation. 4. Increase resources for agricultural research that supports growth of agribusinesses and improves competitiveness of growers.

ECONOMY

Item 1: The county has considerable natural resources to expand the economy—oil, gas, coal, quality aggregate (for roads and construction purposes), and water. The water resources have potential to attract industries who are finding it difficult to expand or locate in other areas due to their water needs. Electric power is plentiful and expandable.

There is a well-developed transportation system—the airport is classified as an air carrier airport with existing capacity for big aircraft on the runway and hangar and potential for further expansion, state highway 16 designation as a “national highway of significance” ensuring high quality maintenance and function, and reliable rail with little or no chance of abandonment.

Oil and gas boom-bust cycles have provided benefits and costs for the county's economy in the past. Local economic development groups are working to diversify and strengthen the local economy.

The county could play a front-runner role in investigating capacity of water, power, and transportation and other infrastructure to have the facts to present to potential businesses. For example, being able to quantify groundwater and surface water resources available for industry in the county, would be important steps in providing needed information to potential major industry such as an oil refinery.

Oil and gas development has potential for continued growth, and has contributed to a recent expansion of jobs, services, and higher paying wages since 2000. Revenues associated with the oil boom provide opportunities to plan ahead and make investments for the future. County residents want to see investments from oil and gas revenues that are long-lasting (e.g., capital improvements and construction) as well as set-aside funds for future needs when the oil boom slows down.

GOAL A:	Continue to build a sustainable and diversified economic base.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand and diversify businesses. 2. Coordinate economic development with land use, natural resources, and capital infrastructure policies and local community values regarding economic development (e.g. some communities desire for clean industry, small business expansion) 3. Evaluate effect of specific development proposals on community character and health prior to committing public resources. 4. Identify and quantify (where possible) the county's resources and infrastructure (e.g., water resources, power, etc.) that may be needed for major new industry. Use as a marketing tool.

GOAL B:	Continue to build county capacity to provide needed infrastructure to support a strong economy.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to work at the state level to safeguard allocation of oil production taxes for impacts in the county. 2. Balance expenditures of oil and gas revenues between construction and infrastructure projects and long term needs.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Item 1: Communities in Action, a multi-agency grassroots project initiated by Richland County Public Health, is in its second year of planning for the long-term overall health of Richland County (including health of the environment and quality of life). As part of that effort they have conducted a number of public surveys and public meetings around the county. Increased rates of domestic violence, drug and alcohol use/abuse; suicide and other mental health issues; high numbers of uninsured and underinsured; shortage of medical and mental health care providers; special issues related to youth; increasing numbers of seniors; water and air quality, law enforcement and emergency services, and desire for more cultural events and activities were all identified as issues or concerns by county residents.

The Communities in Action project is multi-year with a number of resources including VISTA volunteers. There are opportunities for implementing the Growth Policy by partnering with Communities in Action as they begin the next phase of their effort, which is strategic planning.

GOAL A:	Make improvements to overall community health and safety a priority for the county's future.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify and prioritize specific needs and measures that can be taken by the county to address overall community health and safety.2. Implement actions identified in the county's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Item 2: It is getting more and more difficult to attract and retain volunteers for the ambulance-EMT and volunteer fire departments throughout the county.

GOAL A:	Continue emergency medical response and fire protection and suppression services throughout the county.
Objectives:	1. Attract and retain volunteers, and provide training and funding for programs.



Savage Fire Department

Item 3: Life-long learning opportunities were identified as a need in the county. These included post-secondary education and the informational and recreational opportunities provided by the Richland County Library.

Expanding post-secondary education opportunities for existing residents could increase the potential of the existing workforce. Some believe the solution is a post-secondary institution in Richland County, while others encourage use of technology to access classes elsewhere. Many people have used the library for distance education classes. Library staff helps to facilitate these classes as well as proctor for tests.

The library provides a number of in-house and outreach programs and is currently expanding its “Every Child Ready to Read” program (birth through age four) especially to day care facilities. Staff, space limitations, and other resource needs constrain the library’s hours of operation and range of services.

GOAL A:	Expand opportunities for life-long learning for adults and children beyond the K-12 system.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore a variety of options to expand post-secondary educational opportunities in Richland County. 2. Support the Richland County Public Library in providing quality services for the recreational and life long learning needs of all residents.

Item 4: Outdoor recreation is integral to the county’s vision for the future. The county has a variety of existing and potential outdoor recreation opportunities.

50% of residents in Fairview, Lambert, and Savage identified recreational facilities as very important or extremely important to quality of life. Of county residents not living in Sidney, Fairview, Lambert or Savage, 56% identified recreational facilities as very important or extremely important. Recreational opportunities associated with rural community schools and community centers are likely a contributor to the high relative importance.

GOAL A:	Continue to meet needs for recreational facilities and outdoor recreation opportunities.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to identify and make improvements to county recreation facilities (e.g., Richland Park). 2. Assist local communities in identifying recreation needs long-term demand, and cost-benefits of proposed projects. 3. Build on the success of bicycle and walking trails in the county and the region (e.g., plan for trails across the county, such as the successful Maah Daah Hey trail in North Dakota)

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Item 1: The county is working on a systematic approach to managing county-owned public facilities. County-owned buildings have been assessed for condition, projected life-span, and needed improvements. Improvements to the law enforcement center were identified as a top priority, but other needs were also identified for buildings over the next 10 years. The building assessment did not address existing and projected space needs of various county departments.

County roads and bridges have been inventoried and assessed in a road and bridge capital improvement plan. Oil and gas development has created significant increases in traffic frequency and heavy vehicle traffic on county roads.

A community center that would serve a variety of purposes was identified in the 1983 Comprehensive Plan and continues to be a need recognized by the public.

Water and sewer infrastructure capacity and condition is an existing issue or potential issue for future development in all of the communities (incorporated and unincorporated) in the county.

GOAL A:	Plan and design for long term public facilities development, maintenance, operation, and eventual upgrades or replacement over time.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare an overall capital improvements plan for county-owned infrastructure. 2. Provide technical assistance to communities to assess and address needed improvements to water and sewer systems. 3. Continue to work with the public and county departments and city of Sidney to identify opportunities for mix of uses and location for proposed new construction (e.g., potential for continued city police housed in county law enforcement building, etc.) 4. Develop a community convention-auditorium center.

GOAL B:	Promote development with adequate services that does not add to the tax burden for existing landowners.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote development in city limits or areas with existing services, and discourage inefficient land use patterns. 2. Include provisions for subdivisions to pay their portion of infrastructure and services. 3. Require financial guarantees to ensure development of subdivision improvements not completed by final plat.

Issue 2: Cell phone coverage and high speed internet is not available throughout the county.

GOAL A:	Improve cell phone coverage and high speed internet access throughout the county.
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Issue 3: Highway 201 is a significant safety issue because of deteriorating road conditions.

GOAL A:	Work with the state to maintain and improve safety on state routes.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordinate with Montana Department of Transportation on improvements to state highways and access to state roads. 2. Upgrade priority for improvements on Highway 201.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Item 1: Water supply for county residents is primarily groundwater. The groundwater has some quality issues for domestic use and potability-- it is high in iron and other factors that increase sediment build-up and corrosion of pipes and has some aesthetic (e.g., taste) issues. Shallow groundwater wells and sandpoint systems may have potential for contamination.

GOAL A:	Expand opportunities for improved residential water quality in the county.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage potential for Dry-Redwater Regional Water Authority project across Richland County. 2. Expand abilities to address water quality issues on an individual basis. 3. Identify potential funding resources to assist low and fixed income householders to protect and improve existing water quality.

Item 2: The county is rich in natural resources—air quality, surface and groundwater, land, and extractable minerals. Ability to assess and mitigate effects of new development and infrastructure, such as pipelines, can be limited by lack of information, and lack of a consolidated information base.

GOAL A:	Provide for long-term function of natural systems and resources, recognizing a diversity of uses for those systems and resources.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a GIS system to collect and coordinate natural resource and development information. 2. Continue to review the county's weed management plan every two years and update as needed. 3. Continue to protect the natural functioning of the Lower Yellowstone River, recognizing that the irrigation needs of the county must come first.

Item 3: Appearance of community is important to residents. Issues include dilapidated and decaying vacant buildings, accumulation of junk on residential and commercial properties, weed control, lawn and yard maintenance.

Approximately 88% of county residents support preserving historic buildings and sites.

Ability of landowners to address these issues can be limited by income, financial resources, and physical ability.

GOAL A:	Maintain and improve community character and implement beautification projects.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assist communities in identifying priorities and provide technical assistance for implementation. 2. Adopt a county “decay ordinance.” 3. Identify funding resources and individual assistance programs (such as assistance with water bills) for qualifying individuals. 4. Prioritize and implement historic building retention, preservation, and restoration.

Item 4: According to the telephone survey conducted in June 2006, more residents are dissatisfied with cultural opportunities in Richland County than any other type of service or infrastructure. Nearly 40% of those surveyed ranked cultural events as poor or fair. Another 40% ranked such events as good. The need for a cultural event center was identified in the 1983 plan.

Cultural activities are amenities that help attract and retain high quality industries and employment.

GOAL A:	Improve cultural attractions/opportunities in the area.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue and increase support of the MonDak Heritage Center and local museums. 2. Develop a performing arts center.

LAND USE

Item 1: Richland County and the incorporated communities of Sidney and Fairview have identified joint city-county planning areas around each municipality. There is zoning in the municipal areas, but not in the city-county planning area.

New development within the city’s boundaries is limited by the lack of vacant lots. In order for Sidney to provide for a major new housing development, the city would need to extend its boundaries.

GOAL A:	Provide for logical, cost effective future extension of city limits and city infrastructure.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordinate with Sidney and Fairview to identify areas for potential city growth and expansion. 2. Extend zoning up to one mile within each city-county planning area.

Item 2: The county has a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plan that identify measures to reduce or mitigate effects of development in hazard prone areas.

GOAL A:	Reduce potential for development to be impacted by natural or other hazards.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement relevant actions in the Richland County Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plan.