



December 21, 2021

City of Great Falls Commissioners  
Mayor Bob Kelly  
Great Falls, MT 59401

**RE: Community Project Request**

Dear Mayor Kelly,

I know that you have all been working hard on identifying the best use of the City's ARPA funds. I am requesting that you consider our project with those or any other general funds available. As you will need our building back by the end of our current lease November 2023, we have created a strategic plan to move from the current site.

We would like to humbly request funds be allocated to the new museum project and have attached a proposal that will detail the project thoroughly. In essence, this project will relocate the oldest and largest children's museum in Montana; expand services to community identified solutions, create jobs, and increase tourism while offering expanded educational services to our youth and salvaging and repurposing a warehouse. We have spent the last (2) years in strategic planning with architects, engineers, construction manager and the local community to create a multipurpose facility that alleviates community needs while saving our priceless museum.

We have been in communication with several large foundations that offer grants specifically for construction hard costs and each of them has asked us to get more money locally. I asked the specific number and was told a minimum of \$1 million locally. We will be submitting our matching requests to the Treacy Foundation, Murdoch Trust, and the WK Kellogg Foundation for the majority of the project along with the over \$60,000 already donated locally in cash and in-kind services by over 1,000 supporters and businesses. It is important to remember that the community has been showing love and support to the project including solutions for community issues. Mike Cooney, Executive Director at Treacy Foundation, has made himself available if you were to have any questions and has committed to helping us see this project to fruition in any way that they can. Treacy Foundation does not have the means to fund it all and is very welcome to collaborate and work with all of our funders. We have sent this proposal to the Cascade County Commissioners and other business leaders. Please join our efforts to make this project come to fruition!

The attachments offer project team, visual effects from the designers and architect and estimates from the construction managers.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this impactful project and we would like to offer a presentation of the full proposal at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Sherrie Neff, Executive Director  
Children's Museum of Montana  
[sherrie.cmom@gmail.com](mailto:sherrie.cmom@gmail.com) or (406) 564-8070 cell

## Vision

The Museum of Montana project is to build a new museum that “Ignites a passion for lifelong learning” to all that visit. We envision powerful hands-on exhibits that teach while the visitor is in awe of what their eyes see. Our site is over 70,000 square feet of opportunities to ignite the mind and to fulfill community needs. We will renovate an unwanted steel warehouse into a surreal world of fun! Net Zero is the goal in the construction renovation and will also be highlighted in exhibits to share the knowledge that each of us *can* build sustainably.

As we walk through this museum, every major industry throughout Montana's history until today will have a “world class” exhibit offering awareness of our roots, showing our cultural growth, and we will touch on our focus for the foreseen future. For example: Mining in Montana has a long history, the mining companies and association in operation today have given us realistic education for the future of mining also. We want to build thinkers, not just offer information.

Another ignition source is from our experienced designers at creating games that teach the player specific topics. We will innovate this further by using the actual standardized testing material required for each grade level. Leveling up on the game will show the child has mastered the information. Parents attest their children challenge their new video games at home with such fervor that a new \$100 game often only lasts one weekend and the child doesn't leave their room without protest.


There are many different avenues where technology can enhance education. There are as many different styles of adding games to hands-on experiences. We have chosen (AR) Augmented Reality for these factors:

- The guest can download the app on their personal device free and fast.
- The game is individualized to each player and their abilities.
- It can be created to maintain guests progress and monitor growth.
- There is less visual hardware needed in-house and on-site than VR.
- Updates can be created and sent via internet connection so less on-site personnel needed.
- Games can continue to change and evolve relatively simpler than many other platforms.
- AR can also be used as a tour guide docent and information center for the entire museum.

From our research this platform offers the best solutions to our needs and we have experienced creators on our design team.

Our Net Zero build will offer sustainable energy solutions from simple ancient options to new technology. Here is a short list of options we are investigating for this particular site. Whenever possible we will use the simple powers of nature such as: rain, temperature flows, plants and shade. For full success we will use solar and the highest efficiency insulation and appliances.

- PV panels sufficient to provide 100% of power annual needs. 600KW at \$4k per KW = \$2.5M (65,000bldgsf @ 12watts per sf avg need). Equates to 40,000sf of roof area or parking canopy. Might need structural improvements for weight on the roof and +/- \$1.5M in canopy construction if all on the ground.
- Carbon Neutral – No gas emissions. All electric water heating and food service.
- Other opportunities - bioswale, raingarden, cisterns, xeriscaping, filter strips, urban tree canopy, detention pond, wetland.




Sharing each option and the science behind why it works is one of our ways to foster preservation of our natural resources.

Within the museum will be laboratories to build skills and incubate innovation. The labs will be available to all ages but focus on inspiring the youth. The youth are our greatest assets and so this space will be free of barriers that they may face elsewhere. There will be guided instruction for those that want structure and open lab for those that want to be creative.

The community of Great Falls Montana asked us to provide their youth with hands-on automotive, wood working, and metal shop labs. They want them to be able to learn skills that lead to success in life for the hands-on learners. In our innovative realm, we add to this a Maker Space.

Maker spaces have proven to inspire passion throughout our nation. They are called many different jargons, but the idea is the same; give the individual a place to be innovative. Offer a space that creations can be made. Ours will have a 3D printer, a sound room, a video room and technology set up with every business template needed to produce a business plan, a financial proposal, and marketing plan. As our greatest assets, we do not want our youth to feel that they must leave home to find a place for their ideas and innovations. We want to foster their dreams here in our community.


We also see a 300-seat multipurpose (MR) room that can be used for functions and performances. In our many public hearings, a theatrical group shared that our community does not offer a small venue for their performances.



The MR can be used for professional events, theatrical events, and as a small revenue source with minimal personnel to manage. For the non-profit organizations that need space yet have small budgets this room will be a source of giving back to the community also. To use the funds in the most productive way, we will not invest into the very expensive theatre level lights and sound; only meeting space with a small stage.

We will expand our afterschool Whizzards Academy. Since COVID, our youth have had new barriers in their education added: virtual classrooms, isolation, and no one-on-one tutoring. CMOMT's Whizzard Academy starts January 1, 2022 on a very small scale due to room available and will increase in the new museum to maximize the impact we can make. We will spend an hour with each student on homework and then use the rest of the time to make, experiment, or research exciting science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) projects very similar to our successful camp program. This program has been making an educational impact on the children for years and we have decided to grow it to after school also.

The community asked for daycare. We have researched and found there is a true need for more quality daycare options and have chosen the "Drop-in" daycare style. The drop-in daycare will be another small revenue source even with the personnel required to run the center. See attached Sustainability Assessment for details.



The museum will offer hours of entertainment and education so a restaurant is also envisioned. This restaurant will be fine dining in world class quality, but with a Montana flair. The atmosphere is comfortable and roomy. The restaurant will offer full sit down meals and will have an area for quick stop snacks, the Kids' Corner with finger food style options. The Kids' Corner will have each of the food

groups and teach the children what each group does: proteins to build muscle, carbohydrates for energy, etc...

Although the possibilities are limitless, this project has found ways to bring our mission, our core values and the highest priorities of our community into a single vision.

Mission – To Ignite a Passion for Lifelong Learning

Core Values – Quality, Integrity and World Class Customer Service

#### Goals –

- Inspires education, entrepreneurship, and innovation in our youth
- Inclusively invites all persons by both design and experience
- Imagines a harmonious balance with nature through net zero sustainability
- Increases our tourism economy through targeted global marketing with KRTV
- Instills pride in our community and Montana.

#### Objectives –

*Objective 1 is to increase the standardized test scores and educational success of the youth through fun. Education program goal is to ignite the passion for learning so that it is lifelong and ever growing.*

We will be able to monitor our local and state standardized test scores and watch them grow. We will collaborate with the public-school system to monitor growth there. The museum will also stay vigilant to continue to change and grow as needed for the members, families, and community.

*Objective 2 is to increase new entrepreneurship and innovation within our community. Maker Space and Laboratory goal is to ignite a passion for creating.*

We will track the use of the Maker Space. Each individual's innovation will be recorded. We will collaborate with the community to give the innovator a chance to present their idea to the appropriate audience.

While the laboratories will monitor the use, they will also offer guided educational opportunities that will be tracked and recorded to show success at each skill level. The projects will be given space to be showcased and recognized within the museum.

*Objective 3 is to create a design and experience that is inclusive to all.*

*Our goal is for accessibility to seem effortless for all disabilities and the experience to have features that create an amazing experience for all.*

The design team has agreed to keep disabilities in mind as the first priority and not to lean on just the standards required. Through the strong collaboration with our different organizations with disabilities: C.A.N., Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, Developmental Disabilities office, and the Aging Services office. The addition of sign language, braille, wheelchairs and other features will make this an inclusive experience. We will conduct surveys so that we can monitor the needs of the community and ask for suggestions on how we can be more inclusive.

*Objective 4 is to create jobs and make them sustainable for future generations.*

*Goal for construction and strategic planning to create sustainability.*

The project will open 25 to 30 full time jobs by the final phase.

We have identified a Net Zero goal within the construction as the first step to obtaining true sustainability. By adding the necessary systems, materials, and energy efficient appliances, the need for energy costs will be limited to maintenance, repair, and upgrade of said systems. The costs saved by creating our own energy can then be used to reinvest in the community and we see this for those that would also build/renovate at Net Zero.

Strategic planning on each income resource has already been done. We are using the Small Business Development Center Regional Director and Grow Great Falls as a third-party review. Our commitment to create an asset that lasts longer than any of us is a priority. Each revenue stream is subject to clear and concise evaluation and it will add to the success of the new museum.

*Objective 5 to increase tourism to the state and our local area.*

*Goal to increase tourism through targeted marketing will be carried out through streaming opportunities with KRTV.*

After careful review of the Montana Destination Brand Research Study Report of Findings October 2016, we have chosen to target specific markets within the United States such as LA and New York for cold season advertising while targeting Denver and Boise-Salt Lake areas for warm season tourism. These areas were identified in the surveys as having the highest potential number of visitors that want to visit Montana according to their surveys. Of interest were the reasons they marked that they had not visited: hard to access, lack of comfort, and lack of urban attractions.

We are already collaborating with locals in order to market towards changing these negative perceptions. Great Falls has many comfortable lodgings, including the 5-star Ranches at Belt Creek who is willing to collaborate with us. The Great Falls International Airport is working on adding more commuter flights including LA, and we are definitely going to be the biggest and best urban attraction in the state.

KRTV gave us a proposal to target marketing that is cost effective. Through the use of streaming ads, we reach the younger generations that stream more all the time. This ad type we have selected is the most affordable with a very high effective rate. The ad cannot be completely skipped and is only charged when the viewer watches the entire ad. Instead of paying for a traditional commercial that may or may not be seen, we would be charged for the times the ad plays in full.

The new Museum of Montana will also have a full mascot campaign and release to increase our marketability. We will use Raymond Entertainment for this creation plan. Their success includes a mascot in the Hall Fame. (see design team for contact information)

*Objective 6 to instill pride in our community.*

*Our goal is to create such a strong emotion of pride within our youth that we change the current trend for our young adults to move.*

We will open opportunities that they have not had in the past here at home. The museum will offer insights into the industries of Montana now and through history including the military, logging, mining, railroad, hydroelectric, and natural resources.

Every animal, industry, and bit of scenery is going to reflect Montana. We envision a large information board that is interactive to find information about what is currently made and grown in Montana and where it is sent around the world; there are hundreds of examples. We make a difference, and we want to share that.

#### **Brief Background –**

Over 25 years ago, a group of community leaders came together with concerns for the children of our city on the river. Great Falls Montana needed a place for children to come and enjoy productive, interactive, and educational activities year-round. Plans were put into motion, 501(c)3 status was applied for and granted. The museum was backed by an excited community and kind-hearted donors, and the Children's Museum of Montana (CMOMT) was opened on February 13th, 1999. While our museum has grown and changed in too many ways to count, the mission remains the same, "To ignite a passion for lifelong learning!"

At that time, our hours of operation were a couple days a week for 4 hours and now our color-filled museum is open 6 days a week from 9:30 to 5 pm and has served over 80,000 guests. With the help of our community donors, the museum has been able to enact our mission through interactive, imaginative, and educational exhibits, activities, and programs. Our museum is currently targeted towards children ages 0-12, but children of all ages can experience "real life play" scenarios throughout the exhibits. Whether they are saving lives as a doctor in the Kid's Clinic Hospital, learning about money in the Giant Springs Credit Union, or building a homestead on the old frontier, hands-on play is the goal and their imagination is the only limitation!

We aim to provide a "world class" experience to all that visit our museum! The core values at CMOMT are quality, integrity and customer service. Quality is determined through dedicated teamwork among staff members driven to provide continuous improvement of our existing facility and development of future sustainable plans. Exhibits are built and updated with creative, innovative, effective, and

adaptable solutions in mind. Integrity is deeply ingrained in everything we do here as a collective. Ethical accountability, honesty, and trust are three non-negotiable standards we have set for the CMOMT staff and board of directors. Offering world class customer service to every single individual who walks through our door completes our core values. We treasure every relationship we have made with members of our community and visitors from around the world. Inclusivism, kindness, courtesy and respect are always found here in our building- from the front desk to the back office.

Small admission fees have allowed us to continue providing accessible, interactive learning to any child wishing to enter and every caring adult willing to bring them. Donors and sponsors have allowed us to provide not only new exhibits, but membership and camp scholarships for those who would otherwise be unable to pay.

A strong and dedicated Board of Directors and museum staff continually come up with ways to improve the museum exhibits and experiences with minimal costs. All of these things combined allow us to continue offering children opportunities to explore and discover new appreciation for the history, culture, science, technology, health, and nutrition worlds as well as the visual and performing arts. New and future developments are aimed at providing more interactive historical learning with a strong emphasis on our regional culture and industries we see every day.

The old saying, "It takes a village to raise a child" is absolutely true. CMOMT feels that part of creating a strong village is collaborations. We seek and welcome collaborations with all of our service organizations in town and built some strong bonds with some because our missions to help children reach their full potential brings us together so often.

We work almost daily with organizations like Conservatory ASL Northwest to become more inclusive to our deaf and hard of hearing in everything we do. We have weekly, monthly, and annual events with Child Bridge foster care program. Weekly trainings include the foster children playing in the museum with volunteers while the parents receive invaluable training on dealing with the trauma these children have been through. Almost daily Benchmark Human Services uses the museum for screening, therapy, and parent training. They also do their annual Toddler Screening here and it is a large event that brings in doctors, dentists, audiologist, etc...Head Start also conducts their recruitment days at the museum.

We may not have as much constant contact with our other collaborations, yet we truly appreciate each and every one.

Cascade County Family Services – youth scholarships to camp

Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art – youth mural painting collaborations

CASA CAN – annual scavenger hunt

YRC – annual scavenger hunt

MOPS

Big Sky Therapy

Great Falls Museum Consortium (GFMC) – recently the GFMC expanded it's focus to make a larger impact. The Sunday Sampler where every museum in the consortium is open the same day for free is now open to associate and collaborations. We want to expand the impact there also. Museums are invaluable to our culture.

## **Final thoughts and Request**

This project will relocate the oldest and largest children's museum in Montana while salvaging and repurposing a warehouse, creating new jobs, and increasing tourism well into the future. We have spent the last (2) years in strategic planning with architects, engineers, construction manager and the local community to create a multipurpose facility that alleviates community needs while saving our much-needed museum.

Phase 1 of this project is to purchase 8 acres and an approx. 70,000 sq. ft. warehouse that we will renovate and repurpose into a new museum. Our request from you is for \$250,000 as a true stakeholder of our project, though any investment you are willing to make in the future of our museum is greatly appreciated. This is a significant impact towards our \$1 million we must raise as our local match to the large foundation grants. The city must have the building back where we are currently located, so we will move by 11/2023. We are already in the environmental assessment process on the new land and have a discounted selling price of \$3.9 million agreement with the owners, Pacific Steel. We have retained the architect, engineers, construction managers and cost estimators to complete the project.

The exhibit design and atmosphere will be designed by the highest caliber of designers, Studio Y Creations. Phase 1 will purchase the property, renovate, and move current museum to site with some upgraded exhibits and signage. In phase 2 and phase 3 more will be repurposed and more activities for all ages will be created.