

Priest River Community Review Report

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Priest River Community Review September 27-28, 2001

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW:

The Idaho Community Review is a collaborative project of the Association of Idaho Cities (AIC), the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP), the Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC), and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Numerous federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as private businesses and non-profit organizations, generously contributed time, energy, and resources to this process as well.



Priest River is the fifth community to undergo review, following Kooskia who participated on May 15-16, 2001, Hayden on April 25-26, 2001, Jerome on March 1-2, 2001, and Heyburn on September 28-29, 2000.

Priest River submitted an application and selected three focus areas from a broad range of possibilities: 1) Local Economic Development, 2) Community Design and Identity, and 3) Seniors and Youth.

Jan Fisher, City Clerk, was Priest River's Home Team Coordinator; Ted Runberg, Priest River Development Corporation (PRDC), was the Home Team Leader for the Local Economy Focus Team; Bill Rise, City Council President, was the Home Team Leader for the Community Design and Identity Focus Team; and Katie Crill, West Bonneville Library District Librarian, was the Home Team Leader for the Seniors and Youth Focus Team.



The Community Review Steering Committee recruited a Visiting Team of seventeen experienced community development professionals based on the three focus areas identified by Priest River. Each of the seventeen individuals joined one of the three Focus Teams. These individuals and their organizations are summarized later in this report.

On September 27, 2001, Mayor Tom Hartliep welcomed the Visiting Team to Priest River at the River Pigs Inn. Gary Gillespie, HUD State Coordinator and Chairman of the Idaho Rural Partnership, introduced the members of the Visiting Team. Michael Shaw, Human Rights Coordinator for the Association of Idaho Cities, described the goals of the Community Review. Michael and Gary emphasized that while the Visiting Team had a wealth of knowledge and experience, their feedback would take the form of observations and suggestions, not hard advice or prescriptions for success. Gary noted that with the short amount of time spent in Priest River, the Visiting Team would not have nearly enough knowledge of the people, economics, and the overall situation to know precisely what course of action was best for the community. That responsibility remained with the people of Priest River and its acknowledged leaders. What the Visiting Team could offer, however, was a new set of eyes, a fresh perspective, a spark of additional energy and hope, available resources that the community could tap to meet its objectives, and follow up assistance subsequent to the Community Review.

The Visiting Team was challenged to review the community and get a feel for what citizens want, to ask questions that might arise, and to offer honest, constructive criticism and feedback. Mayor Hartliep expressed delight that Priest River was selected for a review. He challenged the Home Team to open their hearts and minds, share honestly both problems and opportunities, and accept feedback in the spirit in which it was intended.



Following the introductions and briefing, Ted Runberg made a presentation on Priest River geography and history. The group then broke into the three focus teams for tours and meetings throughout the morning and early afternoon. Following the tour of the community, the Visiting Team traveled around the community to conduct interviews and fill out questionnaires with local citizens. The Home Team

and Visiting Team then met jointly for dinner at the Feed Mill Beef and Brew Restaurant. Following dinner, the Seniors and Youth Focus Team went to the high school and conducted a public meeting on Senior and Youth issues in the community. The Local Economy Focus Team and the Community Design and Infrastructure Focus Team journeyed to City Hall to conduct public meetings as well, gathering input on community issues and concerns. Input collected from citizens through surveys and interviews is included in this report.

On the morning of September 28, the Community Congregational Church hosted the Visiting Team. Each of the three focus teams deliberated separately then reconvened with the whole Visiting Team to develop themes and resources that would be identified in the final oral presentation to the city. The oral debriefing presentations were given to the Priest River Home Team, community leaders, and interested citizens after a group lunch provided by the River Pigs Inn.



SUMMARY:

The Idaho Rural Partnership, Association of Idaho Cities, Idaho Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the other members of the Visiting Team would like to thank the City of Priest River and its residents for hosting the Priest River Community Review. The team appreciates the generous hospitality of local citizens. Team members learned a lot working with the Home Team over the two days of the review and interacting with so many fine Idahoans.

The Visiting Team understands that asking a group of outsiders to make observations about one's community involves positive risk-taking. The team commends the city leadership for that effort. The team hopes it is understood that all of the observations made in this report are given in the spirit of constructive criticism, to help Priest River understand itself more clearly and to grow stronger. The team wants citizens to understand that this report is made after only a very limited time in Priest River. It is up to the local community to sort through the feedback and decide what to respond to and what to let go.

Priest River is a community that has a lot going for it. The small size of the town gives it a considerable advantage over many rural communities. It has a healthier natural environment and a more beautiful river setting than most small communities. It has good schools, a new library district, and outstanding recreational facilities. It has a compact, well-defined downtown. The community is able to attract and retain professional city management and very competent staff. It has a great location by US Highway 2 with an excellent timber



museum depicting local history and culture. By and large, the people in the community enjoy living in Priest River, though the youth in the community may not be able to find jobs and may not find it easy to stay in the community after high school.

Priest River has some leaders who are very good at community organizing, but they need to continue to be persistent. When dealing with cyclical industries like timber, skilled organization will

come in handy as the community works to fight the sense of decay that pervades a



downturn in the economic cycle. Furthering community discussions relating to the industrial parks, youth programs, the skateboard park, a strong senior program centered on the Senior center, the Library, and a timber museum all seem like good ideas and stabilizing additions to the community.

The community needs to be mindful of the danger in becoming preoccupied with new ideas at the expense of not taking care of what is already there. Some Visiting Team members heard a lot of emphasis on expanding the Opera and the Junior High School Theater for drama and arts events. They also heard emphasis on new residential developments in and out of town, and on new additions to utility capacity to accommodate community growth. There needs to be an emphasis on assisting neighborhoods that are already badly in need of rehabilitation. There is a danger that all of the attention to what is happening on the edge and outside Priest River, especially in Old Town and Newport, may divert the city's focus. Ultimately, it could challenge the city's identity and core values.

The Visiting Team heard repeatedly that people love the small town atmosphere and values of Priest River. With each new development, one might ask the hypothetical question, "Is this project supportive of our small town values?" For example, the renewal of the downtown core clearly needs to be consistent with local values. Additional questions are vital to this debate as well. What about the development of retail services near US Highway 2? What about the way that curbs, gutters, and sidewalks are disjointed around town? Consistent, connected sidewalks and numerous small parks would add greatly to Priest River's small town quality of life. What would an emphasis on housing and neighborhood rehabilitation do for the quality of life of current residents? Is that consistent with local values?



Priest River needs to pay attention to the long-term costs of growth. The community is beginning to grow right now, and many costs of growth are back-loaded and therefore won't be felt for some time. There are considerable costs of deferred maintenance in hidden areas such as utilities, roads, and schools. These factors and conditions will eventually hamper local efforts to bring new businesses and residents into the community.



Is the community of Priest River willing to tax itself to pay for the cost of needed infrastructure? Based on citizen input during the review, the answer is "no."

Some Priest River citizens who were interviewed indicated that they did not feel that their input was valued or solicited by the city, and had taken a less active interest in civic life because they were not sought for opinion or feedback. Better communication and inclusion of all residents is a key to making positive change. It may be more effective to solicit stronger citizen input and involvement before decisions are made. The model of analyzing options and deciding on an alternative, then selling the decision to voters is not the most inclusive model for consensus decision-making, collaboration, or partnerships. Finding ways to involve people, then persuading them to confront the difficult trade-offs of cost versus service is often more effective in garnering their support.

To the extent that leaders involve more people in grappling with the issues and arriving at a plan of action, there will be more community ambassadors to convince residents to move forward. For example, the Study Circles model used by the City of Kuna (www.studycircles.org) in passing school bond issues and examining other community concerns may be worth additional study and consideration by leaders of Priest River. Issues successfully addressed using Study Circles include racism and race relations, education, criminal justice, police protection, youth, and the formation of an auditorium district. Along the way, leaders may find that people need to share a common vision of the community they would like Priest River to become. In pondering the future, an effort should be made to reach out to all possible partners. Such partners should include seniors and youth, low-income residents, the school district, the county, or even other jurisdictions of local government. The city can model outstanding leadership through such outreach efforts. To the extent the community works to better understand itself, to develop relationships, and to clarify the roles and commitment of every organization, there is enormous potential to work as a team to make this wonderful rural community even better.

The Visiting Team thanks the citizens of Priest River for inviting us. The team hopes the information in this report proves useful to the community as feedback as citizens consider a new long-term vision. Team members are happy to answer any questions and to talk with the community about follow-up actions in the future.

Local Economy Focus Team - Brief Summary:

The Local Economy Focus Team was able to identify numerous community strengths in Priest River.

Priest River Strengths Include:



- The town has a good business base with more diversity than most communities of this size. There are a number of unique businesses that have

been attracted to the area for the quality of life.

- The Stimson Mill continues to provide living wage jobs and appears to have a stable future for the near term.
- The area is served by US Highway 2, a short line railroad, and US Highway 95.
- Priest River is in a beautiful setting at the confluence of the Pend Oreille and Priest Rivers. The area has an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities.
- The downtown area has a lot of character and historical significance.
- The PRDC Industrial Park and other holdings are great assets for the community.

Priest River also faces a host of challenges as it moves into the future.

Priest River Challenges Include:

- With the industrial park, the PRDC has succeeded in creating one of the best economic development assets of any small community in the state, but it struggles in attracting and maintaining tenants.
- There are concerns with image, beautification, and community identity.
- The community has worked to beautify the downtown area and has had many successes, but at the same time core businesses are moving out on the highway.
- The rivers are great assets for Priest River, but little direct economic benefit has come to the community as a result of the outdoor recreation and tourism potential.
- There are many talented and committed individuals in the community, but leadership seems fragmented. Local government is not a strong partner in community revitalization. The city, chamber, and PRDC all seem to be working on separate agendas.



Community Design & Identity Focus Team - Brief Summary:

Community leaders and residents of Priest River show a tremendous can-do attitude and high level of expertise in organizational development, management, project development, and resource management. Priest River's natural, recreational, and geographic attributes

are a foundation for success. The town has fishing, boating, hunting, skiing nearby, and convenient access to cultural events. The historic attributes of the community and the area have become a destination unto themselves for history buffs. The steady stream of visitors on their way to and from surrounding urban areas, Priest Lake, and the Selkirk Loop is a potential external asset as well.



Priest River has the potential to be among the most successful rural communities in Idaho. However, there seems to be significant conflict and mistrust among various community interests (this is common to many rural communities). These interests include local government, residents, businesses, and those who live outside city limits but spend most of their time and money in Priest River. Some residents seem to have a defeatist mentality, which was surprising given Priest River's assets

and accomplishments. The absence of any coordinated planning efforts for the community is notable. Along with the lack of a strategic roadmap for the community's future, conflict, mistrust, and a lack of confidence probably represent the greatest barriers to Priest River's vitality. Priest River must make a choice. It can hang on to old turf wars, patterns of blame, and criticism, or it can capitalize on collective strengths and natural resources. Community focus should be on the importance of the strategic planning process. In addition, the community should be aware of the following:

- Priest River's most current comprehensive plan is close to 20 years old. The existing plan should be revised to reflect present realities and projected economic, employment, environmental, housing, and community development needs.
- Effective planning is the key to securing financial resources for the community. Many federal, state, and private funding sources will require a current comprehensive plan before allocating resources to the community. Just as banks like to see a business plan before making a business loan, lenders want to see that a community can at least plan and prioritize, indicating that funds will be well used. The plan helps evaluate successes and documents a track record for future funding efforts and accomplishments.



- Priest River has an opportunity to refine and/or redefine its image. This might be the time to look at the community of Greater Priest River, not simply the City of Priest River. The community might ask itself, "who or what is Priest

River?” The community should define the area identified as Priest River. Does it stop at the city limits? Does it include a larger community of people who work, attend school, or shop in Priest River, but live outside the city proper? Many business owners, for instance, live outside the city limits.

- Make history work for, not against, the community’s evolution and success.
- Priest River’s downtown historic district is one of its greatest treasures. The area is being allowed to deteriorate, and in some places it is being overrun by blight. The community needs to explore mixed, compatible property uses downtown and take steps to get cars off the street and make the area more walkable. The area should have a public gathering space with a plaza or pocket park. Vacant lots in the downtown area are one possibility for developing such a plaza or park. Some of the area’s older buildings could be utilized as affordable senior housing.
- Are residents welcoming visitors and tourists? If not, why not? Is tourism important to Priest River? What community assets are important to residents? To tourists? To both?
- High traffic speeds and inadequate signage may be limiting tourism and visitors.
- Find a way to get the attention of visitors. Tourists have a wide variety of needs and interests. For example, many visitors who are persons with disabilities will seek out businesses and communities that are accessible. These people are grateful to find lodging and businesses where they feel welcome. The community can reap a great reward by working to eliminate architectural barriers and emphasizing accessibility for visitors with disabilities.
- Current Planning and Zoning ordinances require minimum square footages, perhaps as a way to exclude mobile or manufactured housing from neighborhoods. Minimum square footage and lot size requirements can drive up the cost of housing and increase energy consumption and costs.
- A community cleanup could improve local attitudes and improve overall appeal. Think of doing neighborhood cleanup projects like Paint the Town and get local youth involved in cleaning up public spaces and the entryways to town.
- The water treatment plant is not meeting current demands and needs to be expanded. It was also



noted that the city is pumping treated water across the bridge to the mill to wet down log piles. If possible, the mill should pump water directly from the river to keep the log piles wet.

- Civic leaders should look for ways to encourage new businesses to come to Priest River. The city should have a process in place to ensure businesses know they are welcome and are an important part of the community.
- Priest River has many tremendous assets. Foremost among them: the historic downtown, the river park, and the Mud Hole. Find creative ways to link these assets in a walking or driving tour through signage, physical pathways, and other means. Once visitors stop in the community, make them feel at home with clear directions through and around town, including places to stop and sit. Walking tours could be included and local establishments should be identified where visitors can find high-quality food and refreshment as part of the tours.

Seniors & Youth Focus Team - Brief Summary:

The Seniors and Youth Focus Team was hosted by the Seniors and Youth Home Team. Together, they visited community daycare, preschool, grade school, junior high, high school, parks, senior center, and senior assisted living facilities. An open, public meeting was held at the high school library to discuss senior and youth issues. The Seniors and Youth Focus Team observations can be assessed, and specific recommendations can be made, which can then form a blueprint for a plan of action.

The daycare observations were based on the visits to local daycare facilities and one preschool. One of the daycare facilities was in a private home that needed some repairs to address safety concerns. The homeowner seemed intent on addressing the concerns. The preschool was also in a private home with some accessibility concerns. The curriculum and activities of all of the facilities were effective and efficient.

The visits to the elementary and junior high school were very productive and demonstrated to the team that the community is very fortunate to have such a strong cadre of school administrators and teachers. The junior high school facility is old (built in 1940). Its underutilized school auditorium is very large and is the only large meeting hall in Priest River. It could serve as a theater, drama hall, and community meeting facility. The Seniors and Youth Focus Team felt that the town could rally around this facility and get a win-win for both the school district and the community by promoting the use of this already constructed central gathering place.



The youth of the community have numerous after-school activities at the elementary school level but very few at the junior high and high school level. Youth who spoke with members of the team during the visit were quick to point

out the lack of jobs and things to do in Priest River. Junior high school age youth expressed a desire to have a skateboard park in town. When asked if most of the young people of Priest River planned to stay in town to raise a family, the opinion was that there were few available jobs and that they would not be able to stay. Civic leaders need to build a communication bridge and establish partnerships with youth, who have a lot of energy and ideas to offer the community.

The community has an established senior center owned by Bonner County and leased to the “Happy Agers,” a senior group. They have scheduled activities and sponsor an annual Thanksgiving dinner for the community each year. The center has a modern kitchen and a large dining and meeting area. There does not seem to be an open channel of communication between seniors and leaders in the community. The seniors lack a senior transportation program, and there is no public transportation in Priest



River. The senior center is available for community events and can be rented for a small fee. The “Happy Agers” could reach out to all seniors living both in Priest River and in the county. They should also explore forging a partnership with either the Newport Senior Center (through a Memorandum of Agreement) or the new Library District (to establish a branch library or library services at the senior center). The team also visited a newly constructed eight-bed senior assisted living facility. The seniors at the facility were very pleased with it. There appears to be a need for additional assisted living facilities in Priest River.

The community should explore developing a volunteer committee appointed by the City Council to promote community events like the annual Loggers Days celebration. The volunteer committee could be part of an AmeriCorps Program and could work with the school district to ensure that they have trained volunteers.

The newly created library district needs community support to be successful.

The city needs an adult education program. This is a crosscutting issue that impacts all residents. The community might explore an adult education program using computers available at the library, area schools, or distance learning technology.



Priest River needs to build on existing partnerships to promote and capitalize on community activities. Youth, adult, and senior citizen leaders in the community need to be identified and trained to assist the various projects

undertaken by the community (as part of the volunteer committee). There is a need to engage youth in participation in local, regional, and state activities both through the schools and the through the community. A variety of programs are available to assist with engaging youth. One successful model, Idaho Values Youth is available through the Association of Idaho Cities.

The community may want to explore the need for a Job Service office in Priest River. This office could assist youth and adults with job opportunities both in the community, other areas of the state, and in surrounding regions.

PRIEST RIVER REVIEW VISITING TEAM MEMBERS:

Community Review Coordinators:

Bob Ford

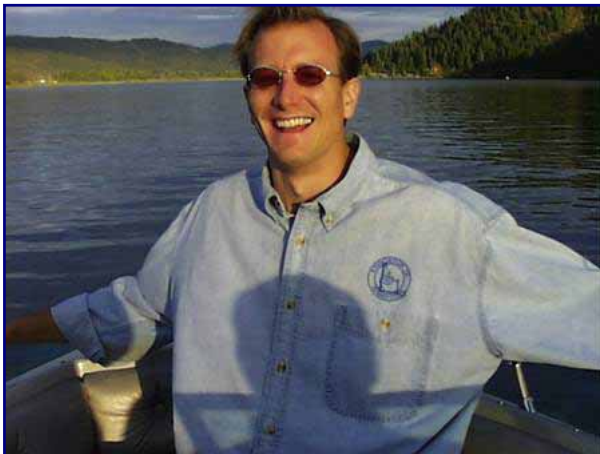
Manager, Rural Development
Idaho Department of Commerce
(208) 334-2470

Bob has a B.S. from the University of Idaho, an M.S. in management from the University of Southern California, has worked in planning and regional economic development since 1979, and has headed up marketing, business development, and the Gem Community Program.

Gary Gillespie

Idaho State Coordinator
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development
(208) 334-1990

Gary has a B.A. from Eastern Washington University, an M.S. from the University of Idaho, and an M.B.A. from Seattle City University. He is a retired USMC Colonel, and has been a manager, director, economist, and market analyst for HUD for the past 30 years.



Michael Shaw

Human Rights Coordinator
Association of Idaho Cities
(208) 344-8594

Michael has a B.A. from Colorado College, an MBA from Northwest Nazarene University, and has worked as a child therapist, civil rights investigator, human resource specialist, and consultant. He currently provides leadership, conflict resolution and facilitation,

community building, hate crime, racial profiling, and diversity training to city officials, schools, and human rights groups across Idaho.

Brian Dale

Community Builder

U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development

(208) 334-1990

Brian has a B.A. from Westminster College (in Missouri), has worked with many local and national disability councils, advisory committees, and coalitions, and has directed work of the Utah Statewide Independent Living Council and Salt Lake Impact 2002 Olympic Committee.

Local Economy Focus Team:

Travis Rothweiler

City Administrator

City of Jerome

(208) 324-8189

Travis has a B.A. and a M.P.A. from Montana State University.

A member of the Idaho Administrators Association and the AIC Human Rights Task Force (Ex-Officio), Travis leads

the Jerome County Local Emergency Planning Committee and the Jerome Gem Community Action Team from his position as city administrator.



Cliff Long

Business Development

Idaho Department of Commerce

(208) 334-2470

Cliff holds a B.A. in psychology from Oregon State University, a M.B.A. from Boise State University and is a graduate of the Economic Development Institute at the University of Oklahoma. He currently leads a team working to attract new jobs and investment to Idaho, retain and expand existing businesses, develop new markets for small Idaho companies through the Idaho Business Network Program, and fund local economic development efforts in rural areas.

John Austin

Economic Development Specialist
Panhandle Area Council
(208) 772-0584

John has a B.S. in Business from the University of Idaho. He served nine years as the Finance Director/Treasurer for the City of Coeur d'Alene and one year as City Administrator for the City of Spirit Lake.

Eldonna Shaw Gossett

Executive Director
Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce
(208) 263-0887

A graduate of the Institute of Organization Management through the U.S. Chamber of Commerce at UCLA, she has a background in community and organization development, with emphasis on tourism and business promotion, through eight years experience in Chamber of Commerce management in northern Idaho. She is Past President of Idaho Association of Chambers of Commerce.

Community Design & Identity Focus Team:

Neil Meyer

Professor of Community Development and Sociology
Lewis and Clark State College
(208) 792-2460

Neil, an extension economist, conducts programs on how federal, state, and local economic policies relate to the economic plight of Idaho citizens and communities. Educational programs concentrate on the present economic situation and what citizens can do to adjust to present economic realities. Neil has a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from the University of Wisconsin.



Erik Kingston

Housing Resource Coordinator
Idaho Housing and Finance Association
(208) 331-4706

Erik created and manages IHFA's Housing Information & Referral Center, a research and referral resource for the state. He is currently involved in Boise's Open Space planning and the Treasure Valley Partnership. Formerly, he was with Boise Public Works, and Executive Director of Wasatch Fish & Gardens (Utah), and on the Utah Arts Council's Performing Arts Tour and Folk Arts Program.

Gaetha Pace

Executive Director
Idaho Heritage Trust
(208) 788-7529

Gaetha graduated from South Dakota State University with a degree in journalism and attended a year of graduate studies in Library Science and Corrections at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. She has been Director of the Idaho Heritage Trust for nine years, and prior to that was Director of the Idaho Commission on the Arts. She worked for five years as a special assistant and deputy press secretary to Governor John Evans.

Craige Naylor

Senior Deputy Director
Fannie Mae Partnership Office: Idaho
(208) 345-1058

A graduate of New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, Craige brings to Fannie Mae 15 years of senior management experience in the mortgage lending industry. He works closely with local lenders, real estate professionals, homebuilders, nonprofit representatives, and government leaders to carry out Fannie Mae's statewide investment plan. He directs Fannie Mae's outreach efforts and develops partnerships throughout the state to increase middle, moderate, and low-income families' access to affordable homeownership and rentals.

Seniors & Youth Focus Team:

Deb Krum

Asset Building Coordinator
Association of Idaho Cities
(208) 344-8594

Deb Krum serves as the Program Coordinator for the Association of Idaho Cities' statewide asset-building initiatives. She is actively involved in supporting local initiatives that focus on providing children and youth with the resources they need for successful living. Deb believes that programs alone won't address the crucial needs of young people - only time and devotion will.

Lynn Cameron

Insurance Agent
Cameron Insurance
(208) 882-1584

Lynn is in the insurance business in Moscow and holds an AmeriCorps Promise Fellowship to develop youth resources in Latah County. He has a degree in Park and Recreation Management, is a retired military officer, and has over 30 years experience with youth, community development, and community leadership.

Mandy De Castro

Program Specialist
Association of Idaho Cities
(208) 344-8594

Mandy de Castro serves as a Program Specialist, for the Association of Idaho Cities' statewide asset-building initiatives with Deb Krum. She works to equip and support communities to build assets for youth.



Pearl Bruno Bouchard

Director

Aging and Adult Services for North Idaho

(208) 667-3179

Pearl received her M.P.A. from the University of Idaho in 1999. At Aging and Adult Services, she is responsible for planning and coordinating services for senior citizens. Although new to the agency, she has been involved in senior services for several years. She has worked for fifteen years in the aging network in the North Central District of Idaho and Western Montana.

Lynda Clark

City Council Member

City of Nampa

(208) 465-9936

Lynda is currently Nampa City Council President. She serves on the Board of Directors of Mercy Medical Center, Nampa Boys and Girls Club, and the Nampa Council on Aging. She is Development Officer for Northwest Children's Home in Nampa. A local historian, she wrote a Centennial history of Nampa, "Nampa, Idaho: A Journey of Discovery," and has taught history at Boise State University and Northwest Nazarene University. She received her B.A. from Northwest Nazarene University and a M.A. in Political Science from the University of Idaho.

TEAM OBSERVATIONS:

Local Economy Focus Team - Detailed Key Points:

The Local Economy Focus Team was able to identify numerous community strengths and challenges in Priest River. The community has a good business base with more diversity than most towns of this size. There are a number of unique businesses that have been attracted to the area for its quality of life. Other strengths include:

- Downtown Priest River has a lot of character and historic significance.
- The Stimson Mill continues to provide living wage jobs and appears to have a stable future for the near term.
- The PRDC Industrial Park and other holdings are great assets for the community.
- Priest River lies in a beautiful setting at the confluence of the Pend Oreille and Priest Rivers. The area has abundant outdoor recreational opportunities.
- The area is served by US Highway 2, a short line railroad, and US Highway 95.

Challenges in Priest River's Future:

The Local Economy Focus Team noted that Priest River faces many challenges as well. These challenges include:

- Concerns with image, beautification, and community identity.
- With the industrial park, the PRDC has succeeded in creating one of the best economic development assets of any small community in the state, but struggles in attracting and maintaining tenants.
- There are many talented and committed individuals in the community, but leadership seems fragmented. Local government is not a strong partner in community revitalization. The city, chamber, and PRDC all seem to be working on separate agendas.



- The community has worked to beautify the downtown area and has had numerous successes, but at the same time core businesses are vacating the area and moving out onto the highway.
- The rivers are great assets for Priest River, but little direct economic benefit has come to the community as a result of the outdoor recreation and tourism potential.

Specific Observations and Recommended Actions:

Coordination/Leadership/Planning:

All the different agencies that are working to promote or develop the community need to join together to discuss cooperation, collaboration, and mutual assistance, in addition to creating a common vision for the future of Priest River.

In several Idaho communities, the Gem Community Group has become a coordinating and information sharing body that keeps the individual goals and objectives of the various community groups under one cover as the community development plan. This group holds periodic meetings to keep everyone informed and to foster ongoing collaboration for key projects. The Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC) and the Panhandle Area Council (PAC) could assist with this effort.

City elected officials should take an active role in assisting community development and should be supported by the people in this role.

Community Image and Identity:

Image and identity are very important in promoting the community for business development, tourism, and downtown use. Priest River is presently overshadowed by both Sandpoint and Priest Lake and has not established its own niche in the region.

Priest River may wish to take image and identity on as a specific interagency or community-wide project. Combinations of town hall meetings, focus groups, and surveys, could be developed to define the town's identity and create an internal/external image-building program to enhance all other marketing and promotion work. Each participating entity (city, chamber, Gem Team, or the PRDC) could appoint members to work on the project and bring back ideas to use in their own marketing efforts. The IDOC and the PAC could help facilitate this work.

Downtown:

Downtown Priest River has great charm and historic appeal. Several efforts over the



years have worked to revitalize the downtown area but key businesses continue to move out, leaving a diminished draw for shoppers and foot traffic. Outside interests are buying downtown property at bargain prices. These conditions pose both an

opportunity and a threat to continued downtown vitality.

Priest River needs an overall plan for downtown that includes historic preservation, business retention and expansion, business development, marketing, promotion, and amenity development. Downtown development should be lead by a group that will approach it in this broad context, a group that can bring individuals together and foster collaboration over a wide range of interests. This should involve all new property owners in the area as well.

The Joodle Bug and the Antique Mall are very unique businesses that can be used to help promote the entire downtown area.

The ordinance prohibiting living in the upper floors of downtown buildings needs to be revisited. Restoring living space in the downtown area can provide additional foot traffic and vitality to the area. Potential agencies to assist include: IDOC, PAC, Small Business Development Council (SBDC), and the Idaho Heritage Trust.

Business Development:

PRDC has done some very good work developing what is arguably the best industrial park in Idaho for a small community. They are struggling to attract and maintain tenants for the space. PRDC also owns some additional property by the river that they have slated for a high amenity RV Park. If developed, the RV Park would be a great catalyst for generating additional traffic and demand for local businesses and the downtown area.

There is some confusion as to the specific role of PRDC in the overall economic development efforts of the community. Creating and providing suitable space for businesses expansion is a critical element in economic development. For economic development to be successful, there are several other activities that must accompany this work too, including: marketing, promotion, responding to inquiries, infrastructure development, business climate improvement, and workforce development. The effort should be integrated into an overall strategy for the community. A lead agency might be set up coordinating the effort and bringing the necessary partners together for success.



PRDC should put together a business plan for the development of their assets and define what roles they wish to take in the overall economic development effort for Priest River. This plan should define a focused mission for PRDC and provide clear direction for the management, operations and marketing of their industrial property.

PRDC may wish to consider strategies that promote increased capital investment by encouraging businesses to buy land and build their own buildings. This may take the form of moving tenants to fair market lease rates after a given time, much like incubators. This would increase the local tax base and foster more stability in the local business base.

PRDC could host a meeting with the city, chamber of commerce, and other stakeholders to create an overall business development strategy for the city that outlines goals, strategies and responsibilities of each of the partners and results in an economic development team.

The economic development team should meet with the owner of the Louisiana Pacific (LP) site to explore common interests in development and opportunities for collaboration. This is a great asset and could help attract additional business to the community.



Priest River leaders should work closely with the PAC, the IDOC, and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to take advantage of the programs available to promote business development. Tax increment financing (TIF), a possible strategy, has been used by many communities to create the infrastructure needed to serve business expansion in an entire area of town. The Louisiana Pacific site could be one candidate for TIF, and PAC could advise and assist with this work.

PRDC's plans for an RV park could be a catalyst for increasing business in the downtown core. This project should be part of the overall economic development strategy and aggressively pursued. The Idaho Department of Commerce has staff and resources to help market the park to private investors. Priest River might conduct a business survey to analyze the local business climate and test for issues and needs impacting business growth. Questions like, "Does a lack of zoning reduce investment and property values?" might be explored, and a rationale developed either for instituting or revising zoning.

The lead economic development agency might also take on questions about limited telecommunications services. Community and business leaders should meet with representatives from Verizon to understand what capabilities currently exist and any plans for future upgrades in the service. PRDC and the city could look for resources to enhance these services, such as the new state tax incentives and IDOC grant programs.



The Stimson Mill is an important employer in the area. Business and civic leaders should meet periodically with company executives to show their support and to create an “early warning” system if the mill is threatened. Stimson is shipping sawdust and chips out of the area. There may be some potential for cogeneration at the site. Energy Products of Idaho in Coeur d’Alene specializes in building cogeneration plants for sawmills.

The airport is an important asset for the community. Although it has limited expansion potential, there should be a plan for the development and use of the facility. This could be done with the assistance of the various user groups.



Education/Workforce Development: Quality education and a trained workforce may become the most critical factors for developing and attracting business in the 21st century.

Priest River might target quality education as one of its highest priorities and start a community-wide campaign to support the school district in its efforts to improve the education system. This program has to start at home and involve the parents.

A sub-committee of the business development group should be formed to focus on workforce development. This work would include assessing the current labor force as well as learning all the available tools to upgrade worker skills as needed to support both existing businesses and new businesses. Key support agencies include: Idaho Department of Labor (IDOL), Idaho Department of Commerce, North Idaho College, and the local workforce development board.

Tourism Development:

Tourism is an opportunity for Priest River with the river being a natural waterway linking to Lake Pend Oreille, creating 50 miles of recreation potential and a huge opportunity.

Downtown Priest River has potential for tourism with its historic buildings and museum. Antiquing can be used as a draw through collaboration with shopkeepers. The City of Burley has started an antique fair as a community festival to draw people to town.



The waterfront is a prime location for retail, dining, and recreation, with boating and marina boardwalk potential. River access and beach recreation have potential with improved access and improved amenities. The railroad could be used for excursion trains that would bring people through and into downtown.

Priest River could capitalize on its location on byway and loop drives like the Panhandle Historic Rivers and Selkirk Loop.

Priest River needs to create a solid identity to market to the traveling public. In keeping with this, there is a need to correct the lack of presence in major, highly distributed guides such as the Guide to North Idaho and the Idaho Travel Guide. Exposure in these publications is either free or inexpensive and forms the basis for an effective effort in marketing tourism. The town might be well served to develop travel packages for marketing on www.visitid.org. Cultural activities and tours co-marketed with regional groups would be another avenue to pursue. Signs directing visitors to services would be helpful, especially during events.

The community needs to develop a visitor-friendly appearance through cleanup programs and improved, easily legible signage.

Priest River needs to create an overall tourism development strategy and plan that includes marketing, development, promotion, and coordination. To get started, there is a need to educate the community to understand the importance of tourism and to get people involved and committed. Tourists must feel welcome in the community if tourism is to become a viable and sustaining portion of Priest River's economy.

Tourism development needs to be lead by a defined local team with defined responsibilities and accountability. The community should work to create synergy to avoid re-inventing the wheel. Celebrate success and share with the community. Strive to create partnerships and alliances and promote what you have.

Resources to assist with the effort include: the Idaho Department of Commerce Tourism Division, the ITC Grant Program, the National Main Street Program, Historic RR Information Groups, the Idaho Historic RR Association, and the National Historic RR Society (Spokane Chapter).

Other regional communities that could be studied and possibly emulated include: Ocean Shores, WA; Sisters, OR; and Virginia City, MT.

Community Design & Identity Focus Team - Detailed Key Points:

The residents of Priest River show a tremendous can-do attitude. The high level of expertise in organizational development and management, project development, and resource management is evident in the community. Community Design and Identity Focus Team members felt that Priest River's natural, recreational, and geographic attributes are a recipe for success. Priest River has it all: fishing, boating, hunting, skiing nearby, and convenient access to cultural events. The area's historic buildings, timber industry, and features (particularly in Priest River's historic district), are a destination unto themselves for history buffs. Several locals expressed the thought that people move to the area for the lifestyle and the aforementioned attractions as opposed to employment.

The steady stream of visitors on their way to and from surrounding urban areas, Priest Lake, and the Selkirk Loop is a potential external asset as well. Many locals expressed pride in their small-town roots, wherever their lives have taken them. All in all, Priest River has the potential to be among the most successful communities in Idaho.

In addition to strong, positive feelings about Priest River, there seems to be significant conflict and mistrust among several community constituencies, common to an extent in all communities and generally more focused in smaller towns. These groups include local government, residents, businesses, and those who live outside city limits but spend most of their time and money in town. There seems to be a certain defeatist mentality among some residents, which was surprising given Priest River's assets and history of



accomplishments. For these individuals, the fact that a project had failed in the past was reason enough not to try anything similar in the future.

The absence of any coordinated planning efforts in the community is notable. Along with the lack of a strategic roadmap for the community's future, conflict, mistrust, and a lack of confidence are probably the greatest barriers to Priest River's vitality at present. The City has a choice to make — it can hang on to old turf wars, patterns of blame, and criticism, or it can capitalize on collective strengths and natural resources to move forward together.

One thing heard clearly by the team is that despite differences, when a neighbor is in need, the community pulls together. Our nation and our world have just experienced a similar awakening and refocusing. Think of Priest River as the neighbor in need. Community focus should be on the importance of the strategic planning process, offering observations, suggestions for addressing issues brought to the attention of the team during the review, and potential resources available to the community.

Roadmap/Comprehensive/Strategic Plan:

“Luck is the residue of design.”

Priest River’s most current comprehensive plan is close to 20 years old. When this plan was written, Idaho’s economic picture was very different. The existing plan should be revised to reflect current and projected economic, employment, environmental, housing, and community development needs and realities. Undoubtedly Priest River can (and will) change without a plan, but it will be difficult if not impossible to move in any one direction effectively. The plan should leave room for unforeseen economic events.

The benefits of a comprehensive, or strategic plan, are many:

- The planning process involves an overview that defines and describes the community, and a needs assessment to better understand the challenges faced by the community and its residents. This is a great way to identify where and what Priest River is.
- The plan is helpful in setting priorities. The public, local government, and nonprofit groups get to contribute to its development. So long as the needs assessment and planning stages reflect the needs and priorities of everyone concerned, the plan, its priorities, and implementation should have broad support. Think of the plan as a detailed but flexible road map. Once Priest River has determined where it is and where it wants to go, the plan can help elected officials stay on course and target priorities.
- The plan helps evaluate successes and provides a track record for future funding efforts and accomplishments.
- Planning is the key to securing financial resources for the community. Many federal, state, and private funding sources require a current plan before allocating resources to the community. Just as banks like to see a business plan before making a business loan, these lenders want to see that a community can at least plan and prioritize, an indicator that their funds will be well used.
- The plan promotes continuity in the face of turnover in government agencies or elected offices. Although plans are flexible, they take some of the risk out of extreme shifts in political personality and keep local government accountable. This is especially critical in smaller towns like Priest River, where a relatively small number of voters can determine political leadership in the community.

Finally, if the planning process is approached with integrity, honesty, and inclusiveness, it can be a tool to bring the community together. When residents see the plan’s goals and objectives being implemented, their trust in the process and their local government increases, and they feel more invested in the community and its future.

Community Image and Identity:

Priest River has an opportunity to refine and or redefine its image. Now might be the time to look at the community of Greater Priest River, not simply the City of Priest River. The community might ask itself, “who or what is Priest River?”

- First, it might help to define the area identified as Priest River. Does it stop at the city limits? Does it include a larger community of people who work, attend school, or shop in Priest River, but live outside the city proper? Some families live outside town but send their kids to school in town. Many business owners live outside the city limits, but their businesses pay city property taxes. Are there



creative means for incorporating these individual’s skills and ideas into the discussion of Priest River’s past and future?

- Ask residents what comes to mind when they think of Priest River. Is it timber, railroads, outdoor recreation, water, geology, history, or all of these?

Priest River can embrace its history without being tethered to it. Make history work for, not against, the community’s evolution and success.

- What are Priest River’s core values? What are its residents known for?
- Are residents welcoming visitors and tourists? If not, why not? Is tourism important to Priest River?
- What community assets are important to residents? To tourists? To both?

Other Focus Team Observations/Suggestions:

- **Get Them in the Door:**

Observation: High traffic speeds and inadequate signage/connectivity may be limiting tourism and visitors. The current speed limit outside the city limits is 55 MPH, and it is 35 MPH through town, too fast for the average vehicle occupant to read signs or notice local attractions.

Suggestion: First, drop the speed limit through town to 25 MPH, then work to lower the speed limit for a quarter mile on either side of town to 35 MPH. Then enforce these new speed limits (when police hand out a friendly warning ticket to a first-time visitor, it can make a good impression). Slower speeds make the town

appear more people friendly and welcoming, are safer for pedestrians, and allow visitors to see community assets. Create clear signage directing visitors to places of interest. Look to the Idaho Transportation Department and the local Chamber of Commerce for assistance with this initiative.

Observation: Many persons with disabilities travel and seek out accessible, disability friendly communities. These people are grateful to find lodging and businesses where they feel welcome. Establishments that make an effort to eliminate architectural barriers, train staff to be sensitive to disability issues, and institute policies that are helpful to persons with disabilities, can reap the rewards available from happy, repeat customers.



Suggestion: If Priest River lodging and businesses are friendly to persons with disabilities, let visitors know. Have local persons with disabilities and agencies that serve them help devise good, scattered accessible parking, accessible routes to businesses and accessible paths through the businesses. Think about accessible routes between businesses. In places where architectural barriers hinder access, devise reasonable alternatives. The Idaho State Independent Living Council (SILC) would be a great resource with efforts to improve accessibility. The rewards for such attention to accessibility will be many, including customer loyalty and increased business. This concept is similar to family-friendly practices that welcome children or pet-friendly policies that welcome pet owners. Priest River should also find other creative ways to get the attention of travelers'.

- **Clean up the Front Porch:**

Observation: Priest River's downtown historic district is one of its greatest treasures, but it is deteriorating. In places it is overshadowed by blight.

Suggestion: Explore mixed, compatible property uses downtown, such as a blending residential, commercial, and retail space. Take steps to get cars off the street and make downtown more walkable. Create a public gathering space with a plaza or pocket park. Cities such as Idaho Falls, Twin Falls, and Boise hold regular, organized events in these areas such as 'Alive After Five,' with live music, dancing, food, and refreshments. Following these types of events, people walk throughout the downtown area to shop and to search for coffee houses, cafes or restaurants in which to linger and continue social activities. Thus, the entire downtown area benefits economically from such an event. Another solid community foundation is a centrally located recreation, civic, or cultural center.

Public sponsorship of engraved bricks for such a center, plaza, or park could help defray construction costs and create a strong sense of investment and ownership. The Cities of Nampa and Idaho Falls are currently working on such projects and could be great resources.

Revitalizing downtown buildings and public areas may draw on Historic Tax Credits, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, HOME funds, USDA Rural Housing funds, and Community Development Block Grants, among other sources. Creative incentives for developers willing to renovate historic structures, perhaps for affordable senior housing, might be helpful.



Increase community emphasis on the arts by sponsoring additional works of public art. The Cities of Kooskia and Kamiah have numerous public murals and works of art, which add to the sense of community beautification and connect the city to multiple local resources of artistic and creative talent. Sandpoint resident and nationally renowned sculptor David Kraisler has expressed an interest in creating artwork with a human rights theme for communities in Idaho. The Idaho Commission on the Arts is also an excellent resource.

Local youth would like a skate park. Get them involved in cleaning up downtown in exchange for investment in such a skate park.

- **Make Them Feel Welcome:**

Observation: Some reports indicate that people passing through Priest River hadn't felt particularly welcome. These encounters can hurt the community through a loss of repeat business and referrals.

Suggestion. Work to educate every resident, who has regular visitor contact, about customer service. If Priest River is known for its friendly, honest, and helpful people, the town and its residents will benefit.

- **Housing Affordability:**

Observation: Current Planning and Zoning ordinances require minimum square footages, perhaps as a way to exclude mobile or manufactured housing from neighborhoods. This is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Minimum square footage and lot size requirements drive up the cost of housing and increase energy consumption and costs. Quality, affordable housing should address the diverse needs of community members at all income levels: seniors on fixed incomes, service workers earning minimum wage; single parents, and those who are unemployed or underemployed. Adequate housing stock is a foundation for any economic development or business recruitment strategy, and ensures that

each citizen can function as a good parent, student, employee, neighbor and citizen.

Suggestion: Managing design is often more effective than limiting square footage. Design standards can help improve neighborhood aesthetics. Enforce health and safety ordinances; create incentives for citizens to keep properties clean and debris free. Look at other communities to see how they have incorporated design standards.

Several sources exist to rehabilitate Priest River's existing housing stock. HOME rehab loans of up to \$20,000 are available through local Community Action Agencies. These loans are "due upon sale," meaning the owner doesn't repay the loan until he or she sells the house. USDA Rural Development also has rehab loans and grants. Homeowners 62 years and older are eligible for home improvement grants. Other low-income families and individuals may receive loans at as little as 1% interest directly from Rural Housing Services. Priest River can also assess local multifamily housing needs for seniors and individuals living with disability or other special needs. If indicated, pursue multifamily financing information through the Idaho Housing and Finance Association (IHFA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of



Agriculture Rural Development Division (USDA/RD), the Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC), and additional private sources.

- **Water Resources**

Observation: The team heard that the water treatment plant couldn't meet current demands and needs to be expanded. It was also noted that the city is pumping treated water across the

bridge to the mill to spray down log piles. This doesn't seem to be the most efficient use of treated water, but water rights or other underlying issues may drive the decision.

Suggestion: If possible, see if the mill can pump water directly from the river to keep the log piles wet. Work with the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) if necessary. Theoretically, the mill site is close enough to the river that most of the water will drain right back to the river anyway. This might free up some volume for municipal use.

In addition, assessing municipal water consumption rates and creating incentives for residential and commercial conservation might be a wise idea. Again, check with IDWR, EPA, and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality about the

availability of funds for conservation efforts, including replacing wasteful fixtures such as toilets and showers, and launching a campaign to encourage conservation through water-efficient landscaping and irrigation. It may be less expensive to reduce waste than to increase capacity.

- **Community Attitudes:**

Observation: Some residents feel local government is dysfunctional, and overly concerned with enforcing rules and regulations. They question the city's ability to grapple with major issues. Of course, it's easy to criticize without making an effort to contribute.

Suggestion: The city needs to prove the critics wrong, one day and one project at a time. Obviously, not all the people can be pleased all of the time. The strategic planning process may be a great vehicle for soliciting broader public involvement. As long as the process remains inclusive and accountable, it's a great way to satisfy critics down the road. It also shows that the city has vision, commitment, planning capability, and the capacity to tackle long-term projects.

Remember, every community has citizens who are against virtually everything, who can spot the cloud behind a silver lining - Priest River is no different. The challenge is not to let these individuals hold others back. The Community Design and Identity Focus Team met many creative, knowledgeable, and committed people during the visit; their vision, energy, pragmatism, and enthusiasm will make the difference in Priest River's future.

Cleaning up the community can improve local attitudes, improve Priest River's overall appeal, and demonstrate the city's capacity to tackle projects successfully. Think of doing neighborhood cleanup projects like Paint the Town. Communities only get to make a first impression once. Think about encouraging citizens to cleanup blighted storefronts, yards, and lots. Get local youth involved in cleaning up public spaces and the gateways to the community. As events happen, don't forget to celebrate the accomplishments.

Observation: The local business community does not perceive city government as receptive or welcoming to new businesses locating into the community.

Suggestion: City government could look for ways to encourage new businesses to come to Priest River. As the new businesses are opening their operations, the city should have a process in place to make sure those businesses know they are



welcome and are an important part of the community. This could be a partnership project (welcome wagon) with the Chamber of Commerce and PRDC.

- **Asset Mapping:**

Observation/description: The Community Design and Identity Focus Team observed some outstanding natural, historic, and community resources in Priest River. Asset mapping is the process of identifying and tracking a community's assets by type and location. The resulting "map" can be used for several purposes: as a way to instill and focus community pride, as a marketing tool for business and economic development, and as a way to attract visitors.

Suggestion: Sponsor an "I Love Priest River Because ..." Project. Buy a few dozen disposable cameras and distribute them to students, seniors, business people, and any other groups that show interest. Then ask them to spend a week in and around Priest River photographing and documenting their favorite aspects of the area. Remind them that assets can be people, places, things, or events (like the swallows returning to Capistrano or Timber Days). At the end of a week (or two), collect all the cameras and develop the film. Pick a public place with large wall space (like the school), put up some butcher paper, and have students and other volunteers arrange the photos by topic or location. Or perhaps you could create an oversized map of town and use that to organize the photos. A brief note listing the photographer and describing the reason for the picture should accompany each photo. At the end of the process, have a community unveiling so the public in and around Priest River can spend some time learning what's special about the area while they mingle with their neighbors. Let people vote on their favorite photo, and give out prizes for different categories. Hand out information on upcoming projects or the strategic planning process. Encourage people to visit these assets. Think about using the results in a permanent display somewhere, either a physical location or on the city web site. Focus on the most popular assets while planning Priest River's marketing strategy for tourism or business recruitment.

Notes on Volunteer Coordination: Remember that people can be community assets too. Keep track of citizens with special skills, hobbies, and interests. Let them know they are valued and invite them to participate. Don't wait, however, until their help is needed. Stay in contact with them and give them lots of notice when projects are being discussed; get their input during the planning phase, and above all, show them that their time is valuable! Coordinating volunteers is frequently an overlooked art, one that can make or break a project. Treat them like hired professionals, treat their time accordingly, and they will come back.

- **Pick the Low-Hanging Fruit:**



Select achievable goals that can turn into success stories. It can encompass community projects like Paint the Town or be a public area beautification. One citizen idea that was repeatedly mentioned was a skate park. Visit nearby communities that have successfully developed a skate park and ask how they went about it. It isn't necessary to reinvent the wheel. They can suggest ideas for funding and construction needs. They can describe how they deal with maintenance, supervision, and liability issues. This is a great opportunity for youth involvement, since youth will be the primary users. Find ways to allow them to design the park, create opportunities for them to help with financing and development, and work with them to establish rules everyone can live with. Youth that help set the rules are more likely to help enforce them. Celebrate and build on successes!

- **Connect the Dots:**

Priest River has many tremendous assets. Foremost among them: the historic downtown, the river park, and the Mud Hole. Find creative ways to link these



assets in a walking or driving tour through signage, physical pathways, and other means. Once visitors are in the front door, make them feel at home with clear directions through and around local features. Include places to stop and sit; include public restrooms; make sure any walking tour includes local establishments where visitors can find high-quality food and refreshments.

Funding and guidance for these types of projects can be accessed through the Department of Commerce, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, Rural Development, U.S. Department of Economic Development, PAC, and TEA-21 funds. Visit other communities that have developed greenbelts or bike and walking paths. Think about wheelchair accessibility when designing tours, and contact the Idaho State Independent Living Council (SILC) for help with accessibility issues.

Seniors & Youth Focus Team - Detailed Key Points:

The Seniors and Youth Focus Team was hosted by the Seniors and Youth Home Team. Together, they visited community daycare, preschool, grade school, junior high, high school, parks, senior center, and senior assisted living facilities. A public meeting was also held at the high school library to discuss senior and youth issues.

Seniors and Youth Focus Team Observations on Youth Issues:

- There is a need for more job opportunities for youth.
- There is a need for after-school activities including soccer, baseball, and football for junior high and high school age youth.
- There is a need for a youth center with youth games.
- There is a need for a skateboard park with adequate night lighting.



- There is a need for a movie theater.
- There is a great auditorium at the PRJHS that is used for some community events.
- There may be a need for additional fast food restaurants on Highway 2.
- There appears to be some tension between community members and school district employees.

- The alternative school has a federal grant to provide educational services to alternative school students.
- The school district has had some problems getting school bonds passed
- Priest River Junior High School is an old building built in 1940. It is in need of updated heating and air conditioning systems.
- The junior high school is not accessible to persons with disabilities (old building) and needs modification for such access.
- The elementary school playground is not youth friendly.
- The elementary school serves a large geographic area and has many services for students, including: free and reduced pay lunches, volunteers, a good gym, and after school programs (soccer, baseball, scouts, and 4H) for elementary school age children.
- The daycare facility needs to have a protective rail on the changing table, have the hot water heater wrapped, repair gaps in the fence, and put a rail on the back deck.
- The city library is too small and needs more room for youth reading programs and youth computer projects.

The Seniors and Youth Focus Team observations can be assessed, and specific recommendations can be made, which can then form a blueprint for a plan of action. The daycare observations were based on the visits to two daycare facilities and one preschool. One of the daycare facilities was in a private home. The home did need some repairs to address the safety concerns of the Seniors and Youth Focus Team. The items were pointed out to the homeowner at the time of the visit and may have already been addressed. The preschool was also in a private home. The stairs leading down to the basement were very steep and narrow which was a concern to the team. The overwhelming consensus of the team was that the curriculum and activities of all of the daycare and preschool facilities were effective and efficient.

The visits to the elementary and junior high schools were very productive. The Seniors and Youth Focus Team noted that the community is very fortunate to have a strong school administration and team of teachers. Teachers are poorly paid but this is a statewide problem. It was pointed out that a starting teacher can make substantially more money in Newport, Washington just eight miles away.

The junior high school was built in 1940 and is in need of restoration in several areas. The auditorium is very large and is the largest meeting hall in Priest River. It appears that this resource would serve as a theater, drama hall, and community meeting facility. The Seniors and Youth Focus Team felt that the community could rally around this facility and get a win-win for both the school district and the citizens of Priest River.

Priest River has a very passionate and dedicated cadre of school principals, teachers, and school administrators that are a valuable asset to the community. These individuals are an ideal resource for strengthening the overall leadership structure of Priest River as it moves toward developing more adult-youth partnerships.



The youth of the community have access to numerous after school activities at the elementary school level but very few at the junior high and high school levels. The youth who served as part of the Home Team and those who spoke with members of the Seniors and Youth Focus Team, including those at the open meeting at the high school, were quick to point out the lack of things to do in Priest River. Youth say they must travel to Newport, Sandpoint, or Spokane for entertainment. Almost all of the junior high school youth expressed the hope for a skateboard park and youth center.

When asked if the young people of Priest River would remain residents after high school graduation and beyond, the youth stated that they would move to communities that would provide more job opportunities and recreational activities.

The Seniors and Youth Focus Team feels strongly that Priest River must build a communication bridge and establish partnerships with young people (and seniors) in order for true community revitalization to occur. The youth of Priest River can contribute to community development if given the support and encouragement to expand their leadership potential. In this regard, many of the quality staff at the school and library can serve as mentors. The AmeriCorps Youth Asset Builders (see Association of Idaho Cities website at <http://www.idahocities.org/Coalition%20Report.pdf>) could also be a valuable partner in bridging this communication gap and fostering adult-youth partnerships.

Seniors and Youth Focus Team Observations on Senior Issues:

- There is a wonderful, privately owned assisted living facility, but there is a need for additional senior housing.
- The senior center needs community and city support to be successful.
- The senior center is owned by Bonner County and leased by a senior group for activities.
- The senior center is not a meal site for seniors.
- The senior center does not have organized senior community programs, but has some community events like the annual Thanksgiving dinner that function as a fundraiser for the senior center.
- There is no longer a meals on wheels or soup kitchen program. The program was transferred to Sandpoint.
- There is no community volunteer program to assist seniors with home repairs, snow removal, and yard work (idea for youth community service project).
- Newport Senior Center is competing and providing senior services for Priest River Seniors. There is a need to coordinate and/or collaborate on activities.
- The town lacks public transportation for seniors to get to community facilities.
- The town lacks medical facilities.

The community has an established senior center. The center is owned by Bonner County and leased to the “Happy Agers,” a senior group. They have a paid Executive Director. The pamphlet published by the senior center lists regularly scheduled activities on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month. The center has a modern kitchen and a large dining and meeting area. The center lost a meal program when it was consolidated into a facility in Sandpoint. There does not seem to be an open channel of communication between seniors and leaders of the community.

The Seniors and Youth Focus Team spoke with “Happy Agers” leadership and discussed programs at the senior center. They were unhappy at the move of the senior meals program (along with the equipment) to Sandpoint. They also said that they did not have a senior transportation program nor is there public transportation in Priest River.



The “Happy Agers” leadership needs to work with community leaders to establish a good transportation plan, including a senior car pool program. The “Happy Agers” could appoint a transportation committee to explore all options. Senior drivers might assist other seniors who do not drive.

The senior center is available for community events and can be rented for a small fee. The “Happy Agers” leadership might consider asking those groups who use their facility to assist with senior services, including transportation, as part of the user fees or a waiver of fees for the center. They could sign Memorandums of Agreement (MOA) with other associates to form partnerships for the good of the seniors. The “Happy Agers” need to reach out to all seniors living both in Priest River and in Bonner County. They should also explore forging a partnership with the Newport Senior Center to share ideas and services. Perhaps they could develop a MOA with the Newport Center. The “Happy Agers” could also form a partnership with the new library district to establish a branch library or library service at the senior center.

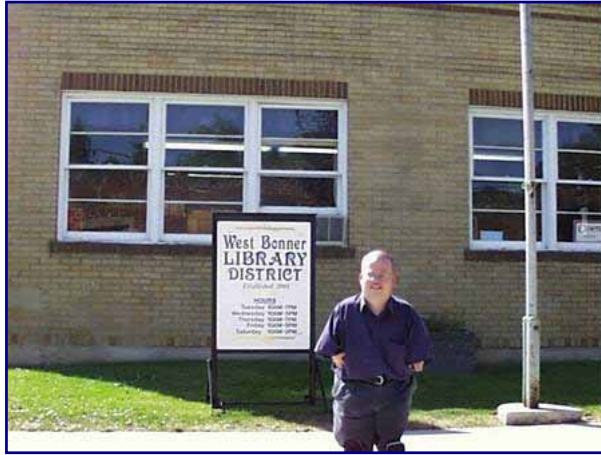
The Seniors and Youth Focus Team also visited a newly constructed, eight-resident, senior assisted living facility. The seniors at the facility were very pleased with the facility. The construction phase of the facility overcame many roadblocks, including neighborhood opposition. The community should explore working with facility sponsors to review their permit process. This review may turn out to be a worthy process for the city to explore. This process may help encourage new construction and rehabilitation of the housing stock in the community, especially for senior citizens.

Seniors and Youth Focus Team Observations on Miscellaneous Issues:

- There is a need for an onsite “Job Service” facility.
- There is a need for community volunteers (youth and adults) to serve on various committees and boards.
- Stairwells are narrow and stairs are steep in the PRJHS.
- There is a need for adult education.
- The voters of Greater Priest River recently established a library district to support the community library.

The Seniors and Youth Focus Team also made observations that in general could be considered by the community of Priest River for additional action.

- A community center could be housed in one of the abandoned buildings in the historic district. Three resources for possible volunteer services for this project and the skateboard park are the Panhandle Area Council, AmeriCorps Young Community Builders, and National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC). Contact information for the NCCC is
Lew Witherspoon, Region Director
NCCC Western Region
3427 Laurel Street
McClellan, CA 95652
Or, contact Kelly Houston, Executive Director of Serve Idaho.



- The newly created library district needs community support to be successful. The library is a central hub of activity for all community residents and considered a safe meeting place for many young people. Expanding library impact in the region

will have a significant impact on economic development (utilizing services brings people to town).

- The City Council needs to explore adding a volunteer committee, appointed to promote community events like the annual Loggers Days celebration and other festivals.
- The volunteer committee could work with the school district to ensure that they also have trained volunteers.
- The city needs better adult education. This is a cross-cutting issue that impacts all residents. The community might also explore an adult education program using computers available at the library, area schools, or distance learning technology.
- The Chamber of Commerce also seems like a viable partner in assisting Priest River in creating a climate for economic change. Youth and seniors could play a prominent role in any community revitalization efforts.
- The Association of Idaho Cities is prepared to assist Priest River in engaging their youth and senior partners.
- The community should explore working with facility sponsors to review the building permit process. This process may help encourage new construction and rehabilitation of housing stock in the community, especially for senior citizens.
- The community should also work with the school district to make better use of the junior high school auditorium. The auditorium can be used for community events, creative arts, big screen movies and videos, talent shows, and fundraisers (possibly for the skateboard park).
- The “Happy Agers” said that they would work with the community to provide parking at the new skateboard park if it is built adjacent to their facility. These creative partnerships need to be capitalized on and promoted.
- Adult youth advocates need to be identified and trained to assist in the various projects and programs in the community (part of the proposed Council Volunteer Committee). There is a need to encourage youth to participate in local, regional and state activities both through the schools and through the community. Programs like the Search Institute’s Healthy Youth Initiative, America’s Promise: the Alliance of Youth (not affiliated with America’s Promise Ministries), and Youth Action Councils are all possibilities.



- The community may want to explore the need for a Job Service office in Priest River. This office could assist youth and adults with job opportunities both in the community, and other areas of the state.

The Seniors and Youth Focus Team was impressed with the resiliency of both youth and seniors in Priest River. Though youth perceive they are not taken seriously by their community, and fractiousness exists within the senior population that prevent the groups from collaborating, they are eager to improve their community. This was clearly visible to the team when several youth and senior representatives attended the town hall meeting at the high school. Once they were able to find common ground, their energy level for creating a healthy community was extraordinary and infectious.

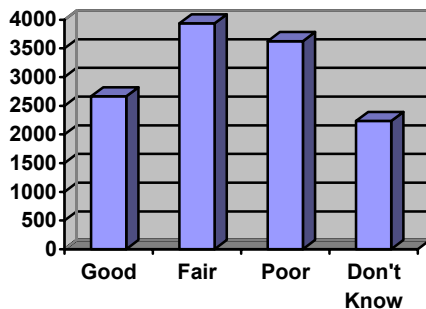
The Seniors and Youth Focus Team strongly encourages more open forum meetings where youth and adults are able to build consensus and explore how to make Priest River a viable, thriving, and energetic community. The possibilities are endless! The team looks forward to hearing about your successes and helping the community through future steps.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS:

Priest River residents completed 220 of the “what’s good about your city” surveys. The majority of the surveys were filled out concurrently with citizen interviews for the separate community input questionnaire. Some surveys had been faxed to Priest River residents before the review, and were filled out earlier.

Questions on the survey cover a wide variety of topics, from infrastructure, schooling, and safety concerns to quality of life, housing, and employment. On the survey they are grouped into major interest categories, starting with public works and ending with employment opportunities.

The 223 respondents gave a fairly balanced account of opinions on the various topics. Each of the 60 survey questions allowed for a response of “good”, “fair”, “poor”, or “do not know.” The total number of “good” responses was 2687, or 20.08% of the total. The total number of “fair” responses was 3978, or 29.73% of the total. The total number of “poor” responses was 3672, or 27.44% of the total. The total number of “do not know” responses was 2297, or 17.17% of the total. There were also 746 unanswered questions, or questions marked invalidly (multiple answers were a common mistake).



Review of the results shows a fair number of discernable trends. By the following shows of “good” responses, residents strongly preferred Priest River’s: Garbage Collection and Disposal (115 “good” responses), Fire Protection (107), Community Parks & Playgrounds (105), Availability of Homes to Purchase (97), Library (96), Police Protection (95) and Availability of Doctors (89).

Results demonstrate a few areas of community concern as well. By the following shows of “poor” responses, residents are greatly concerned about Priest River’s: Quality of Available Jobs (160 “poor” responses), Recreation for Teenagers (151), and Streets & Roads (132). Residents are also worried about:



Hotel & Motel Accommodations (125), Variety of Local Industry (125), Night Life (123), Vocational Education - Job Training Opportunities (114), Recreation for Adults (113), Planning & Zoning (107), Community Involvement in Decision Making (106), Adult Education Opportunities (102), Long-Range Planning (98), Arts & Cultural Opportunities (96) and Responsiveness of Local Government (95).

Numerous “do not know” responses to two questions indicate an opportunity to educate citizens about: Flood Control Measures (134 “do not know” responses) and Availability of Drug & Alcohol Treatment Programs (113).

Through the survey, Priest River residents identified a number of things they feel good about, other things that concern them, and some items about which they would like additional information.

COMMUNITY SURVEY DETAILED RESULTS:

What's Good About Your Community?					
Below are the detailed results of the 220 citizen surveys summarized previously.					
	Good	Fair	Poor	DNK	N/A
1. Streets & Roads	14	61	132	0	16
2. Traffic Conditions	74	115	24	3	7
3. Parking Downtown	72	99	40	8	4
4. Police Protection	95	80	18	23	7
5. Crime Prevention Programs	40	49	44	83	7
6. Fire Protection	107	60	14	33	9
7. Garbage Collection & Disposal	115	57	22	21	8
8. Water Supply	74	57	64	22	6
9. Sewage Collection & Disposal	72	52	29	56	14
10. Flood Control Measures	38	22	14	134	15
11. Community Parks & Playgrounds	105	77	22	7	12
12. Long-Range Planning	7	22	98	89	7
13. Planning & Zoning	10	32	107	66	8
14. Night Life	8	31	123	48	13
15. Recreation for Adults	18	49	113	38	5
16. Recreation for Teenagers	11	25	151	33	3
17. Recreation for Children 12 and Under	84	47	51	34	7
18. Library	96	81	22	21	3
19. Arts & Cultural Opportunities	19	59	96	42	7
20. Ambulance Service	79	53	30	51	10
21. Availability of Emergency Care	53	71	54	38	7
22. Access to Hospital	66	80	53	13	11
23. Availability of Doctors	89	86	31	11	6
24. Availability of Dentists	82	91	21	16	13
25. Availability of Drug & Alch. Trtmt.	18	27	55	113	10
26. Availability of Senior Services	24	70	66	57	6
27. Availability of Senior Housing	9	49	78	79	8
28. Availability of Rental Housing	17	67	69	64	6
29. Condition of Rental Housing	9	56	81	70	7
30. Availability of Homes to Purchase	97	64	18	30	14

DNK - Do Not Know; **N/A** - No Answer or Invalid Answer

	Good	Fair	Poor	DNK	N/A
31. Condition of Owner-Occupied Homes	34	99	37	34	19
32. Condition of School Buildings	75	85	27	21	15
33. Quality of Elementary Education	73	73	22	38	17
34. Quality of Junior High & High School	50	81	35	41	16
35. Vocational Ed.-Job Training	5	28	114	63	13
36. Adult Education Opportunities	10	43	102	55	13
37. Appearance of Neighborhoods	24	93	82	6	18
38. Appearance of Downtown	30	110	66	3	14
39. Appearance of Public Buildings	35	116	53	4	15
40. Accessibility to Persons With Disab.	28	65	67	52	11
41. Appearance of Gateways Into	29	88	64	23	19
42. Welcome Given Newcomers	30	54	74	48	17
43. Friendly & Neighborly People	84	88	31	6	14
44. Acceptance of Minorities	33	75	44	52	19
45. Progressive Community Spirit	23	61	79	35	25
46. Responsiveness of Loc. Gov.	14	53	95	39	22
47. Community Civic Organizations	39	72	35	58	19
48. Cooperation Bet. Com. & Civ. Grp.	23	64	48	71	17
49. Comm. Involvement in Dec. Making	8	45	106	47	17
50. Diversity in Community Leaders	8	44	80	71	20
51. Churches Active in Community	81	89	19	26	8
52. Avail of Daycare for Child	55	71	24	63	10
53. Number & Quality of Eating Places	40	87	75	6	15
54. Variety & Qual. of Goods in Stores	43	93	61	10	16
55. Banking & Financial Services	81	94	19	10	19
56. Local Newspaper Service	64	105	25	13	16
57. Hotel & Motel Accommodations	11	48	125	19	20
58. Variety of Local Industry	12	49	125	21	16
59. Business Involvement With Comm.	40	86	38	42	17
60. Quality of Available Jobs	3	30	160	17	13

DNK - Do Not Know; **N/A** – No Answer or Invalid Answer

COMMUNITY INTERVIEW RESULTS:

Citizens were asked three basic questions during the community interviews. Their responses to the questions posed by the Visiting Team are shown below.

1) What Makes Priest River a Special Place?

- The beautiful environment and opportunities to camp, fish, hunt, and enjoy all kinds of outside activities
- Being that there was a need for the residential care facility, for which I work, I enjoy coming to this town and working for those individuals, so, I feel that we are an asset to the community
- Sense of family based on little occupation
- Close family ties within the community
- Safe Community-little crime
- Good People-Friendly
- Recreation
- Good business & projects
- Beauty of area
- Small town, people are wonderful
- Elementary school is awesome
- Water sources for recreation
- Good community swimming
- Restaurants good
- Smaller town atmosphere
- Close knit families
- Countryside – land – river
- High school administration is wonderful
- Small town where you can have a personal identity
- Close to major shopping/cultural events
- One good thing about Priest River is that I think that we are a pretty good community
- A lot of people in our community are related, and so we know a lot about the people here
- Logging, construction, good schools, general labor, and beauty of area
- We're well taken care of in this assisted care facility, we have family here
- Why are you in this assisted living facility? We have medical problems and our families set us up here, they all live in the area
- Recreational opportunities – four seasons
- Cost of living low
- Grew up here
- Raising children here and caring by choice committed citizens
- Extended family nearby



- Too many, the beauty, recreational opportunities, snowmobiling, fishing, skiing, kids keep busy (17 & 21 year old)
- Not as self-centered a place to live
- It is a community still
- Natural beauty; low population; friendly
- Good Chamber
- Lions/Lioness do well
- Strong local organizations
- People try here
- Timber Days

2) What Problems and Challenges Face Priest River?

- The lack of employment opportunities, the water quality problems
- Definitely lack of activities for youth



- Lack of community involvement
- Winter-There is no or little business opportunities
- No real diversity of businesses
- No parking downtown
- Money is tight here
- Lumber industry depressed
- Needs more industry
- Industrial park needs to be full

- Diversify
- Retail/tourism – low wages
- Most of the kids leave
- City does not enforce keeping businesses neat & kept up like they do personal residences, results in a lack of appeal in downtown area
- Need to raise expectations and standards of the community as a whole
- Education & community involvement is not a priority!!!
- Snow from November through March
- Need 4-wheel drive to be safe
- City not receptive or welcoming to new business
- City attitude is perceived to be unfriendly and strict
- Loggers unemployed which results in business slow down
- Minimum opportunity for youth, they finish school & leave the community
- Building permits hard to get
- Signage in downtown-harsh enforcement with little communication on standards, no grace period-just notice of non-compliance
- Sewer problem-cost

- Growth
- Need more stuff for kids such as an arcade, a bowling alley
- People not working together i.e. city council, not enough people attending the council meetings to find out what's going on
- No communication!
- We don't have any job opportunities to offer young people or any age group!
- Give electricity to power company who in turn sells it
- Not a diversified economic base, as timber goes, so does the community
- School building in terrible state
- Not open to change
- No volunteer base
- The children normally go into timber, not university or military
- A lot of people don't pay taxes
- A lot of kids go home without electricity or water, need to improve conditions
- Education in comparison to the rest of the state is behind the times
- I see problems with the youth in the future
- There's not enough for kids to do
- Not involved in city affairs, don't know what is going on
- We (in the care facility) have no transportation so we don't go down there, so our kids take us where we go
- School District had two applicants for a full time teaching position (by comparison 40 applicants in Washington), can earn \$10,000 more in Washington – five miles away
- Educational benefits by District – Idaho; by State – Washington
- Timber = 5%-10% of the economic base
- Environmentalists are a problem, keeping logging industry alive is a challenge
- Additional job opportunities – a challenge
- Small manufacturing attracts retirement cash– difficult to get them to spend locally

3) What Would You Like to See Priest River Accomplish In the Future?

- A new middle school building and more community involvement with youth programs
- Health club-YMCA
- Bigger library, not enough to work with
- To be independent and not be dependant on the county
- Youth center for kids
- Better streets and kept up
- Growth & business improvements



- Senior citizen meals
- Our current businesses struggle to make it
- Better police coverage
- Better communications between organization groups etc. - no bickering!!!
- Improvement on personal properties (get rid of old cars & garbage)
- Some technological businesses
- Have to diversify the economic base
- In the next few years, I would like to see more facilities put in for the youth
- Maybe a bowling alley, a cinema, a center, just something for youth to do
- Continued support for education, we are now in the third year of a new school district; not just \$, but staff development, levy, curriculum, and facilities
- More for kids to do
- Doing a lot – road improvements are underway; great restaurants now already here; water quality could be better in town, “I’m happy”
- Having to diversify, tourism is a good direction to go towards, going to be greater dependency
- Would help to provide assistance in preservation in the historic district
- Bring in more business



AVAILABLE COMMUNITY FUNDING, ASSISTANCE, AND FOLLOW-UP:

The following resources can be supplemented by referring to the Idaho Department of Commerce's (IDOC) Advantage Handbook available online at

<http://www.idoc.state.id.us/pubs/pblock.html>

or in the 2001-2002 Small Business & Community Development Resource Directory available through the Association of Idaho Cities and the Idaho Rural Partnership.

In addition, the website cited above has application rules and forms for the Idaho Community Development Block Grant program, a Downtown Handbook to assist with downtown and main street revitalization projects, and other important community development information and resources.

A community review coordinator will contact you periodically following the community review to determine what additional assistance the visiting team may provide to you in realizing your community development objectives. Please feel free to contact members of the visiting team if you have follow up questions, comments, or require assistance in any way.

Local Economy:

- Small Business Development Council (SBDC)
- Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC)
- Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC) Tourism Division
- Panhandle Area Council (PAC)
- Idaho Heritage Trust
- Verizon
- Qwest
- Idaho Department of Transportation (IDOT)
- Idaho Department of Labor (IDOL)
- U.S. Department of Labor
- North Idaho College
- Workforce Development Board
- Guide to North Idaho
- Idaho Travel Guide
- ITC Grant Program
- National Main Street Program
- Historic RR Information Groups
- Idaho Historic RR Association
- National Historic RR Society (Spokane Chapter)



- Idaho Rural Water Association (IRWA)
- Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP)
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- University of Idaho Cooperative Extension
- University of Idaho Department of Agricultural Economics
- Association of Idaho Cities (AIC)
- Local Chamber of Commerce
- Gem Team Economic Development Administration (EDA)



Community Design & Identity:

- Idaho Department of Transportation (ITD) Transportation Enhancement Program
- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)
- Bonner County
- Highway Districts
- Chamber of Commerce
- Historic Tax Credits
- Low-Income Housing Tax Credits
- Community Action Agency - HOME funds
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Housing
- Idaho Housing and Finance Association (IHFA) Multi-Family Division
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Multi-Family



- Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC) Community Development Block Grants

- University of Idaho Cooperative Extension
- Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Idaho Department Environmental Quality (IDEQ)
- Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)
- Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Panhandle Area Council (PAC)
- TEA-21 funds
- Idaho State Independent Living Council (Idaho SILC)
- Association of Idaho Cities (AIC)
- Association of Idaho Counties
- Other Cities
- Sandpoint Artist David Kraisler
- The Idaho Commission on the Arts

Seniors & Youth:

- Idaho Council on Aging
- Idaho Department of Commerce (IDOC)
- Association of Idaho Cities (AIC)
- National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC)
- Serve Idaho
- Search Institute's Healthy Youth Initiative



- America's Promise: the Alliance of Youth
- Youth Action Councils
- Governors Council on Aging
- YMCA - YWCA
- Gem Community Improvement Grants
- Service Club - Youth Activities
- Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Natural Resources Conservation

Service (NRCS)

- University of Idaho Forestry Lab
- University of Idaho Department of Art & Architecture
- University of Idaho Cooperative Extension
- Idaho Council on the Arts (ICA)
- Advantage Club in North Idaho
- Idaho Department of Transportation (IDOT)
- Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Local School Districts - Computer Labs

- Annenberg Foundation
- Idaho Council on the Arts (ICA)
- Qwest Education Fund
- Micron Foundation
- Albertson's Foundation
- Community Action Agency
- Idaho Health and Welfare



- Senior Housing Planning - Health Districts
- Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Association of Idaho Cities (AIC)
- Idaho Parks and Recreation

PRIEST RIVER POWERPOINT PRESENTATION:

On September 27, as part of the preliminary report to the community, the Visiting Team presented a PowerPoint slide show illustrating team experiences during the review. The team anticipates that it will be able to provide a copy of this presentation to the community of Priest River, as well as a VHS or cd copy of the community debriefing session, in the very near future.



PRIEST RIVER COMMUNITY REVIEW NEWS ARTICLES: